

The Fate Of Empires And The Kingdom Of God

Someone once said that the only thing we learn from history is that we don't learn anything from history.

These words were written by a man with the unlikely name of Sir John Glubb, a high-ranking official in His Majesty's army and a decorated veteran of two world wars.

His words serve as an introduction to a monograph he wrote entitled "The Fate of Empires."

Glubb studied the growth and decline of the world's great empires to see if they exhibited similar characteristics.

He began in 859 B.C. with the Assyrian empire and concluded in 1950 with the British empire.

Other empires included the Persian empire, the Greek empire, the Roman empire, the Arab and Ottoman empires and the Spanish empire.

The first thing that he discovered was that all these empires all lasted about the same length of time—an average of 250 years.

The next thing he found was that all the empires he studied went through similar stages of birth, growth, period of rule, decline and ultimate collapse.

Every empire began by invading other nations.

Then it grew in size through by expanding commerce.

It became wealthy from revenues it received from taxing the states it had conquered—its vassal states or colonies—and then enjoyed a stable period during which there was a rich culture of artistic and intellectual innovation.

But at some point, the artistic and intellectual innovation began to deteriorate and the culture became shallow and frivolous.

People became materialistic and money-motivated.

The work ethic evaporated and people began to rely on the government to take care of them.

Religion lost its appeal and moral decadence set in.

Patriotism and a sense of duty or obligation to the empire disappeared and narcissism set in with “everyone doing what was right in his own eyes.”

After about ten generations, the empire collapsed and became history.

It’s amazing how every one of the empires Glubb studied went through exactly the same periods of growth and decline.

And, as the famous historians Sonny and Cher intoned, “the beat goes on.”

One might ask: will we ever learn?

Certainly not in our day and age when historians and history departments in academia forego teaching actual history and use the classroom to teach things like gender studies and critical race theory.

The reason we don't learn from history is simple: we refuse to face the fact that the primary force that drives history is sin.

Sin began to rule the world in the Garden of Eden, when it transformed the relationship between Adam and Eve from a relationship based upon love to a relationship based upon competition.

This (interlocking fingers) became this (two fists).

When God called them to account for their sins, instead of accepting responsibility for them, Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent, and they both tried to hide from God.

Then their first son, Cain, slew their second sons, Able, and was banished to the land of Nod, which means “the land of wandering” where he began to build an empire.

The desire to win, to prevail over each other which had replaced the desire to love and honor each other, reached its zenith in Cain's great grandson Lamech, who boasted that he had the right to kill as many men as he liked—for any reason he liked.

Later at Babel, when God confused the languages, humanity divided into warring factions and the thirst for empire-building was born,

Ever since then, the history of mankind has largely consisted of the rise and fall of empires.

When Jesus came to Jerusalem on the day we call Palm Sunday, the people welcomed him, assuming that he had come to build a Christian empire.

That he would shake off Roman rule, and like his predecessor David, conquer Israel's enemies and return Israel to its former glory.

The crowd welcomed him with shouts of "Hosannah!" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

They were following an ancient tradition of welcoming home a king who was returning from winning a victory in battle.

They didn't understand that the battle Jesus would fight had not yet begun.

It would be fought five days later on an instrument called "the cross," and it would not be won by sword and spear but by suffering and death.

They had it 180 degrees wrong because they were thinking in worldly terms rather than spiritual terms.

And when the battle was over, they thought he had lost, when he had actually won the most important war of all: the battle for men's souls.

He had come to build a new and entirely different kind of kingdom: a spiritual kingdom that he called the Kingdom of God.

It's interesting to contrast the features of Jesus' Kingdom of God with those of worldly empires.

The birth of a worldly empire always begins with the invasion and subjugation of other peoples.

The birth of the Kingdom of God began with an invasion of love and forgiveness to all peoples.

The growth of a worldly empire involves projecting its commercial and military power.

The growth of the Kingdom of God involves projecting the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The growth of a worldly empire brings wealth to the conquerers.

The growth of the Kingdom of God brings freedom from sin to the people it touches.

The growth of an empire brings artistic and intellectual innovation.

The growth of the Kingdom of God brings wisdom.

The reign of an empire at its height is brief..

The reign of the Kingdom of God is eternal.

In a worldly empire begins to decline, culture becomes pop culture, art becomes silly and intellectual innovation becomes nihilistic.

In the Kingdom of God, truth is truth and faith in Jesus Christ is the truth which sets people free.

In a worldly empire, materialism sets in and generates the fear of losing one's wealth and possessions.

In the Kingdom of God, love banishes fear and one's treasures are in heaven where moth and rust cannot devour and thieves cannot break in and steal.

In a worldly empire, the work ethic evaporates and people begin relying upon the state to provide for their needs.

In the Kingdom of God, people believe that man was created to work and trust to God to provide for his needs.

In a worldly empire, true religion—the worship of God and His Son Jesus Christ—is forced to either conform to secular standards imposed by the government or go out of business.

In the Kingdom of God, the Gospel is given free reign and souls are brought to glory.

In a worldly empire, moral decadence sets in and people begin to believe that they have the right to do whatever is right in their own eyes.

In the Kingdom of God, God convicts people of their sins, draws them to repentance, blesses them with forgiveness and urges them to “go and sin no more.”

In a worldly empire, people become narcissistic and end up being ruled by their appetites: desires of the sinful flesh.

In the Kingdom of God, people care about their neighbor and strive to conform their thoughts and words and actions to the law of love.

In the final stage of the decline of a worldly empire people abandon thoughts of loyalty and duty and patriotism and begin to hate the empire itself.

In the Kingdom of God, people give Caesar his due in this life and look forward to heaven, the New Jerusalem of God, for the perfect society.

St. Paul tells us that the three abiding characteristics of those who live in the Kingdom of God are faith, hope and love.

In a worldly empire, people are guided by the unholy trinity of me, myself and I.

There's a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelly entitled *Ozymandias*.

In the poem, a traveler who is wandering through a desert comes upon the ruins of a statue of a man whose head has become detached and lies on the sand.

The expression upon the face of the man is cruel and arrogant, a "sneer of cold command."

Upon the base of the statue, there is an inscription which reads as follows:

"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings. Look upon my works ye mighty and despair!"

The poem concludes: "Nothing else remains. Round the decay of that colossal wreck boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away."

I did some research on that poem and discovered that it isn't entirely fictional.

The name "Ozymandias" is the Greek word for the Egyptian Ramses II, a pharaoh who increased the power and wealth of Egypt during the early part of his reign.

He had statues of himself placed throughout Egypt.

The ancient historian, Diodorus, reported that one of the statues bore this inscription: "King of Kings Am I, Ozymandias. If anyone would doubt how great I am or where I lie, let him look upon my works."

None of his statues remain; they were all blown away by desert winds and sandstorms.

Old Testament scholars generally agree that Ramses II was the pharaoh Moses dealt with in the *Book of Exodus*.

If so, this is the pharaoh who presided over Egypt's destruction during the ten plagues and the routing of Egypt's armies at the Red Sea.

It would be nice to think that these experiences may have had a humbling effect on him.

But ever since the Garden of Eden, pride has governed the natural human heart, and kings are well versed in nourishing it.

It was reported that in the 1956 war between Egypt and Israel, when Israeli troops drove the Egyptians out of Sinai back into Egypt, the Egyptian band led the Egyptian army into Cairo playing a victory march.

Empires come and go, but some things never change.

The fate of empires is to pass into oblivion but the Kingdom of God lasts forever.

Amen.