

# THE UNIVERSAL KINGDOM OF GOD

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## CHAPTER IV

From *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (1968)

*There is therefore recognized in Scripture . . . a natural and universal kingdom or dominion of God, embracing all objects, persons, and events, all doings of individuals and nations, all operations and changes of nature and history, absolutely without exception . . . . ---James Orr<sup>1</sup>*

Since this volume is devoted in large part to the Mediatorial phase of the Kingdom, my treatment of the Universal Kingdom will be quite brief, restricted to one chapter, including not much more than a summary of its chief characteristics. In any conventional system of theology this universal rule or control of God would be dealt with in part under the head of the divine work in Providence. But the Kingdom of God in its universal sense is not a synonym for providence. It is a vastly greater concept as set forth in the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament.

In seeking to establish the existence of such a universal kingdom, as an ever present reality in Biblical history, a problem of interpretation will need to be faced. It will be necessary to distinguish clearly between *history* and *prediction*. The Biblical passages selected, therefore, must contain statements of historical fact, not of predictive prophecy. For example, Psalms 97 and 99 open with the glad announcement, "The LORD reigneth." But a study of the context shows clearly that both speak predictively of a future kingdom. Other psalms, such as 93 and 103, are basically records of historical fact, referring to a rule of God which was existing in the day when these Scriptures were written. Therefore, keeping in mind this selective principle in approaching the Biblical material, we note that the most important characteristics of the Universal Kingdom of God appear as follows.

### 1. *This Universal Kingdom Exists Without Interruption Throughout All Time*

Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

--Ps. 145:13

The 29th Psalm has given to us a beautiful and inspired description of the progress of a storm in the land of Israel. It begins with the rumbling of thunder out over the sea, probably the Mediterranean. It sweeps in across the land breaking the "cedars of Lebanon," making them "skip like a calf." It shakes the wilderness, causing the frightened animals to bear their young prematurely. Yet the psalmist wants us to understand that *God* is present in this violence of nature and is in complete control. More than that--so intimate and immediate is the relation of Jehovah to the storm that no less than six times are we told that its manifestations are "The

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1 "Kingdom of God," *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1901), Vol. II, p. 844.

voice of the LORD." But all this is not to be regarded as something new: looking backward in human history the psalmist declares (vs. 10) that "Jehovah sat at the Deluge."<sup>2</sup> All that happened there was under the sovereign control of Him who is both the God of nature and the Judge of men. And, as to the present situation, the conclusion of the psalm is that "the Lord sitteth King for ever" (vs. 10).

The prophet Jeremiah bears a similar testimony concerning the abiding reality and character of the rule of God in his day. With fine irony he sketches a picture of the vanity and impotence of the gods of the nations: an object of worship is made of a tree cut from the forest by the hand of man; it is fastened securely with nails; it is decorated with silver and gold; it must be carried from place to place; it cannot move and it cannot speak; it cannot do evil, neither can it do anything good. Such gods can be ignored. It is otherwise with the true God who is the LORD of Israel, for He is "the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king" (Jer. 10:2-5, 10).

In the midst of his lamentations, because of the devastation of Jerusalem and the ruin of the land of Israel by reason of the Babylonian invasion, Jeremiah finds his comfort and hope in a present Kingdom of God which is grounded in the eternal nature of God Himself. The historical situation was dark and terrible (Lam. 4). The skin of the people was black by reason of the famine; the women in Zion had been cruelly ravished; the princes were hanged up by the hands; the crown had fallen from the head of the nation of Israel; the hearts of the captives were faint and their eyes were dim. Beyond the terror of darkness and gloom, the prophet has a glimpse of a better day when the enemies of Israel will be punished and the nation will no more be carried away captive (Lam. 4:22). But while they wait in hope for that better day, there is a present consolation found in the eternal God and His abiding Kingdom: "Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation" (Lam. 5:19). The historical Kingdom of God in Israel may be interrupted; the nation may abide for many days without a mediatorial king; but there is nevertheless a Kingdom of God which continues without any hiatus or diminution.

## 2. *The Universal Kingdom Includes All That Exists in Space and Time*

Thou reignest over all.

--I Chron. 29:12

Nothing lies outside its vast reach and scope. It includes all things in space and time; in earth, in heaven, and in hell. The nations of the earth may rebel, follow other gods, even deny the existence of the true God; but all to no avail; Jehovah is still the "King of nations" (Jer. 10:7). Nebuchadnezzar, made the golden head of an ancient world empire by divine appointment, forgets the heavenly source of his authority; and so he is cut down from his throne by the judgment of God in order that "the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men." The importance of this divinely given lesson appears in its threefold repetition in the inspired record (Dan. 4:17, 25, 32). Men are not to forget that it is the "God of heaven" who "removeth kings, and setteth up kings" (Dan. 2:19-21).

Witnessing to the present reality of God's universal kingdom in his own day, the psalmist writes, "The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all" (103:19). In this psalm the scope of the Kingdom reaches up into the heavens; the angels are within it and under its rule; the hosts of God are here, and all His works in all places of His dominion. To

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2 Hengstenberg's Translation.

know this brings blessing and comfort to the souls of men in every generation and in every age (103:19-22).

Neither the underworld of the dead, nor hell itself, lies outside the rule of this Kingdom of God. Even though the enemies of God should "dig into Sheol," He warns, "thence shall my hand take them" (Amos 9:2, ASV). The scornful rulers in Jerusalem may suppose that they have made protective terms "with death and with Sheol," but no such covenants and agreements will be permitted to stand (Isa. 28:15-18, ASV). The fires of divine anger will be found burning even in "lowest Sheol" (Deut. 32:22, ASV). The strange notion that the devil is the king of hell has no basis in divine revelation. *God* is the King of hell, just as He is the King of everything else in time and space. And because this is so, that everlasting prison-house of the lost will not be the noisy and disorderly place that is sometimes imagined by the popular mind. There is no more orderly place than a well-disciplined prison, even under imperfect human government. There will be no riots in hell. For all those who reject the mercy of God in Christ and recognize no final argument but force, there will be force without stint or limit, the force of a divine government from which there can be no escape, either now or hereafter.

As for the Lord's own people in ages past, Sheol could have no terrors for them. With the psalmist they could say, "Whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Ps. 139:7-10, ASV).

Perhaps the finest and clearest testimony regarding the existence of the Universal Kingdom of God in Old Testament times was uttered by David as he gave his last instructions to his son Solomon and reviewed the goodness of the Lord toward his house and the nation of Israel. No one understood better than David the reality of that divine Kingdom in history of which he had been anointed as the mediatorial king. But above and beyond the limits of the land of Palestine and the city of Jerusalem, David saw another and a greater Kingdom, describing it in these wonderful words: "Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. . . . and thou reignest over all" (I Chron. 29:11, 12).

### 3. *The Divine Control in the Universal Kingdom Is Generally Providential*

Fire, and hail; snow, and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling his word.

--Ps. 148:8

By the term "providential" we mean control by means of second causes; for example, the accomplishment of God's purpose at the Red Sea by using a "strong east wind" to sweep aside the waters from the path of Israel (Exod. 14:21). Such a providential method of control applies especially to the operation of the Universal Kingdom with reference to the earth. Because God is in the operations of what men are pleased to call "natural law," He is able to "tip the scales" of nature in ways indiscernible to the eyes of men. For a long time scientists were greatly intrigued with what they called the reign of law in a "closed system" of nature, excluding the possibility of any "divine tinkering" with the system on the part of a sovereign God. Today they are not so sure. To the Bible writers, of course, there is no problem. Since God not only created the system

of nature but also sustains the operation of its so-called laws, there can be no question about His ability to manipulate the system from within as well as from without. It is fairly well recognized today by some reputable scientists that, in the system of nature, there is room for "unlawful" events without interfering seriously with the statistical averages which we call "laws." Some investigators, hoping to keep as far as possible from the realm of theology, have named the "outlaw" variant a "cheater"!<sup>3</sup> Having no compunctions of this kind, the Bible writers may at times attribute to God directly what happens in the world of nature. Where men would normally say, "It thundered," the psalmist does not hesitate to say, "The God of glory thundereth" (Ps. 29:3).

Because in His Universal Kingdom God controls the processes of material nature, He is able by such means to control the circumstances of human existence and thereby direct the stream of history. There are many instances of such divine control. In some cases we are not told what the circumstances were or just how they were divinely used, but are only brought immediately into the presence of the accomplished fact. Thus the Assyrian monarch is spoken of as a "rod" in the hand of Jehovah to be used in the infliction of divine judgment upon Jerusalem, though the king knows nothing about God's purpose and certainly has no intention of serving Him. So complete is God's control in the situation that Isaiah multiplies terms of divine irony to describe it: The Assyrian is not only a mere "rod"; he is also a "staff," and "axe," and a "saw"; all wielded by the hand of a King who is greater than he (10:5-15). Likewise, the king of Babylon is God's chosen "servant" for the accomplishment of His will against the people of Jerusalem (Jer. 25:9). Furthermore, in the long sequence of the rise and fall of world empires, it is Jehovah who raises up and prepares the "kings of the Medes" for the destruction of Babylon (Jer. 51:11, 28-37). And again, long before his birth, the great Cyrus is named prophetically and "anointed" by Jehovah to fulfil His purpose in rebuilding the temple (Isa. 44:28-45:4).

In other Biblical events the veil of providential control is drawn aside and the determining circumstance is openly declared. The Book of Esther dramatically records such an event in the days when the nation of Israel stood in mortal danger of its very existence. Serving in the palace of Ahasuerus, the Persian king, there was a Jew named Mordecai, through whom two important happenings were brought to pass: first, he had counseled his cousin Esther in her conduct leading to her selection by the king as his queen; and second, he had saved the king's life by exposing a plot to kill him (Esther 2:5-23). But there is a villain in the palace, Haman by name, who hated Mordecai because of the latter's stiff-necked refusal to bow before him. And so there was hatched a scheme to destroy not only Mordecai but also the total nation of the Jews throughout the entire Persian kingdom. The decree of destruction had been signed by Ahasuerus, the date had been set, and copies had been sent to all parts of the empire, the king not knowing that his queen was a member of the people thus callously doomed to death. Haman, well satisfied that the thing was as good as done, sat down with the king to "drink" to the success of his nefarious purpose (ch. 3).

For those who have eyes to see, it was one of the most critical points in all human history. At stake, in a very real sense, was the entire divine program for the ages. If Israel perished, there would be no Messiah, no redemption, no Church, no future Kingdom of God among men. With such issues in jeopardy, we might not have been too much surprised to see the arm of Deity breaking forth into the affairs of men with some great supernatural intervention; perhaps something like the deliverance of Israel from the hand of the Egyptian Pharaoh. But nothing of the kind happens. There is not even any mention of God. The writer of the Book of Esther

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3 Lecomte du Nouy, *Human Destiny* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947), p. 38.

merely records what might be regarded as the master understatement of all time: "On that night could not the king sleep" (6:1). Why he could not sleep, we are not told; but more likely from a troubled indigestion than a troubled conscience. At any rate, turning to the ancient and well-known remedy, the king called for something to read; in this case the "records of the chronicles" of his kingdom; probably dry enough in spots (like our own Congressional Record) to induce the sleep he could not imperiously command. And in the course of the reading, the attendants came to the record of Mordecai's good deed in uncovering the plot against the king's life. The remarkable sequel may be read in the Book of Esther: as the outcome of this fit of regal insomnia, and also the chance opening of the "chronicles" at exactly the right place, the nation of Israel is rescued from extermination and the world was saved from all the irreparable losses which such a disaster would have entailed (ch. 8).

It may be true, as Cicero once observed, that "kings do not trouble themselves with insignificant affairs"; which is one reason for the oft failure of their purposes and plans. It is otherwise in the Universal Kingdom of God, where things too small to merit human attention may be used to change the course of history. In fact, "God must care for the least, or He cannot care for the greatest." Thus He does concern Himself with small affairs, because the fall of a raindrop or the sleeplessness of a king may, under God, have momentous consequences. As the Book of Proverbs reminds us, "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD" (16:33).

It would be hard to think of a simpler event than the fall of a coin which has been carelessly tossed in the air. The outcome can be only one of two clean-cut possibilities. Yet the material factors which contribute to the end-result of such an event are complicated beyond the understanding of the wisest men. And in this complex of causation we as Christians must never forget the unseen "finger of God" whose touch always brings the final decision in the affairs of the universe. This is the providential factor, for the most part overlooked or ignored by men, which confounds at last all the Hamans and the Hitlers and wrecks their well-laid schemes. As the prophet Isaiah put the matter, it is the LORD who "frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; that confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited" (44:25-26).

#### *4. The Divine Control in the Universal Kingdom May Be Exercised at Times by Supernatural Means*

He worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth.      --Dan. 6:27

While it may not be easy to draw a precise line of demarcation between what is called the natural and the supernatural, nevertheless the general difference is clear and absolute. The God of the Bible is said to be both *in* the universe and also *above* it. Therefore at any time He may break into the so-called "closed system" of nature (which He upholds and controls) with great exhibitions of His unveiled power. The writers of Scripture are never conscious of any necessary conflict between the idea of God's rule through the system of nature and that of His rule through the miraculous. In both they recognize the hand of the same sovereign King who is transcendent as well as immanent in His creation. As we have seen above, the method of His divine control in the Universal Kingdom, especially with reference to the earth, is quite generally providential, that is, through second causes: "Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word" (Ps. 148:8). Yet at certain times and under special circumstances the divine rule may be

openly supernatural. Both methods of control are brought together in the 135th Psalm: "Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasuries. Who smote the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast. Who sent tokens and wonders into the midst of thee, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his servants" (vss. 6-9). Here we have clearly both nature and miracle. God rules through the phenomena of nature and also through supernatural "tokens and wonders," such as the terrible plagues which fell upon Egypt and her arrogant king.

The resort to miracles in the rule of the Universal Kingdom does not mean necessarily that God might not be able to accomplish His purposes by other and less spectacular means. The supernatural method is rather for the purpose of demonstrating publicly that there is a true God in heaven who always will have the last word in human affairs. On the one hand, such a miraculous demonstration was needed to answer the insolent challenge of the Egyptian Pharaoh: "Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Exod. 5:2). But on the other hand, the same supernatural demonstration served to confirm the faith of God's own people in the reality of His Universal Kingdom, as Moses reminded them, "Hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations [trials], by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him" (Deut. 4:34-35). Furthermore, the inspired record of the historical event stands as a documentary witness to all succeeding generations, that men may have no excuse for any failure to recognize the reality of God's Universal Kingdom, even though His mighty hand may temporarily be hidden beneath the veil of providential control.

##### 5. *The Universal Kingdom Always Exists Efficaciously Regardless of the Attitude of Its Subjects*

None can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

--Dan. 4:35

Some personal beings have submitted to the rule of this Kingdom. As we might expect, there is no problem in heaven. The King's angels there, we are told, "do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word" (Ps. 103:20). In the same submissive attitude we find the true people of God in all ages. During the period of the theocratic kingdom in the Old Testament, God was indeed the King of the *nation* of Israel in a special sense; but even after the close of the historical kingdom, when God had withdrawn His immediate presence from the nation, when they had been scattered and a "byword among the heathen" with no longer any prophet among them (Ps. 44:14; 74:9), still the remnant of godly individuals acknowledged and claimed a personal relationship to God as King. Several times in the Book of Psalms we read the glad cry in the midst of desolations: "Thou art my King, O God" (44:4). And again, "For God is my King of old" (74:12). Whatever of truth there may be in the asserted "reign of God in the hearts of men," it was something already known and experienced by the saints of the Old Testament. Could anything be any clearer or finer, on this point, than the testimony of the 84th Psalm? "My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. . . . O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God" (vss. 2-3). When we come to the New Testament, although our Lord is never called the King of the Church, nevertheless there is no abrogation of the Universal Kingdom of God, and the Church cannot be set outside of it. Nor can there be any dispute about the Church's glad submission to

the will of her only Head, who today shares the Father's throne in the Universal Kingdom of God--"He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (I John 2:17).

On the other hand, there are many in rebellion against the rule of this Kingdom. The very essence of sin, the Apostle John tells us, is "lawlessness," and "the devil sinneth from the beginning" (I John 3:4, 8, ASV). Thus Satan is described as the primal and original rebel against the control of God's Universal Kingdom; and with him are the "angels that sinned" (II Pet. 2:4). On earth among men there are unnumbered multitudes who, deceived by Satan, are actively opposed to the revealed will of God. Still others, like the Assyrian in the prophecy of Isaiah, may know little or nothing about a sovereign God ruling over the universe. But regardless of the attitudes of men, whether it be indifference or rebellion or submission, the Scriptures declare that the Lord "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11). Even if in all the universe there were not one solitary personal being not in rebellion against God, whether angel or demon or man; even if there were no heaven of the redeemed but only a hell of the lost--it would still be true of this Universal Kingdom that "The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all" (Ps. 103:19). For this Kingdom is an ever present reality from which there can be no escape. We can be grateful that God has left a place for personal choice and freedom in His dealings with men, but we must understand that there is no room for any freedom with respect to this divine rule. It is not for men to choose whether or not they will be under the rule of the Universal Kingdom. Whether they like it or not, they are already under it (Ps. 75:4-7).

#### 6. *The Rule of the Universal Kingdom Is Administered Through the Eternal Son*

He is before all things, and by him all things consist.           --Col. 1:17

The complete Biblical evidence for the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and also for the doctrine of the Trinity, must be reserved for another volume in this series. However, any adequate discussion of the Universal Kingdom of God must give some recognition to the high place occupied by the Son of God in relation to that Kingdom. Sometimes men have thought too narrowly of His regal activity, restricting it almost exclusively to His office as the incarnate Ruler of a purely Messianic Kingdom. This is an important idea, of course, as we shall see later in dealing with what I have called the Mediatorial Kingdom. But the kingly function of our Lord appears first in the dateless past, beginning with creation itself.

In this connection several things should be noted. First, the creation of the universe and the establishment of the Universal Kingdom must be regarded as contemporaneous events. Second, the creation with its divine control was and continues to be a standing revelation of the invisible God. As the Apostle Paul argues, "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1:20). Third, the Son of God is spoken of in the Gospel of John as the eternal "Word" (Grk. *logos*), who is from the beginning both the "life" and the "light" (1:1-5). Now since it is the nature of light to shine and overcome the darkness, we must conclude that the creative and sovereign power of Deity has always been revealed in and through the activity of the eternal Son who in the fulness of time became our incarnate Saviour.

This sovereign activity of our Lord seems to be indicated in the book of Isaiah where the prophet names him the "*Everlasting Father*" (9:6). At first glance, this statement seems to confuse the

Persons of the Godhead, calling the Son the Father; but a more literal translation shows that such is not the case. The name may be read as the "Father of the Everlasting" or the "Father of Eternity" (ASV, margin). But we must be careful here not to read into the passage any dialectical notions of time and eternity. In the Bible, eternity is not absolutely opposed to time, but is simply (at least in its forward aspect) an unending duration or succession of ages. And the Son of God is the "Father" of this succession of ages. This means not only origination but also Fatherly guidance.<sup>4</sup>

The same idea is found in the first chapter of Hebrews where we are told that through His Son, God "*made the worlds*" (1:2). Now it has often been pointed out that the Greek term here should be rendered "ages." However, it seems clear from the passage in 11:3, where the same word occurs, that the writer is not thinking merely of the flight of time when he declares that God made the "ages" through Christ. As a matter of fact, the writers of the Bible never attempt to deal abstractly with the ideas of time and space in relation to the universe. This world, to them, is a moving world, not a static affair. Thus the writer of Hebrews, in a single term (*aionas*), unites the idea of the world existing in space with the idea of the world moving through time--no mean accomplishment. And the Son of God, we are told, is the Maker of this world, not only viewed from the standpoint of its vast extension in space, but also from the standpoint of the ages through which the world has passed and is yet to pass.<sup>5</sup>

For a long time men have regarded with deep interest the complex movements of world history, asking the question, What is the meaning of it all? To this some have answered, There is no meaning; lo, we have searched and have found nothing but vanity and a striving after wind. But other men, more thoughtful, have felt deeply that there must be some final significance above and beyond the contradictions of human existence. As the result we have the so-called "Philosophies of History," often the work of earnest and brilliant minds, yet always inadequate and missing the mark. But the philosophers have been right in one respect; that is, in believing that there *is* a philosophy of history. Age does not follow age by a kind of "fortuitous concurrence." There is an orderly arrangement, a plan, in the midst of seeming chaos and confusion. The great periods of history were not ushered in by chance, nor are they wound up by the will of men. The Son of God is the Maker of the ages, the Father of the everlasting, the God of history. Because this is so, the man who has found God in Christ has laid his hand upon the key which explains the riddle of cosmic history. And the more we know of Him, the closer we come to the heart of the mystery; for He is indeed the Light of the world, intellectually as well as spiritually and morally. Here is the trouble: men are trying to understand history apart from Christ in whom we have found the God who is described as the "King eternal" (I Tim. 1:17); or better, *King of the Ages*.<sup>6</sup>

It is in this glorious capacity that our Lord Jesus Christ sits today upon the throne of the universe. Not that He ever abdicated for a moment His rightful place there; even during the

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4 Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprint, 1949), *in loc.*

5 On the clause, "By whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:2), Marcus Dods has said, "The writer perhaps has it in his mind that the significant element in creation is not the mass or magnificence of the material spheres but the evolution of God's purposes through the ages. The mind staggers in endeavouring to grasp the vastness of the physical universe, but much more overwhelming is the thought of those times and ages and eons through which the purpose of God is gradually unfolding, unhasting and unresting, in the boundless life He has called into being. He Who is the end and aim, the Heir, of all things is also their creator . . . He only can guide the universe to its fit end . . ." --*Expositor's Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), Vol. IV, p. 250.

6 So Robertson, Olshausen, Meyer, *et al.*



time of His deepest humiliation and suffering, He was "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). Commenting on this remarkable statement, Marcus Dods has rightly said, "The present [tense], *pheron*, seems necessarily to involve that during the whole of his earthly career, this function of upholding nature was being discharged. Probably the clause is inserted not merely to illustrate the dignity of the Son, but to suggest that the whole course of nature and history, when rightly interpreted, reveals the Son and therefore the Father."<sup>7</sup> But following His incarnation and death and resurrection, He was exalted *as Man* to sit down "on the right hand of the Majesty on high." This was not the throne of David transferred somehow from earth to heaven, as some have mistakenly supposed, but God the Father's own throne in the Universal Kingdom. The distinction is made very clear by our Lord Himself when, speaking to the Church on earth from His throne in the heavens, He promises, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. 3:21). These are two thrones, not one. The former is distinctly Messianic; the latter is the throne of God alone upon which "none may sit but God, and the God-Man Jesus Christ."<sup>8</sup>

7. *This Universal Kingdom Is Not Exactly Identical with That Kingdom for Which Our Lord Taught His Disciples to Pray*

His kingdom ruleth over all.  
Thy kingdom come.

--Ps. 103:19  
--Matt. 6:10

In its universal and providential sense, the Kingdom of God had already come, and the will of God was being done, in every place including even the earth. For, as we have seen above, this Kingdom "ruleth over all" (Ps. 103:19), and its sovereign God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11). This rule of God, in fact, had always existed and never had been abrogated or interrupted. The duty of man, in relation to such a Kingdom, was to acknowledge its reality and bow to its sovereignty; not to pray for its coming in any objective sense. There should be no confusion as to this distinction.

What then was the Kingdom for which Christ bade His disciples to pray? The infallible key to the meaning of the petition, "Thy kingdom come," must be found in the clause which follows: "As *in heaven, so on earth*" (Matt. 6:10, ASV). Although this clause is immediately connected with the petition, "Thy will be done," it no doubt qualifies all three of the petitions which precede it.<sup>9</sup> The disciples are to pray for the hallowing of God's name, for the coming of God's Kingdom, and for the doing of God's will--all this to be done "*on earth*" as it is being done "*in heaven.*" Although the Kingdom of God was already ruling over all, there was nevertheless a profound difference between the exercise of its rule "*in heaven*" and "*on earth.*" This difference arises out of the fact that rebellion and sin exist upon the earth, sin which is to be dealt with in a way not known in any other place in the universe, not even among the angels which sinned. It is here that the great purpose of what I have named the *Mediatorial* Kingdom appears: On the basis of mediatorial redemption it must "come" to put down at last all rebellion with its train of evil results, thus finally bringing the Kingdom and will of God *on earth* as it is in heaven. When this purpose has been fully accomplished, the mediatorial phase of the Kingdom will disappear as a

7 *Op. cit.*, p. 252.

8 R. C. Trench, *Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1897), p. 230.

9 So Alford.

separate entity, being merged with the Universal Kingdom of God.

This is substantially the view taken by the discerning Adolph Saphir in his very able and spiritually helpful treatment of *The Lord's Prayer*. Commenting on the clause "Thy kingdom come," he says, "The petition refers primarily and directly to the Messianic kingdom on earth, of which all Scripture testifies. The King of this kingdom is the Lord Jesus, the Son of David; the subjects of it are Israel and the nations,--the chosen people fulfilling the mission which, according to the election of God, is assigned unto them, of being the medium of blessing unto all the nations of the earth; the center of the kingdom is Jerusalem, and the means of its establishment is the coming and visible appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ. When we pray 'Thy kingdom come,' our true meaning is, 'Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!' "<sup>10</sup>

Referring to the same petition in the Prayer, Ellicott finds that "Historically, the prayer had its origin in the Messianic expectations embodied in the picture of the ideal king in Isaiah 11:1-6; 42:1-7; Daniel 7:14. It had long been familiar to all who looked for the consolation of Israel. Now the kingdom of God, that in which He manifests His sovereignty more than in the material world or in the common course of history, had been proclaimed as nigh at hand. The Teacher of the prayer knew Himself to be the Head of that kingdom."<sup>11</sup> Here Ellicott seems to distinguish between the already existing divine kingdom in nature and history and that kingdom for which men are taught to pray.

This distinction is also supported by the Greek text of the Prayer. In each of the petitions concerning God's name, kingdom, and will, the Greek verb is not only in the emphatic position but also aorist imperative in form, thus indicating "single or instantaneous" action.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in harmony with all Old Testament prophecy, the prayer taught by our Lord suggests not only that His kingdom is to be prayed for, but also that its coming to the "earth" will be a definite crisis in history, not a long and gradual process of evolution. This is in sharp contrast with the Universal Kingdom which has always been present in the world, on earth as well as in heaven.

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10 *The Lord's Prayer* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Alliance Publishing Co., no date given), p. 173.

11 Charles J. Ellicott, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, reprint, 1954), *in loc.*

12 S. G. Green, *Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1912), p. 309-310.