

# THE BEST CITIZENS

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It is a Christian's duty to obey the laws of our earthly government. Romans 13:1 says, "*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.*" Titus 3:1 says, "*Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.*" We are commanded in 1 Peter 2:13-15, "*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.*"

These commandments are based upon the fact that our God possesses all authority in this world and is the one governs all things.

## **God's authority in the earth**

The very first verse in the Bible, Genesis 1:1, establishes the fact that God rules in the kingdoms of men. "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*" God is the Creator and, therefore, Owner (Psa 24:1-2) and Ruler over the entire universe. Joshua 3:13 says that Jehovah is "*the Lord of all the earth.*" Zerubbabel and the faithful children of Israel described themselves as being "the servants of the God of heaven and earth" (Ezra 5:11). This is in keeping with Psalm 96:10, which instructed the children of Israel, "Say among the heathen that the Lord reigns" (see also 1 Chr 16:31). Psalm 59:13 declares that "God rules in Jacob unto the ends of the earth." Psalm 22:28 says that "the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations." "The Lord most high is terrible; *he is a great King over all the earth*" (Psa 47:2), and "*God is the King of all the earth*" (Psa 47:7-8). God desires for all men to know that he, whose name alone is Jehovah, is "*the most high over all the earth*" (Psa 83:18; see also 1 Chr 29:11-12; Psa 103:19; Jer 10:7). Righteous Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, acknowledged that God rules "*over all the kingdoms of the heathen*" and in his hand is "power and might" such that none can withstand him (2 Chr 20:6).

## **Nebuchadnezzar's lesson**

God demonstrated this fact when he humbled Nebuchadnezzar, king of the mighty empire of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar boasted about his kingdom, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty (Dan 4:30)?" God then drove the king out with the wild animals (Dan 4:33) until he came to know "that *the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will*" (Dan 4:25,32), that "*the heavens do rule*" (Dan 4:26). After this, Nebuchadnezzar "praised and honored him that lives for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation" (Dan 4:34). In Daniel 4:35, he acknowledged that God "*does according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?*" Nebuchadnezzar then praised, extolled, and honored "the King of heaven" (Dan 4:37). This was not only done for Nebuchadnezzar's sake. An entire chapter of the Bible (Daniel 4) is devoted to this account "to the intent

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that *the living* may know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will, and sets up over it the basest of men” (Dan 4:17). All men need to understand that God is the one ruling through the governments in this world. Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson, Belshazzar, was rebuked by God and ultimately killed for not learning this lesson (Dan 5:18-23).

## **Christ is Lord of all**

But God did not only rule over the entire universe during the Old Testament. Psalm 2:6-12 foretold that God would give Christ the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession on the day of his resurrection, and Christ would then rule the nations “with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” Similarly, Psalm 110 foretold that Christ would sit at God’s right hand and rule in the midst of his enemies and “judge among the heathen.” These prophecies were fulfilled (see Acts 2:32-36; 13:33; Rev 2:26-27; 12:5; 19:15), as Christ was indeed given “all authority in heaven and in earth” (Mt 28:18). Christ truly is “Lord of all” (Acts 10:36). According to Romans 13:1-7, Jesus exercises his authority as Lord over all and rules over all nations with a rod of iron through earthly governments. “*For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God*” (Rom 13:1). That is why government officials are referred to three times in Romans 13:4-6 as “God’s ministers.” That is why it is essential for *every soul* to be subject to *every ordinance of man* (Rom 13:1; 1 Pet 2:13) and every government official, from the king down to his lowliest ministers and tax officials (Rom 13:6-7; 1 Pet 2:13-14). Jesus himself obeyed earthly authorities. He paid his taxes (Matt 17:24-27), and taught everyone to “*render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s*” (Matt 22:17-21; Mark 12:14-17; Luke 20:22-26). Those who do not obey the laws of the land are punished. The rulers are a “terror” to evil works and men should fear this power (Rom 13:3-4), “*for he bears not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that does evil*” (Rom 13:4). The only exception to this would be if the government commanded us to disobey God. When any authority over us commands us to disobey God, we must always obey God over man (Est 3:1-6; Dan 3,6; Luke 16:13; 14:26; Acts 4:17-20; 5:25-29). Otherwise, men who do not voluntarily submit to Jesus as Christ will be forced to submit to him as Lord. Prison (or worse) awaits those who break the laws of any land. In this way, Jesus truly is ruling over all with a rod of iron. But Christians should not obey earthly governments strictly because they force us to. Rather, we should submit “for conscience sake” (Rom 13:3-5), “for the Lord’s sake” (1 Pet 2:13). Since these officials are the Lord’s ministers (though they themselves seldom realize this fact, Jn 19:10-11), whoever disobeys them are guilty of disobeying God. For this reason, “*whosoever therefore resists the power, resists the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation*” (Rom 13:2). Christians should always therefore be the best citizens in the land.