



# God Is King

by

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**Abstract:** God is King of the earth. That is a given which most Christians will agree with, but what exactly does it *mean*, for God to be King? Here is a sermon on the idea that God is King – not like the king of a modern parliamentary monarchy, but like an ancient middle-eastern autocrat. It also takes a look at how such a view of God impacts the lives of His children.

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# God is King

## *I. Introduction*

Close your eyes for a minute and let me draw a picture for you. We have reached a warm country, somewhere to the south and to the east. There we've been invited to visit the palace of the local ruler. We are ushered into a high-vaulted hall made entirely of black marble. It is inlaid with gold and semi-precious stones, forming intricate mosaics, breathtakingly beautiful. It is lit by indirect lighting between the columns. Before each of the twelve columns stands a guard. Each is dressed in a tunic and breeches of deep crimson, trimmed in gold. They have swords by their sides and stand ready, watching us with suspicion.

At the far end are high, wooden doors, overlaid with gold, into which pictures of lions and unicorns and griffins and other magnificent, fairy-tale creatures and plants are intricately carved. We wait expectantly, looking at the high doors, wondering what will come out of them. Slowly they open and a man beckons us forward into another hall, even more highly vaulted than the one we are in.

The walls are made of white marble, carved so fine in places that it is translucent. Inlaid in the marble is gold and silver and sapphires and rubies and turquoise and emeralds and other precious stones depicting landscapes, scenes from battles, or from court life. The ceiling is hidden by purple tapestries edged in gold, embroidered with the symbols of each of the provinces of this country. There are men and women and soldiers, all dressed in glittering finery. The clothing is made up mainly of varicolored flowing robes that are embroidered with threads of precious metals and set with precious stones. The air is heavy with the scent of cinnamon and myrrh and incense.

But it is what is at the far end of the hall that rivets our attention. There are six steps going up to a dais. On each step there are two gilded lions, one on the right, one on the left. Each step is made of the finest cedar, carefully smoothed out, so no imperfections can be seen. Each is also lightly overlaid with gold leaf. And at the top of the stairway, on the dais of red marble, is a high throne, made entirely of gold, spread with crimson cushions. The man sitting on the throne is tall, with dark hair and beard, and a swarthy complexion. He is dressed in blinding white robes, a gold belt at his waist. He has a crimson robe resting over one shoulder and his midnight tresses are encircled by a heavy crown of wrought gold with a massive diamond set in the center above the dark brow.

The majesty of the one on the throne is so heavy that it weighs down on us and we – almost in relief – sink to the floor in obeisance.

That is what it might be like to walk into the opulence of an ancient oriental king's court. And this picture is what started me on the journey of what I'd like to talk about this evening. As I was studying at CIU the professors impressed it upon my heart that it was very important to study the culture surrounding the Scriptures in order to understand them better. I did as they said and it opened new horizons to me.

What intrigued me the most was, what was an ancient king like? That led to another question. What is it that God means when He talks about being King? Is He talking about being a king like an ancient oriental ruler? After about two years of thinking about this and looking into God's Word, I came to the conclusion, that yes, that is the way He wants to be seen.

## **God is King – let the nations tremble!**

### ***II. Kingship Now and Then***

We Americans don't like kings. After all, our country broke away from a king's oppressive rule in order to be "free." So when you encounter kings in American literature, very rarely are they portrayed positively. Usually the king is painted as a tyrant who must be thrown down in order to give the people freedom. Think of one of the best-known myths of our day and age.

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...<sup>1</sup>

And so a saga of Star Wars begins; the righteous rebels fighting for a republic against an evil emperor. Telling, isn't it? We want to be free, we want to control ourselves. For that reason we look at kingship as an anachronism at best. I already mentioned the worst case. So, when kings come to mind, we'll be talking about dictators and despots, like Hitler, Castro, Mussolini, Saddam Hussein. Good kings, like King Hussein of Jordan are rarely mentioned.

If we had to have a monarchy, we would probably be looking at a parliamentary monarchy, like in Great Britain, where the real power lies with the people through the parliament and the prime minister, and the king is only a figurehead.

And yet our Bible is filled with references to kings, whether rulers of empires, small countries, or cities. Even God is called King numerous times. And I submit to you that we as Americans do not understand what is meant by a king.

Since humans first began recording history we have had rulers. We have always needed rulers, because we are like sheep. We need a shepherd. So, from the rise of mankind until the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century kings who ruled with absolute power were the norm. There were a few notable exceptions, such as the fabled Greek democracies under Plato and Aristotle and the attempts at the Roman Republic, which quickly became an empire. However, it wasn't until the nineteenth and the twentieth century that *real* democracy arose. This idea is something new. It is not something biblical. There may be people who will argue that it is biblical, citing the elders ruling the church or the commune of Jerusalem, but this is reading our culture back into the Bible.

Before we go on, we must remember that the Bible wasn't spoken into a cultural void. God used the language, the concepts, the terminology, and the culture of the Israelites to convey

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted from George Lucas's *Star Wars: A New Hope*, released by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox in 1977.

His Word to us. When He had the writers use specific terms, He knew exactly what these terms would mean to the people who heard them. Therefore it is very important to study Scripture not only in its literary context, but also in its cultural context. What did the Israelites think of when they heard the term 'king' used by their God? What did the Jews who had returned from exile think? What about the Gentiles who were won over to the Way of Jesus the Christ? What did they understand a king to be?

To some effect we can see a bit of an evolution in the term as God revealed more and more of Himself and of His plan, but in the end the meaning altered very little. That is, until the so-called "Enlightenment" began. It was when we as humanity declared ourselves grown-up and ready to take over the planet for ourselves, when we declared that we had the strength and right to rule ourselves. Many positive things came from this, such as accountability for kings and governments, an understanding of the rights of the individual, and scientific advancement. But many more negative things arose from this, including our losing our understanding of a fundamental part of Scripture – the meaning of the word 'king.' Let's refresh our memory about what a king was to the people who first heard the words of God.

In the ancient middle east the king was an absolute monarch. He was law-giver, judge, supreme military commander, and often high priest, all at the same time; one who was absolute ruler by right, be it of blood or by divine choice. As a matter of fact, while Israel had a single God, all other nations around them had a pantheon which was ruled over by a king over the other gods. The gods were said to have adopted the human king and so have given him his power and his right to rule. Egypt even went a step further and declared Pharaoh to be a god in his own right. In Israel's case the king is even titled the son of God in the second Psalm. (I realize that this had its ultimate fulfillment in Christ, but it was also used in the enthronement rituals of the kings of Israel.)

To be allowed to enter the king's presence was the highest privilege on earth. To dispute him was dangerous, to defy him was often certain death. To appease him was as important as making a living. To serve him was the highest possible honor and the very breath of life to his subjects.

### ***III. God is King***

God is King – not in the modern sense, but in the ancient Middle Eastern sense. Let's take a look at the qualifications He gives us for His being King. Perhaps the best book to underscore the fact of God's kingship is the book of Psalms.

#### **A. By Right as Creator**

The first clue to why He is King is found in Psalm 95:1-5.

<sup>1</sup> *Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;  
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.*

<sup>2</sup> *Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
and extol him with music and song.*

<sup>3</sup> For the LORD is the great God,  
the great King above all gods.

<sup>4</sup> In his hand are the depths of the earth,  
and the mountain peaks belong to him.

<sup>5</sup> The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.

Also take a look at Psalm 24:1-2

<sup>1</sup> The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,  
the world, and all who live in it;

<sup>2</sup> for he founded it upon the seas  
and established it upon the waters.

God is King because He owns the earth and the sea and everything that is in it. In the ancient Middle East, the king was the one who – at least in theory – owned all of the land and gave it out to his subjects to keep and farm in return for taxes and military protection. God is King because He owns the earth. It is indisputably His. Why? Because He made it.

If I would form a pitcher from a piece of clay and then fire it, would you be able to come to me and claim that it was really yours and not mine? Could you legally tell me what whether I was to fill it with juice or wine or water or milk? No. I made the pitcher by the sweat of my brow. I fired it in the kiln. I hold it in my hand. It is mine. I made it.

Well, we could technically dispute the pitcher and you could steal it from me, but what about if I sat down at that piano and started jamming and making up music. Could you come to me and tell me how my music was supposed to sound? Could you control where my fingers were going and what harmonies I was using? No. It is my creation, my property, not yours.

Exactly the same principle applies to God. He made this place. It is irrevocably His. He lets it out to us, His subjects, and we are to keep it for Him. And I submit to you that we have done a very poor job of keeping up the land of the King. I wouldn't be surprised if He would wipe us all out simply for the way that we and our forefathers misused this earth. It also reminds us of how we should be careful to keep this earth in the best possible condition and do our part to restore it to its former purity as much as we can.

## **B. Over Israel**

Kingship, however, is not just defined by ownership. God is and was King over Israel in a very special way. He chose Jacob to begin with and gave him the name Israel, to be a "kingdom of priests" before Him (Exodus 19:6). He demonstrated His right to designate them as His priests by giving them His Law. The most clear example of this is the book of Deuteronomy.

Most scholars – even those who maintain that Deuteronomy was written over a long period of time – will agree that the format of the last book of Moses is that of a treaty between a suzerain, the more powerful king, and a weaker king who became his vassal. On a side bar,

one of the most significant arguments for an early date of writing for Deuteronomy is the fact that the format of this treaty is exactly the same one used by the Hittites and Egyptians only during the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries BC!<sup>2</sup>

God uses this form to emphasize the fact that He is the suzerain and that Israel is His vassal. Because He is the Suzerain, He has the right to give Israel a law that she must abide by. He has the right to distribute land to her in any way He sees fit. That's why there are two alternate distributions of the land: the historical one in Joshua 14 - 19 and the future distribution described in Ezekiel 47 and 48. Because He is the sovereign King, He has the right to evict Israel from the land if she does not abide by the treaty.

He demonstrates His rights as sovereign King by calling and empowering the Judges. He then chooses the Israelite kings, beginning with Saul, continuing with David and Solomon, all the way down through Jehoiachin to Jesus the Christ. He exercises His rights as sovereign King by calling his wayward children to account and by judging them for their sins.

God is King over Israel. And Israel knew it. They called Him king. Let's look at the word of God.<sup>3</sup>

**Psalm 10:16-16**

<sup>16</sup> *Yahweh is King for ever and ever;  
the nations will perish from his land.*

<sup>17</sup> *You hear, O Yahweh, the desire of the afflicted;  
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,*

<sup>18</sup> *defending the fatherless and the oppressed,  
in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more.*

**Psalm 24:7-9**

<sup>7</sup> *Lift up your heads, O you gates;  
be lifted up, you ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.*

<sup>8</sup> *Who is this King of glory?  
Yahweh strong and mighty,  
Yahweh mighty in battle.*

<sup>9</sup> *Lift up your heads, O you gates;  
lift them up, you ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.*

<sup>10</sup> *Who is he, this King of glory?  
Yahweh Zebaoth --  
he is the King of glory.*

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Dr Ferris McDaniel, *Old Testament Theology Class Notes*, Columbia, SC: Columbia International University, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> All passages are taken from the New International Version. Old Testament passages show the following alterations: "the LORD" has been rendered as "Yahweh" and "LORD Almighty" has been rendered more literally as "Yahweh Zebaoth" which could be more accurately translated as "Yahweh of Hosts".

**Psalm 47**

<sup>1</sup> Clap your hands, all you nations;  
shout to God with cries of joy.

<sup>2</sup> How awesome is Yahweh Most High,  
the great King over all the earth!

<sup>3</sup> He subdued nations under us,  
peoples under our feet.

<sup>4</sup> He chose our inheritance for us,  
the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.

Selah

<sup>5</sup> God has ascended amid shouts of joy,  
Yahweh amid the sounding of trumpets.

<sup>6</sup> Sing praises to God, sing praises;  
sing praises to our King, sing praises.

<sup>7</sup> For God is the King of all the earth;  
sing to him a psalm of praise.

<sup>8</sup> God reigns over the nations;  
God is seated on his holy throne.

<sup>9</sup> The nobles of the nations assemble  
as the people of the God of Abraham,  
for the kings of the earth belong to God;  
he is greatly exalted.

**Isaiah 6:1-5**

<sup>1</sup> In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh Zebaoth;  
the whole earth is full of his glory."

<sup>4</sup> At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

<sup>5</sup> "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh Zebaoth."

**Isaiah 30:20-22**

<sup>20</sup> Look upon Zion, the city of our festivals;  
your eyes will see Jerusalem,  
a peaceful abode, a tent that will not be moved;  
its stakes will never be pulled up,  
nor any of its ropes broken.

<sup>21</sup> There Yahweh will be our Mighty One.  
It will be like a place of broad rivers and streams.  
No galley with oars will ride them,

*no mighty ship will sail them.  
<sup>22</sup> For Yahweh is our judge,  
 Yahweh is our lawgiver,  
 Yahweh is our king;  
 it is he who will save us.*

***I Timothy 1:17***

*<sup>17</sup> Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

***I Timothy 6:15b-16***

*<sup>15</sup> God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.*

God's people clearly called Him King, both in the Old and in the New Testament. I would like to make one point here concerning kingship: God is King, undisputedly. Jesus is King, undisputedly. Jesus is God. Therefore He is King. The Father is God, therefore He is King. Let's not make an artificial division between the Father and the Son. Their unity is undisputed as is their diversity. However, they *both* hold the title of King. So when we talk of Yahweh being King over all the earth, remember that we mean both the Father and the Son, not only one or the other. The Father is our King, and so is Jesus Christ.

### **C. Over the Whole World**

Aside from being King over Israel, we have already mentioned that God is King over the whole earth. Especially the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah stress this fact. Let's look at the words of Nebuchadnezzar from the book of Daniel.

*I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.*

*His dominion is an eternal dominion;  
 his kingdom endures from generation to generation.*

*<sup>35</sup> All the peoples of the earth  
 are regarded as nothing.  
 He does as he pleases  
 with the powers of heaven  
 and the peoples of the earth.  
 No one can hold back his hand  
 or say to him: "What have you done?"*

*<sup>37</sup> Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (Daniel 4:34-35,37)*

As a matter of fact, the whole book of Daniel deals with God's being King over all the nations. He shows that He is sovereign over Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire, over the Medo-Persian Empire, over the Greek Empire, and over the Roman Empire. He shows that the proverb holds true:

*The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. (Proverbs 23:1)*

Again we can quote Psalm 47<sup>4</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> *Clap your hands, all you nations;  
shout to God with cries of joy.*  
<sup>2</sup> *How awesome is Yahweh Most High,  
the great King over all the earth!*

God is King over all the earth, all nations and He will prove that at the end of time, when He returns to rule in justice for 1000 years.

#### **D. In Comparison to Other Gods / Kings**

Before you think that Yahweh is anything like the other gods or kings around Him, he clearly states otherwise. He is *nothing* like them. For one thing, other gods don't exist. They are shams, if anything, demons masquerading as all-powerful beings. And for one thing the gods of the nations around Israel were not all-powerful like our God is!

One of the key differences between our God and the other rulers is the fact that they all needed advisors, whether they were mortal or immortal. And these advisors often exercised great power over the kings. Let's read what God declares in Isaiah 40:13-14.

<sup>13</sup> *Who has understood the mind of the LORD,  
or instructed him as his counselor?*  
<sup>14</sup> *Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him,  
and who taught him the right way?  
Who was it that taught him knowledge  
or showed him the path of understanding?*

The context makes it clear that the answer to these questions is 'no one.' No one has understood the mind of the Lord. No one has instructed Him, ever! No one could advise Him if they *wanted* to. He knows it all! Even wisdom is a creation that went forth from Him. There is none who can compare with Him! And this is our king! Who can compare with the Lord Most High?

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<sup>4</sup> While NIV, this is modified in that "the LORD" is rendered as Yahweh.

<sup>21</sup> *Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood since the earth was founded?*

<sup>22</sup> *He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,  
and its people are like grasshoppers.  
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,  
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.*

<sup>23</sup> *He brings princes to naught  
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.*

<sup>24</sup> *No sooner are they planted,  
no sooner are they sown,  
no sooner do they take root in the ground,  
than he blows on them and they wither,  
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.*

<sup>25</sup> *"To whom will you compare me?  
Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.*

<sup>26</sup> *Lift your eyes and look to the heavens:  
Who created all these?  
He who brings out the starry host one by one,  
and calls them each by name.  
Because of his great power and mighty strength,  
not one of them is missing. (Isaiah 4:21-24)*

## **E. Jesus is King**

That brings us to another thing: Jesus is King. Jesus is Messiah, the visible manifestation of God, therefore He must be King. In Philippians 2 Paul declares that "every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10b-11)

Jesus is *kyrios*, *'adonay*, Master, Owner, Lord. *Kyrios* is what the ancient Greeks used to designate their overlords, or kings. It was a term of royalty. It was also used in place of the sacred Name of God: Yahweh. He is King, because His status as God makes Him so, because the Father has declared Him to be so.

Because of this He has the right to judge. He has the right to judge *us*. But we must remember that our King and Judge is also our Savior, our Father, our Brother. He can and will give pardon for every wrong thing that you and I have ever done – if we will only ask Him.

## ***IV. We are the King's Children***

And that brings us to our final point: We who have made peace with God through Jesus are the King's children by adoption. We are princes and princesses of the Kingdom, we have

unique privileges that the rest of the world does not. We also have weighty responsibilities that they do not.

How are we as His children to approach Him? In the ancient middle east, even at the time of the Roman Empire, even the king's own family members had to prostrate themselves before him. After all, he was the viceroy of the gods. He was to be honored by all, including his own family. This was usually done by getting down on hands and knees and bowing before him, with the forehead touching the ground.

Well, you might say, a king is just human, how can I bow before him? I bow only to the living God! Well, that's where the problem sets in. When we say that we assume that we're something better than the king. We are not. You would not act disrespectfully to the American President. I can just see one of us going up to him.

"Yo, Dubya, whassup? Wanna hang out and have a couple drinks, and by the way I was wondering if you could put in a pardon for me." Would you come into the presence of the President with your work clothes on, without first cleaning up? No.

That is but a tiny example of what it means to come into the presence of God. I must be honest that I don't come into His presence in the way I should. I have found, though, that outward prostration is a powerful way of showing my reverence for Him. Did you know that the regular way for people to pray in Israel until the Exile was prostration? Again and again you find people bowing in the presence of the King of the earth. This is something that died out very slowly. As a matter of fact in Medieval times monks would often fully prostrate themselves before their Lord and Savior when worshiping him, lying face-down on the ground!

Now, I wonder very much what would happen if God Himself were to visibly walk into this room. How would we feel, what would we think? I doubt even one of us would remain on his or her feet or butt. We'd be cowering on the floor in fear and in awe. We so easily forget how to come before Him.

We may have the right to call Him "Daddy" – that's what Abba means – but at the same time we have to remember that Daddy is still the King and demands respect. I remember that my human Dad, always demanded respect. I am allowed to call him Dad, but I still must treat him with respect. How much more so God!

We as God's children have certain rights. We have the right to enter His presence whenever we choose. We have the right to have fellowship with Him. We have the right to ask Him to act on our behalf. We have the right to be cleansed by Him whenever we mess up. We have the right to be dependant on Him. We don't have to be dependant on anyone else. We have the right to call Him Daddy. Can you imagine how wonderful that right is? It's the one that touches my heart the most. I can call the King of the Universe Daddy. I can call God Daddy.

But with all of these rights we have amazing responsibility. In the ancient middle east the King's family was the court of appeals for the people. If you wanted something done, you'd go and talk to a prince or the queen who would then take the request to the king. The princes and princesses were well known and respected and they were expected to behave in accord with their station. Unfortunately there were many who did *not* do that.

We on the other hand are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that [we] may declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (I Peter 2:9) We are God’s representatives in the world. The commoners of this world will come to us, the Royals, to have us present their petitions before the King. They may not know it, but whenever someone comes to you and tells you about their problems you have the *responsibility* to pray for them. You are the King’s ambassadors – His own children.

We have the responsibility to love Him as He loved us – and that means that we are to obey Him. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said again and again, “If you love me you will obey what I command.” (John 14:15) Doing His will is the center of our responsibilities. And His command is simple:

*You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:5 — NASB)*  
*And you will love your neighbor as yourself. (Leviticus 19:18 — NASB)*

That is the central command – to love. And that is the one thing that makes our King different from any others. He may be Judge and just Ruler. He may be unapproachably seated in light, so high up that we cannot reach Him, but at the same time He is love and He is therefore accessible to all who will come to Him. The invitation to join His family is open to all and all you need to do is come and accept His offer to forgive you everything that you’ve done wrong.

To be so completely guilty, given over to despair, to look into your Judge’s face and see a Savior there.<sup>5</sup>

## ***V. Conclusion***

God is King! Let the nations tremble. He is King in the old sense of the word – He is the absolute King and when He decides something we have no right or reason to disagree and talk back to Him.

God is King, who rules the nations and Israel. Therefore we must come before Him with reverence and awe. We must bow before Him when we come and remember that we are coming into the presence of the most wonderful, most glorious, most powerful, most loving Being that exists – the One without whom nothing would exist. Keep that in mind as you pray and worship.

When you come into His presence rejoice and sing, praise Him in your own way, but also let him take away whatever might keep you from coming into His presence, and make you become real.

God is King! Let the Nations rejoice! He is ruler over all the earth! Let His family give praise! Amen!

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Michael Card, "Jubilee", *The Ancient Faith*, Brentwood, TN: The Sparrow Corporation, 1993.

## ***Bible Translations***

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