

God is King

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Many scholars would say that the root metaphor for God in the Old Testament is “the Lord is King” or “God is a warrior”. It’s been established that “warrior” means something similar to “king”, and that all kings are considered warriors. Thus, the theme for the Old Testament is that of God being king. There are many ways the Bible shows God to be king, including exclamations of His kingship in Psalms, by the prophets and in apocalyptic literature. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel struggled with serving God as their king; they went so far as to demand a human king! How do we know that God is king over all other kings? How did people proclaim God as king? What kind of king is God? What standards for human kings were developed based on God’s kingship? How did Israel handle God as their king? These questions will be discussed below.

There are many parts of the Bible that recognize God as king over the earth. They can easily be found in Psalms, but can be deduced from other books as well. “The Lord shall reign forever and ever” is found in Exodus 15.18, and an almost identical verse is in Psalm 10.16 (*Spiritual*). “He [God] is king, always has been king, and always will be king” (O’Neill, p4), just as it says in Psalms 24.7-8: “God is my King from of old...” (*Spiritual*). Psalms 96.11 and 98.7-8 (*Spiritual*) both proclaim “Yahweh’s kingship” (Ringgen). God is above all other kings, and was the one to appoint human kings (Denio, p13). David in Psalms sums up the motif of God as king: “Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, The Lord mighty in battle” (*Spiritual*, Ps. 24.7-8). J. C. O’Neill explained that the Hebrew word “malekuch” in the Old Testament, often interpreted as “kingdom”, should sometimes instead be translated as “kingly rule”, or “royal power” (O’Neill, p1-2). This would increase the number of places in the Bible where evidence of God’s kingship can be found.

King David recognized God as the true king many times in Psalms. Based on the verses above, David saw God as an eternal king over everything (*Spiritual*, Ps. 24.7-8, 10.16). That's exactly what He is. He destroys enemies (*Spiritual*, Ps. 3.7), reigns from a throne in heaven (Ps. 11.4), avenges his people (Ps. 18.47), judges with right judgements (Ps. 19.9), and has established His kingdom on earth (Ps. 24.1-2). God is merciful, faithful, righteous (Ps. 36.5-6), and upholding (Ps. 37.17). David exclaims in Psalm 47 that God is King over the earth, above every person and nation, and he knows our future and loves us (*Spiritual*, Ps. 47.2-4). God is an awesome king (*Spiritual*, Ps. 47.2)! David knew this, and took 150 psalms to express it. He glorified his King like no other king has been exalted.

If you study the requirements it took for humans to be kings, you might wonder what kind of king God was, since He had no such requirements. F.B. Denio had a good point: that the two attributes of a king are leadership and judgeship (Denio, p12). While those are the most common attributes of kings and often of God, they are not the only attributes of a king. They are perhaps the base attributes of a king, as all kings lead and judge. From there, you can show compassion, wisdom, strength, jealousy, anger, etc. Leading and judging are part of the job, but kingship is always much more than that. Saul failed as a king. David and Solomon were known to be great kings. God is the perfect king, since He is God as well as king. He leads Israel by going ahead of them, clearing the way (Reed, p11). He gave His people laws "to regulate order and morality" (Piroq, p7).

Kings are also known as warriors, and there are several places in the Bible that describe God as a warrior and protector. He "obliterates his enemies" (Reed, p1), fights for his people (*Spiritual*, Ex. 14.14), and delivers his people (Reed, p6-7). Jeremiah 10.10 states that he is an angry God and will not stand for His people to be mistreated (*Spiritual*). What better king is that?

He even promised to fight for His people (*Spiritual*, Josh. 23.10). “Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us” (*Spiritual*, Neh. 4.20)!

Israel didn’t always cooperate with the idea of God being their king. They had a pharaoh king in Egypt. You’d think they would want God as their king after 400 years of abuse and oppression from their king, but once they were settled in the promised land, they demanded another human king. God gave them Saul, but Saul ended up making things worse for the Israelites because he didn’t obey God. Then God appointed David, the man after God’s own heart, to be king. God considered him the greatest king because of this, but even he wasn’t perfect. David’s son Solomon was the wisest king, but he sought worldly things. God is the wise king. Solomon wrote that there is no end to wisdom, but God has all the wisdom and knowledge in the world. What better king is there than God?

So why would Israel want a human king over a perfect divine one? They first demanded, not requested, a king in 1 Samuel to judge them (*Spiritual*, 1 Sam. 8.6). This was right after Samuel appointed his sons as judges over Israel, under God’s guidance. Obviously, Israel was unhappy with the judgement they were getting. The judges worked based on God’s commands. When you see how different rulers change the laws over time, you can see why Israel thought a king might change their judgements. They probably thought they were getting a better deal. God’s response to their demand was this: “...they have not rejected you [Samuel], but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (*Spiritual*, 1 Sam. 8.7). He said the Israelites were acting the same way they had since leaving Egypt (*Spiritual*, 1 Sam. 8.8), which included worshipping other gods. If they forsake their God, why wouldn’t they forsake their King? God granted their demand, however, to teach them a lesson. He told Samuel to show the people of Israel the type of king they would get. What Samuel showed the people became the standards for

a king: “He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots. He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make weapons of war and equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to work. He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the Lord will not hear you in that day” (*Spiritual*, 1 Sam. 8.11-18). You would think after 400 years of slavery, these people would not take kindly to work. They didn’t seem to care about all those things that God via Samuel listed. Instead, they said, “No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles” (*Spiritual*, 1 Sam. 8.19-20). They seemed to have forgotten that God did just that, even recently when they fled Egypt. God gave them king Saul, and at his coronation, Samuel told the people, “...see that your wickedness is great...in asking a king for yourselves” (*Spiritual*, 1 Sam 12.17). God sent a storm to show the people their sin, and they immediately regretted asking for a king. Sound familiar? How many times had the Israelites immediately repented when they were caught doing something that they knew was wrong? A famous example was the golden calf and Ten Commandments. Israelites were like children testing their Father’s boundaries—or subjects testing their King’s.

Since then, God has appointed “kings” all over the world, and the world always suffers one way or another. America’s own “kings”, Bush, Obama, etc., have been on the country’s bad side often, just like with the kings of old. The truth is, we may not like God’s judgements, but

they are for the best. He is a right and just king, and Israel shouldn't have had the right to ask for a human one. ““But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King” (*Spiritual*, Jer. 10.10). “...he will defeat all hostility, demonstrate his kingship, renew his people and all creation, and fill heaven and earth with his glory” (Reed, p22).

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