

# Seek First the Kingdom



**HOW OFTEN ARE WE FRUSTRATED** with our government? Do you ever despair over the direction your government goes? When chaos erupts, pandemic strikes, poverty increases, home prices are out of reach, health care seems only for the well-off, and unemployment rises, we expect our governments to have an answer. Looking around at the current state of the world, there is much to be concerned about. We see riots in the streets, looting, violence, wars, persecution of Christians, anti-Semitism and unbridled rage. How we long for a righteous “king” to arise and bring calm to our nations. I sat in my office with a Jewish friend recently, discussing the unrest in Israel and around the world. He summed it up by saying: “We need Messiah now.” How true! In the meantime, we struggle with earthly leaders, some good and some not good.



Although today many kings have a largely ceremonial role, historically and biblically the king was the ultimate authority, usually with the recognition that he was under the authority of God. When we read the books of Kings in the Bible, we quickly see that kings could be righteous or evil. The Bible often says of evil kings, “*He did evil in the sight of the LORD.*” Good kings conversely pleased the Lord because they did what was right in the sight of the Lord. Today world leaders may be called presidents, prime ministers or supreme leader, as well as king. Some are dictators, others elected, and some are born into the role. Just like in biblical times, some act righteously, and some are evil.

There were times when kings ruled with a heavy hand; Rehoboam, for example (1 Kings 12). Just like today, when an evil king was in power, the people suffered, and when a righteous king ruled the kingdom, its subjects thrived. Whichever they were, the kings expected loyalty from their subjects.

Every kingdom (nation) has a code of behavior, and an expectation of loyalty and allegiance. Those who choose not to align

themselves and instead act against the kingdom can be charged with treason or sedition, which are viewed as extremely egregious crimes against the state.

The United States has a pledge of allegiance, and the House of Representatives begins each day with a recitation of this pledge. When I was growing up, children in school stood facing the flag every day, placed their right hands over their hearts and said, “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America; and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” It was a constant reminder of our commitment to our country and the ideals for which it stood. It remains a solemn patriotic act of respect and unity. I imagine that most US citizens could readily quote this pledge. The words are impactful, but their true value lies in the hearts of the citizens—are they just words, or are they coming from the heart? What exactly is allegiance?

According to [yourdictionary.com](http://yourdictionary.com), allegiance is defined as:

1. Loyalty or devotion to a cause or person.
2. Loyalty to some cause, nation or ruler.
3. Giving a promise to be loyal, or the action of actually being loyal and on someone’s side.

## In the Time of Jesus

In Jesus’ (Yeshua’s) day, the people were ruled by Rome, and the Roman leadership demanded total allegiance. Some of the laws were in direct opposition to the Bible. For example, the emperor was expected to be worshipped. This presented problems for the pious Jewish population who ascribed to the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.), including the Ten Commandments, which warned against serving other gods. The Second Temple period was one of great oppression for the Jewish people, which eventually ended in tragedy. In AD 70, the Temple was destroyed and the people were besieged, starved, murdered or enslaved and forced to leave their beloved homeland.



Just as today when many struggle to submit to leadership that is weak, tyrannical, ungodly or even evil, so it was in the days of Jesus and His followers. It must have been extremely difficult to live in an environment where they were expected to obey the laws of Rome. We can see many references to the conflict in the Scripture. Once Jesus was asked about paying taxes to Caesar. He said, “*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s*” (Mark 12:17). Although He advocated civil obedience, clearly His attention was on another kingdom—the Kingdom of God and the values of God’s Kingdom.

During this chaotic and challenging time, Jesus often spoke of the Kingdom of God. In His words and through His actions, He constantly drew attention to God’s Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven. For example, the Lord’s Prayer begins with the words: “*Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, **thy kingdom come**. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,*” (Matt. 6:8b–10, Luke 11:2, KJV emphasis added).

## God Is Our King

This month in Israel we are celebrating the Fall Feasts (Lev. 23). The first is the Feast of Trumpets, known today as *Rosh HaShanah* (“the Head of the Year”). The atmosphere is charged with the prayers of the Jewish people who gather in large numbers in the synagogues. Trumpets are blown throughout the day. One of the themes of this holiday is the kingship of God.

Contrast the human king with God our King and you come up with a different picture entirely. Our God, our King is always righteous and good, looking out for the best for His loyal followers. He is a God of mercy and judgment. Isaiah 33:22 proclaims: “*For the LORD is our Judge, the LORD is our Lawgiver, the LORD is our King; He will save us.*”





God is referred to as King throughout the Bible, and both Christians and Jews refer to God as King and speak about His Kingdom. Psalm 47 is an example. *“For the LORD Most High is to be feared, a great King over all the earth...Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is King of all the earth...God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne”* (Ps. 47:2, 6–8 NASB).

In Judaism it is customary to bless God numerous times each day. These prayers begin with the words, “Blessed are you, oh Lord our God, King of the universe.” On *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) and other fast days, God is addressed as King in a prayer which repeatedly references His kingship. It is a prayer of repentance and petition. This beautiful prayer and song are called “*Avinu Malkeinu*” (“Our Father, our King”). You can find the text of this prayer at <https://www.my-jewishlearning.com/article/text-of-avinu-malkeinu/>

## The Kingdom of God

In the time of Jesus (Yeshua), the people prayed for deliverance from the Romans. According to David Flusser, a renowned Second Temple period expert, “...people in general believed that when the Kingdom of God came, Israel would be freed from the yoke of Rome.” Jesus’ disciples had sat under His teaching and heard Him say much about the Kingdom of Heaven, yet clearly, they also expected Jesus to free Israel from Roman oppression. After the resurrection, they plainly asked Him, *“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’*” (Acts 1:6).

Flusser also states that:

“For Jesus and the rabbis, the kingdom of God is both present and future...According to rabbinical Judaism the kingdom of heaven means that the one and only God presently rules *de jure*, but in the eschatological future the kingdom of God [will] be revealed to all the inhabitants of the world *de facto*. There should be no doubt that both for rabbinical Judaism and for Jesus the kingdom of heaven is a present reality (Luke 11:20–21, Exod. 25:8 and the Aramaic Targumim). The sages taught that there may even be individuals who are already living, so to speak, in the kingdom of heaven, if they take upon themselves the ‘yoke of the kingdom of heaven.’”

To take on the yoke of heaven means to live according to the rules of God’s Kingdom. In Jewish thinking it refers to practicing our faith according to the revealed will of God in the *Torah* and *Tanakh* (Gen.–Mal.). As Christians we would add the Writings of the Apostles (NT).

In Jesus’ references to the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, both the here and now and the future are referenced, something which has led to much confusion. Is He talking about now or the future? The answer is “yes.”

Jesus showed through His life and actions the way the Kingdom of God should operate. Remember the phrase from the Lord’s Prayer, “*Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” This marries both thoughts in one sentence. He healed people and delivered the oppressed and told them that this was evidence that the Kingdom of God was here. “*But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you*” (Luke 11:21).





Jesus told His followers that the Kingdom of God had great value and should be searched for like a person searching for a lost coin. It was so valuable that everything else should be given up to obtain it (the parable of hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl; see Matthew 13).

Jesus referred to the Kingdom of God in the parables of the leaven and the mustard seed. Both show growth. The mustard seed, a very small seed, grows into a bush large enough to house birds. Leaven causes the dough to expand. When we consider the small band of Jesus' disciples and the proliferation of Jesus followers today, there has been a growth in the Kingdom.

There are benefits to being part of God's Kingdom. "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*" (Matt. 6:33). What are the things that will be added? This verse is preceded by Jesus' teaching on our attitude toward treasure and riches, and we are told not to store up treasures. The next verses are hard to understand unless you know Hebrew sayings. In Hebraic thought, someone with a good eye is generous, and someone with a bad eye is stingy. This is followed by an admonition not to worry about food, drink and clothing. We can sum this up easily by saying, "Trust God, share your wealth generously, and don't worry." Matthew 6:25–32 clearly states that our God, our King, knows that we need these things. Just as He provides for the birds of the air, He will provide for us.

Throughout the Scripture there is a theme of blessing for those who seek God and live in the way He has ordained. Similarly, there are negative consequences for those who choose to rebel against Him.

I started this teaching letter by referencing the situation of the world today. Even though we live in a fallen world and are subject to leaders who do not follow God or His ways, we also live as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. Although things could get more difficult in the natural realm, we have the assurance of knowing that God is still on the throne. I can hear His voice through the Scripture, “*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...*” Spend time with Him, trust Him, choose to live His way, and we can rest in the knowledge that He will watch over us, just as He does the sparrows.

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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

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### TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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