

# Jehoshaphat: Governments Under God

*Bible Characters*

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**Bible Text:** 2 Chronicles 19:8-11; Matthew 22:15-22  
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The Scripture lesson today is taken from two places, 2 Chronicles chapter 19, where we continue this look at King Jehoshaphat and his repentance, and beginning there at verse 8. 2 Chronicles 19:8, page 700.

8 In Jerusalem also, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites, priests and heads of Israelite families to administer the law of the LORD and to settle disputes. And they lived in Jerusalem. 9 He gave them these orders: ‘You must serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the LORD. 10 In every case that comes before you from your fellow countrymen who live in the cities—whether bloodshed or other concerns of the law, commands, decrees or ordinances—you are to warn them not to sin against the LORD; otherwise his wrath will come on you and your brothers. Do this, and you will not sin. 11 Amariah the chief priest will be over you in any matter concerning the LORD, and Zebadiah son of Ishmael, the leader of the tribe of Judah, will be over you in any matter concerning the king, and the Levites will serve as officials before you. Act with courage, and may the LORD be with those who do well.’

And then over to Matthew chapter 22. Matthew chapter 22, and you’ll find this on page 1,928. Matthew 22 beginning at verse 15.

15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. 16 They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. 17 Tell us then, what is your opinion?’

Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' 18 But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, 'You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? 19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought him a denarius, 20 and he asked them, 'Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?' 21 'Caesar's,' they replied. Then he said to them, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.' 22 When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

The word of the Lord. ["Thanks be to God."]

*Lord, help me to be clear and concise, compelling, and practical. And Lord, that as we hear your word read and proclaimed, we may also find our hearts prepared to eat your word. Through Jesus our Savior. Amen.*

The first thing I want you to notice is how clever these people are. First of all, these are not sincere men. These are people who have come to do what? To trap Jesus.

It's as if they have a lasso, and they want to lasso him and catch him. And it's amazing, notice what they do, they flatter him.

Turn with me if you will for a moment, back to the book of Proverbs chapter 29. Proverbs chapter 29, right after the book of Psalms and you find these words here, Proverbs 29, and he says, what does he say about a flatterer? Verse 5, page 1,028:

"Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet" (Proverbs 29:5)

Beware of somebody that tells you a lot of compliments, even if they're true. I mean, these are things that were true of Jesus. What they said about him was true, but notice what they're doing, they're flattering him. They're trying to flatter him. In other words, they've got a net for his feet. I used the illustration of a lasso, but what they're attempting to do is to trap him, to get him off guard.

"We're your friends. We believe in you. We support you. We know that you're really open and honest and transparent, and you don't flatter anybody at all. You shoot straight."

But we're flattering you. We're spreading a net for you. We're going to catch you. And I think that's an important thing because what are they doing? They want to trap him, and Jesus does an amazing thing. He throws that lasso off. He steps out of that net. He never responds to their question with a direct answer.

This is often used to excuse all kinds of chicanery and wickedness in civil government but notice that Jesus really doesn't answer what they're asking. He simply uses it as an opportunity to get out from their lasso. And this is what he says. He says, "Show me a coin of the realm."

Now, the coin of the realm would have said, if my Latin, which I took back in the early 1960s, though I still read Greek, but here's what it says on the coin, "*TI CAESAR DIVI AUG F AUGUSTUS*," which means "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus." Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, meaning that this was a coin proclaiming the image on it as a son of a god, as a son of a god. And so Jesus uses this device to trap them, in a sense. They're trying to trap him because he had told a parable that was very much about them, and they're really angry (Matthew 22:1-11; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18).

And now notice something else here, Jesus unites people. He unites people who love him, and he unites people who hate him. That's an interesting thing. Here are the Pharisees and the Herodians.

Now, the Herodians were supporters of the party of Herod. Herod, because he was very shrewd, when Caesar, that is, Julius Caesar was assassinated on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 44 BC. When he was assassinated, civil war resulted, and Herod, clever fellow that he was, was able to hedge his bets and ends up backing the winner, that is Caesar Augustus, Octavian, because Octavian defeated the military that was under Mark Anthony (Herod had actually backed Mark Anthony, but after Anthony's defeat, Herod traveled to Rhodes to meet Octavian and persuaded him he would be a loyal subject) —And so, very clever. Herod, maneuvering, jockeying.

See, he didn't have any claim to the Jewish throne because he was a half Edomite, but he used the power of Rome to keep himself in power and his heirs. At this time, this would have been Herod Antipas. So the Herodians

were people who said, “Look, don’t rock the boat. We've got a good thing here. We don’t want to get the Romans upset.”

And you’ve got the Pharisees who really don’t approve of this idolatrous practice of paying this poll tax to Caesar, which had to be paid for in Roman coin.

And so it’s interesting how people, because they hate Jesus, can unite against him. It’s also interesting how Jesus unites people of various persuasions around a love for him. And so I find that an interesting thing.

Now here’s the problem: Jesus’ disciples mainly came from the Galilee. That’s the area north of Judea and separated with Samaria, and they were almost all very strongly opposed to paying this tax because of the idolatry involved—can’t even handle this thing. This is a filthy, filthy, filthy thing.

It’s got a human image on it of a man who claims to be a son of god, a son of a god, Augustus, because the Romans begin to put their politicians on such pedestals that, hmm, anyhow.

So here, Jesus is confronted with a problem. If he says, no, it’s not lawful to do this, and he’s thinking of the law of God, it’s not right to pay these taxes, then he’s immediately going to be charged before the Roman governor, and Jesus is ready to die, but not yet. Jesus had impeccable timing. He knew what had to be done first and later and later and so what he does is he dodges the question, and he dodges the question, and they say, “Well, it’s Caesar’s,” and basically what Jesus is saying, “Take this piece of idolatrous junk and give it back to where it came from.”

Now a lot of people take that to say there should be no involvement of God in government and I’ve printed out a sheet for you to take home (Printed out at the end). We’re not going to look at that sheet today, but I’d like you to take it home because it illustrates something of the nature of the relationship of Christianity to the government of the United States from the very beginning.

What is the First Amendment? It’s about Congress making no law respecting an establishment of religion or restricting the free exercise thereof. Congress. And what does that have to do? Well, Thomas Jefferson explained what it meant and what he explained what it meant is not in his letter that he

wrote to a group of Baptists in Danbury, Connecticut where he said there was a “wall of separation between church and state.”

What about mosque and state? What about synagogue and state?

That was a private letter, and he’s basically saying to them, mind your own business. But what he explains if you read that in light of that one, two, three, four, fourth paragraph that begins in 1802, and what happens is that Thomas Jefferson’s phrase after separation of church and state in 1802 must be understood in light of what he said in his “Second Inaugural Address” in 1805.

“In matters of religion, I have considered that its free exercise is placed by the Constitution independent of the powers of the general government.”

What does he mean by the general government? He’s talking about the government that resides in Washington, D.C. today. It didn’t then. And he says:

“I have therefore undertaken on no occasion to prescribe the religious exercises suited to it, but have left them as the Constitution found them under the direction and discipline of the Church,” now look at the next statement there, “or,” what? “State authorities.”

In other words, at the time of the founding of the United States, at the time, under the *Articles of Confederation*, it’s laid out pretty clearly, but then when we have the *Constitution*, which results in George Washington being elected unanimously, our first president, 1789, and so what happens there in the *Constitution*, they don’t address the issue of the local states and what they do.

Many states had established churches at that time, and they received support from the states. So it’s not the separation of church and state as such, because the church and the states in the various states often had some form of establishmentarianism.

And then he says, “under the direction and discipline of the Church or state authorities acknowledged by several religious societies.”

And then there's an interesting quote at the very end there that you might want to take and read. This man served on the Supreme Court from 1811 to 1845. Justice Joseph Story, and he's the first one who wrote a commentary on our US Constitution, and if you would read that this evening, I think you might find it profitable. What was the purpose? And the purpose was not to do away with Christianity.

And you see that also, I said I wasn't going to deal with this, but in the second paragraph, if you look at the statement in Article 1, Section 7 of the *Constitution of the United States*, it says, "If any bill shall not be returned by the President within 10 days," notice the parenthetical comment and notice it's all bold, I emboldened it, "**Sunday's excepted.**" Why not Fridays? That's the Muslim day of prayer. Why not Friday night to Saturday? That's the Jewish day of prayer. Why Sundays? What does that tell you?

It tells you this, and I think it's summed up quite well in the book that I'm currently reading by Elesha Coffman, and that is that Christianity shaped America. While we were never a quote unquote "Christian nation" as such, it shaped us. And I liked her analogy.

A history of the United States with Christianity cut out would be like a map of the United States minus the Mississippi River basin. It would have a gaping hole in the middle.

So where did we find our laws being shaped? Basically, from the Ten Commandments. Basically, from the Ten Commandments, and it's not about having an established religion.

Now, I'm saying that because I think it's an important thing that we keep in mind.

Our country is adrift ever since the man who imprisoned Japanese without legal process by law (<https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2021-10-29/earl-warren-racist-record>), the governor of California, Earl Warren, who the President of the United States, who appointed him to the Supreme Court and indeed to be the Chief Justice, Eisenhower said it was the greatest mistake of his life (<https://www.lawweekly.org/col/2018/10/17/ikes-mistake-the-accidental-creation-of-the-warren-court>). What happened with Earl Warren, and by the way, he's the one that headed "The Warren Commission" that completely covered up who really killed John Kennedy,

and I know who killed him, and a person who is here today has met that person. That's true.

The Warren Commission covered the whole thing up, and Earl Warren's court began to find all of these things to be unconstitutional. And so prayer in public schools outlawed based on dealing with the regent's prayer in New York (*Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962)). Bible reading, *Schempp v. Abington Township*, no Bible reading (*Abington School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963)).

What did we do when we did that? We invited God to leave our school system. And I can tell you looking at education—education today compared to education when I was a boy is amazing. I remember trying to help correct my children's papers, they would sometimes send them to me when they were in college for their mother or me to look at, and I thought, this would not have passed in Myrtle Beach High School in the early 1960s.

Where has education gone in this country? It's gone downhill. It's gone downhill. And so many other things. What is our crime problem? Our crime problem is that we have young men without fathers in the home. A boy needs a mother and a father. Mothers are gentle; fathers sometimes deal with things a little less gently. But it takes, not a village to raise a child, it takes a mother and a father. Now no home is perfect, of course.

All I'm saying is this, you can track changes in our national life, in our culture, in our civilization in this country, back to Earl Warren's Supreme Court decisions to expunge all of this and now, where are we?

I won't go on and on about American history, but the same Congress that sent down the *Constitution* to be ratified also passed the Northwest Ordinance (1787), which had to do with what we do with the lands that we have acquired in the Northwest, lands like Ohio and Indiana, and religion, knowledge, religion, morality, and knowledge being essential for good government, schools will be forever encouraged.

Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged. (*Northwest Ordinance* (1787), Sec. 14, Art. 3,

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/northwest-ordinance>)

What's the purpose of having a public school? Religion, morality, knowledge. When you remove religion, you remove the basis for ethics, and when you remove that, eventually you remove the basis of knowledge and therefore you have things like just expunging whole things out of our history.

I'm so grateful that I have this enormous library. As with Ben, I support the silverfish. Terrible joke, Ben. I don't know if you have more books or less, but I'm grateful to have books that are printed because I've discovered when you research on the internet, history is rewritten, and you sometimes miss the documentation that's there in black and white. Wow. Print it out.

So here we are and with that little rabbit trail that I think is profitable, I want us to see what Jesus is really teaching us here.

He's not teaching us that there's any area of life that's hands-off for God, and anyone who says that really isn't thinking about this in the context at all. It's Jesus jumping out of the net. It's Jesus getting that lasso off of his neck. It's Jesus answering their question by giving them an answer that doesn't answer it.

Having said that, we have to ask the question, well, what about what we read in 2 Chronicles 19, as we turn back there, 2 Chronicles 19, and that's page 700. Notice that King Jehoshaphat ends up with two divisions of administration in his government. Look there, if you would, in verse 11, 2 Chronicles 19:11.

Amariah the chief priest will be over you in any matter concerning the LORD, and Zebadiah son of Ishmael, the leader of the tribe of Judah, will be over you in any matter concerning the king. (2 Chronicles 19:11)

What is he saying? It sounds a little bit like what Jesus is saying, but it isn't. And the reason we know that it isn't, is what precedes this. If you look there and you go back up in verse 10,



In every case that comes before you from your fellow countrymen who live in the cities—whether bloodshed or other concerns of the law, commands, decrees or ordinances—you are to warn them not to sin against the LORD; otherwise his wrath will come on you and your brothers. Do this, and you will not sin. (2 Chronicles 19:10)

So what is Jehoshaphat's deal? His deal is that both those pertaining to the matters of the Lord (that has to do with the temple itself and religious rituals pertaining to the temple). And we know that by its context as over against those matters that deal with the king: He's thinking of ordinary civil law as we think of it (2 Chronicles 19:11; cf. Exodus 18:26, 19; Deuteronomy 17:8–13), but both of them are under the law of God. You see where he says there again in verse 10:

You are to warn them not to sin against the LORD; otherwise his wrath will come on you and your brothers. Do this, and you will not sin. (2 Chronicles 19:10)

So he sees an administrative difference. There is a difference between religion, the religious rules, what we call the church, I think is a good way to put it, and that of the state.

But here's the thing we have to say, and we have to say it as Christians, and we have to speak this in the public square, that the state, no less than the church, is under God. There is no area of life that is not to be under God. When you're not under God, you're under the devil. I want to say that. When you're not self-consciously under God, you're under the devil and, see, what Jehoshaphat is saying is that in the sphere of ruling and administering things in this country, that is Judah, he says, you've got to do it under the Lord and the fear of the Lord. That's what brings integrity and honesty.

If you don't fear God, of course you're going to take bribes. If you don't fear God, of course, you're going to destroy for your own personal interest things around you. So this is a **division, not a separation** of God from civil affairs but it's a division, (civil affairs, the matters pertaining to the king), and those matters that pertain to the Lord as a reference to the temple. It's worship, it's cultus, how God prescribed worship should be done.

And this is a vital truth, Dear Ones. This is a vital truth because a nation will either be ruled by the fear of man or the fear of God. When you don't have the fear of God, you're going to be ruled by the fear of man. And the same kinds of divisions that were going on in Judea and in the Galilee under the Romans are things we face today.

But our nation has become adrift. It's lost its way. Why? Because Jesus unites people who are different from each other, who don't like each other, to make strange bedfellows in their desire to suppress the knowledge of Jesus (Matthew 22:16; Luke 23:12). Make no mistake about it, Jesus is the heart of the matter. Jesus is the one on whom history turns. And it's the love of Jesus or the hatred of Jesus that unites people. It's an amazing phenomenon.

I look at where we are today, and I wring my hands, and I think of Jehoshaphat's division—appropriate, an appropriate division—there are matters that pertain to a local congregation or denomination that are none of the business of government.

But there are matters that pertain to a local church that are. Does the civil government have the right to say that we can limit the number of people that can be in a space? Does the civil government have the right to say doors need to open out rather than opening in?

There's an interesting plaque in Natchez, Mississippi and that is where there was a gigantic fire of a nightclub, and the doors opened into the nightclub rather than opening out, and as the building caught fire, people are trapped trying to get out, but they couldn't get out because the doors didn't open out, they opened in (The Rhythm Club fire took place on April 23, 1940 at 11:30 at night, and 209 burned alive, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhythm\\_Club\\_fire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhythm_Club_fire)).

Have you ever thought about why do we have doors that open out? Those are regulations that are very legitimately the concern of the civil government to protect people, to protect people against being harmed.

To put 500 people in here, I guess nobody would be able to breathe, it'd be like being on a modern airplane in non-business or first class. Wow. We protect people by limiting the number of people that can come in, making

sure that things are fireproof, and those are things that are legitimate for the government to say to the church.

However, there are also things that are legitimate for the church to say to the government. Except that, we don't have the power of coercion (Romans 13:4). The church is to persuade. The church is to speak to power and say, "This is not right. This is not right." But we have to be very careful that we do not embroil ourselves into divisive issues that are not rooted in Scripture alone. That's the great danger the church faces.

So what do we say here? We have to say on issues that are clearly laid out in Scripture of a moral nature, it is not just the right of the church, it is the duty of the church to speak and say, "This is evil. This is wrong. This is ungodly." And the church has often failed to do that. So these are just some thoughts here and I want to conclude again by reflecting on our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ dodged issues. Do you find that strange to think that he dodged issues?

I dodge issues all the time on the internet because I've learned this: Most people want to simply spout their ignorance and trap you in some kind of foolishness, so I don't respond to things like that (Proverbs 26:4-5).

And I try not to ever reveal where I might end up voting for a candidate or this one or another one, though I may hint. But the point I want to make is: As we move into yet another increasingly divisive election period, it is vital that the Christian church not allow the issues of horrible candidate A or horrible candidate B to come in and rip the church apart.

The fact that we have a rematch potentially is an indication that God is judging this country (Isaiah 3:4).

"Preacher, you have gone into politics." I have.

Neither man would be able to be a member of this church. Think about it, neither man would be able to be a member of this church. The one man that so many people who are conservative Christians voted for says he's never asked anybody for forgiveness.

Well, he's going to go to hell. I'll say that without equivocation. You may have voted for him. I'm not telling you how I've voted in the past but a person who's never asked anybody for forgiveness is a person who is not, and never has been, a Christian, and he is on his way to hell.

I believe the other man is also on his way to hell. And so when my wife and I pray for these people, which we generally do every day, we pray:

Lord, do whatever it takes (and we name them by name), save them and their families from going to hell.

Wow!

That ought to be the burden of the church, winning people to Christ.

And to get out here and to make a ridiculous stand supporting this man or that man? That has no business in the Christian church.

It's like when you're going to a polling place, you're not supposed to be wearing a t-shirt that endorses a particular candidate. That's wrong in our laws, and you'd be asked to leave or take your shirt off. Anyhow, the same thing is in the church.

Supporting this candidate as over against that candidate, that's wrong, but issues, issues, issues. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).

We should preach issues. We should preach that human life is sacred. That has implications both for unnecessary wars, for euthanasia, and for abortion. It doesn't give you a plan of how to deal with those issues specifically, but it addresses those issues.

And all of that then brings us to this, the difference between the church and the state is this: The church's power is strictly proclamation. We proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, and we offer him to people in the gospel and we celebrate that in the Lord's Supper, and the Lord's Supper reminds us of why we're here, over, and over, and over again.

Not to be a base for political rallies, but a base for the one thing that can change the world. I've yet to see any political movement that has really changed the world, because real change has to do with the human heart.

We have to come to a point where we yield our lives in full surrender to Jesus, whereas the role of the government is physical coercion. It bears not the sword in vain, says St. Paul (Romans 13:4). They can coerce.

The church must only persuade, and the church must be willing not to ever take human life, as the church, but to give up their lives for the sake of Christ and the gospel. Jesus sent us into the world to be willing to die for the faith.

May we pray.

*Lord, bless this meditation on what I see in Jehoshaphat's division between the priests on the one hand and those that ruled in the name of the king on the other, yet both profoundly under you. Bless us now, Lord, as we would take the Lord's Supper. For Jesus' sake.*

## **Handout**

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” (*The Constitution of the United States of America*, (1791) “The Bill of Rights,” Amendment I)

Yet this same Constitution reflects a Christian understanding of morality: “If any Bill shall not be returned by the President within ten Days (**Sundays excepted**) after it shall have been presented to him, the Same shall be a Law, in like Manner as if he had signed it, unless the Congress by their Adjournment prevent its Return, in which Case it shall not be a Law.” (*The Constitution of the United States of America*, (1787) Article 1, Section 7)

‘Narratives of American history that minimize the impact of Christianity, then, are incomplete at best, misleading at worst. Which is not to say that the United States is or ever has been a “Christian nation.” Rather, Christianity is an indelible part of the nation's story, no less than geography or the Constitution or the legacy of enslavement. A history of the United States

with Christianity cut out would be like a map of the United States minus the Mississippi River basin—it would have a gaping hole in the middle. (Elesha J. Coffman (2024), *Turning Points in American Church History: How Pivotal Events Shaped a Nation and a Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), p. 1)

‘**Religion**, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, **schools and the means of education** shall forever be encouraged.’ (*Northwest Ordinance* (1787), Sec. 14, Art. 3, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/northwest-ordinance>)

In 1802, Thomas Jefferson wrote a private letter to an association of Baptists in Danbury, Connecticut, and stated that the purpose of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States was to build “a wall of separation between church and state.”

Thomas Jefferson’s phrase in 1802 must be understood in light of what he said in his “Second Inaugural Address,” in 1805: “In matters of religion I have considered that its free exercise is placed by the Constitution independent of the powers of **the General Government**. I have therefore undertaken on no occasion to prescribe the religious exercises suited to it, but have left them, **as the Constitution found them, under the direction and discipline of the church or state authorities** acknowledged by the several religious societies.”

“Probably at the time of the adoption of the Constitution, and of the First Amendment to it . . . the general if not the universal sentiment in America was, that **Christianity ought to receive encouragement from the state** so far as was not incompatible with the private religious rights of conscience and the freedom of religious worship. **An attempt to level all religions, and to make it a matter of state policy to hold all in utter indifference, would have created universal disapprobation, if not universal indignation . . . .** The real object of the amendment was **not to countenance, much less to advance, Mahometanism, or Judaism, or infidelity, by prostrating Christianity; but exclude all rivalry among Christian sects, and to prevent any national ecclesiastical establishment which should give to a hierarchy the exclusive patronage of the national government.**” (Justice Joseph Story (who served on the Supreme Court from 1811-1845) (1905), *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States*, 2 Vol. 2:593-95, 2nd Ed. Boston: Little Brown)

Emphases mine throughout