

Psalm 99

Bible Study

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Men's Bible Study - February 26, 2026

The 1977 movie "Oh, God", starring George Burns and John Denver, portrayed God as a humorous grandfatherly old gentleman who appears to a supermarket manager named Jerry Landers. God (George Burns) chooses Jerry (John Denver) to be his messenger. He is chosen to be a type of modern-day Moses telling people that God exists and things on earth can all work out well, but it's up to people to make things happen. What follows is a comedic imagination of what happens when Jerry attempts to tell people that God has appeared to him. In the end, Jerry expresses his worry that he has failed in his mission. When God tells Jerry that he is going away for a while, Jerry asks God what to do if he needs to talk with him. God says, "I'll tell you what, you talk. I'll listen."

In sharp contrast to George Burns portrayal of God is the portrayal of God in the older 1956 movie "The 10 Commandments". Moses, played by Charlton Heston, receives instructions from God in a disembodied – off camera – voice which sounds closer to the voice of James Earl Jone than that of George Burns. He is portrayed as a stern, fearsome, autocratic God.

I suspect many people today imagine God to be more like George Burns' portrayal of him in "Oh, God" than "The 10 Commandments". They imagine God as soft-spoken. He's the witty, grandfatherly George Burns type. He's our "buddy", our "pal", or "one-of-us". Perhaps others imagine God like the one portrayed in the movie "Monty Python and the Holy Grail". In that movie God is a satirical cantankerous God who is annoyed at traditional religious depictions of God – annoyed at "those miserable Psalms that are so depressing" (*sic*) and annoyed at people who constantly bow down to him, grovel, say they are sorry and ask for forgiveness. Someone once wrote, "we today have 'domesticated' God; we have laundered our idea of Him, thereby ending up with an idol of our own imagining, but not with the God who in the Bible discloses Himself as sovereign King."

In Psalm 99 God is portrayed as an exalted sovereign King! Does that metaphor mean anything to us today? Last Summer and Fall political groups in the United States organized "No Kings" demonstrations to protest the policies of President Trump. The Americans notably revolted against the authoritarian policies of King George III during the American Revolution.

Perhaps the metaphor of a King might mean more to Canadians because we really do have a King! However, even for Canadians the image of a King may not speak very powerfully anymore, considering the scandals that have plagued the British Royal family in recent years. The Royal family seems to behave more like "commoners" than royalty. Mystery, awe, esteem, and dignity seem to have been diminished. The aura of royalty is gone.

In contrast, Psalm 99 portrays a great distance between the exalted sovereign King and his subjects. God is not just "one-of-the-boys". He is awesome. He almost seems out of character compared to Psalm 98 which encourages us to "Sing to the LORD a new song".

DISCUSSION:

In verse 1 what do the words "tremble" and "shake" mean to you? Could you ever think of your relationship with the LORD in those terms? While praying? While worshiping?

When Luther explained the 10 commandments in his small catechism, he wrote that we are to "fear and love God". Are these two things incompatible? Is it possible to both "love" and "fear" God at the same time? Are there different kinds of fear?

What or who are the "cherubim"? **Read Exodus 25: 10-22** What does it mean to you when the Psalm says, the LORD "sits enthroned between the cherubim"?

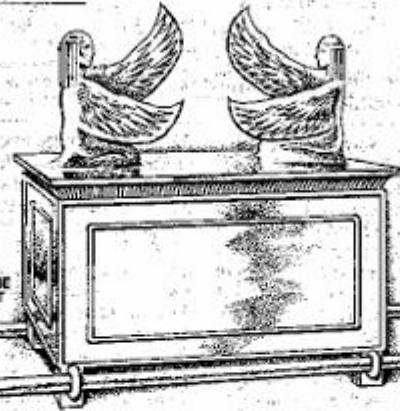
Three times the Psalm says God is "holy" (verses 3, 5, 9). The primary meaning of the word "holy" in Hebrew means to be "set apart", "kept from profane use", or "consecrated" for a special purpose (like the way women may keep their special dishes separate from their daily use dishes). What does it mean when the Psalm portrays God "holy". How does that fit with modern day portrayals of God in media?

Verse 8 says, "you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds." Verse 4 says the King "loves justice". Sometimes we muddle-up love and justice, as when a child says, "if you really loved me, you wouldn't punish me". We often hear victims come out of the courthouse unhappy with the sentence handed down to a convicted criminal. Victims sometime say they did not receive justice. Are love and justice opposites for God? For us?

How was the cross of Jesus Christ God's answer to our dilemma with love and justice?

Tabernacle Furnishings

The symbolism of God's redemptive covenant was preserved in the tabernacle, making each element an object lesson for the worshiper. The Levitical priests, including some with Egyptian names and perhaps Egyptian training, gave meticulous attention to facts about the shrine. Reconstruction of the furnishings is possible because of extremely detailed descriptions and precise measurements recorded in Ex 25-40.



ARK OF THE COVENANT

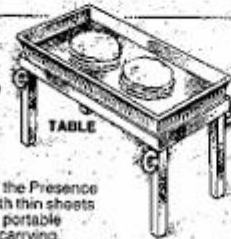
The ark of the Testimony compares with the roughly contemporary shrine and funerary furniture of King Tutankhamun (c. 1350 a.c.), which, along with the Nimrud and Samaria ivories from a later period, have been used to guide the graphic interpretation of the text. Both sources show the conventional way of depicting extreme reverence, with facing winged guardians shielding a sacred place.

The traditional form of the lampstand is not attested archaeologically until much later.



LAMP STAND

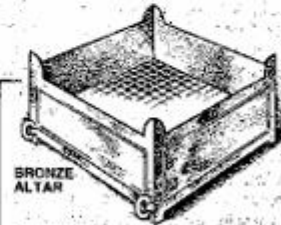
The table holding the bread of the Presence was made of wood covered with thin sheets of gold. All of the objects were portable and were fitted with rings and carrying poles, practices typical of Egyptian ritual processions as early as the Old Kingdom.



TABLE



INCENSE ALTAR



BRONZE ALTAR

The altar of burnt offering was made of wood overlaid with bronze. The size, five cubits square and three cubits high, matches altars found at Arad and Beersheba from the period of the monarchy.