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## A Biblical Theology of the Israelite Monarchy

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**Abstract:** In undertaking a comprehensive Biblical theology, one must take account of each and every aspect of the biblical message and from the accumulated data distill its fundamental concepts and concerns, looking for a central theme if one exists. At the very opening of the sacred text and in the first recorded statement of God about mankind, he speaks of the purpose of his creation: "Be fruitful, multiply, and have dominion over all things" (Genesis 1:26-28). That mandate was never rescinded and the Israelite Monarchy was one of its most significant expressions.

**Key Words:** Israel, Israelite Monarchy, Kingship, David

## Foreword

If nothing else, the Bible is a theological treatise originating in the mind of God, revealed to and through the prophets and apostles, and made available to the Church. As such, no part of it, canonically speaking, is non-theological nor is any one of its literary genres intended in the end to communicate anything but theology. This includes the historical books and the events they describe, including, of course, the era of Israel's monarchy. To 'do' theology of a part of the canon, one must view it as an integral part of the whole without the opportunity to do the whole. Our desire and prayer is that this brief study will be read and examined in light of the entire canonical revelation.[1]

## Defense of 'Monarchy' as a Theological Theme

By 'theme' in biblical theology is meant a notion or concept that is readably observable, easily understood, and intuitively sensed to be appropriate to the discipline. Many works on the subject fail in one or more of these respects. To a great extent the criteria are determined by such features as (1) the 'space' allocated to it in the Bible; that is, to what extent is it the subject matter of Scripture?; (2) how pervasively is it identified and carried throughout the various writings of the Bible?; (3) is there a perceptible

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1. For a more thorough discussion of this author's theological method, see Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 28-33.

sense of its organic nature, its development from a germination to a full-grown body of truth that informs all its parts and is informed by them as well?; (4) does it reach a climactic point where the creative and salvific purposes of God from the beginning have been realized in history and in the eschatological age? Proposed themes that lack one or more of these should foster concern as to whether the theologian has adequately made a case for whatever central ideas he or she might be promoting to see if their works are indeed credible and persuasive. A legitimate question can now then be raised: Does the topic "Monarchy of Israel" pass muster?[2] Only the reading can supply an answer.[3]

## Monarchy in the Ancient Near East and in Israel As Religious/Political Institutions[4]

### Creation: The Origin of Israelite Kingship

The concept of kingship or monarchy or dominion was accepted world-wide except, it seemed, in Israel. But this is a misreading of the sacred record. Words like "dominion," "rule," and the like occur first at the very beginning, in Genesis 1: 26-28, even before mankind was created. God as king brought about humankind to represent him as sentient beings, to be his images and to reign on his behalf. "Let us make man as[5] our image," he said, and "let them fill the earth and have dominion[6] over everything." This is followed by the first recorded words uttered by God to man, and in even stronger terms: "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, subdue[7] it, and have dominion…" (v. 28). Part of this concept of having dominion is self-sufficiency, exacting from surrounding creation the means by which he could exercise a certain degree of human autonomy. Even before plants were created, the delay in their springing forth was attributed partly to the fact that "there was no man who could work [the soil]" (Genesis 2:5), clearly referring to the creation dominion mandate.

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2. For an older but still important (and in agreement) work on the theme, see Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology.* BZAW142. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977.

3. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 127-162.

4. G. E. Mendenhall, "The Monarchy," *Interpretation* 29 (1975): 155-170; Baruch Halpern, *The Constitution of the Monarchy in Israel* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981); K. M. Heim, "Kings and Kingship," *Dictionary if the Old Testament: Historical Books,* Eds. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Predss, 2005), 610-623.

5. [5] This subordinate conjunction can (and here does) have the meaning of *beth essentiae*, not "in" but "as." Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 11.2.5e.

6. Hebrew רָדָה (*rādā*), "tread, rule" (HALOT, 1190).

7. A related term is כָּבַשׁ (*kabas*), "subjugate" (HALOT, 460). The idea implicit here is that creation might resist human dominion at times, but it must be made to 'understand' that man is sovereign under the Creator's mighty hand

The Lord then expanded on the notion of "working" the ground by planting a garden in Eden in which he placed the man (Genesis 28-17). As though to communicate to him the marvels of self-sustenance, God made the soil burst forth with plants both beautiful to see (flowers?) and good to eat (v. 9). Man's emulation of these agricultural techniques released him from utter helplessness and taught him what dominion over "all things" might mean. He too could "create" plants, though not by spoken word as had the Lord, but by arduous, fulfilling, labor.

The labor consisted of two stages: to "work" the ground and to "watch over" it (Genesis 2:15). The first, "to work,"[8] intimates bringing soil under control, as it were, through breaking up the ground and making it subservient. "To watch over"[9] was to manage, guard, and cultivate it once it had been properly prepared by cultivation. The agricultural language became translated to kingdom responsibility in due course, the working being the preparation for monarchy, and the watching over to kingly responsibility for maintaining the Creation plan of dominion over all things for the glory of God.

Two examples of the preparation of mankind to be the image of God are (1) the uniqueness of the bestowal upon him of life and (2) its result contrasted to that of lower beings. The text in great detail specifies that God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life[10] and [he] became a living being" (Gen 2:7). This tender anthropomorphic moment in effect gives to man certain God-like qualities, but not in essence; the resemblance is in exercise of authority, no matter how derivative and incomparably less glorious it is to that of the King of Heaven and Earth.

Man's (singular) and humankind's (collective) function under God may be conceptualized as levels of "sphere sovereignty" (to use the Dooyeweerdian term), in which, as in pyramidal layers, God is the Apex, the source and distributor of all authority, followed next in descending order by mankind, society, government, institutions, and, at base, all other created things, sentient or otherwise.[11] This is the order as established in the days of creation, but in crescendo reverse order: (1) Heavens and Earth, (2) the Waters, (3) Vegetation, (4) Heavenly Bodies, (5) Creatures of the Seas and Skies, (6) Creatures of the Land), (7) Man, Woman. In opposition

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8. The very common verb 800) עָבַד x in BH) in most contexts means "to work" or "to make."

9. The verb שָׁמַר, equally as common, is rendered "watch over," "take care of," and the like (HALOT, 1581-1584).

10. The breathing out (יָפַח) and breathing in (בְּאַפָּיו) clearly suggests a certain transfer of "godlikeness" or authority granted to mankind alone, another step toward dominion. The breathing consisted of the "breath of life" (נִשְׁמַת חַיִּם, *nišmat ḥayyîm*) which produced a "living being" (נֶפֶשׁ חַי, nepheš ḥay). Only mankind, of all living things, is said to have been created by God's breathing. Otherwise, it is merely by the spoken word. This alone suffices to mark man as unique in all creation; hence his right to rule.

11. For the pyramidal model, see Figure 1 (below). This notion is associated with the Dutch Reformed 'School,' especially with Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) followed by Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), Gordon H. Clark, and Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987). See John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing), 215-221.

is the order of the Fall: (1) The Animal, (2) the Woman, (3) the Man. The snake subverted the woman and the woman subverted the man and with their disobedience to the Great King of All Things the pyramid collapsed from bottom up until only God stood sublime and supreme to view the wreckage of what he had made in perfection. By divine judgment the animal would thereafter crawl in the dust, the woman cower in the dust in submission to the man, and the man return to the dust from which he was made. But a note of gracious reversal to this calamitous circumstance was sounded: The woman, cursed from then on by the pain of pregnancy and birth, would stand between the two as the source of the restoration of God's glorious creation plan. She, suffering great pain, would be mother of a seed that would in time crush the snake, though her offspring would be wounded in it that act of salvation. By crushing the head of evil, the Seed would also restore man's dignity and sovereignty. The dominion of the man remained intact but in a crippled, disfigured way. He retained the privilege of "working and guarding" the soil, but now no longer in the perfect environment of the Garden. Rather, he was cast out and barred from that special place of uninterrupted fellowship with God to break up and tend to a soil resistant to his labor (Genesis 3:23-24). In a now hostile world, dominion slipped through his hands in many ways. In that first little realm of his wife and two sons rebellion broke out resulting in the death of Abel at the hands of Cain, the first instance of human death recorded, and a violent, murderous one at that. He who was created to be the image of God, ruling like God over all things, could not rule over even his family. Sadly, his descendants from that day to this have done no better. Of generation after generation it was (and has been) dolefully recorded: "And he died." Eight times between Adam and Noah the bell tolled that awful message of man's finitude, failure, and ultimate fate, the universal Flood. And yet there remained grace and hope. With a new post-Deluge second chance came a new expression of the dominion mandate, this time with Noah. In nearly exactly the same verbal expression as before, Yahweh revealed to Noah that he, as "second Adam," would pick up the shattered pieces of broken dominion and sire a race that, like Adam's, would be "fruitful and abundant, filling the earth" (Gen 9:1-7). But in a stark reversal of the codicil spelling out man's dominion over all other living things, Yahweh omitted that phrasing, saying now that the innate authoritative power implicit in "subjugation" and "having dominion" was no longer to be the case. Now man would be lord by virtue of his superior intelligence and forcible discipline upon the 'lower' orders. In this new phase of kingship, motivation to compliance and obedience of the sub-human would come through "fear and terror" (Gen 9:2).[12]

12. The terms are מוֹרָא and חַת respectively. This combination is likely a hendiadys to be rendered "terrible fear," "fearful terror," or the like.
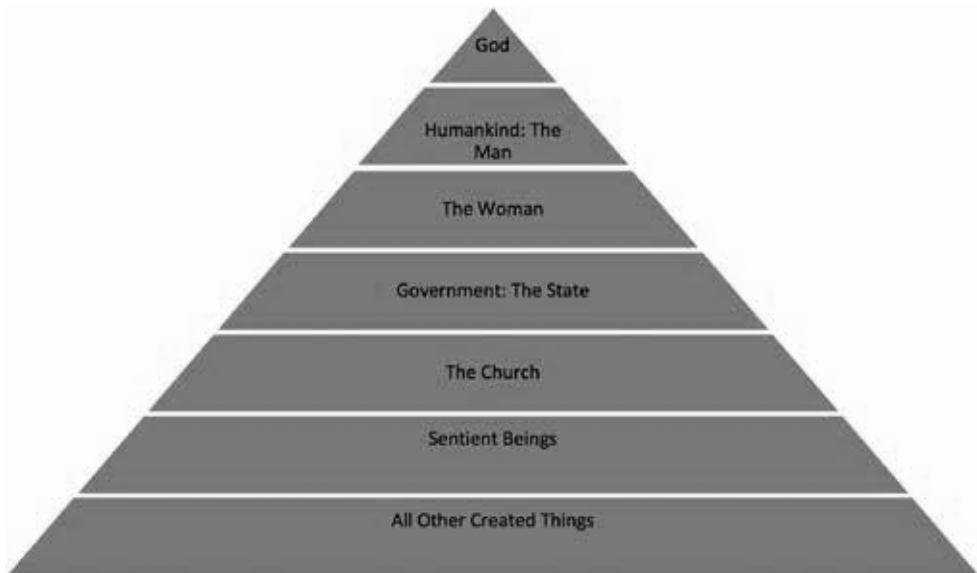
**Figure 1 Divinely Established Layers of Monarchy**

## Babel and the Development of National Monarchy

A natural impulse is for family and friends to stay together, even as nations, because the familiar inculcates a feeling of joy, contentedness, and belonging. At the same time, it stifles the very reason mankind was created in the first place, that is, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). The selfishness of comfort and shared culture of the creature prevailed over the mandate of the Creator. The geo-center of human population had not moved far from Babel and it was there that a great ziggurat was constructed, one so high it would reach up "to the heavens." It would serve as a symbol of defiant unity and oneness, of unbridled hubris flying in the face of the Almighty. They would not leave until evicted, so evicted they were and scattered "over the face of the whole earth."

Apart from this and despite it, human population in time multiplied and spread throughout the earth, a dispersion necessary for the following reasons:
- Natural population growth through the process of reproduction.
- Forced expulsion of the race because of its insistence on remaining geographically concentrated in the Middle Eastern river valleys and plains in direct contradiction to the divine command to multiply and fill the earth (Gen 1:28; 8:17; 9:1, 7; 11:1, 8, 9).
- The natural impulse of travel, adventure, discovery, and incessant quest for a better life somewhere else.

By 3000 B.C. Middle Eastern civilization began to blossom, especially in two major regions: Egypt along the Nile and Mesopotamia, "between" the rivers, that is, the Euphrates and Tigris. Eventual scarcity of land brought about a sort of primitive

urbanism, where people lived in small communities, and with that modest beginning the accompanying onset of labor specialization apart from that of earlier agriculture and pastoralism. Thus there emerged the industries of the potter, the weaver, the tanner, the metallurgist, and the smithy, with his bronze vessels for domestic and military uses. These naturally generated many other craftsmen, merchants, and traders.[13] The 'invention' of writing by the Sumerians ca. 3200 BC enabled merchandising, trade, and distant communication to be undertaken at a highly more sophistical and profitable manner than ever before.

All this spawned the need for expert and powerful leaders in religion, security, defense, and law and order. This presupposes the inevitable establishment of government whereby population entities could enjoy, peace, prosperity, and personal safety and protection. Village chieftains sufficed for small communities, but with the rise of cities more complex political structures must be organized, all of which demanded strong leadership. Again, in the case of minor concentrations of persons, requirements demanding full-time, charismatic, and powerful central control essential to the complications of large urban locations could largely be forgone. Cities of multiplied thousands of inhabitants obviously required wise and strong leadership invested in either councils or, increasingly commonly, in a single individual at the top. The Sumerians called the office and person so selected LU.GAL, literally, "big man." The Semitic Akkadian term was *šarru*, "king."[14] A similar term was *malku*, cognate to West Semitic *melek,* the usual Old Testament Hebrew designation.[15]

Like many institutions of the ancient world, human kingship was connected first and foremost to the rule of the gods from which, it was thought, it derived. Thus the deities of Sumer, Akkad, Egypt, and Hatti ruled over their celestial realms, dealing with all the exigencies of life thrust upon them by virtue of their positions, wisdom, power, and sympathies (or lack hereof).[16] They were the creators and managers of all

13.  For a brilliant (if somewhat hypothetical) explanation for the 'prehistoric' development of urbanism and division of labor, see Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999).

14.  Thorkild Jacobsen made a strong case for what he called "primitive democracy," the model suggested here for the secular realm. He proposed that Sumerian and Akkadian literature, especially the epics, viewed the gods as equal participants in heavenly councils, gatherings chaired by a deity conceded to be the most powerful or wise. Such a system, he argued, collapsed under the weight of increasingly powerful LU.GALS who morphed into outright monarchs answerable to no one. Human monarchy was nothing but a pale imitation of the divine but it eventually came to be the *modus realis* of at least the ancient Middle East. See his "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia," *JNES* 2/3 (1943): 159-172. The biblical model is, of course, diametrically opposite to this view of governance.

15.  In Egypt, the corresponding monarch was called *pharaoh*, that is, "big house," obviously referring to the resident of a palatial structure. Without exception, all 42 royal rulers of Israel from Saul to Zechariah were addressed as 'king.'

16.  Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 145-151; W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr., eds., *The Context of Scripture. Volume Two: Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 256-257. King Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC): "When the god Shamash, great lord of heaven and

things, the arbiters of discord, the benefactors of the weak and poor, and the leaders in conflict against hostile powers in the heavens and on earth that threatened their realms of authority and responsibility and endangered the peoples on Earth who trusted them to protect and preserve them.[17] To whatever degree was possible, earthly kings above all were expected to inaugurate and oversee various religious exercises by which they themselves could be honored and the practice of which would bring religious significance to the monarchs, thus mimicking their heavenly counterparts so as to become models of how governance should be undertaken.[18]

To some extent, this was at the heart of Israelite monarchy as well. The duties of the kings of Israel (and Judah) included oversight of the religious life of the nation as well as political and military affairs. Though most of the kings of Israel and Judah, as it turned out, were written off as "evil," the office itself continued to find favor and common usage as late as the Second Temple period of the Maccabees and Hasmoeans.[19] Jesus was mockingly described as "king" by the Roman authorities and Pharisees, but the same term is ascribed to him in all seriousness in Scripture in a number of times and places, especially in eschatological texts.[20]

## Old Testament Pre-Monarchic Statecraft

Following the death of Moses, his brother Aaron, and finally Joshua, Moses' longtime junior associate and leader of Israel's conquest of Canaan (ca. 1350 B.C.), the nation was leaderless and began slowly and then more precipitously to slip away from its moorings in Torah and its monotheistic credo into a watered-down Yahwism and inexorably into outright paganism (Judges 3:1-7). In the plan of God, the time was not right yet for a long-promised monarchy,[21] so he established an order of judges, charismatic[22] persons raised up from time to time to deal with particular crises as

earth, king of the gods … granted to me everlasting kingship (and) a reign of long days." Byron E. Shafer, *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* (London: Routledge, 1991), 67: "[the king] was originally mortal" but the deity "always divine."

17. On the subject see Henri Cazelles, "De l'ideologie royale," *JANES* 5 (1973); Ivan Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Witsells, 1943); Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948).

18. Labat, René, *Le caractère religieux de royauté assyro-babylonienne* (Paris, 1939)*;* S. N. Kramer, "Kingship in Sumer and Akkad: The Ideal King," *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* I:19 (1971):163-176.

19. Out of 42 kings of Israel and Judah together, only 16 escape the opprobrious description "evil." In Judah alone 16 of the 20 kings are described thus. For the Maccabean and Hasmonean kingship see Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 12-16.

20. Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:18; Luke 23:2, 3, 37; John 1:49; 12:13; 18:37; 19:3, 19; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15; Revelation 15:3; 17:14; 19:16.

21. Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17; Deuteronomy 17:14-20.

22. The term in Judges suggests that the judges did not occupy their offices by human appointment, but as the Spirit came upon them as a sign of God's presence and power (Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14).

they arose. This system, almost jerry-built it seems at times, lasted for about 300 years. Problems with surrounding nations—permitted, indeed ordained—by God were met by judges who, having resolved the challenge, retired from view and gave way to succeeding persons called forth for the next emergency.

The first of these was Othniel, nephew of the great warrior Caleb (Judges 3:9). He delivered Israel from a far-off people beyond the Euphrates in Aram-Naharaim. The oppression lasted for eight long years until Othniel drove out the invaders. However, for the next 350 years the cycle was repeated: Israel sinned, Yahweh punished them at the hands of another oppressor, they repented, Yahweh elevated a new judge who saved them, a new peace ensued, only to be broken by a repetition of these stages. The last of these was mighty Samson, he who slew lions and defeated single-handedly whole companies of Philistine warriors (Judges 13:1-16:31). But his 20 years of leadership epitomized the weakness of human flesh to govern and be governed. His lust for foreign women and seeming indifference to the very Spirit who empowered him brought him down to a suicidal death in the temple of Baal (16:28-31). Written as an epitaph over Israel's history for these abysmally wretched years are the somber words: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25) or similar sentiments (18:1; 19:1). Indeed, there was no king, a situation requiring drastic remedy, and Yahweh had one in view.

## Late Pre-Monarchical History and Governmental Failure (1400-1350 B. C.)

### The Episode of Conquest

#### *Full Trust in God's Instructions*

Israel's impending conquest of Canaan was a most formidable challenge to say the least, but Yahweh gave to Joshua and the priests instructions to be followed to the letter.[23] First in importance was the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant, borne by the priests, epitomizing the presence of God leading the procession as a mighty warrior (Joshua 3:3-6, 8-13). This and following instructions are all elements of so-called 'Holy War' (or, alternatively, 'Yahweh War') in the Old Testament. The principal truths central to the conveyance of the Ark were (1) its pride of place (Joshua 3:3-4);

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23. The procedures outlined here are standard elements of so-called Holy War. See Eugene H. Merrill, "The Case for Moderate Discontinuity," *Show Them no Mercy: God and Canaanite Genocide,* ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 63-94. See also now M. Daniel Carroll, R., and J. Blair Wilgus, eds. *Wrestling with the Violence of God: Soundings in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013); Paul Copan and Matthew Flanagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide: Coming to Terms with the Justice of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014).

(2) its association with the supernatural (vv. 5, 7); (3) its metaphorical assurance of the presence of Yahweh (vv. 10, 11); and (4) its function as a standard at the head of the hosts of Israel that enabled a miraculous crossing of the overflowing river and a sure and certain triumph over the nations that would fight to prevent their coming into the land (vv. 10, 13).

### Full Trust in God's Ways

An important component of Holy War in general (but not the only one) was the total destruction of certain persons and places (cf. Numbers 21:1-3; Joshua 6:21; 8:26; 1 Kings 9:11; 2 Kings 19:11; Jeremiah 50:21). [24] So inflexible and precise was the ritual of Holy War that any deviation from it constituted serious disobedience of the Great King, with all its implied consequences. In the case of the Conquest, *ḥērem* had been predicted and commanded by Moses (Deuteronomy 7:1-5; 12:2-3; 13:15; 20:16-18; 31:1-6). Moreover, it had already been exercised in the Exodus[25] and the Conquest of the Trans-Jordan (Deuteronomy 2:34; 3:6; Joshua 2:10). The operation at hand focused on Jericho's total demolition and the annihilation of its populace (Joshua 6:2-5). Once the walls were breached and the warriors could enter the city, Joshua warned them not to take anything for themselves because Jericho was to be dedicated to Yahweh as a whole 'burnt' offering. Anyone who violated this principle would himself become its victim (vv. 16-18, 26). The temptation to loot the ruins for silver and gold and imported finery was too much for Achan, a Judean, and once found out, was stoned to death, along with his family, and all he stole was burned up as mere refuse (Joshua 7:16-26). This focus on Holy War suggests, in a broad sense, that aggressive warfare and moral and spiritual integrity need not be considered counter-intuitive, certainly not where divine holiness and righteousness are at stake. In a narrow sense, a kingly priest could be called by God to be, as He is, a heroic priest-king engaged in the mission of establishing a monarchy over which Yahweh himself would ultimately reign forever.

## The Era of the Judges (1350-1100 B. C.)

To return to the central theme of this study, namely, the theology of Israel's monarchy, attention is directed to the chaotic period just before the accession of Saul to the

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24. The term can bear the following notions: (1) "to separate;" (2) to enclose; (3) to claim something as one's own; (4) to annihilate something or someone at Yahweh's command as an offering to him. See HALOT, 353-354.

25. This victory hymn, commonly called the "Song of Moses" (Exodus 15:1-18), extols Yahweh as a king who has demonstrated his sovereignty over the sea and over Pharaoh and his mighty armies that have malevolently pursued his chosen people Israel (v. 18). He is also called "a warrior" and he who is incomparable 'among the gods' and "majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders" (v. 11). These attributes far transcend anything that can be said of a mere mortal king, but Israel's monarchy was to be seen as God's earthly agency and therefore was to receive similar accolades and respect.

throne as King of Israel (ca. 1051). External fashion and internal moral, social, and political realities were driving the leading voices of the people to demand some kind of solidarity, something more comprehensive and effective than had been the case in the days of the judges. The dominant theme of the historians who lived in and reflected on the situation at the end of the Twelfth Century is embedded in the laments in the book of Judges as a motif underlying the rationale of and urgent need for a monarchy. "In those days," says the compiler of Judges, "there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Jud 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). This is the very definition of anarchy, society without law and restraint, instability on every hand, breakdown of cohesion, discipline, morality, and civility. Added to all this was the imminent threat from unfriendly neighbor countries ready for war and plunder and slaughter.

### *False Sovereignty and Idolatry*

The first of these laments concerns idolatry, denial of the sovereignty, grace, protection—and judgment of a God to whom they were accountable and in whom their only hope for stability and security lay.[26] The comment of complaint occurs in the midst of a narrative featuring two young men (Jud 17:1-13). The first, Micah, prevails on his mother to give him the funds necessary to the establishment of a household cult including the fabrication and installation of two silver figurines, one sculpted and the other molded, before which his own son would serve as priest for the family. This blatant denial of Yahweh and flagrant disregard for Torah prompted the narrator to summarize "every man did what was right in his own eyes." But this was only half the story. Micah needed a legitimate priest and it so happened that an 'unemployed' priest passed by and offered his services. The mutual need was thus supplied to Micah's great satisfaction: "Yahweh will now do good (things) for me because I have a Levitical priest" (Jud 17:13).

### False Governance: Immorality, Violence, and 'Frontier' Justice

Micah's joy was to be short-lived, however, for the lawlessness that inspired Micah to create his own god and a priest to perform ritual in his own chapel turned on him and in his chaotic world he had no one to come to his aid. What prompted Micah's negative turn of events was the forced migration of the tribe of Dan from its original mandated territory between Ephraim/Benjamin on the East and the Mediterranean Sea to the West to a region named Laish at the farthest limit of Israelite territory along the Aramean and Lebanon border (Judges 18:7-10). En route through Ephraim, five men, delegated to find a place of security for the tribe, came across the home of Micah where they saw paraphernalia of syncretistic worship and the young hireling

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26. J. Gadd, "The Hebrew Conception of the Kingship of God: Its Origin and Development," *Vetus Testamentum* 6 (1956): 268-285.

priest. Realizing that they would now be far from Shiloh and the Tabernacle, the five concluded they would have to create their own shrine and, of course, their own priesthood and religious system.

Reaching Laish, the Danites slaughtered all the people there and undertook their own construction of a city with its social and religious institutions, including a new tabernacle. Recalling what the five spies had seen in Ephraim, the tribal leaders sent the five plus a 600-man contingent of soldiers back to Micah's home. There they looted the place of all the idols and vessels of worship and persuaded the young priest to go back with them. Which is better, they asked, to be priest of one man or of a whole tribe (Judges 18:19)? The answer is obvious.

The foregoing litany of broken systems, broken ideologies, and broken people— all because of a lack of strong, godly, obedient leadership—should suffice to justify the insistent clamor of the populace for a king, a central authority who would be able to gather together the loose cultural, political, and religious strands into a cohesive system that would bring stability, peace, and wellbeing to God's chosen nation. To this day, nations in turmoil look to a 'strong man,' no matter how despotic and self-serving, to establish law and order and some sense of civility and normalcy. This is when Samuel sprang into action, he who had seen with his own eyes and rebuked with his own lips the corruption of Israelite society and its futile attempts to pull itself up by its own bootstraps.

## Samuel: God-Appointed Kingmaker

Born for the day in which he was sovereignly placed, the prophet began to speak words from God at a time, notes the historian, when "the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions" (1 Sam 3:1[NIV]). But by the time Samuel finished his 'apprenticeship' with Eli it could be said of Samuel that "all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord" (1 Sam 3:20).

Samuel's most important accomplishment was the recovery of the Creation principle of God as King in Heaven who created mankind to be his image and surrogate king on Earth, charged solely with administering the affairs of God in accordance to his designs and purposes. Samuel conceptualized this over-riding biblical idea and served as God's agent to establish, not just theoretically, but politically and theologically, the nexus between Yahweh as universally sovereign and mankind (in his case, a solitary man of God's choice), as a monarch charged with leading his chosen people Israel. What was envisioned, it seems, was that for the first time an actual nation with a human ruler would serve as a proto-type modeling what God had in mind from the beginning and what he was preparing to demonstrate historically and eschatologically through this existing chosen nation[27] and now a chosen king.

27. This was affirmed in Israel's encounter with Yahweh at Sinai: "If you attentively listen to me

The notion of Yahweh as king is lavishly documented in the Old Testament and was certainly a well-known theological tenet.[28] On the other hand, for a man to be called 'king' and to be considered so in the sense that he was the special image of God and an envoy on earth working out God's plan for Israel would have been at first incomprehensible to most. Israel wanted a king 'like all the other nations,' to be sure, but now they could and would have a veritable 'son of God' as ruler; one, in fact, whose last descendant will one day be called God in the flesh. Had they only reflected on the Torah pledge of the appearance of monarchy climaxing the covenant promises to Abraham and Sarah that someday she would be the 'mother of kings,' how different the nation's mood would have been.

## Anointing of Saul

The prophet's first great commission was to accede to the people's demand for a king, though his compliance in doing so was with personal displeasure and apprehension (1 Samuel 8:4-6). Nonetheless, Yahweh made clear to the old prophet that what he as God knew to be a wrong choice for the moment was something from which the nation could and needed to learn. They must wait upon him for that which was best and for what had been promised to the Fathers, namely, the emergence of a human monarchy under divine permission and authorization. The time had come but not in the person of Saul. This tragic figure, so much, it seemed, was to Israel a 'messianic' ruler who could put down the hated Philistines and other foes and at the same time bring internal harmony and an end to the corruptive administration of priests and renegade self-appointed politicians. In the end he was a foil against whom the glory of the God-chosen candidate would be all the more glorious.

But this was not to be, at least on the near horizon. Samuel's own lascivious sons typified the times, enabling him to see up close the cogency of the peoples' outcries. Budding judges though they were, they viewed their ministries as a means to personal social and financial gain (1 Samuel 8:1-3). If this be true of the priest's household, what hope lay ahead for the household of the nation? "Make a king for us," they pleaded, "one to judge us like all the nations" (v. 5). To be fair, they were not asking for kings like other nations had but for a system of justice that other kings of other nations created and administered in their various realms.

Samuel's quandary was alleviated somewhat by Yahweh's assurance that it was not he, Samuel, who was being rejected, but Yahweh himself and his kingship (v.

and keep my covenant, you will become to me סְגֻלָּה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים ("an especially treasured one from among all the nations). The idea will now be applied to David who is to Yahweh אִישׁ כִּלְבָבוֹ, "a man according to my heart," that is, "a man of my choosing."

28. Numbers 23:21; 1 Sam 12:12; Psa 5:2; 24:7, 8, 9, 10; 44:4; 47:2, 6, 7; 48:2; 68:24; 74:12; 84:3; 95 :3; 98:6; 99:4; 145:1; 149:2; Isa 33:22; 41:21; 43:15; 44:6; Jer 8:19; 10:7, 10; 51:57; Zeph 3:15; Zech 14 :16, 17; Mal 1:14.

7). He therefore instructed the prophet to concede to popular demand but to do so with the severest warnings as to the kind of king they could expect. The kings of the other nations demanded their youth to go to war; Israel's God fought Israel's wars for them. Other kings subjected their people to *corvée*; Yahweh set his free to labor for his glory. The others catered to the rich and the powerful; he sought out the poor and needy to give them rest. The kings of the nations behaved as they did for they were merely mimicking the gods they served: exploitative, acquisitive, and, at the end, powerless (vv. 10-18). Surely, this could not be what the people wanted but all the louder they clamored for this very thing until Yahweh confided to Samuel, "Make a king for them."[29]

## Anointing of David

The dismal forty years of Saul's reign that followed made one point crystal clear: Kingship in itself was not the answer unless from the beginning it was embodied in a man called by God. That man would now be found in a most unlikely place called Bethlehem, in the home of a peasant shepherd, Jesse by name. It will be recalled that Bethlehem played a somewhat unsavory role in the days of the judges. It was from Bethlehem that the young Levite sallied forth seeking employment, which he found in the idolatrous house of Micah, which he then he left for what he presumed to be a better opportunity as a priest for the renegade tribe of Dan. They spurned him as a traitorous upstart, forcing his ignominious retreat homeward (Judges 17:1-18:26). Bethlehem also was the home of a feckless girl who married a Levite, was unfaithful to him and ran away, was retrieved by him, murdered by a gang of ruffians in Gibeah, and cut to pieces by her Levite husband (Judges 19:1-30). Could the king of Israel come from such a place?

On the other hand, Bethlehem was the home of David's great-grandmother Ruth, a Moabite who had come to embrace Yahweh as her God. She had married a son of a Bethlehem widow named Naomi who himself had died. The two widows took up residence in Bethlehem where Ruth met and married a next of kin to her mother-in-law, Boaz by name. The story behind the marriage is a story of redemption. Naomi, as a widow, was seeking possession of her husband's properties which were in the hands of a lender who was entitled under Torah law to hold it as earnest until it could be redeemed through debt payment by a family member. When it seems there was no close kinsman who could, meet the requirements, Boaz, a more distant relative, agreed to the transaction only to find that he must take Ruth as wife as part of the 'inheritance.' He was happy to do this so he, by this deference, became (obviously unaware) the great-grandfather of King David, the messianic prototype of Jesus Christ. Ruth 4 lists David's ancestry as follows: Perez (son of Judah), Hezron, Ram,

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29. The factitive verb form here converts the nominal to a verbal, הִמְלַכְתָּ לָהֶם מֶלֶךְ ("you [Samuel] bring about a king for them." Or, more idiomatically, "Appoint them a king."

Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David. The providence of God in sustaining the Abraham > David > Jesus chain of salvific hope cannot be ignored.

This remarkable backdrop provides a context in which Yahweh's instruction to Samuel go to Bethlehem and there to the house of Jesse can be understood. Any bafflement felt by Samuel initially was certainly allayed when Yahweh revealed to him more specifics: "Fill your horn with oil" and "I have chosen one of [Jesse's] sons to be king" (1 Samuel 16:1). At last the old prophet knew he would live to see the fulfillment of his mother Hannah's prayer:

> The Most High will thunder from Heaven;
> > The Lord will judge the ends of the earth.
> He will give strength to his king
> > And exalt the horn of his anointed (1 Samuel 2:10)

David having been chosen from all of Jesse's sons, and having been anointed by Samuel, the narrator states that "from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David" (16:12). That statement alone may explain (1) David's immediate awareness of his exalted position even though he had not assumed it, and (2) how and why he apparently began to compose and sing the magnificent poetic psalms attributed to him or speaking of him. Here is the appropriate place to examine them and others referring to him to glean from them the more full extent of his self-understanding of his kingship in light of all that had transpired. Chart 2 lists the 'Davidic Psalms and how they reflect these viewpoints. Chart 3 consist s of so-called "Royal Psalms," those written by David and others that celebrate the kingship of both Yahweh and his anointed one, David

## Table 1: The Psalms of David

|  | Literary Type | Divine Kingship | David's Political Kingship | David's Priestly Kingship |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | Lament |  | Elevation of his head |  |
| 5 | Lament | My King and my God |  |  |
| 7 | Lament | Enthroned |  |  |
| 8 | Hymn | Majestic name | Man's sovereignty |  |
| 9 | Thanksgiving | Enthroned, Reigns |  |  |
| 11 | Lament | Enthroned |  |  |
| 18 | Messianic |  | "his [Yahweh's] king" |  |
| 20 | Blessings |  | "the king" (David) |  |
| 21 | Thanksgiving |  | "the king" (David) given "splendor and majesty" with a "golden crown"and "un-ending blessings" |  |
| 22 | Lament | Enthroned, Holy One, dominion over all |  |  |

| | Literary Type | Divine Kingship | David's Political Kingship | David's Priestly Kingship |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24 | Entrance Liturgy | King of Glory, Lord Almighty | | |
| 29 | Hymn | Enthroned as King forever | | |
| 55 | Lament | Enthroned from of old | | |
| 59 | Lament | Rules over Jacob | | |
| 61 | Lament | | "increase the years of the king's life," "may he be enthroned forever" | |
| 63 | Thanksgiving | | | "I have seen you in the sanctuary" |
| 66 | Thanksgiving | Rules by his power over the nations | | |
| 68 | Victory Songs | God reigns forever, "Sovereign Lord," majesty over Israel | | |
| 103 | Hymn | From a throne in heaven, rules over all | | |
| 144 | Praise and Petition | | "the one who gives victory to kings, who delivers his servant David" | |
| 145 | Hymn | God the King | | |

## Table 2: The Royal Psalms

| 2 | Messianic | "I have installed my king [David];" Yahweh's son |
|---|---|---|
| 18 | Messianic | "[God] delighted in me," "exalted me," "his anointed" |
| 20 | Blessings | "his anointed," "give victory to the king [David]" |
| 21 | Thanksgiving | "the king [David] rejoices in Yahweh;" [God] placed a crown on his head |
| 72 | Intercession | "royal son," "may all kings bow down to him," "long may he live," "may his name endure forever," |
| 132 | Messianic | "For the sake of your servant David, do not reject your anointed one;" "The Lord swore an oath to David…one of your own descendants I will place on your throne;" I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one |

## Affirmation of David

Perhaps the strongest testimony to the selection, empowerment, and paradigmatic messianic nature of David's kingship is Psalm 89, generally categorized as a royal psalm.[30] It is attributed to 'Ethan the Ezrahite[31].' Structurally, it can be understood as follows:

Introit (vv. 1-2)

30. C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, revised and expanded (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988), 137-39

31. For 'Ethan the Ezrahite,' the attributive author of the psalm, see Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms.* Vol. III. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n. d.), 32-33.

The name David occurs four times in the psalm out of 14 times in the entire book of Psalms. Together with Psalm 132 (5 times), the two account for nearly ¾ of all in the book. In addition, the term 'covenant' is found four times, once for every reference to David. Clearly, the poet is making a profoundly important theological point, one that demands at least brief attention.

At the outset, the composer connects 'covenant' with 'David, describing the latter as 'my chosen' and 'my servant' (vv. 3-4). Two other concepts are also joined, 'seed' and 'throne.' The referent is, of course, self-evident: David the anointed servant will sire one who will be king. Only Yahweh, the incomparable and omnipotent God, can bring this to pass. Amongst the heavenly hosts and in battle with the monsters of chaos and unrighteousness, he stands alone as Sovereign (vv. 6-17). But his sovereignty he shares with his servant David, says the poet:

> Our shield belongs to Yahweh,
> Our king to the Holy (One) of Israel.

Shield and king are in poetic parallelism as are 'Yahweh' and 'Holy One.' In context, David is Israel's shield, a descriptor found nowhere else in the Bible but an imagery found commonly in the Psalter with reference to God as a shield (Psa. 3:3; 7:10; 18:2, 35; 28:7; etc.). David is thus raised here hyperbolically to a super-human level of being and function. On the other hand, deity is never attributed to David or any other king of Israel, contrary to the traditions of surrounding nations, especially, of course, those of Egypt. In the remainder of the psalm, similar sobriquets surround the king. He was 'found' and 'anointed'[32] (v. 20; cf. vv. 38, 51) and then was promised victory over all his foes, human and otherwise (vv. 21-25). Of particular note is the allusion to the creation mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 in which mankind is commissioned to have dominion over all things including the realms of the seas and rivers.[33] The very powers articulated here were displayed by Jesus Christ, Son of David and Son of Man (Matt. 8:26-27). In the historical circumstances of David,

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32. בְּשֶׁמֶן קָדְשִׁי מְשַׁחְתִּי. The transliterated form of the adjectival-nominal מָשִׁיחַ is, of course, "messiah," which occurs three times in this psalm as an epithet of David (vv. 20, 38, 51).

33. This brings to mind the Ugaritic (Canaanite) epics of Baal who, in achieving the construction of his palace and throne of kingship, had to slay Nahar, the god of the rivers, and Yamm(u), god of the seas. Such imagery would be of great interest and meaning in the pagan environment surrounding Israel in the 11th Century. For David and his successors to have such power would be an unanswerable claim to the messiahship of David (as lord of the bordering nations) and Jesus Christ (as Lord of heaven and earth).

these pledges of dominion and of military and material success were conditioned on his adherence to the covenant Yahweh had made with him. However, in the eschatological sense, also in view here (vv. 28-29), terms such as 'forever' (vv. 4, 28, 29, 36, 37) and 'never' make clear that the covenant in view is unconditional. On the other hand, David's historical dynastic descendants could and did break covenant over and over, infidelity that brought both Assyrian and Babylonian exiles and multitudes of troubles in addition (vv. 30-32, 38-52). But in the midst of the statements of the contingencies of the future (vv. 30-31) and the realities of the past (vv. 38-51), the poet returns again to the irrefragability of the unconditional covenant yet to come (vv. 33-37).

## Retrieval of the Ark of the Covenant

Samuel's second important mission pertained to the misfortunes of the Ark of the Covenant which, with the defeat of the armies of Israel, had been stolen by the Philistines and taken to Ashdod. The Philistines entertained the idea that this 'box' either contained the God of Israel or was some kind of talisman that evoked the power of that God. In any event, that 'box' spelled nothing but trouble for the Philistines, notably the humiliating fall and fracture of the deity of the place, Dagan, in the presence of the 'box,' thus giving evidence of the superiority of Yahweh.

## David: Prophet, Priest, and King

These series of events—good, bad, indifferent—ushered in the turning-point in the history of the monarchy because now crown could be integrated with cult and the two would be one, which was God's plan and purpose from the beginning.[34] In fact, David celebrated the return of the ark by dancing in delirium and clothed in a linen ephod, a theologically significant piece of attire for 'glory and beauty' that marked one as a priest (Exodus 28:2). But how was David (and potentially his dynasty) a priest? The earliest hint chronologically is in David's purchase of Araunah's 'threshing-floor' where he then offered sacrifices as a 'down-payment' for the time when it would be the seat of the temple altar yet to be established (2 Samuel 24:25). Along the way from Kiriath-Jearim to Mount Zion David, not totally surprising now, offered sacrifices in his priestly garb (2 Samuel 6:13, 17); he apparently entered into the quasi-temple he had built without rebuke from any quarter (v. 17; 1 Chronicles 16:1); he appointed Levitical temple personnel (vv. 4-7); and, notably, Asaph and Zadok as priests (vv. 37-39). Prior to David's era, there is no record of a non-Aaronic undertaking such

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34. After eliminating all his brothers from consideration, Samuel anointed David, at first in the confines of the family home (1 Samuel 16:6-13), and later in a public ceremony. But Samuel, previous to that event, had already been informed by Yahweh that the only proper candidate must be "a man after his [Yahweh's] own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). See Zecharia Kallai, "The United Monarchy of Israel—a Focal Point in Israelite Historiography," *IEJ* 27 (1977): 103-109; Eugene H. Merrill, "Royal Priesthood: An Old Testament Messianic Motif," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993):50-61.

sacred duties saving only Moses, but he was a Levite, and, therefore, of the 'right' tribe as opposed to David of Judah.

At this point, it will be helpful to return to Genesis, to the very beginning of the concept just proposed and on the basis of which David could understand and act upon as a priest-king. The patriarch Abraham, having learned that his nephew Lot had been taken captive by four kings from the East, without delay set forth in hot pursuit from his home in Mamre all the way to the far north near Hermon where he was able to defeat Lot's captors and bring Lot back (Genesis 14:1-12). On the way home he was met by a strange and striking figure whom the narrator identifies as מַלְכִּי–צֶדֶק מֶלֶק שָׁלֵם and כֹּהֵן לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן (v. 18). This combination of two of the most theologically significant offices in the Old Testament in one individual—and especially his connection with 'Salem'leads one inevitably to think of David the king in Jerusalem dressed in priestly attire, specially the ephod. As noted above, David was actively involved in matters of temple and cultus. He retrieved the Ark and accompanied it to Jerusalem with much fanfare of a religious nature (2 Samuel 6:5) and even by personally offering sacrifices of praise (vv. 13, 17-18).[35] Upon arriving at Zion, David "blessed the people in the name of Yahweh," clearly a priestly function in context, and, like Melchizedek, had in his hands for distribution חַלַּת לֶחֶם and אֲשִׁישָׁה, if not wine, at least raisins (v. 19).

Not to be overlooked is the Chronicler's inclusion of a celebratory hymn composed by David and handed over to Asaph for presentation (1 Chronicles 16:8-36; expanded in Psalm 105). Only pertinent words and phrases can be addressed here. In v. 13 attention is drawn to Israel's election as a special people with whom a covenant was made, first with Abraham, inherited by Isaac, and "confirmed"[36] to "Jacob for a statute,[37] to Israel for an everlasting covenant" (v. 17). This embodies the land of Canaan (v. 18), the praiseworthiness of Yahweh as opposed to would-be gods and dumb idols (vv. 25-26), and the exhortation to worship Yahweh "in the splendor of his holiness" (v. 29). Then, climacticly, David the king looks to the day when the nations (הַגּוֹיִם) will declare, with Israel,יְהוָה מָלָךְ, "Reign, O Yahweh!" In echo to this is the glad response in the same words in the so-called Enthronment Psalms (93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1; 47:9 (MT) reads מָלַךְ אֱלֹהִים, "God has been enthroned." Though the form מָלָךְ is technically nominal, context requires verbal, either stative or denominative. However, at times the forms are exactly alike and must be undertood within their contexts.[38]

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35. The preterite וַיִּזְבַּח allows no other meaning than this.

36. יַעֲמִידֶהָ, "made it stand." God's promise to Abraham will never be rescinded until its full purpose for Israel and the church has been achieved.

37. The term חֹק (*ḥoq*) refers to a deep, undeletable incision in stone. It is used as a *pars pro toto* for the entire Torah.

38. So Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 364-376.

Of all biblical characters, Melchizedek is one of the mose elusive and myterious.[39] He appears and disappears in this narrative only, though he is mentioned ten other times, all but once of these in the New Testament book of Hebrews.

## The Book of Hebrews and Kingdom Theology

Names of this kind occur in the Bible, but much more commonly in foreign texts, especially the Amarna Letters of the New Kingdom Egypt period (ca. 1388-1332).[40] For example, in those documents the city of Jerusalem is said to have been led by King Adoni-Zedek, that is, "My Lord is King." He, of course, was a Canaanite or Amorite ruler since the Jerusalem throne was not occupied by an Israelite king until David did so in 1011 B. C. Abraham, however, encountered Melchizedek as early as 2050 B. C., more than 700 years prior to the Amarna Period. Even then, names of this type are attested to in the records of various Ancient Near Eastern monarchs or private citizens.[41] His name is not as much of a conundrum as is what he says and does.[42] Bearing bread and wine, he takes the initiative in conversation and makes the following declaration: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth." Only the God of the Patriarchs and of Moses and the Prophets centuries later ever spoke of himself this way. However, he was thus praised and blessed by poets and prophets in numerous texts in these very terms of exaltation (Deuteronomy 32:8;

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39. John G. Gammie, "Loci of the Melchizedek Tradition of Genesis 14:18-20," JBL 90 (1971): 385-396. He is also given prominent attention in the Qumran text 11Q13; Targums Jonathan and Yerushalmi; and the Babylonian Talmud. See Fred L. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century A. D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976; Joshua G. Mathews, *Melchizedek's Alternative Priestly Order: A Compositional Analysis of Genesis 14:18-20 and Its Echoes Throughout the Tanak.* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns), 2013.

40. The Tell el-Amarna Letters from Egypt (ca. 1350 B. C.) consist of correspondence mainly from peer nations or from vassal states such as Canaan, then in the throes of conquest by Israel. The names of various kings of Canaanite states appear, many resembling the name 'Melchizedek' either in form or semantic equivalency. Examples are Ili-Milku ("Milku is my god") and Milk-Uru ("Milku is [my] Light"). "Milku" is the East Semitic equivalent to West Semitic Melek, as in Melchizedek. William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, pp. 382, 383. Though this exact name was not found in the important city-state of Mari on the upper Euphrates, the two elements MLK and ZDK are attested (though not in combination) in these 17th Century B. C. texts. For example, there is Malaku-il ("Ilu is King') and Malik ᵈDagan ("Dagan [another name for Baal] is King"). The equivalent of *zedek* occurs in Ili-Ṣidqum, "my god is righteous." Herbert B. Huffmon, *Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 230-231, 256-257.

41. For Mesopotamia, see Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions.* Vol. I. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 1972; Vol. II. 1976. These alone attest such names as Adad-nīrāri II (911-891), "Adad is my helper." A second is Sargon II (722-705; *Šarru-kîn*; "legitimate king"). The third, Shamshi-Adad IV (1053-`1050; "Adad is my sun"), was nearly contemporary to David (1011-971).

42. It is the epithet, not the name, that is at issue, for Elohim or forms much like it were common in early patriarchal times. However, to claim to be the priest of אֵל עֶלְיוֹן (El Elyôn, "God Above All Else"), would be the height Hebrew arrogant blasphemy if not true.

23 times in Psalms). David spoke of him in this manner in many of those psalms, including some where his royal and priestly callings are also at play.

The place of the encounter is called עֵמֶק שָׁוֵה alias עֵמֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ ("Valley of Shaveh"[43] and "Royal Valley" respectively). Melchizedek is asserted to be "King of Salem," almost certainly (Jeru)salem, a place strangely unmentioned in Scripture as early as Abraham. Chronologically and topographically this identification is not difficult to prove. Jerusalem is cited in texts as early as the Early Bronze age (ca. 3000- 2200 B. C.). Its meaning is something like "Peace City."[44] Melchizedek comes with bread and wine, typical articles of peace offerings, but also as a priest of El Elyon, "Exalted God." What religious tradition he served is not disclosed but the fact that he worshiped God by a name that occurs more than 50 times in the Old Testament strongly suggests that he was a man of the true God of the Patriarchs. Moreover, Yahweh is extolled as the creator (קֹנֵה) of "heaven and earth," a claim whose meaning, if not exact wording, is also common to Hebrew Scripture.[45]

Now, however, focus must be on the one text in which David[46] extolls his God for having made him, the king, also the "priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek," namely, Psalm 110:[47]

> 1 Yahweh says to Adoni,[48] "Sit to my right
>> Until I place your enemies under your feet."[49]
> 2 Yahweh will extend

43. The meaning of the lexeme שׁוה is uncertain. Most likely it has to do with worthiness or restfulness. HALOT, 1991-92. Neither the name of the valley nor its location can be known with certainty. It may suggest a dry, desert-like place just north of Jerusalem. HALOT, 1438; cf. TDOT 14:524, "plain."

44. Amarna texts (ca. 14th century B. C.) refer to it as Urusalim and later Assyrian inscriptions render it Urusalimmu. The name is likely based on the ancient Sumerian term for 'city' (UR) developed in Akkadian as Uru; or on the Hebrew verb יָרֵה ("cast down," "lay a foundation," HALOT 437) + שָׁלֵם ('healthy," "whole," "peaceable," HALOT 1539).

45. The precise wording here ("Creator of heaven and earth") is unique to this passage but the concept of God as creator of all things is, of course, common in the Old Testament.

46. The psalm is attributed to David as are others in which he understands himself to be the royal and priestly messianic prototype. See Psalms 18:50; 20:9; 21:1-7; 27:4-5; 30:6-7; 55:14; 61:6-8; 63:2,11, all of which testify to David's awareness of his kingship, his responsibility in light of it, and his attachment to the Temple, the home of the living God.

47. Author's translation. For an excellent literary analysis and practical applications of the psalm, see Elliott E. Johnson, "Hermeneutical Principles and the Interpretation of Psalm 110," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (1992): 428-437.

48. This epithet, not to be confused with Adonai, is the normal term for a person of prestige or honor. It is to be taken here as a highly indirect, politically correct self-reference. David as king is "My Lord" to his subjects and so refers

49. This image of submission originates in Genesis where placing under the foot is seen as a shorthand for dominion (Genesis 3:15). See Eugene H. Merrill, "'Foot'-Notes in Old Testament Texts: A Study of Verbal and Nominal Expressions of Walking," *The Unfolding of Your Words Gives Light: Studies on Biblical Hebrew in Honor of George L. Klein*. Ed. Ethan C. Jones (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018).

Your mighty staff[50] from Zion, saying,

"Have dominion among all your adversaries."

3 Your people are ready for the day of your battle;

Clothed in holy garments (and) from the earliest dawn

Your warriors (will arise) for you.

4 Yahweh has sworn and will not recant;

"You are an eternal priest,

After the manner of Melchizedek."

5 Adonai will be at your right (hand);

On his day of wrath, he will crush kings.

6 He will judge the nations, filling [them] with corpses,

He will crush the heads of all them upon the earth.

7 (Then) he will drink from a stream along the way;

So thus he will elevate his headship.

An important (and often misunderstood) aspect of the royal priesthood must here come to the fore, and that is the non-Aaronic and non-Levitical designations and public displays of the normally priestly roles carried out on occasion by the Davidic, non-Levitical, royalty. These have been briefly alluded to but must here have a more expanded analysis. In addition to what has been said of David already, the following demand consideration. First, in terms of nomenclature the Samuel record refers to some of David's less well-known sons as בְּנֵי דָוִיד כֹּהֲנִים ("sons of David [were] priests"; 2 Samuel 8:18) but 1 Chronicles 18:17 reads בְּנֵי דָוִיד הָרִאשֹׁנִים ("ruling sons of David").[51]

Solomon after him also assumed a priestly role, even more vigorously and thoroughly than his father. First, he was admonished to build the temple and was invested by his father with kingly authority to be in charge of its architecture, furnishings, and every detail necessary to its function as the dwelling-place of Yahweh, God Most High. He was then to be responsible for the worship therein and for the appointment of priests and Levites ministering the things of God to the people (1 Chronicles 28:9-10, 20-21). The book of 1 Kings gives examples of Solomon's implementation of his duties, and in bold letters. He relieved Abiathar of his priestly role (1 Kings 2:27), installed Zadok in his place (v. 35); and, of course, oversaw the building of the great temple (6:1-38; 2 Chronicles 3:1-4:22). That Solomon understood his role of priest\king is most clear in his dedicatory prayer (1 Kings 8:23-53; 2

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50. The description of kings in the ancient Near East as shepherds is common. In the prologue to his famous law code, the first epithet employed by the great Babylonian king Hammurabi (1790-1753 B. C.) in in his self-asseveration "I, Hammurabi the shepherd [*ri-iu-um*]." Akkadian *rē'û* is cognate to Hebrew רֹעֶה, *rō'eh*, and its functional and semantic equivalent. HALOT, p. 1261; cf. CAD, Vol. 14, pp. 310-311.

51. Eugene H. Merrill, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Chronicles*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2015), 233: "the Chronicler, though not adverse to viewing David as a messianic priest…, may not have been willing to cede that privilege over to the sons in view here because only Solomon was qualified to succeed in that office along with the kingship (2 Chr 1:6; 7:4-7; 8:12)."

Chronicles 6:14-42), preceded (1 Kings 8:15-21; 2 Chronicles 6:4-11) and concluded (1 Kings 8:56-61) by prayers blessing the assembly.

## An Assessment of the Royal Descendants of David

The Scriptures list 20 kings of Judah before the Babylonian exile of 586 B. C. and they also assess their personal lives and their effectiveness as heirs of the messianic promises invested in David. These will consist of very brief comments that encapsulate these issues.

## Table 3: The Dynasty of David from 931-586 B. C.

| Names and Dates | References | Assessments |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Rehoboam (931-913) | 1 Kgs 12:1-14:31; 2 Chr 10:1-12:16 | Permitted widespread idolatry; Judah "did evil;" did not seek after God |
| 2. Abijah (913-911) | 1 Kgs 15:1-8; 2 Chr 13:1-22 | Committed the sins of his fathers; did not seek God |
| 3. Asa (911-870) | 1 Kgs 15:9-24; 2 Chr 14:1-16:17 | Did what was right; expelled idols, destroyed shrines, but left high places; urged the nation to seek Yahweh, commanded obedience to Torah, and renewed covenant vows. |
| 4. Jehoshaphat (873-848) | 1 Kgs 22:41-50; 2 Chr 17:1-20:34 | Did what was right; followed in the ways of Asa but left high places alone; sought the Lord; sent teachers of Torah everywhere; followed Yahweh in Holy War |
| 5. Jehoram (848-841) | 2 Kgs 8:16-24; 2 Chr 21:1-20) | Walked in the ways of the kings of Israel; did evil; forsook Yahweh; made high places; murdered his brothers |
| 6. Ahaziah (841) | 2 Kgs 8:25-9:28; 2 Chr 22:1-9 | Walked in the way of Ahab (his father-in-law); did evil |
| 7. Athaliah, (841-835)[52] | 2 Kgs 11:1-16; 2 Chr 22:10-23:15 | Murdered the Judean royal family |
| 8. Joash (835-796) | 2 Kgs11:12-12:21; 2 Chr 23:11-24:27 | Did what was right; repaired the Temple; tolerated high places; allowed murder of prophet Zechariah, son of Jehoiada |
| 9. Amaziah (796-767) | 2 Kgs 14:1-19; 2 Chr 25:1-28 | Did what was right, but "not with a perfect heart;" tolerated idolatry |
| 10. Uzziah (=Aza-riah) (792-740) | 2 Kgs 15:1-7, 2 Chr 26:1-23 | Did what was right but left high places; entered the Temple to burn incense and became leprous[53] |
| 11. Jotham (750-731) | 2 Kgs 15:32-38; 2 Chr 27:1-7 | Did what was right; followed his father but tolerated high places |
| 12. Ahaz (735-715) | 2 Kgs 16:1-20; 2 Chr 28:1-27 | Was evil; sacrificed his son as a burnt offering; open idolatry; paganized the Temple; practiced divination; made idols of Baal; sought alliance with Assyria |

52. At this point there is an inter-regnum in which Athaliah, wife of Jehoram and daughter of King Ahab of Israel, exercised wicked leadership over Judah until she was assassinated.

53. The Law states clearly that only Aaronic priests could do this so royal priests were excluded (Numbers 16:39-40).

| 13. Hezekiah (729-686) | 2 Kgs 18:1-20:21; 2 Chr 29:1-32:33 | Did what was right; removed high places; repaired the Temple; destroyed idols; none like him among all the kings; kept Torah; rebuked by Isaiah for pretentiousness; revived the worship of Yahweh; tried to reunify the nation by inviting people from the north to worship in Jerusalem; interceded for all the people before Yahweh; sought God with all his heart. |
|---|---|---|
| 14. Manasseh (696-642) | 2 Kgs 21:1-18; 2 Chr 33:1-25 | Did evil as the nations; built high places and fashioned idols, even in the Temple; offered his son as a burnt offering; slew his own people; resorted to divination; after his personal captivity, he repented and "knew that Yahweh was God." |
| 15. Amon (642-640) | 2 Kgs 21:19; 2 Chr 33:21-23 | Did evil; mimicked his father |
| 16. Josiah (640-609) | 2 Kgs 22:1-23:30; 2 Chr 34:1-35:27 | Did what was right; walked in the ways of David; refurbished the Temple; received and enforced the 'Book of the Law';[54] was spared the pain of seeing the nation fall to Babylonia in 586. |
| 17. Jehoahaz (609) | 2 Kgs 23:31-33; 2 Chr 36:1-3 | Did what was evil |
| 18. Jehoiakim (608-598) | 2 Kgs 23:36-24:7; 2 Chr 36:5-8 | Did what was evil; committed 'abominations' and 'detestable things' |
| 19. Jehoiachin (598-597) | 2 Kgs 24:6-17; 2 Chr 36:9-10 | Did what was evil |
| 20. Zedekiah (597-586) | 2 Kgs 24:18-25:7; 2 Chr 36:11-23 | Did what was evil; hardened his heart; permitted the Temple to be defiled |

## Theological Observations of the Davidic Dynasty in the Divided Monarchy Era

- The summation "he did evil" (וַיַּעַשׂ הָרַע) suggests in the use of the preterite a characteristic behavior, not an evil deed now and then. This is said to be explicitly true of eight of the 20 kings.
- "He did right" (וַיַּעַשׂ הַיָּשָׁר) occurs seven times. This was a mark of these kings' personality and manner of life.
- Six kings tolerated high places, idolatry, and neglect of Yahweh and the temple.
- Three kings openly adopted paganism in some form or other.
- Only two were iconoclastic.
- Only two sought to repair or rehabilitate the Temple.
- Three neglected or paganized the Temple.
- Three attempted to return the people to Yahweh and Torah.
- Only two returned to the covenant and tried to restore the community to it.
- Two offered their sons as burnt offerings.

54. It is clear this is the book of Deuteronomy since this is the term employed therein to describe itself (Deut 29:21; 30:10; 31:26).

## Synopsis

The conclusion is beyond dispute: The Divided Monarchy of Judaean kings (i.e., the Davidic Dynasty) fell far short of God's expectations for the continuation of the line of messianic kings who should (1) embody what is inherent in the term 'messianic' and (2) who, at least to some degree, should measure up to the character and godliness of its prototype, King David, who himself was, of course, imperfect by his own frequent admissions. The question then must be asked: In light of the spiritual, political, and genealogical fragility of this stream of successors to David and predecessors of the second David, the Lord Jesus Christ, how could it be that the royal lineage they claimed and, indeed, to which they had been appointed by God, would be a channel of world redemption and eschatological re-enthronement of Yahweh as God in the minds and hearts of all mankind?

## Four Responses are Tentatively and Cautiously Offered:

1. The rulers of the divided monarchy—the good, bad, and ugly—were Everyman; that is, they are a mirror into which all mankind—and especially the Church--must peer to see themselves (ourselves) as they (we) really are: liars, thieves, blasphemers, adulterers, murderers, disobedient, disloyal, undependable, sexually impure, unrepentant, and unworthy to be called God's people—his sons and daughters.

2. The irony and grace of it is that the messianic transmission was never broken: from Abraham, through Jacob, Judah, David, Solomon, Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah, and, yes, Jehoram, Ahaz, and Manasseh, to the perfect One, conceived by the Spirit, born of a virgin, He who 'went about doing good,' and who died on a cruel cross only to conquer death and sin by his glorious resurrection.

3. The genetic strain throughout the 345 years of the Divided Monarchy remained Davidic despite its generally sorry record. Never was it successfully overcome by internal or external powers that would, in effect, derail the continuity of the line and thus separate David dynastically from his latter Son.

4. It is said that a chain is as strong as its weakest link, but it is also said that blood is thicker than water. The Ahaziah's, Ahaz,s, and Manasseh's of the lineage, evil as they were, were overcome by the sworn oaths of Almighty God that through David would come ultimate salvation, peace, and righteousness though a better David who will usher in the everlasting Kingdom of God.

A Theology of the Monarchy is more than the history of a nation, no matter how providentially selected and powerfully enabled. But it is history and must be understood as such. These are not random tales of villains and heroes, or a space age mythology of the Battle of the Gods. It is the account of' a profoundly transcendent God, one eternally and absolutely 'Other' from his creation, and to the same degree, one sharing 'Sameness' with it. He who reigns in Heaven ordained that creatures

whom he calls his 'image' should emulate his kingship and reign over his kingdom on Earth. The wicked choice in and by the infancy of the image to serve another god seemed to have jeopardized the experiment, but not so. The 'Fall' was to demonstrate the fallacy of human independence, but God was not so easily manipulated as to end in failure. The sequel was a program of redemption by which the fractured model could be reassembled, having learned its lesson. Now the Master Planner set in motion a plan to 'pick up the pieces,' put them together again, and reshape and repurpose them this time into a line of redemption, of re-creation, formed and designed as a 'Kingdom Model,' a prototype of what he himself will bring to pass in the endless ages of eternity yet to come. The Model in mind took the form of a man, Abraham, called to be founder of a nation through which the nations of the world will find everlasting *shalom*. That nation was Israel and that kingdom his namesake. The theology that integrates all this and more is the topic of this paper.

To God the Great King and to his son Jesus Christ the Lord be all praise and glory given!