

Jesus the King, Part 1

One of the primary descriptions of Jesus is of Him as King. We will be taking a look at the kings of the Old Testament in order to get a better idea of how Jesus was a king. In the Old Testament we see many types of kings. We see kings that rule over what seems to be small city states, and then other kings who rule over most of the known world at that time. We will focus primarily on kings of Judah and Israel for this study. However, the idea of a king was so prevalent among all the nations that outside examples can teach us as well.

The Establishment of Israel's King

When the Israelites first came out of Egypt, they had no king. This is fitting, as their time in Egypt had been as slaves. There was no one to take the mantle of king. Nor was there a need for a traditional king. The kings were often noted for their great victories in battle. One of their primary roles was to lead a nation's army to conquer the foes around them, whether it be in conquest or defense. Yet the Israelites had Yahweh to lead them into battle. The Egyptians were destroyed by God, and there was no need for a man of Israel to raise a sword or bow (Exodus 14:14, 21-28).

These victories continued into the land of Canaan, and they were able to defeat the people in Canaan. As always, they were led by the great power of Yahweh. A look at the battle of Jericho shows how reliant they were on God to lead them to victory (Joshua 6:20). Even during the time of the judges, after the people repented and returned back to God, He would lead them to victory.

By the time of Samuel, however, the Israelites had grown discontent with this arrangement. They asked for an official king to lead them. They wanted to have one, like the nations around them. Looking at the requests of the people and God's response in 1 Samuel 8, we can learn a lot about the role of the king.

The King Pronounced Judgment

Up until this time, when people had disputes or disagreements, they would go before the judges to adjudicate their disagreements. In 1 Samuel 8:5, we see that they wanted a king to pronounce judgments for them. The king would be in charge of dispensing justice. This was a key characteristic of the kings. There is no better illustration of this than David and his son Absalom. Absalom comes to the people and tells them that David is not fulfilling the obligation of making such judgments (2 Samuel 15:1-6). Absalom then proclaims that if He could be king, the people would surely find the justice that they seek. He undermined David's authority as king and won the hearts of the people (v. 6). This illustrates how people looked to the king to be the judge of the Law.

The King Led the People in Battle

In 1 Samuel 8:11-12, Samuel informs the people that if they anoint a king, this king will draft their sons into an army. This foreshadows the king leading them into war. We also see in verse 20 of the same chapter that they wanted the king to go out before them and fight their battles. They want a king so they can defend against and then conquer their enemies.

This role is one that dominates the lives of Old Testament kings. Saul is anointed and proclaimed king in 1 Samuel 10. Yet when we next see him in chapter 11, he is still working in his field (1 Samuel 11:5). Saul is pressed into action to save the people of Jabesh-gilead, and he takes an army and defeats the attacking Ammonites. In verses 14 and 15 we see that this victory brings his acceptance as king and his kingdom is established in full.

It is this same role that caused Saul to begin to be threatened by David. David's ascension really starts when he is willing to be the one who fights Goliath while Saul stays back (1 Samuel 17). Saul truly becomes worried about David when the people start proclaiming David as a better warrior than Saul (1 Samuel 18:6-8). It shows how central the warrior mindset was to the kingship that Saul recognizes that these praises meant the people would want David to replace Saul.

The King Owned the People

God warns the people that they are about to make themselves slaves of the king they so desperately clamor for in 1 Samuel 8:10-18. Notice the rights that the king will have over the people.

- He will take your sons for his army (v. 11-12)
- He will take your sons for his farming (v. 12)
- He will take your sons for manufacturing weapons and war material (v. 12)
- He will take your daughters for his own service (v. 13)
- He will take the best fields and vineyards (v. 14)
- He will tax you on the fields he lets you keep (v. 15)
- He will take your servants (v. 16)
- He will take your livestock (v. 16-17)

When you see everything that the king will take from them, you can see why Samuel proclaims that they will indeed be slaves to the king (v. 17). If the king decides you work for him, you will do it. It does not matter if that is what you desired. It does not matter what you want. You serve at the pleasure of the king.

Furthermore, Samuel warns nothing you own will actually be yours. It is all the king's that you are keeping in possession on his behalf. Say you have a nice field, and the king decides it

should be used for feeding his army, he will just take it from you. He may take it just because he wants it. That is his right as king. The field was never really yours to begin with.

Even when the king lets you keep your fields and vineyards, you are always reminded that it is his. The taxes he imposes are a constant token. When you grow things in your field, he gets part of those crops. The same goes with your livestock. It is you who puts in the work of raising the livestock, protecting them from predators and keeping them safe and healthy. Yet even then the king will take a tenth of your flocks. Again, it is a reminder that you are not working for yourself, but for the king.

The Anointing of the Kings

A key feature that we see about the kings for the Israelites is that they were anointed. We see that in particular Saul, David and Solomon were anointed as kings by prophets of God (1 Samuel 10:1; 1 Samuel 16:13; 1 Kings 1:39, 45). This showed that their kingship had been designated by God. It was both an honor and a responsibility to be anointed as the Lord's chosen one.

We see that David understands how special being anointed by a prophet was. When he has the chance to harm Saul, he refuses to carry it out. This is while Saul is actively trying to kill him. Yet David's respect for God meant that He could not go against the Lord's anointed.

Furthermore we see the responsibility that this honor implied. Saul is rebuked by Samuel (1 Samuel 15:17-19). Samuel specifically points out that Saul had been anointed by the Lord. Why then would Saul not obey the Lord that had honored him in such a way? David received the same rebuke when sinning with Bathsheba and killing her husband. God, through Nathan the prophet, specifically brings up the fact that God had anointed David (2 Samuel 12:7-9). Why then is David sinning against God? Being God's anointed had expectations that went along with it.

The Kings and the Law

These rebukes by God's prophets point back to the expectations laid out for the kings in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Despite the fact that there were no kings at the time Deuteronomy was written, God knew that the people would eventually want a king and he set up laws concerning them. His goal for the kings was that they would be faithful to Him. In fact, God even requires that they write out the law so that they would know the Lord and learn to fear Him (v. 18-19). The other requirements that God outlines here seem to be along those same lines: stay faithful to the Lord.

It is important to note then that the kings were not meant to be a law unto themselves. They were to follow and obey God's law. Instead of the creators of the law, they were to be instruments of it. When reading through the scriptures, it is interesting to see that sometimes the

prophets seem to outrank the kings. The two examples above stand out. Even David, the great king from whom all other kings would be judged, could be rebuked by a prophet. As much power as God imbued on the kings when they were anointed, they still needed to follow and obey God.

Questions:

1. Why would the Israelites not have a king as they left Egypt?
2. Why would the Israelites not need a king?
3. Why did the Israelites want a king?
4. In what ways would the king act as a judge for the people?
5. What types of battles would a king need to fight?
6. Why was Saul jealous of David?
7. Why did God say the people would be slaves to the kings?
8. Who would anoint a king? Why does it matter who anointed them?
9. What was the responsibility that came with being anointed?
10. Why was it necessary for the kings to write out the law?