

OpenTheo

Q&A#36 Was Israel Wrong to Ask for a King?

September 1, 2018



Alastair Roberts

Today's question: "Was it a sin for Israel to ask for a king? 1 Sam 8 makes it seem so. But then Deut 17 seemingly gives permission for Israel to ask for a king. How should we think about Israel's monarchy? Should it have happened, or is it an example of an evil that God used for good?"

The post on Solomon that I mention in the video can be found here:
<https://theopolisinstitute.com/article/exodus-in-1-kings/>.

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account:
<https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

If you have enjoyed these videos, please tell your friends and consider supporting me on Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>.

My new Soundcloud account is here: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes:
<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

This question is, was it a sin for Israel to ask for a king? 1 Samuel 8 makes it seem so, but then Deuteronomy 17 seemingly gives permission for Israel to ask for a king. How should we think about Israel's monarchy? Should it have happened, or is it an example of an evil that God used for good? The questioner mentions Deuteronomy 17, which is an important passage in this regard. I'll read it out from verse 14.

1. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses. For the Lord has said to you, you shall not return that way again. 2. Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away.

3. Nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself. 4. Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book,

from the one before the priests, the Levites. 5. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes.

6. That his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel. So already from that point there is the suggestion that Israel will enter into the land and establish a king over them. So this is not something that arises out of nowhere in 1st Samuel 8. Even before that, in Genesis chapter 49 we read And so within these passages we already have suggestions of a coming kingdom, a coming king, and we have more details than that in that the king is going to come from the tribe of Judah.

Saul is not from the tribe of Judah and at that point there is no one actually that's fitting to serve from the tribe of Judah. If you remember in the book of Genesis, Judah had sinned with Tamar and so Judah's offspring were disqualified from entering into the congregation for 10 generations. And so the true king from the tribe of Judah had not yet arisen.

The problem is that they wanted to jump the gun as it were in the kingdom. Moving from a nation of tribal groups under elders and judges to a kingdom was a growth in glory. It was not inappropriate for Israel to want that thing in the right time.

They were under the rule of God but for that period of the judges everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Israel was not in a good state and coming under a king that would give them security, that would give the nation a clearer identity in its worship. The king would be the one who would set up the temple, guard the worship of God.

He would be the chief worshipper of the people and he would also represent a new authority that the people had under God. The king would be vice-gerent with God and they would extend the borders of their land and that they would have sovereignty within the world. This was a growth in glory and it's not inappropriate that they should want it.

Also because we have these things suggested earlier on. They're a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. To be a kingdom of priests you have to have a king.

You have to be established in that way. God was their king at the outset. The human king was not supposed to be a replacement for God but was supposed to be God's vice-gerent.

Someone who represented God's rule, someone who acted on behalf of God and ruled with God. This was a growth in glory. This was a rising up to a new level of authority.

As the king built his house next in association with the temple, God's house, there was this complex of buildings that represented God's rule within the nation. The palace of the

king was part of that too. It is appropriate that they move towards this.

Yet in 1 Samuel 8 we see them rebelling against Samuel. Samuel's sons were not good but there was clearly a pushing against Samuel in an inappropriate way. They were rejecting God's kingship over them and they were wanting a king like the nations.

It was not inappropriate for them to want a king but that king was supposed to be the representative of God's rule, of God's kingship. Yet they wanted to reject the ruler that God had established over them and have a king of their own. Now that is something that is a challenge to God's kingship rather than a growth in it and an entrance into a new form of participation in God's rule as a people.

So that was a problem. What we see within the kingdom itself are further signs that this was intended ultimately for good. That God establishes David and Solomon as types of Christ.

Within these characters we see an anticipation of who the Messiah will be. We see in the story of David the movement from the period of the law, the period of just the words of the commandments. We see a movement towards wisdom.

We see a movement towards song as David establishes song within the worship of God and music. And we see in Solomon the establishment of the temple. The glorious height of the people of Israel comes in the early reign of Solomon.

Wisdom, the temple, song and the kingdom. All of these things come together as an anticipation of what will be the greater glories of the kingdom of the Messiah to come. And so it was not inappropriate to want this in the right way and in the right time.

But to jump the gun and to want it in a way that was a resistance to God's rule and the way that he had set things up, that was a problem. Now what we see in the later reign of Solomon is that he does precisely the things that the king is told not to do in Deuteronomy 17. So in Deuteronomy 17 he's told he's not to multiply horses for himself nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses.

He's not to multiply wives for himself and he's not to greatly multiply silver and gold for himself. And so what we see in the beginning of the story of Solomon is a sort of Edenic situation where Solomon is set up. He is set up in his rule.

He's given wisdom. He's given God's presence with him. He establishes the temple, which is again an Edenic type situation.

The whole story of the Exodus has come to its climax that they've arrived in the promised land, as it were. And now they've truly settled and the hill has now had God's sanctuary established upon it. And then what we see is a steady series of rebellions as Solomon breaks every single one of these things.

It's a full story and then it leads to the point where Solomon becomes like a new pharaoh. I've written a piece on this for the Theophilus website and I'll post the link to that below. If you have any further questions, please leave them in my Curious Cat account.

If you would like to support these videos, please do so using my Patreon account. I've really benefited from and appreciated the support that people have given on that. And I want to thank everyone who has supported me there.