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The King
17: 14-20

The King DIG: What do you know about the time, anticipated by Moshe, when Isra'el would ask for a king (First Samuel 8:4-9)? Why should the king be an Israelite? What should he refrain from accumulating, and why? What king did this? Instead, how was the king to live? What should be his inspiration? How was Josiah and Ezra different then Solomon?

REFLECT: Isra'el desired a political king so they could be like other nations. In what area of your life are you tempted to imitate the world instead of trusting in the Lord? In which areas have you stopped imitating the world? What still tempts people in places of leadership? How does power often corrupt? How could this passage help your Messianic congregation or church avoid such corruption? How would application of this passage help prevent corruption? What part will you play in its application this week?

Moses anticipates a time when the people of Isra'el will ask for a king like all the other nations around them; ADONAI did not command a king, but allowed for one.



It may seem strange that this section of leadership in **Isra'el** (**to see link click Df – The Appointment of Kingdom Leaders**) comes second, rather at the head of those listed. The reason is that whereas sound judicial administration by impartial judges is at the very heart of **Isra'el's** covenant theocracy, monarchy is not. The nation did survive without **kings** both before and after the centuries of actual rule by different kings, both good and bad. Sometimes a good **king** could be seen as the human embodiment of **YHVH's Kingship**, this is not the point here. In **Deuteronomy, the judge** stands closer to divine functions in the Tabernacle and later the Temple; and as a result, is a truer successor to **Moshe** than **a king**.[389]

Moses anticipates **Isra'el's** thought process once **the Israelites** became settled in **the Land of Promise**. **He** declared: **When you have entered the Land ADONAI your God is giving you, have taken possession of it and are living there, you may say, "I want to have a king over me, like all the other nations around me" (17:14).**

The qualifications of a king:

First, he must be a man chosen by YHVH: In that event, you must appoint as king the one whom ADONAI your God will choose (17:15a). During the time of **the judges**, the political and spiritual unity of the twelve tribes deteriorated greatly **(Judges 17:6** and **21:25)**, and **Isra'el** was in constant danger of invasion by **their** enemies **(First Samuel 9:16** and **12:12)**. Instead of trusting in **God, the people** wanted **a king** who would build an army and lead **the nation** to victory. Unfortunately, the spiritual leadership in **Isra'el** had decayed, and **Samuel's sons** weren't following **the way of the LORD (First Samuel 8:1-5).** But the main cause for **Isra'el's** cry for **a king** was **their** desire to be like the **other nations**.[390] Later history made it clear that **prophets**, speaking on **God's** behalf, would declare **His choice**. **Samuel** supported **Ha'Shem's** choice of **Sha'ul (First Samuel 9-12)**, and then **David (First Samuel 16)**. **Nathan** later supported **the LORD's** choice of **Solomon (First Kings 1)**.[391]

Second, he must be an Israelite: He must be one of your kinsmen, this king you appoint over you – you are forbidden to appoint a foreigner over you who is not your kinsman (17:15b). An Israelite raised from childhood in the traditions and Torah of **Isra'el** would be a far better choice than **a foreigner** to protect the purity of **their** devotion to **ADONAI**, who would be more likely to introduce idolatry into **the Land**. This requirement did not mean that non-**Hebrews** were "second-class" citizens in **Isra'el**. Numerous passages make it clear that **the**

Israelites are to treat **foreigners** with tender compassion **(1:16** and **10:17)**.[392]

Imitating the world instead of trusting in **the LORD** has always been the great temptation of **God's people**, and each time **they** have surrendered, **they** have suffered. During **their** wilderness wanderings, **Isra'el** compared everything that happened with what they had experienced in **Egypt**, and at **Kadesh-barnea they** even wanted to choose a leader and go back to **Egypt (14:1-5)**. But the Church today, made up of Jews and Gentiles, is equally guilty of unbelief. When our spiritual leaders adopt methods and measurements of the world, then the Church has taken a giant step toward becoming like the world and losing its divine distinctiveness. Instead of trusting in **the Word of God** and **prayer (Acts 6:4)**, we far too often depend on following the world's wisdom, imitating the world's methods, and catering to the world's appetites, giving **the people** what **they** want instead of what **they** need. Believers today need to take to heart **God's** reminder to **Isra'el, "I am ADONAI your God, who has set you apart from the peoples** around **you" (Leviticus 20:24).**[393]

Then, Moshe gave three restrictions relating to the behavior of a potential king. Isra'el might admire the kings of other nations, but the king they were to have was to be more unlike the kings of other nations as one could imagine.

Military power: However, he is not to acquire many horses for himself. The principle reason for acquiring **horses** was related to warfare, specifically chariot warfare. But **the Israelite** form of warfare lay not in the number or type of troops but in the strength and presence of **their God**. **They** had already experienced **YHVH's** aid against an enemy equipped with **horse**-drawn chariots at the Sea of Reeds (see the commentary on **Exodus Ci – The Waters Were Divided and the Israelites Went Through the Sea on Dry Land**). In the days ahead, there would be similar occasions. For example, in **Debra's** war **(Judges 4-5), the Israelite** forces were at a strong disadvantage in facing the chariot-equipped Canaanite forces, but once again victory was achieved through the intervention of **Ha'Shem**.[394]

Or have the people return to Egypt to obtain more horses, inasmuch as ADONAI told you never to go back that way again (17:16a). Since Egypt was the market for horses, Isra'el's king was warned not to station his buyers there permanently – for permanent settling in Egypt was forbidden – in order to export horses from there to his country and elsewhere. King

Solomon disregarded this mitzvah and had buyers living in Egypt who were engaged in exporting horses to various countries.

A large harem: Likewise, he is not to acquire many wives for himself, so that his heart will not turn away (17:16b). This would hurt **the king's** relationship with **ADONAI, for surely they would turn his heart away after** other **[foreign] gods (First Kings 11:1-4).** The purpose in the acquisition of **many wives** would normally be political. A marriage to a **foreign** princess could add strength to a treaty with a neighboring state. But the danger in such a course of action would be to become unequally yoked (see **Ca – Warning Against Idolatry**). These political marriages would be at odds with **Isra'el's** covenant with, and **the king's** relationship with **God**.

King David violated this mitzvah. **He** had six sons born to him at Hebron to seven wives. Then he had thirteen sons born to him in Jerusalem, four from Bathsheba and nine from other wives. That's **seventeen wives** and nineteen sons besides an unknown number of daughters born to his wives, and an unknown number of sons and daughters born by **his concubines** in Hebron, and ten known concubines in Jerusalem (who functioned and were protected as wives). Tamar is mentioned in the biblical account only because she was prominent in the story of the disintegration of **David's** family. **Therefore, could have easily had fifty to sixty children.** And as a result: **The sword never** departed **from his house (Second Samuel 12:10).**

Great wealth: And he is not to acquire excessive quantities of silver and gold (17:17). The accumulation of great wealth would tend to give **the king** excessive personal power, so that **he** would become separated from **the people he** was supposed to be serving. But even more worrisome, this could become a consuming passion, which would divert **his** attention away from **his** relationship with **ADONAI**, and serving **the people** under **his** care. **His** attention should not be on **himself**, but on worshiping **YHVH** and serving **the people**.

King Solomon violated all three of these restrictions, and it led **him** and **the nation** into sin. **He** married **an Egyptian princess (First Kings 3:1),** the first of many political alliances **he** made taking **foreign wives (First Kings 11:1-6). He** went back to **Egypt** not only for **a wife**, but also for **horses** for **his** army, and built "chariot cities" in **Isra'el** where **he** stabled **his horses** and **chariots (First Kings 10:26, 28-29).** As for **his** wealth, it was fabulous and impossible to calculate **(First Kings 10:14-25** and **27)**.[395] In **Isra'el, Solomon** was the first **king** to go to such

extremes, but others soon followed **him**. A fact that **he** recognized too late in life (see the commentary on **the Life of Solomon Cb – Finding Joy within the Frustrations of Life**).

Clearly, the issue was not merely if **Isra'el** should have **a king** or not, but what *kind* of **a king he** should be. What matters fundamentally for **Deuteronomy** is whether or not **the covenant people** would remain wholly loyal to **YHVH their God**. The value of **a king** is judged solely by the extent to which **he** will help or hinder that loyalty. **A king** who would not trust **God**, but instead, trust in **his** own defenses **(3:21-22)**; **his** own political alliances **(7:3-6)**, or **his** own wealth would lead to snares of pride **(8:13-18)**. Such **a king** would quickly lead **his people** in the same disastrous directions. **Isra'el's** history proved this point with depressing regularity.[396]

The wisdom of a king: The most important qualification for **the king** was a personal relationship with **ADONAI** and knowledge of **Deuteronomy**. **He** was to have **his** own personal copy of **Deuteronomy** provided by the priests, to read **it** regularly, and to take **it** to heart **(Joshua 1:7-8)**. **When he has come to occupy the throne of his kingdom, he is to write a copy of Deuteronomy for himself in a scroll, from one of the cohanim. It is to remain with him, and he is to read in it every day, as long as he lives; so that he will learn to fear ADONAI his God and keep all the words of this book and these mitzvot and obey them; so that he will not think he is better than his kinsmen; and so that he will not turn aside either to the right or to the left from the mitzvot. In this way he will prolong his own reign and that of his children in Isra'el (17:18-20). The king's** study of **Deuteronomy** would help **him** to rule **the people** justly, but it would also reveal to **him** the character of **God** and encourage **him** to have **the fear of ADONAI,** and therefore, love **Him** more **(Proverbs 4)**. **The king's** submission to **God** and **His** mitzvot would keep **him** from getting proud and abusing the authority **YHVH** had given **him**. For **him** to think that **he** was **better than the people he** was serving, and privileged to live above **God's** mitzvot would indicate that **he** wasn't fit to lead **the nation**.[397]

Centuries later, in 622 BC, during **Josiah's eighteenth year, the scroll of Deuteronomy** was **found in the Temple** after fifty-seven years of neglect by Manasseh and Amon (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Ai – Josiah Ruled For 31 Years from 640 to 609 BC**), and it started a revival in **Isra'el (Second Kings 23:1-25)**. Still later in 458 BC, the scroll of **Deuteronomy** was honored when **Ezra** read it out loud from **first light until midday, in the presence of all the men**

and women, and others who could understand, and this continued for a week (see the commentary on **Ezra-Nehemiah Bm – Ezra Reads the Scroll of Deuteronomy**). But when **Solomon** reigned from 970 to 930 BC, **he** did not **read Deuteronomy every day**, and that caused **his** downfall **(First Kings 11:1-6)**. And the apple didn't fall far from the tree, for it was **his son, Rehoboam**, that divided **Isra'el (First Kings 12:1-25).** Thus, the words of **Moses** came true.

Dear Heavenly Father, ***Praise*** *you for being so wonderful! Praise* ***You*** *that* ***You*** *are so loving and always want the best for* ***Your children (John 1:12).*** *Praise* ***You*** *also that* ***You*** *are holy and even when* ***You discipline Your children****, it is always done in* ***love****.* ***My son, do not take lightly the discipline of ADONAI or lose heart when you are corrected by Him, because ADONAI disciplines the one He loves and punishes every son He accepts (Hebrews 12:5).*** *The goal is to help* ***the child*** *to get back on the right path.* ***Now all discipline seems painful at the moment – not joyful. But later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:11).***

Thank ***You*** *for giving us* ***Your*** *Word which can keep us on the right path as we read and meditate on it.* ***Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law, day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water (Psalms 1:1-3a NIV).*** *In* ***Yeshua's*** *holy name and power of* ***His*** *resurrection. Amen*