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Caleb H A Brown
Liberty University, cbrown183@liberty.edu

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Caleb Brown

Dr. Fowler

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The Hebraic Monarchy as God's Redemptive Response to Israel's Unfaithfulness

The institution of the Hebraic Monarchy is one of the seminal events in the history of the people of Israel. Every subsequent development in Israel's fortunes occurs in light of the monarchy, and David, a monarchic king, dominates the Hebrew tradition. While it is clear the monarchy is significant, it is not clear whether God approves or disapproves of it. The people's desire is clearly condemned in 1 Samuel 8, but it is clear that the Monarchy plays a role in God's redemptive plan leading to the Messiah. The first portion of this paper will argue that the Old Testament portrays the monarchy neither as God's chosen method of relating to his people, nor as an intrinsically evil institution, but as God's redemptive response to Israel's unfaithfulness. The second portion addresses a potential objection to this portrayal by arguing that Moses serves primarily as a type for Samuel, not the monarchy.

God's attitude toward the Hebraic monarchy is best understood through the larger story of the Israelite nation and how the idea of kingship is woven through this story. In Genesis 17, God promises that some of Abraham's children will be kings. Importantly, in the ancient near east, "king" did not necessarily signify a monarchic king, but rather "a male ruler, usually hereditary, of a city, tribe, or nation" (Russel 1967, 465). In Exodus God's actions leading up to the Sinai covenant demonstrated that, as the Creator, He ruled over creation (Fowler 2016). This theme is continued in the "enthronement psalms" which portray God as King due to His creatorship (Routledge 227). While God's kingship extended to all of creation, it was exercised

specially over Israel. Rutledge describes God's kingship of Israel, saying, "Israel was established as a theocratic state. God was the people's suzerain, and they had his Law to guide them" (228).

Part of the guidance God provides in his law concerns the inauguration of a human king. In Deuteronomy 17, God tells the people that, when they want to set a king over themselves, he must be chosen by the Lord. Additionally, the king must be an Israelite who is dedicated to the law and he must not multiply wives or horses or make the people return to Egypt.

Moses and his successor Joshua led the people at Sinai, where they received the law, in the wilderness, and in the conquest of the Promised Land. After Joshua's leadership ended, the judges led Israel both nationally and spiritually (Rutledge 2008, 228). This period was not a time when Israel sought God. Rather, the central theme of the book of judges is that, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21.25). Moreover, the judges' period was characterized by frequent oppression and a lack of unity. Miller argues that the confederacy of tribes was too weak to provide appropriate protection (1). One crucial weakness seems to be a lack of continuity in leadership—moral relapses and oppression frequently occurred upon the death of the presiding judge. While the judge lived the people followed God and prospered, but when he died the people lacked leadership and strayed (Judg. 2.14-19, Minkoff). Under the judges the Hebrew people experienced moral and political chaos.

When this history led to the people's request for a king, God did not explicitly oppose them. He told Samuel to:

Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other Gods, so they are also doing to you. Now obey their voice; only you

shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who will reign over them.

(1 Sam. 8.7-9)

After this initial acquiescence, God demonstrates His commitment to the monarchic system. This is especially clear in His response to Saul's failure. Rather than scrapping the entire monarchic system after Saul's unfaithfulness, He appoints a new king.

This story contains seemingly conflicting elements. On the one hand, as Routledge writes, "There seems little doubt that the golden age of Israel's history under David and Solomon came to be regarded as a fulfillment of the promises made to the patriarchs" (225). The promises to Abraham are fulfilled in the monarchy, particularly the Davidic covenant (Raddish 77-78). The monarchy is similarly important in subsequent redemptive history. As Kaiser writes that the king, "[carried] in his person and office the promise of the coming Messiah" (67).

On the other hand, it is clear that the monarchy is often not a positive thing. In 1 Samuel 8 Israel is explicitly said to be rejecting God as its king by its demand for a human king. Once the monarchy was established, the kings of Israel clearly do not follow God's regulations for kingship in Deuteronomy 17. Solomon, for instance, violated all three prohibitions, and many kings led the nation away from the Law and the Lord.

God provided the Israelites the opportunity to be his people without a king oppressing them; in Judges 8.23 Gideon urged them to let the Lord be their king, but the Israelites were unfaithful. Just as the flawed implementation of the monarchic system does not prove it was an evil institution, so the unfaithfulness of the people in the time of Judges does not prove the system described was not God's chosen method of relating to them at that time. All the same, the Israelites had demonstrated their unfaithfulness to God in the period of the judges, and He was willing to respond to their request for a new system. In the monarchy it appears that God adopted

a new method of relating to Israel. This new method is a redemptive response to Israel's unfaithfulness. As such, God's ultimate plan for redeeming His unfaithful people, the Messiah, is rooted in the monarchy. While the Messiah was foreshadowed in Genesis, He only emerges fully in the redemptive context of the monarchy.

Dr. Fowler of Liberty University has argued persuasively that Moses serves as an ideal type for the kings of Israel (2016). If the text portrays Moses as the type of an ideal king, then the monarchy seems to be not a response of God to Israel's unfaithfulness (as portrayed above), but rather His chosen outcome. However, the proper typological connection is not between Moses and the monarchy, but between Moses and Samuel. Moreover, there is a clear break between Samuel and the monarchy—Moses cannot serve as a meaningful type for both. The rest of this paper explores the typological connection between Moses and Samuel and demonstrates that this view of Moses is consistent with the view of the monarchy outlined above.

There are three areas of evidence that cast doubt on the idea that God intended Moses to function as a paradigm of an earthly king. These are: 1) similarities between Moses and Samuel, 2) similarities between Moses and other prophets, and 3) differences in the biblical treatment of Moses and the biblical treatment of monarchy.

The text portrays Moses and Samuel in such similar ways that it is clearly typologically linking them. Their early lives are both recounted at length; they are born in times of distress and are raised by people other than their parents. Where their parents are involved, their mothers feature more prominently than their fathers. When the Lord calls them into service, this call and the circumstances surrounding it are recounted at length. Their service to the Lord also links them. As Peter Quinn-Miscall writes: "to say that Samuel judged is a serious pronouncement and makes Samuel akin to Moses" (43). Both converse with, rather than merely receive revelation

from, the Lord, receive the word of the Lord, perform priestly duties, and administer justice. God validates their authority for these tasks through similar signs of His presence (see the Sinai account and 1 Sam. 12.18-19). In this authority, they both establish new institutions in Israel (Moses establishes the priesthood and Samuel establishes the monarchy) and are betrayed by the leaders of these institutions (Aaron and Saul, respectively). At the end of their ministries, both deliver farewell addresses which focus on God's deliverance of Israel, and neither is succeeded by their sons.

Given these extensive similarities, it seems that the biblical account is intentionally portraying Samuel as a man in the type of Moses. Thus, *prima facie*, it would be rational to assume that they occupied the same role. Because Samuel was clearly not a ruler in the mold of the monarchy God establishes, this would imply that Moses was not either. However, the activities of Moses do go beyond those of Samuel. It is possible that Moses held the positions that Samuel held but also possessed a kingly office which went beyond them. Because the differences between Moses and Samuel are accounted for by the similarities between Moses and other prophets, this is not the case.

There are many similarities between Moses and prophets other than Samuel. Moses is labeled a prophet in Deuteronomy 34.10, and the defining phrase of Moses' relationship with God is "and the Lord said to Moses." This is significant because receiving the word of the Lord is the hallmark of a prophet. Like Moses and Joshua, prophets are raised up and then disappear, often with no apparent successor. The succession that *does* exist between Moses and Joshua is mirrored in the succession between Elijah and Elisha. Moses' confrontation with pharaoh is mirrored by Elijah's conflict with Ahab, and Aaron speaks for Moses even as Elisha's servant speaks for him.

Not only are a great many (most likely a majority) of Moses' distinctive features accounted for by his prophetic office, there are also many differences between the portrayal of Moses and the portrayal of the monarchy. This is true even when the wickedness of many of the monarchic kings is put aside.

The Bible recounts significant differences between Moses and the monarchy. While continuity is a key aspect of monarchy, this is lacking after Joshua. For instance, there is no mention of either Moses' or Joshua's sons succeeding them. There are many plausible explanations for this, such as the death of Moses' sons, but the complete lack of any comment in both cases is noticeable. In the monarchic period the king's relationship with God and the people's relationship with God are heavily linked, but Moses and Joshua often stand in stark contrast to the morality of the people. Finally, Deuteronomy 17 is couched in future terms, not present terms, implying that the qualifications for a king were not relevant at the time they were given.

The mere fact that Moses was a type of a prophet does not prove he was not a type of a king. However, two observations are in order: 1) Samuel resembles Moses more than any of the kings do. There is a clear distinction between the period of Samuel's governance and the monarchy. Samuel and David did not occupy the same office. If Samuel was not a foreshadowing of the monarchy, it seems that Moses could not have been either. 2) If you take all the attributes which Moses exhibits, and take away all those which Samuel and the other prophets also exhibit, not much is left. Moses may have been prophet, priest and king, but the designation "king" is largely meaningless if the offices of prophet and priest can account for all, or nearly all, of his activities. In the end, because so many of Moses' activities fall within the office of prophet, and there are marked differences between Moses' governance and the

monarchy, the Old Testament does *not* portray Moses as a type of the ideal monarchic king. Therefore, the portrayal articulated above, that monarchic kingship is God's redemptive response to Israel's unfaithfulness, stands.

God was King over His world and especially over His people. No human "sub-king" could be as good a king as God. However, Israel's unfaithfulness meant that God was willing to take a new approach. God did not initiate the monarchy, but He did institute it and uphold it. This understanding is corroborated by the typological connection between the Monarchy and the Messiah. The Monarchy, as God's redemptive response to Israel's unfaithfulness under the judges serves as a type for the Messiah, God's ultimate redemptive response to all of Israel's unfaithfulness.

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