

GOD AND GOVERNMENT:
SHOULD A CHRISTIAN GO TO WAR?
March 10, 2002

INTRO: We left off in our last message, in the section of the government of the kings. We saw how Israel went against the advice of Samuel and the Lord and chose a king. The king must be of Jewish descent. He was not to multiply horses to himself. He was not to have many wives and he was not to multiply silver and gold to himself. Last, he was to write out a copy of the books of Moses and study them all his life. We looked at the task of a king as set out in Scripture and the requirement of both king and people. In short, they were to trust and obey the Lord. Then we looked at one last important point: the separation of the secular from the sacred. I mentioned that it has big implications for the doctrine we would later come to know as the separation of Church and state.

This morning we are going to finish looking at the secular government of the time of the kings and then the sacred government of that time. From there we are going to look at God and government after the Babylonian captivity. So, let us conclude the section of secular government in the time of the kings.

5) The centralization of government

One of the major changes in government at this time is that government became centralized. It was to be the place which the Torah instructs as the place which the Lord Your God shall choose to put His name there. The nation would be governed from this place, namely Jerusalem.

It was king David who was instrumental in centralizing Jewish government in Jerusalem. Both secular and sacred aspects of government were centered in Jerusalem as this is the place God chose for the temple as well.

6) The quality of the time of the kings

If I interpret the intent of the people right when they desired a king, it would go like this: Give us a king to take care of our enemies, our problems, and then we will not have such a hard time living a godly life. We are constantly under stress. Relieve the stress by giving us a king and then we will live right.

Let me put it in modern vernacular. Lord, prosper me so that I can pay all my bills. Help me get a nice place and take care of all my health needs and then I will be able to devote my time to reading the Bible and living a godly life.

But what did the rule of the kings bring? Did they have a trouble free life after they had a king. Did they obey the Lord and walk in His ways? The next time you read through the Bible, consider this question when you read the times of the kings. The spiritual climate in the northern kingdom was disaster from the moment the kingdom split. The spiritual climate in the southern kingdom was a roller coaster ride from good to bad, ending up in the Babylonian captivity.

7) The office of prophet

I mentioned the prophet during the section on the Judges. I mention the prophet here again because he played a very important role in OT government. It was not that he was involved in government. But when the kings went astray, God used the prophet to try to call the king back to obeying the Lord or to awaken his conscience. I would call him the conscience of the nation.

The prophets warned the governing powers over and over again. Listen to

the prophet Habakkuk, in Habakkuk 1:5-8. Listen to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 19:3. Both of these prophets prophesied near the end of the time of the kings.

8) Conclusion on the time of the kings

Israel wanted a king. Israel got a king. They concluded that if they had a king to look after their secular dangers, then they would live godly spiritual lives. What happened? If there is one lesson to be learned from the rule of the kings of Israel and Judah, it is that it did not work. The governing system of human kings for spiritual good was a tragic failure. The southern kingdom had 8 good kings out of 20. Would you rate that a success or a failure? The northern kingdom had 20 evil kings out of 20. At best, that is a drastic failure. Yes, Israel did not reject Samuel when they wanted a king, they rejected God as their ruler.

If we do not learn from history, then we are cursed to repeat it. Someone has said that the only thing we learn from history is that we do not learn from history. Well, what should we learn from the history of the kings? Christians, by and large, become corrupted when they are placed in secular leadership. Surely we should learn that from modern times as well as from history. During the time of the kings, it took only a little over 400 years to prove this point.

When man sought to rule man's secular world through spiritual people, it ended up in the secular leaders leading the spiritual realm to depart from God. It failed. It failed miserably. Read 1 & 2 Samuel. Read 1 &

2 Kings. Read the prophets. It failed over and over again until God said, "I will allow it no longer!" Israel had demanded a king. God gave them a king. But Israel failed and God removed from Israel the right to reign over secular affairs. This was to be true for the next 2500 years! Then in May of 1948, this changed and Israel once more began to rule their own secular affairs.

b. Sacred government

The system of sacred government instituted by Moses remained the same as prior to the kings. However, during the time of the third king, Solomon, the temple was built in Jerusalem to take the place of the moveable tabernacle. The Levites and the priests governed the spiritual life of the nation.

Thus, during the time of the second King, David, all secular government was centralized in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place God chose to govern the nation Israel and from here the Lord Jesus will rule the world in the millennium. David also wanted to build the temple in Jerusalem but God said he had shed too much blood. And so, his son Solomon, in a time of great prosperity and peace built the first temple and the Shekinah glory of God indwelt it (2 Chron. 7:1-3).

Let me encourage you to read through the time of the kings and see who carried more weight in influencing the people for good or evil, the kings or the priests. See if you do not agree with me that the direction of the nation was set by the kings rather than the priests. And I do suppose that if the kings had kept the words set out by Moses in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, this would have been different.

2. From the Babylonian captivity to the Messiah
 - a. Secular government

I view this time between the rule of the kings and the time of Christ as a time of transition to a new period of time. We mentioned earlier that the northern kingdom of Israel had 20 bad kings of a total of 20. That is a 100% failure rate. God removed both their wicked government and their wicked religion. They never again ruled either in the secular or sacred realm.

But even after the northern kingdom was removed the southern kingdom continued to move into more and more wickedness. And in 586 BC God said, "It is enough!" And God allowed Babylon to conquer the southern kingdom. God removed all secular governing rights from Israel. They had failed miserably.

From the time of the Babylonian captivity until the time of Christ we have what I consider a time of transition. The Babylonian captivity took place in 586 BC so we have almost 600 years to the time of Christ. This time period begins what we call the times of the Gentiles. It is a time when the Jew is in submission to the Gentile people; the Jew is ruled by the Gentiles in secular affairs. This was the case from 586 BC until 1948.

One of the only sources of hope during this time period was the preaching of the prophets. Daniel, who interpreted this time period in Daniel two, prophecies of four world, Gentile powers in Daniel 2. The fourth kingdom will form the transition into the kingdom of heaven. It is the Roman kingdom. It was in power just before the time of Christ and it was in power for the first several hundred years of the time of the Church.

The prophets, Daniel, Ezekiel and Obadiah prophesied before and during the 70 year captivity. Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi prophesied after the captivity was over and during this time there was some semblance of Jewish government in Jerusalem, although under Gentile dominion.

b. Sacred government

Spiritual life under Gentile dominion during this time is a huge topic. Many changes took place. In the Bible this time period is described in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and some of the minor prophets. Before and during the time of the Babylonian captivity the Jews were driven out of their own nation into all the nations of the world. Here, it seems, the synagogue was born. Since they could no longer worship at the temple, the synagogue became the most important structure in their spiritual lives.

The synagogue is one of the Jews longest lasting institutions. Again there is some disagreement as to when it came into being but most likely some time after the Babylonian captivity. It was a place of prayer and spiritual instruction. It is very similar to our idea of "church" building. Since the temple was no longer available for religious purposes for those in other nations, the synagogue became a place of spiritual learning and training. The synagogue was in use during Jesus' time and we read of it in the NT. The synagogue is still in use today. If you should go to our larger cities you will find synagogues in most of them.

I need to mention here as well that the temple was destroyed in 586 BC. But it was rebuilt later and the Jews were allowed to govern the sacred aspect of their lives.

So, to some extent the original system begun during the time of the Judges was restored to Israel. The temple in use in Jesus' day was built by King Herod and was then still in the process of being built (See John 2:19-20).

Another important institution that is generally believed to have come into existence during this time of Israel's history is the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a governing body of Jews made up of 70 ruling elders, of which the High Priest was the president. The Sanhedrin had considerable power and had some political authority but largely they ruled the religious lives of the Jews under their Gentile rulers. It was the Sanhedrin that tried Jesus at the time when He was captured for crucifixion. Look at their restricted authority in John 18:31. The Sanhedrin ceased to exist after the fall of the Jewish temple in 70 AD.

The institution of the synagogue and the Sanhedrin were two important institutions that helped the Jews through this time of transition into another era. Look at Hosea 3:4 (read). Israel had misused the office of the king and God would remove it. The prince is likely a reference to those who looked after Israel's military. They would be without a sacrifice because the temple where they sacrificed would be removed and because they would be removed from the place where the sacrifice was to be made. They would also be without sacred temple. Israel would be cured of her idolatry. Furthermore, they would be without ephod and teraphim. The ephod was the approved way of divining the future and the teraphim the idolatrous way. You see, Israel will lose the privilege of both secular and sacred government. And they would have to be like that for a long time. The result of their removal from those privileges will be that in the end

they will be restored to God (read Hosea 3:5).

One of the saddest things during this time period is that the prophets too, fell silent. For 400 years silence reigned in the prophetic world. Look at the last 2 verses of the OT. This was at least partly fulfilled in John the Baptist (Matt. 11:14) and he came some 400 years after this prophecy was made. This time of transition must sink, and it must sink in very deeply, before God again will step into human history to make a new mark.

We are now ready to look at God and government after the birth of the Messiah.

CONCL: In Genesis 1 we see the creation of heaven and earth and man set as governor over the earth. The father of each family is responsible to govern in both the secular and sacred realm. Then mankind sinned and divided into saved and unsaved. And as mankind increased God set governors over His people. They were known as the judges. When life was not easy under the judges the people insisted on a king and God relented and gave them a king. Someone has said, "Watch what you pray for, you might get it." After 400 short years, God took all governing rights away from Israel and placed them under Gentile leadership. From the time of the Babylonian captivity until the time of Christ, God's people lived with varying degrees of liberty in governing their own affairs. However, except for a short period of time under the Macabees, they were always subject to Gentile rulers.

(If time, explain the books of the Apocrypha and read 1 Macabees 2:1-28. This is the time of the rule of Antiochus Euphianes, not too long before Rome came into power).

I see the time between the Babylonian captivity and the time of the NT as a time of transition to a new age. Government, as far as God's people are concerned lies shattered on the rocks. And for 400 years God's people wait. The one thing that keeps hope alive during these years is the hope of the Messiah. God will send them a deliverer who will govern them. Listen to these familiar lines penned by Isaiah, "For unto us a Child is born, unto

us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgement and justice from that time forward, and even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it."

The Old Testament, from a spiritual perspective, closes on a very sad note. It almost seems as though all hope is lost. Israel insisted on a king and ended in almost complete disaster. The picture of Israel is that of a valley of dry bones. But during those 400 long years God was preparing the world for a new time. That time is one in which the world has now been for some 2000 years and it is about to come to a close. It is our time. It is this time we will begin looking at in the next message.