

Be the Church *Judges, I Samuel (summary)*

Which is better – *democracy* (rule of the people), *theocracy* (rule of God and, presumably, those claiming to be His representatives) or both?

The theme of the books of *Judges* and *I Samuel* is the transition of Israel from a *direct* theocracy (rule of God directly to the people) to a *representative* theocracy (rule of God through His representatives, the Judges of Israel) to a *theocratic monarchy* (rule of a king as representative of God).

In plain English, this means that the relationship of Israel to the God who formed her is one of increasing distance through the addition of “layers” between the two.

Originally, after the death of Joshua, all the people inquired of God when decisions had to be made (Judges 1: 1, 2), and God answered directly to the people. But that same generation of Israelites that entered the Promised Land with Joshua began to drift away; instead of carrying out the Divine Instructions to completely destroy the Canaanite nations (and their religious practices) before them, Israel began to settle for sparing the people, but making them their servants.

The next step away becomes that as the Canaanites were spared, so were their religious practices (worship of Asherah, Molech, the Baals, etc.), which the Israelites were drawn to. As a result, the curses of the covenant with God came into play to get Israel back to God. The nations that were supposed to be destroyed by Israel are spared by God and permitted to oppress her as punishment for turning away from God. When Israel turned back to God, He would raise up a Judge to represent Him, rout the oppressors and lead Israel in the Ways of the Lord. The only problem was the repentance and return was never permanent; so for generations, Israel became a theological “see-saw,” going back and forth between the Baals and the Lord.

Finally, Israel asks Samuel, the last of the Judges, to give the people a king, “just like all the other nations have” (I Samuel 8: 5). The reason stated by the people for the change was because Samuel was old and his sons did not follow the Lord. The Lord, however, characteristically cuts through the baloney and gets to the root of the problem – “It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected Me as their king” (I Samuel 8: 7).

Israel was in a unique position; the only nation on Earth whose Creator was their direct ruler. In making His covenant with the nation, God promises Israel that the nation would be a “peculiar people” (Deut. 14: 2, KJV) and His “treasured possession” (Deut. 7: 6).

Israel could have enjoyed this unique status among the nations of the Earth by continuing to have God Himself as their King – One who deals in true justice with people, is compassionate and whose character does not change with the whims of the times. Yet instead of trusting in the covenant God made with them, the people turned their collective eyes to the other nations around them. And what they saw were lands that have great splendor, kings surrounded by a lot of pomp and the trappings of power and massive temples to their gods... O.K., their gods are fake, but still – *look* at these places!

And Israel forgot that their God drove out similar kings and nations before them to set them up as His treasured possession. Seeing all those other nations lined up against them (also forgetting that those nations were kept around because they didn’t do what the Lord told them to), Israel begins to experience “monarchy envy;” *Well, shoot – we’re just*

this little country, we worship our God in a tent, our leader travels the countryside deciding cases, and his sons don't even necessarily follow him after he croaks. Dang it, we need us a king! Someone to wear a proper crown and sit on a throne and look important and lead our army into battles; then those other nations will stop lookin' at us funny, by gum! Yet those other nations had all the pomp and flummery to keep them from seeing how they really were; insecure, worshipping blocks of wood and stone, holding as much power as their meanness or trickery could get or else making deals with demonic forces... and under God's judgment. Israel forgot that their neighbors weren't "all that."

So, Israel falls back on the familiar – and fallible, as things turn out. After generations on the "see-saw" (God/Baal/God again/Baal again), what God had done for Israel with Moses and Joshua in the past (and longed to do again) was just something that Grandma and Grandpa told the kids at bedtime to get them to go to sleep. Even the more recent exploits of God through the Judges apparently didn't count for much. *Israel's problem was they no longer believed their God was God; He had gone from Almighty Creator of the Universe to one among many.* What was worse, that was all the Israelites apparently wanted. Just get these Philistines off our backs, okay? And if some folks do a little Baal worship, just let it slide...

However, God agrees to what the people wanted; indeed, had foreseen this particular development and laid down what was to be done in this circumstance with Moses. And yet, it's as if God is saying, "Okay, you'll get your king. But My Presence will not be with you like it was when I alone was your King." Miracles, while not eliminated, shifted to the individual prophets that would be sent to advise the king (and remind them Who is *really* running the show) and not directly to the nation as a whole.

One of the consequences of this action was that the kings of Israel, like the kings of the other nations she wanted so much to be like, got full of themselves. Even with the spread of Christianity, this curious mind-set continued in the notion of "divine right;" that kings got their authority to rule directly from God. The idea may have had its (pardon me) genesis at the height of the Roman Catholic Church's power – when the pope began to claim infallibility in matters of faith and direct apostolic succession from St. Peter himself. These were the days when the Church's influence trumped those of entire nations; so, by extension, if the Church approved the installation of a king, then said king's next logical thought was, *hey – I'm "in" with the pope, so God must want me here running "this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this..."* And even if that particular king ruled in a most un-Christ-like manner, committing acts for which ordinary folk would be doing penance right up the moment of their death, that didn't seem to change anything; *God put me here – let Him take me out.*

Even with the Reformation, this mind-set continued; after all, even if believers disagree, call each other "heretic," burn each other at the stake, spill frightful amounts of blood and do all other sorts of things that Jesus *never* did over how He is to be worshipped, even if you were a "Catholic" or a "Protestant" king (Ever notice there was never anyone that could be considered a "Pentecostal" king?), you were still a king, and kings had to get the approval of *some* Christian denomination, which meant "divine right" still held sway.

The advent of the United States of America would change all that. Here in the New World, a group of people, tired of the "Old World" ways of doing things, not only threw off the king they were ruled by but also challenged the very idea of "divine right;"

We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights... that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...

The people that would ultimately consent to be governed by this new republic were, for the most part, Christian in belief (and weren't killing each other over minor differences in how Jesus was to be Lord). Even those that were not believers had enough sense to realize that the majority of folks *were* believers; as a result, they knew how to police themselves to the point where the new government did not have to enact laws for every little thing. (With the spurned mother country still licking its wounds over losing "the colonies," and other European powers still wanting to be "players" in the New World, the new government had *enough* to worry about.)

More importantly, since those who were believers were quite sincere about their beliefs (and distrustful of governmental influence to begin with), God would ultimately be the leader of the people once more. The people would be focused on Him, and not on some elected leader who would only be in office for only a few years anyway before some other fellow took over. I do not pretend to know if the United States is specifically mentioned in prophecy; I tend to think not (and believe it chauvinistic on our part to suggest it is), but I do think that if a believing people are willing to openly declare "No king but Jesus" or "The Bible is our law" (on early coins of the state of North Carolina) and set up their government influenced by His Word and His Ways – as the evidence does, indeed, suggest, no matter how much "spin" Christophobes try to put on it today to say otherwise – then God will take advantage of the opportunity: *You want Me to be your god? I'm willing to do it – but I must be God over all for this to work.*

What is the evidence of this assertion? One need look no further than what happened when one of the Old World countries tried to duplicate what America did. France, which was helping the United States partly because the colonists were trying to break free from England (France's old nemesis), thought the ideas set down in the American Declaration of Independence were so great that it tried to duplicate the results of what has been termed the "American Experiment." The only difference was, France (with its culture based on humanism) thought they could leave God out of the picture; and if you know your history, then you know that quite a different result ensued. Where the American Revolution was one of the *least* bloody in all of history, the French Revolution was notorious for its near extermination of the royal family and almost anyone connected to it, its use of the guillotine and for "the terror" that would last for years before a new nobility (headed by Napoleon Bonaparte) would restore some semblance of order.

The revolution in America succeeded (at least partly) because the revolutionaries – from its leaders to its military commanders to the lowest buck private – felt themselves led by God; churches in the colonies served as public meetinghouses, town halls and, in some cases, recruiting stations for the Continental Army. The story goes that at least one pastor, in declaring his support for independence, tore off his minister's robes before his congregation to reveal a Continental Army uniform beneath. There was no such thing as "separation of church and state" (Jefferson hadn't even written the phrase yet), but everyone understood the concept to mean that the government was to keep its hands off of the free exercise of religion, not the other way around.

We've gotten off the track somehow. I don't mean just with the alleged church/state "wall," but in how we view our leaders. Washington, Jefferson and all the Founding Fathers who made it to the Presidency went back to their old jobs (usually gentleman farmer) when their terms were done. And Washington set the pattern for the practice by staying on the job for only two terms; he had no intention to hang on for life, and dismissed any grandiose form of address like "your excellency," "your magnificence," etc. ("Mr. President" was fine.) The limit would not be formally written into the Constitution until after Franklin Delano Roosevelt died on the job in his fourth term. Few (like John Quincy Adams) went back to Congress when their stay at the White House was completed.

Today, with the possible exception of Jimmy Carter, ex-Presidents make their living as... ex-Presidents. No sooner is the new guy on the job than the former occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. is busy with plans for his Presidential Library, often a grandiose, modern-day pyramid to mark his term(s). He gets Secret Service protection for life (which, in a sad comment on these times, is necessary) and he usually makes his living by getting paid to speak at various banquets and dinners on the issues of the day (in what used to be called the "rubber chicken" circuit) or help his political party get others of his viewpoint elected to office. Should these men be respected, even honored for their service? Certainly. Were Washington, Jefferson, *et al*, consulted in similar ways once they left the job? Probably, but (equally likely) they did not make a living at it; *Sure, I'll be glad to help – whaddya need?*

At the same time, there is a great discussion in this country about how the rest of the world views us. The lines are drawn between two camps; the first is comprised of those who feel we shouldn't care if other countries (usually France, Britain, Germany and those of the Old World) approve of our policies or not. We *are* the world's leading superpower, aren't we? Did we not save many of those same Old World countries from Hitler and his cronies and keep the Communists off their front porches for several decades afterwards? Do they not owe us *some* debt of gratitude?

In the other camp are those who feel the United States should be less of the "rugged individualist" type of nation we like to think of ourselves as and be more a participant in the "global village" concept of nations. These folks think we have much to learn from countries that have been around for a millennia or two against the 200-odd years we've been in existence. In fact, much has been made lately of U.S. Supreme Court decisions that take into account the laws of *those* countries, in addition to our own constitution.

Depending on the issue, both sides have valid arguments, but I won't run down the list here. In spiritual terms, one key point has been forgotten by both the "right" and the "left;" *a nation's defense, prosperity and influence ultimately lie in that nation's relationship to God.* In Numbers 14, the children of Israel are (for the first time) on the edge of the land promised to them by God. They're not ready to go in and take it, because their relationship to God is such that they have not reached the place where they are sold out to Him; in fact, the people are ready to stone Moses to death and go back to Egypt – and slavery. Only Moses, Joshua and Caleb, son of Jephunneh, have a clue as to what is really going on, and Caleb has the nerve to step up and counter the arguments (and exaggerations) of the mob: "And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. *Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us.* Do not be afraid

of them.” (Numbers 14:9, emphasis mine) In other words, *Hey – is the LORD God or isn't He? Then if we're pleasing Him, who's gonna beat us?* And this principle would be dramatically played out in the book of Joshua as he, Caleb and the next generation of finally-sold-out-to-God, Egypt-out-of-their-systems Israelites enter the promised land and defeat nations much bigger and stronger than they are. In fact, God takes the point a step further: “When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, *He makes even his enemies live at peace with him.*” (Proverbs 16:7, emphasis mine) This principle can also be applied to groups of people as well... like, say, nations.

In Europe, great old churches either lie next-to-empty or have been completely abandoned and converted to mosques or nightclubs. Debate rages over whether to include any mention of God in new constitutions. Lifestyles condemned by God as sinful are now considered routine. In terms of prophecy, they are far down the road to conditions that will be right for the anti-Christ to make his move once he arrives on the scene – running headlong into disorder so severe that the people would be willing to trade their freedoms just for a little peace, just like France after its revolution. We should not necessarily be influenced by nations that are, for all intents and purposes, in a “post-Christian” state. In a sense, those who advocate the “global village” concept suffer from a variation on the “monarch envy” experienced by ancient Israel.

At the same time, those who reject the “global village” concept must remember this: *the United States is in no position, and has no right, to lead when we ourselves engage in – and, in some cases, encourage and fuel – the same hedonistic lifestyles as now consume the Old World.* Spiritually, the concept of “sovereignty” is something of an illusion. To paraphrase Bob Dylan, all levels of society from individuals to entire nations must serve somebody, be it God or Satan in one of his various disguises; worship of self, false gods, materialism, etc. And while much of our nation still believes in (or at least is willing to pay lip service to) God, much of what we export to other countries in the way of entertainment – movies, music, video games, etc. – glory in hedonism, violence, rampant sexual immorality and most of the other things God hates, because they destroy people's lives. This nation continues to distance itself from God to the point where other religions (most notably Islam) see a spiritual vacuum in the United States, and are trying to fill it, either by old-fashioned proselytizing or the more extreme tactic of terror and conquest.

The church in America is still a force for society, but less of one than it used to be. If the church wants to be as great an influence as it once was, it must get back to the basics – and the most effective application – of the faith; God changes individuals as they accept (or return to) Jesus, and individuals collectively change society. For decades the church has tried, and to some extent is still trying, to do the quick and easy approach of changing society by gaining and wielding political power instead of obeying the Great Commission: *Go into all the world and make disciples of all men, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

The trouble is, all you get out of a quest for political power is... political power. You may become a “player” in the political scene, but you lose your effectiveness for anything else. The Great Commission calls for us to go into Total Ministry; meeting the needs of the people through the power of the Holy Spirit as we obey that Commission. Can we influence the political process? Indirectly, yes – but God calls for us to do more and greater things. Sometimes, this does call for a political approach, but sometimes other

things are needed that politics cannot supply. When the church opts only for one solution, it ties its hands – and puts its neck in a stiff brace. Political solutions often mean adopting the philosophy of one party or another. A healthy man is regarded as one that can turn his head, to listen to what good advice there is from both his “right” and his “left.”

To answer the question posed at the beginning of this article, neither a theocratic monarchy, nor a democratic republic *by itself*, is the answer to America’s problems. This nation may not have worked perfectly, but well enough when God was lifted up in the life of the nation – not just in official documents where it looks good, but in the everyday lives of the people. God is calling believers in America back to a simpler concept; be the church, and let Him do the leading. God wants us to go back to the task He gave us to do in the first place – lift up the Lord Jesus, and let Him draw all men to Himself. Be more than a mere statistic for some political number-cruncher – be His new creation, seeing the world as Jesus sees it and letting the world see what Jesus has done for and through us:

So from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. (2 Cor. 5: 16 – 20, NIV)

For the Glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ
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