

## Handout: Tribes into Monarchy

### PART 1: Distinguishing early from later traditions on the rise of the monarchy

The following gives one of the main biblical reports of the rise of the monarchy, with labels indicating parts of the report that are likely reasons added by much later authors for why Israel got a king. Take a look at them and compare with the underlying narrative.

underline – kingship started because of corruption of Samuel’s sons. *italics* kingship was to imitate foreign nations **bold** kingship was to reject and replace Yhwh as king

1Sam. 8:1 When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges of Israel. 2 His eldest son was called Joel and his second one, Abijah; they were judges at Beersheba. 3 His sons did not follow his example but, seduced by the love of money, took bribes and gave biased verdicts. 4 The elders of Israel all assembled, went back to Samuel at Ramah, and said, 5 ‘Look, you are old, and your sons are not following your example. So give us a king to judge us, *like the other nations.*’ 6 Samuel thought that it was wrong of them to say, ‘Let us have a king to judge us,’ so he prayed to Yhwh. 7 But Yhwh said to Samuel, ‘Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you: **it is not you they have rejected 8 but me, not wishing me to reign over them any more. They are now doing to you exactly what they have done to me since the day I brought them out of Egypt until now, deserting me and serving other gods.**’ 9 So, do what they ask; only, you must give them a solemn warning, and must tell them what the king who is to reign over them will do.’

1Sam. 8:10 Everything that Yhwh had said, Samuel then repeated to the people who were asking him for a king. 11 He said, ‘This is what the king who is to reign over you will do. [12-17 summary of how the king will oppress the people and enslave them.] 18 When that day comes, you will cry aloud because of the king you have chosen for yourselves, but on that day Yhwh will not hear you.’

1Sam. 8:19 The people, however, refused to listen to Samuel. They said, ‘No! *We are determined to have a king, 20 so that we can be like the other nations, with our own king to rule us and lead us and fight our battles.*’ 21 Samuel listened to all that the people had to say and repeated it in Yhwh’s ear. 22 Yhwh then said to Samuel, ‘Do as they ask and give them a king.’ Samuel then said to the Israelites, ‘Go home, each of you, to his own town.’

### Follow-up – (early?) accusations about the injustice of a monarchical structure:

Note that the underlying narrative in 1 Samuel 8 suggests that kingship is inherently unjust – it will lead to landowners losing their servants, goods and being enslaved. This tradition might also be late (some scholars think so), but its complaints about the king’s injustice agree with and *may* have originated in some form amidst a series of rebellions against David’s (and Solomon’s) monarchy that are reported in 2 Samuel. Here are some key incidents -

Rebellion 1 (2 Samuel 15) David's son, Absalom "wins the hearts of all *Israel*" by stopping everyone coming to the king on the road to the city gate, and promising "[if I was king,] anyone with a lawsuit or plea could come to me and get a fair hearing!]

David is almost defeated, but eventually Absalom is killed by David's general.

Rebellion 2 (2 Samuel 20) A man from Benjamin named Sheba leads a rebellion, again in "Israel," against the Davidic monarchy, invoking the oral exodus-wilderness tradition and proclaiming "We have no share in David, we have no heritage in the son of Jesse. Every man to his tents, O Israel!"

David's armies pursue him to Abel-beth-maacah in Dan in the far North of Israel. The town remains closed to the army, but they end up throwing Sheba's head over the wall to end the siege.

Rebellion 3 (1 Kings 12) The tribes of Israel split from Judah after the death of David's son/heir Solomon, after Solomon's heir, Rehoboam, reacts negatively to the tribes' demand for a less oppressive kingship.

**Part 2 - DEBATE PREP:** the following materials from the Bible are preparation

**Briefing for the case *against* establishing a monarchy**

[Some possibly early fragments of anti-monarchal traditions embedded in centuries-later prose stories about [non-Davidic] kings]

The speech attributed to Samuel in 1 Sam 8:10-17 about the king's injustice  
(see above text)

A fable attributed to Jotham in Judges 9:8-15 about the worthlessness of a king

One day the trees went out to anoint a king to rule them. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king!' The olive tree replied, 'Must I forgo my oil which gives honor to gods and men, to stand and sway over the trees?' Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and be our king!' The fig tree replied, 'Must I forgo my sweetness, forgo my excellent fruit, to go and sway over the trees?' Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come and be our king!' The vine replied, 'Must I forgo my wine cheers gods and men, to go and sway over the trees?' Then the trees all said to the thorn bush, 'You come and be our king!' And the thorn bush replied to the trees, 'If you are anointing me in good faith to be your king, come and shelter in my shade. But, if not, fire will come out of the thorn bush and devour the cedars of Lebanon.'

## **Briefing for the case *against* establishing a monarchy** (see Carr, *Intro*, 71)

Basically the case for the monarchy revolves around two poles-

*Zion theology* (not Zionist): belief that Jerusalem/Zion is God's home, thus called to a higher standard of justice, but also invulnerable from enemy attack.

*Royal theology*: belief that king is appointed by God, receives God's favor and military victory. Also called to mediate God's justice and blessing to the people.

### Psalm 72

God, endow the king with your own fair judgment, the son of the king with your own saving justice, that he may rule your people with justice, and your poor with fair judgment.

Mountains and hills, bring peace to the people!

With justice he will judge the poor of the people, he will save the children of the needy and crush their oppressors.

In the sight of the sun and the moon he will endure, age after age. He will come down like rain on mown grass, like showers moistening the land.

In his days uprightness shall flourish, and peace in plenty till the moon is no more.

His empire shall stretch from sea to sea, from the river to the limits of the earth...

For he rescues the needy who calls to him, and the poor who has no one to help. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the needy from death.

From oppression and violence he redeems their lives, their blood is precious in his sight. (Long may he live; may the gold of Sheba be given him!) Prayer will be offered for him constantly, and blessings invoked on him all day.

May wheat abound in the land, waving on the heights of the hills, Lebanon with its fruits and flowers at their best, like the grasses of the earth.

May his name be blessed forever, and endure in the sight of the sun. In him shall be blessed every race in the world, and all nations call him blessed.

### 2 Sam 23:1-7

Thus speaks David son of Jesse, thus speaks the man raised to eminence, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the singer of the songs of Israel:

The spirit of Yahweh speaks through me, God's word is on my tongue; the God of Jacob has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: The one whose rule is upright on earth, who rules in the fear of God, is like the morning light at sunrise (on a cloudless morning) making the grass of the earth sparkle after rain.

Yes, my House stands firm with God: God has made an eternal covenant with me, all in order, well assured; does God not bring to fruition my every victory and desire? But partisans of Belial [a demon] God rejects like thorns, for these are never taken up in the hand: no one touches them except with a pitchfork or spear-shaft, and then only to burn them to nothing!