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The Kingdom of God as a Reality: Israel in the Time of the Judges

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In honour of my 'guru' Dr. George E. Mendenhall on the occasion of his 65th birthday.

George Mendenhall has long shown a great interest in the period of the judges or early Israel. Not only has he written several articles about this period¹ but one of his most important and controversial contributions to Old Testament scholarship was his description as to how 'Israel' came into being at the beginning of the period of the judges.² Dr. Mendenhall has seen this period as the 'ideal' period of Israel, later spoiled by the paganization of the monarchy.³

The period of the judges was the only time when the kingship of God was a practical affair related to everyday life, rather than a theological concern. This period was the formative period of Old Testament thought and theology and if we see the idea of the kingship of God at this time it will help us to understand later theology of the kingship of God. One of the continual problems of later Israel was its divorcing the ruling power of God from its everyday life and relegating Him to the temple and its cultus.

It is difficult to know the exact form of government and beliefs of this early period. There are conflicting views

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¹ George E. Mendenhall, 'The Relation of the Individual to Political Society in Ancient Israel', hereafter referred to as 'The Relation . . .', *Biblical Studies in Memory of H. C. Alleman*, ed. J. M. Myers, O. Reimherr and H. N. Bream (Locust Valley: J. J. Augustin Pub., 1960, pp. 89-108) and 'Early Israel as the Kingdom of Yahweh,' *Tenth Generation* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1973), pp. 1-31.

² G. E. Mendenhall, 'The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine,' *Biblical Archaeologist*, XXV, 3 (September, 1962), 66-87.

³ G. E. Mendenhall 'The Relation', p. 101 and *Tenth Generation*, pp. 16, 18, 30-31. This is also the viewpoint adopted by Walter Brueggeman, *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

regarding : (1) What materials date from this period. (2) When the concept of the kingship of God became a part of Israelite thought. (3) The status of Israel as a political state during this period, and (4) the dependability of the picture of this time given in biblical narratives of Joshua, Judges and I Samuel. We will make assumptions which will not be accepted by everyone, but in light of the evidence, seem most likely to us. Perhaps one of the most intriguing things about the period of the judges is its era of mystery that gives the challenge to modern biblical scholars to reconstruct the period and to interpret the materials related to it. What we seek to do is to demonstrate that Israel, in the time of the judges, was a theocracy, with God as king. Though various scholars have assumed this, we wish to show the evidence that God was regarded as king during the time of the judges.

If we are to demonstrate that in early Israel Yahweh was regarded as King, we must first look at the duties of a king in ancient western Asia.⁴ The prologue of the Lipit-Ishtar Law code states the Lipit-Ishtar was called 'to the princship of the land in order to establish justice in the land, to banish complaints, to turn back enmity and rebellion by the force of arms (and) to bring wellbeing to the Sumerians and Akkadians.'⁵ Hammurabi describes his duties as 'to promote the welfare of the people . . . to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil, that the strong may not oppress the weak.'⁶ Medenhall summarizes these descriptions of duties of a king in the following way : 'The administration of law internally, the waging of war, and the economic wellbeing of the diverse population are here already the three prime functions of the king.'⁷ Leo Oppenheim gives as the duties of the Mesopotamian king ; to lead the army, the welfare of the people, maintaining proper legal procedures and hearing appeals. He also mentions that during certain periods of Mesopotamian history, the king had cultic responsibilities and devised new regulations for the protection of certain strata of population.⁸ Two other duties of kingship mentioned in later biblical materials are : (1) that of dominion over foreign powers and their land (Psalm 72 : 8-11) and (2) that of land distribution (I Samuel 8 : 14).

⁴ It has been brought to my attention by my colleagues in India that though the lands of the Bible are 'The Near East' for Europe and America, a more exact description that can be understood anywhere in the world is 'Western Asia.'

⁵ Lipit-Ishtar Law code, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. James Pritchard (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 159, hereafter referred to as *ANET*.

⁶ The Code of Hammurabi, *ANET*, p. 164.

⁷ Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation*, p. 29.

⁸ A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 102.

The concept of God as king is not unique to Israel, though ideas of God as king in other ancient western Asian countries differ from those of early Israel. The fact that the concept of God as king existed before Israel came into being makes it more likely that the origin of the idea that God was king was a part of Israelite thought from its beginning and was not a later adaptation in theology from the political structure of the Israelite monarchy. It is well known that from early times god was thought of as incarnate in the king of Egypt.⁹ Among the Canaanite neighbours of Israel El and Baal were regarded as kings of the gods.¹⁰ The Ammonites called their god *MLK* or king.¹¹ A. R. Johnson, in discussing theophorous names with the root *MLK*, says, 'The use of names of this type . . . was as common at the beginning of the monarchy as at its close; and, what is more important in the present connexion, it already had a long history behind it so far as the land of Canaan was concerned.'¹² Ringgren finds the kingship of God motif most probably of Canaanite origin¹³ and Fohrer states of Canaanite religion, 'Among the early Israelites, therefore, this religion was able to reinforce the element of reciprocity between God and man and make possible the element of God's rule as king.'¹⁴ The concept of God as king was early in Israel, but the Israelite God was neither incarnate in the king, nor the king of a polytheistic pantheon, but ruled as king of a body of people, i.e. a theocracy.

A theocracy is 'a form of government in which God or a deity is recognized as the supreme civil ruler.'¹⁵ We feel there was a theocracy or kingdom of God, in the time of the judges though the term 'kingdom of God' is only used once in the Old Testament in the form 'kingdom of the Lord' (*malkuth Yahweh*) in I Chronicles 28 : 5.¹⁶ Albright objects to speaking of Israel, in the pre-monarchic age, as a theocratic state in the sense that the head of

⁹ The classic discussion of Egyptian kingship is Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1978), The divine kingship idea as a part of Persian theology is mentioned in Geo. Widengren, 'The Persians,' *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 346.

¹⁰ John Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan*, (Leiden : E. J. Brill, 1957), p. 117. Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1966), p. 42. Georg Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, Trans. by David E. Green (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), pp. 44, 49, 53-54.

¹¹ W. A. Irwin, *The Old Testament: Keystone of Human Culture*, (New York : Henry Schuman, 1952), p. 195. I Kings 11 : 7.

¹² Aubrey R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff : University of Wales Press, 1955), p. 40. For the whole discussion of names of this type see pp. 33-42.

¹³ Ringgren, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

¹⁴ Fohrer, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹⁵ *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*.

¹⁶ O. E. Evans, 'Kingdom of God, of Heaven,' *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. K-Q (New York : Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 17.

the religious organizations was also head of the state as in later Judaism.¹⁷ The point is that the theocracy of the time of the judges was a purer form with God as ruler and no human figure such as king or priest between God and the people. A theocracy fits in well with Mendenhall's statement about the relationship of the individual with the state in ancient western Asia, 'The individual never identified with the state because his real citizenship was in the smaller community.'¹⁸ In the time of the judges the Israelite felt no need of an earthly king. The state's functions, as they were needed (war and law) were furnished by God.

Some earlier scholars saw the time of origin of the idea of the kingdom of God after the period of the judges, either seeing it a theological adaptation of the monarchical form of government in Israel and Judah or seeing the most important utilization of the concept in post-exilic times, particularly in the emphasis of Deutero-Isaiah.¹⁹ It is true that when the political monarchy disappeared Judaism again re-emphasized the idea of the kingship of God, and Israel did become a theocracy with the high priest or the priest-kings of the Hasmoneans as the head of government. But there are differences between this theocracy and that of the time of the judges. The later theocracies were subject to a foreign political power such as the Babylonians, Persians, the Hellenic powers after Alexander, or the Romans. These theocracies had a human administrator with a hereditary line such as the high priest or priest king. The theocracy of post exilic times is more theological, theoretical and eschatological and not such a practical reality as in pre-monarchic times.

Generally, now, scholars recognize the origin of the theocratic idea or kingship of God in pre-monarchic times.²⁰ Some, as we

¹⁷ W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), p. 282. John L. McKenzie, *The World of the Judges* (Englewood Cliffs; Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 110 also objects to the term theocracy for early Israel.

¹⁸ Mendenhall, 'The Relation', p. 9.

¹⁹ H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1956), p. 195. Irwin, *The Old Testament*, pp. 158, 223. Roy A. Rosenberg, 'Yahweh becomes King,' *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXV (September, 1966), 297-307 deals with the development of the theology of Yahweh's kingship in post-exilic times. Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 61 sees a new lease of life on the title of *Melek* applied to Yahweh in the late period.

²⁰ Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 59-60. Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, p. 166. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, Trans. and abridged by Moshe Greenberg (New York: Schocken Press, 1972), pp. 203ff. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, Vol. I (New York: McGraw-Hill 1965), p. 94. McKenzie, *The World of the Judges*, p. 111. Albrecht Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, trans. R. A. Wilson (New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 233. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation*, pp. 16ff, 224. Mendenhall, 'The

indicated earlier, see God as king as a concept borrowed from Canaanite religion. John Gray even sees the possibility of the origin of the idea of the kingship of God from an Egyptian setting.²¹ Though the early Israelite theocracy had some unique features, there were other ancient western Asian states that had some aspects of theocracy. Egypt, with the king as God was technically a theocracy and was more practically one during the theocratic rule of the priests of Thebes during the 21st dynasty.²² The early Sumerian city states, with the dominance of the temple, had at least theocratic tendencies.²³ Post exilic Judah was also a theocracy. Many centuries later John Calvin and other puritans would again seek to institute the rule of God as a political reality.

Can we call the Israelite theocracy of the time of the judges a government or state? John McKenzie says that the Israelite amphictyony refused the idea of a political structure.²⁴ John Bright says of early Israel, 'She had no statehood, no central government, no capital city, no administrative machinery.'²⁵ Albrecht Alt makes a differentiation between the organization under the tribes and a 'national state.'²⁶ George Mendenhall speaks of 'the withering away of the state under the old Israelite federation.'²⁷ Whether the theocracy of the times of the judges was a 'state' or 'political structure' probably depends on our definition of these. One dictionary defines 'state' as 'A body of people occupying a definite territory and organized under one government.'²⁸ Mendenhall defines the term 'political' as designating a social group which carries out either of two functions: (1) the waging of war and (2) the administration of legal processes.²⁹ We will seek to show that Israel in the time of the judges meets these definitions of state and political structure. It was unified

Relation' pp. 98-99. Murray Lee Newman, Jr., *The People of the Covenant* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 120-7. S. Szikezai, 'King, Kingship'. *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. K-Q (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 14. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol. I, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 195. John Bright, *Covenant and Promise* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 32.

²¹ Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan*, p. 10.

²² Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, trans. P. R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 191.

²³ See the discussion on this in Samuel Nosh Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 73-76.

²⁴ McKenzie, *The World of the Judges*, p. 11.

²⁵ John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), p. 143. See also Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, pp. 31, 39. In the latter reference he says though Israel was not a state, she was a sort of political unit.

²⁶ Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, pp. 235, 237.

²⁷ Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation*, p. 23.

²⁸ *The American College Dictionary*.

²⁹ Mendenhall, 'The Relation', p. 89.

in its acceptance of God and king. It was thought of by later Israelite tradition and even in the Merneptah stele³⁰ as having a unity, though the latter refers to Israel as a 'people' rather than a 'country'. (Whatever this differentiation may mean). The tribes waged war, they had a common law and some kind of governmental organization as reference to *nasi*,³¹ elders, judges and assemblies would indicate. They kept historical records³² and the very length of the existence of this theocracy, over two centuries, would seem to add some legitimacy to calling it a state. Indeed, when Saul became king, he was made king over an already existing state.

Let us now look at material that shows the early Israelite idea of God as king. It is extremely difficult to arrive at a consensus as to what biblical materials either originate from or at least show what early Israel was like. We will seek to construct our idea of God as king in early Israel from materials we feel reflect this era. In a sense there are two theocracies of the time of the judges, the real, that actually existed; and the ideal, constructed by the later editors, particularly the D historians. Even the ideal has value in that it shows the later theologians' thoughts about theocracy.

There are five poetic passages that probably date as early as the time of the judges.³³ In the first of the Oracles of Balaam, Numbers 23 : 21, we have 'The Lord their God is with them and the shout of a king is among them.' In the Blessing of Moses, we find in Deuteronomy 33 : 5, 'Thus the Lord became king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together.' In the Song of Miriam, Exodus 15 : 18 it is stated, 'The Lord will reign (*yimelök*) for ever and ever.' In addition to this, God is depicted like a king in His part in Israel's battles against their enemies in the Song of Moses, Exodus 15 : 1, 3, 6, 10 and 12 and in the Song of Deborah, Judges 5 : 11b, 23b, 31. So even in the relatively small body of literature which origi-

³⁰ ANET, p. 378.

³¹ Interestingly enough, *nasi* is used in Joshua as an official of the people.

³² Joshua 10 : 13c.

³³ For the dating from this era see W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City : Doubleday, 1969), pp. 12-20. David N. Freedman, 'Early Israelite Poetry and Historical Reconstruction', *Symposia*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Cambridge : American Schools of Oriental Research, 1979), pp. 87-89. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol 1, p.195 and John L. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament* (Garden City : Doubleday, 1974), p. 84 likewise support an early date for 'The Oracles of Balaam,' 'The Song of Miriam,' and 'The Blessing of Moses.' See Alexander Globe, 'The Literary Structure and Unity of the Song of Deborah,' *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 93, No. 4 (December, 1974), pp. 496-7, 508 for early dating of 'The Song of Deborah.'

nates from the time of the judges we see the idea of God as king expressed.

We turn now from the poetic passages dating from the time of the judges to the historical materials about this time in Joshua, Judges and I Samuel. We look first at passages from Judges which originate closer to the time of judges than the materials from the other two books. Some commentators date these materials from a later date by the circuitous reasoning that we could only have anti-monarchical and pro-theocratic material after a monarchy and a poor experience with kings. Needless to say any one living during the time of the judges would be well familiar with the ways of kings, as many of Israel's neighbours had had this form of government for centuries. If we approach these passages with the pre-supposition that there was a theology or philosophy during the period of the judges that favoured Yahweh as king as against an earthly king, rather than with the pre-supposition that they reflect later Israelite or Jewish anti-monarchical bias, these ideas can very well be seen to originate from the time of the judges.³⁴ There are four passages we wish to consider from Judges: (1) Gideon's refusal of kingship, Judges 8 : 22-23 ; (2). The fiasco of Abimelech's kingship, particularly the judgment of it in Judges 9 : 22-23 ; (3). The fable of Jothan, Judges 9 : 7-15 ; and (4). The phrase found in 17 : 6 and 21 : 6 dealing with kingship and 'doing what was right in one's own eyes.'

A very clear statement of the concept of the kingship of Yahweh is found in Gideon's refusal to accept permanent authority that could be passed on in dynastic fashion in Judges 8 : 22-23 where he says, 'Yahweh will rule over you.'³⁵ As mentioned above, a number of scholars date this passage to a later period. Gray finds it 'much later than the time of Gideon and the work of the Deuteronomic historian,'³⁶ and Moore from 'the last ages of the kingdom.'³⁷ On the other hand a number of scholars³⁸ do regard this as an authentic reflection of and dating from the time of the judges. It all depends on what one sees as the context and material which shapes the thought expressed and we prefer to see

³⁴ A. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 84 says, 'The anti-monarchic passages cannot be called late simply because they are anti-monarchic.'

³⁵ The term here is *MšL*, 'rule' rather than *MLK*, 'reign.'

³⁶ John Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth* (London : Nelson, 1967), p. 313.

³⁷ George F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (Edinburgh : T. & T. Clark, 1958), p. 230. Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, p. 232, n. 15 also doesn't find this passage dating from the time of the judges.

³⁸ Jacob Myers, 'The Book of Judges : Introduction and Exegesis', *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. II (New York : Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 748. Newman, *The People of the Covenant*, p. 121. Robert Boling, *Judges* (Garden City : Doubleday, 1975), p. 160. Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, pp. 31-32.

it in the context of a theocratic organization where the expression of support for any king other than God would be unacceptable.

We believe that the story of Abimelech's monarchy and its result were included to show what happens when one attempts to have a monarchy : fratricide, civil war and an ignominious end to Abimelech, ³⁹ 'the man who would be king.'⁴⁰ We would note several things about Abimelech's misadventure. (1) It was based upon an alliance with Shechemites, not regarded as Israelites. (2) It seems to be on the pattern of the city state kingdom that was common in Canaan at this time.⁴¹ We also note particularly God's (Elohim not Yahweh) sending an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem of v. 23 which would certainly seem to us to support the idea of the monarchy of God as against that of a human, Abimelech. A similar point of view is also expressed in the fable of Jotham.

The fable is a rare form in the Old Testament⁴² and the poetic form of this fable would be appropriate for an early origin of this passage. Unlike 8 : 22-23 which uses the term *M_SL*, the root *MLK* is used here for the idea of being king. Gray and Moore⁴³ understand the fable to be aimed against Abimelech only and not against the institution of kingship. If as presented in the fable, the work of kingship is found unimportant by the important and fruitful trees and only the worthless bramble desires this office, it would seem to us to speak not against Abimelech alone but against the idea of monarchy. This would be in keeping with our thesis that the preferred type of government of Israel during this period was the kingship of God and that a monarchy was seen as undesirable.

We would like to look at one other passage, 'In those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes' (17 : 6 and the concluding statement to Judges in 21 : 25. The first half of the statement is also found in 18 : 1 and 19 : 1). This passage is usually considered as pro-monarchic, probably because of the type of material it is associated with in Judges which displays lawlessness.⁴⁴ We would ask, however, if this was the original *sitz im leben* of the phrase? George Men-

³⁹ We would note the form of the name which might be translated, 'My father is king', for what it is worth.

⁴⁰ A similar ignominious end came to the man in Rudyard Kipling's story by this title.

⁴¹ We would see the reference to Abimelech as king of Israel in 9 : 22 and reference to 'the men of Israel' in v. 55 as later editorial work. Despite the predominantly anti-Abimelech feeling of the passage he also does have a certain heroic quality.

⁴² Found only here and in II Kings 14 : 9.

⁴³ Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, p. 320. Moore, *Judges*, p. 245.

⁴⁴ Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, p. 3.

denhall describes 'what was right in his own eyes' as 'a description of self-determination and freedom from interference or harassment by the king's bureaucrats or military aristocracy.'⁴⁵ As such this statement is not pro-monarchic.

In the book of I Samuel we find three passages, I Samuel 8 : 4-9, especially v. 7 ; 10 : 17-19, especially v. 19 ; and 12 : 12 that all express the thought that in the choosing of a king, the people of Israel were rejecting the kingship of Yahweh. The three passages : 8 : 7b, 'but they have rejected me (Yahweh) from being king over them,' 10 : 19, 'But you have this day rejected your God, who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses ; and you have said, "No! but set a king over us,"' and 12 : 12b, 'you said to me, "No, but a king shall reign over us",' when the Lord your God was your king,' all portray our thesis that the time of the judges was a theocracy, when Yahweh was the king of the people and with the coming of the monarchy this concept was rejected. Again we see division of opinion over whether these materials actually date from the time of the beginning of the monarchy or are ideas read back into this time by later editors disenchanted with their experience with the monarchy. Fohrer, Baly, Irwin and Alt see this concept arising at a later date.⁴⁶ McKenzie sees this as reflecting the thought of the late time of the judges⁴⁷ and Newman and Caird see the present form of this as originating from a later time but reflecting a legitimate tradition which has come down from the time when the monarchy originated.⁴⁸ But why do the two ideologies, pro, versus anti-monarchy, have to be seen as coming from different times ? Politics is usually made up of groups of people who hold contrasting ideas at the same time. There could certainly be a strong anti-monarchic feeling during the time of judges, especially if we accept George Mendenhall's thesis that the people of Israel came into being as a movement against the city-state monarchies.⁴⁹ Ackroyd, commenting on the differing traditions about kingship says, 'It is not unlikely that from the very outset there would be division of opinion.'⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation*, p. 27.

⁴⁶ Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, pp. 124-5, Baly, *God and History in the Old Testament*, (New York : Harper and Row, 1976), p. 56. Irwin, *The Old Testament*, p. 195. Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, pp. 241, 245-6.

⁴⁷ McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 84.

⁴⁸ Newman, *The People of the Covenant*, p. 127. George B. Caird, 'The First and Second Books of Samuel Introduction and Exegesis', *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. II (New York : Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 917.

⁴⁹ Mendenhall, 'The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine'.

⁵⁰ Peter R. Ackroyd, *The First Book of Samuel* (Cambridge : University Press, 1971), p. 70.

These are the major passages that support the idea that Yahweh was regarded as king during the time of the judges and to establish an earthly king was an act of unfaithfulness to him. There are other Old Testament passages, however, which also touch on the kingship of God during the time of the judges. Perhaps more research should be done to see if the *sitz im leben* of at least some enthronement Psalms is not during the time of the judges, rather than being post-exilic. They certainly would fit in then. Some of the Psalms with Canaanite origin, particularly Psalm 29, also portray the idea of the kingship of God.⁵¹ Though these Psalms have an early origin, their concept of kingship is closer to the Canaanite idea of kingship of the gods and nature, rather than an earthly theocracy. G. E. Wright says, 'The argument over the meaning of the first commandment ('no other gods before me') should now be settled. An abstract monotheism is not to be gained from it but rather a *political* monarchy,'⁵² (emphasis mine). In Exodus 19 : 6 Israel is told, 'you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'⁵³ The concept of the heavenly court has also been used to indicate that the idea of the kingship of God had an early origin.⁵⁴

The book of Joshua is greatly influenced by the theology of its Deuteronomist editor.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, his account of what happened at the time of the conquest was not entirely invented but is based on some historical events. This account strongly reflects a theocracy, but an idealized one of its authors. Though there are no statements about God as king, there are many references which depict his acting like a king in the capacities of military leader, distributor of the land and the one who establishes the law. In Joshua, Yahweh is often spoken of as acting through his servants Moses and Joshua who seem to be almost in the position of the Egyptian vizier. The oldest material of Joshua, the accounts of the covenant assembly in Joshua 23 and 24 are analogous to the suzerain treaties and as such depict God as the king with Israel as his vassal.

⁵¹ Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, pp. 173-4; Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, pp. 79-81; Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, pp. 195-6; Bright, *A History of Israel*, p. 135.

⁵² G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament and Theology* (New York : Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 108-9.

⁵³ The passage is allotted by S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York : Meridian Books, 1956), p. 31 to the E document.

⁵⁴ Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, p.195; Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, p. 174.

⁵⁵ Gordon H. Wenham, 'The Deuteronomistic Theology of the Book of Joshua,' *Journal of Biblical Literature*, XC (June, 1971), pp. 140-148.

Joshua deals more with how God acts like a king. Let us turn to the various ways in our historical materials where God is portrayed in the role of a king. The first way in which Yahweh functions as a king for Israel is to function as a unifying factor.⁵⁶ Without Yahweh there was no government or ruler. The major judges could be compared, at best, to generals of the army such as Joel or Abner at a later date. If the minor judges were different from the major judges, they would seem to be best interpreted as adjudicators and interpreters of law and not as administrators. Whether Israel was indeed a Yahwistic amphictyony⁵⁷ or not, Yahweh is still the unifying factor for Israel. Indeed, what made an Israelite an Israelite, was his acceptance of Yahweh as God. This is the challenge offered by Joshua in the covenant ceremony at Shechem (Joshua 24 : 14-15). Judges 20 : 2 also speaks of how the men of Israel 'presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God.' Even when the Israelites disagreed with each other (Judges 20-21) they were still united in their allegiance to Yahweh.

A second way in which Yahweh and Israel had a king-subject relationship is the relationship formed between them through the basis of the covenant treaty.⁵⁸ G. E. Wright describes the covenant relationship with God in the following way, 'By means of the treaty (covenant) Israel's self-understanding was that of a people of God in the sense of being governed directly by the emperor of the world. The types of treaty identified God, not as a king among kings for whom the Canaanite term *melek* was proper, but as "Suzerain", a technical term in political science for a monarch who acknowledged no other power the equal of his own.'⁵⁹ The relationship of Israel to their suzerain through covenant is well illustrated in Joshua 24 where all of the sections of the covenant treaty as described by Mendenhall can be discerned. G. W. Anderson even sees the New Year Festival as the time when Yahweh was acclaimed king and he renewed his covenant with his people.⁶⁰

A third place where Yahweh is seen as king, and perhaps the one which is given the most attention is Yahweh as military leader.

⁵⁶ G. W. Anderson, *The History and Religion of Israel* (London : Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 35 ; Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, p. 41 ; Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation*, pp. 16, 28 ; Mendenhall, 'The Relation', p. 101.

⁵⁷ McKenzie, *The World of the Judges*, pp. 103-4 ; Bright, *A History of Israel*, p. 135.

⁵⁸ See Mendenhall's pioneering work, George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh : Biblical Collegium 1955) and George E. Mendenhall, 'Covenant,' *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. A-D (New York : Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 714-23.

⁵⁹ Wright, *The Old Testament and Theology*, p. 107.

⁶⁰ Anderson, *The History and Religion of Israel*, p. 72. Of course the date of origin of this festival in Israel, or even whether it existed in Israel, is in dispute.

Yahweh protected his people and helped them to acquire the land through his holy wars.⁶¹ In his speaking about the 'Song of Deborah' P. C. Craigie says, 'The militia are thus "the people of Yahweh" in effect the army of Yahweh; it was Yahweh's war and Yahweh's victory.'⁶² As Bright puts it, 'The league had no king save Yahweh... It was obligated to adjust its affairs in accordance with his stated will; its wars were his wars and it was he who won the victory.'⁶³

There are many scriptures which speak of the military action of Yahweh. In one of the earliest pericopes of the Old Testament, the Song of Miriam, Exodus 15 : 21, it is the Lord who has triumphed at the Sea of Reeds. In the Song of Deborah, Judges 5 : 19-21, God, through the workings of nature, causes the defeat of Sisera's army. Similar references to God defeating Israel's enemies through natural phenomena are also mentioned in Joshua 10 : 11 and I Samuel 7 : 15. In Judges 4 : 14-15, the prose account of the battle with Sisera, we find, '...the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the Lord go out before you? ...and the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak.' In the Gideon story (Judges 7) the whole point of the reduction of the forces of Israel under Gideon to 300 was to demonstrate that it was the Lord who delivered Israel (Judges 7 : 2) and there are numerous references in the story to the Lord being the moving force in the victory over the Midianites (7 : 7, 14, 15, 18, 22 etc.). Jephthah, with his tragic vow to sacrifice the first one he meets if the Lord gives the Ammonites into his hand (Judges 11 : 29), finds that the Lord does give them into his hand (11 : 32). In I Samuel 4 ; when the Israelites are at first put to rout by the Philistines, they bring the ark of the Lord into the camp 'that he may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies,' (4 : 3c) and the Philistines' response when they learn that the ark has come is, 'A god has come into the camp... Woe to us ! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods.' (4 : 7-8) Unfortunately, the belief in God's delivering power did not work this time. Later, however, (cha p. 5) God, again working through nature in the form of the plague, defeats the Philistine cities.

The power of God as military force is particularly popular with the authors of Joshua. There is an interesting pericope

⁶¹ Andrew C. Tunyogi, 'The Book of the Conquest', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXIV (December, 1965), pp. 376-7; Gerhard von Rad; *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York : Harper & Row, 1962), p. 328; McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 152. For a full discussion of holy war see Rudolf Smend, *Yahweh: War & Tribal Confederation*, trans. Max Gray Rogers (Nashville : Abindgon Press, 1970).

⁶² P. C. Craigie, 'The Song of Deborah and the Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta,' *Journal of Biblical Literature*, CXXXVIII, Part III (September, 1969), p. 256.

⁶³ Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, p. 32.

in 5 : 13-15 where Joshua meets the commander of the army of the Lord. In the Jericho story, 6 : 16, Joshua says to the people, 'Shout, for the Lord has given you the city.' 10 : 42 summarizes this theology, 'And Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel.' The Achan story, Joshua 7, demonstrates what happens to Israel when God is not aiding them; they are defeated in battle. The kingly concept of God as military figure was important both in the theology of the time of the judges and the theology about it from the later D historian.

Closely related to God the king as a military figure is the idea of God the king as protector and deliverer.⁶⁴ We find this function of Yahweh as king analogous to the role portrayed for the Egyptian king in the Amarna letters, where the king is requested to send troops to help protect his vassals in Palestine.⁶⁵ The aspects of Yahweh as protector and deliverer had become so well established that the past acts of Yahweh as a deliverer had been formulated in creedal statements about his deeds, particularly his deliverance of Israel from Egypt. We find examples of these in Joshua 2 : 10-11 ; Judges 2 : 1 ; 6 : 8-9 ; 10 : 11-12 ; 11 : 21-23 ; I Samuel 4 : 8. As these formulaic passages indicate, God is understood mainly as protector and deliverer for his whole people of Israel. This is indicated in the D editing of Judges. (The formula with only names introduced is found in 3 : 7-11). God the deliverer is also illustrated in Gideon's deliverance of Israel from the Midianites where Yahweh says in 6 : 14, 'Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian ; do I not send you?' and 6 : 36 where Gideon says to God, 'If thou wilt deliver Israel by my hand . . .' We find Yahweh as deliverer and protector of Israel from the Philistines in I Samuel 7 : 3, 8 and 13b. Saul, after leading Israel in the deliverance of Jabesh Gilead says in I Samuel 11 : 13b, 'for today the Lord has wrought deliverance in Israel.'

There is also some indication that Yahweh was not only protector of the whole people of Israel but also, in the pattern of the ancient western Asian king, was protector of the defenceless and downtrodden.⁶⁶ Ruth, and her position as a widow gleaning in the fields, shows God's concern for the defenceless as a part of his law. Though there is the question as to how much the book

⁶⁴ Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 287 and von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 328 comment on this aspect of Yahweh during the time of the judges.

⁶⁵ ANET, pp. 483-87. Letters EA 137, 244, 271. Israel had more luck in receiving protection from Yahweh than the Canaanite kinglets from the Egyptian King.

⁶⁶ Psalm 72 : 2-4, 12-14 shows this obligation of the king.

of Ruth actually portrays the time of the judges, we do have a reference to gleaning in Gideon's pacification speech to Ephraim in Judges 8:2. The whole matter of the action taken against Benjamin in Judges 20-21 also indicates that Israel was obligated when someone transgressed the law against the defenceless, as the man of Gibeah had, to take action on their behalf. This, however, is related to the aspect of God as king in the matters of justice and law, so let us turn to that aspect.

In ancient Israel God was both the source of the law and also the enforcer of this divine law. This divine law had its origins in the very beginnings of Israel and its association with Yahweh. According to the biblical tradition Yahweh's law became known to the people at Mt. Sinai, and the oldest law codes, particularly the covenant code, are thought to be pre-monarchic.⁶⁷ God is referred to as a judge (Judges 12:27) and a mediator, (I Samuel 2:25) and may have been a court of last resort when a case was too difficult for human decision,⁶⁸ much as Solomon did in the case of the two harlots and their child (I Kings 3:16-28). The relationship of God to the judiciary process was the closest in his role as punisher for transgression of the law. This is central to the theology of the D historian but is also seen in the story of Achan (Joshua 7), the rape of the Levite's concubine (Judges 20-21) and the punishment of Eli and his household (I Samuel 2:34, 3:13). The crimes punished in these narratives are theft and disobedience to God (Achan), violence against an individual (the Levite's concubine), embezzlement, blasphemy and disrespect of the sanctuary (Eli's sons) and of course the turning away from God to other gods which is the general crime of Israel according to the D historian. This disobedience also is indicated in the story of the Transjordanian tribes and their altar (Joshua 22:10ff). God's provision for the defence of those guilty of manslaughter against blood vengeance is seen in the provision of cities of refuge for them in Joshua 20. This also portrays Yahweh in a judicial role. Though some of these aspects of Yahweh as king in the judiciary function may be a part of the idealized theocracy of the later editors, it remains probable that the law of Yahweh was the standard for the time of the judges, often interpreted by the judges whose functions we will consider later, but at times transgressions of the law were punished by Yahweh himself.

Another function of the ancient western Asian king, particularly

⁶⁷ Noth, *The History of Israel*, p. 104; Baly, *God and History in the Old Testament*, p. 59; Israelite Religion, p. 46; John D.W. Watts, *Basic Patterns in Old Testament*; Ringgren, *Religion* (New York: Vantage Press, 1971), p. 65; Mendenhall *The Tenth Generation*, pp. 23-24; Newman, *The People of the Covenant*, p. 116.

⁶⁸ Evans, 'Kingdom of God, of Heaven', *loc. cit.* n. 16 *Supra* p. 18.

in a feudally organized state, was distribution of land.⁶⁹ One of the warnings in the anti-monarchic speech of Samuel is that the king will redistribute 'fields, vineyards, and olive orchards' to his servants (I Samuel 8 : 14).⁷⁰ The motif of Yahweh as land distributor is also a part of the Old Testament tradition and is another indication of his functioning as king in early Israel.⁷¹ The relationship of the distribution of the land to Yahweh is central to the theology of Joshua⁷² and chapters 13-19 deal with land distribution to the tribes and there are many other references to this theology.⁷³ This is not only the theology of Joshua, as we find the promise of the land in the patriarchal promises (Genesis 13 : 14-17 ; 15 : 18 ; 17 : 8 ; 26 : 2-4 etc.) and it is also found in Judges as, 'the land which I swore to give to your fathers' (2 : 1), the inheritance of the people (2 : 6), and the land of those who oppressed Israel that the Lord gave them (6 : 9). Even when the Danites go to possess Laish they are told, 'The land is broad ; yes, God has given it into your hands' (18 : 10).

One other aspect of the kingship of God as reflected in the writings about early Israel was the obedience that was generally given to God. This is particularly true in the Joshua theology where Israel is depicted as obeying the commands of God, delivered through Moses or Joshua with no question asked, particularly in matters that have to do with possession of the land (See 1 : 17 ; 4 : 1 ; 6 : 2ff, etc.). Of course there are examples of disobedience to God i.e. the story of Achan and the covenant with Gideon which was done without God's consent, but such disobedience brings troubles and demonstrates the necessity of obeying God.

We have seen then seven ways in which God was treated as king in the historical materials about early Israel : (1) He was the factor that unified Israel. (2) He had a covenant with the people like the suzerain-vassal covenant. (3) He was the military leader. (4) He was the deliverer and protector of his people. (5) He was

⁶⁹ 'The Code of Hammurabi', 28-38 *ANET*, pp. 167-8 discusses land and feudal obligations as does also the 'Hittite Law Code', 46-47 *ANET*, p.191. H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon* (New York : The New American Library, 1962), pp. 219, 233-4 discusses old Babylonian feudalism, pp. 252, 255 Assyrian feudalism. O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (Baltimore : Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 102-3 discusses Hittite feudalism, Widengren 'The Persians' *op. cit.*, n. 9 *supra*, p. 334 discusses Persian feudalism and its precedents. See Mendenhall, 'The Relation,' p. 103, n. 50 for royal grants at Ugarit and Alalakh.

⁷⁰ See also I Sam. 22 : 7.

⁷¹ Anderson, *The History and Religion of Israel*, p. 22 ; Watts, *Basic Patterns in Old Testament Religion*, pp. 90, 93, 95-96, 98 ; von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 299 who all see this as an early idea. Brueggemann bases chapters 5 and 6 of *The Land* on the theme of Yahweh as land giver.

⁷² Wenham, 'The Deuteronomistic Theology of the Book of Joshua', *op. cit.*, n. 55, p. 142 sees the land distribution as the second great theme of the D editor.

⁷³ Josh. 1 : 2-3, 13, 15 ; 2 : 9 ; 9 : 24 ; 13 : 6 etc.

the source of and administrator of law and justice and punished those who transgressed this law. (6) He was the distributor of the land. (7) And he was obeyed as king. The ark tradition also supports the concept of Yahweh as king as at least one interpretation of it was that it was the throne of Yahweh.⁷⁴ The ark tradition plays a prominent part in our materials at the crossing of the Jordan (Joshua 3-4), the fall of Jericho (Joshua 6) and in its own tradition of capture by the Philistines (I Samuel 4 : 1-7 : 4). In the latter it is almost treated as Yahweh himself by both the Israelites (4 : 3) and the Philistines (4 : 7-8). It also was present at the covenant festival at Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim (Joshua 8:30-35) which would be suitable for the presence of Yahweh as king upon his throne at his covenant festival. The presence of the Lord with the Ark is also inferred by the inquiry of the Lord in the presence of the Ark (Judges 20 : 27).

One of the problems of regarding God as king was determining his will for his people. There are various ways of communication mentioned between Yahweh and his people. We find in Joshua that Yahweh generally speaks directly or through Joshua. It is easier, if one is writing a theological history at a later time, to simplify God's communication in a theocracy in this way. God also speaks directly in other places (Judges 6 : 25 ; 7 : 2 etc.). God also makes his will known through lots in the matter of Achan, Joshua 7 : 14-18 ; division of the land, Joshua 14 : 2 and one account of the selection of Saul as King, (I Samuel 10 : 20ff). God speaks through prophetic figures, Deborah (Judges 4 : 6), an unknown man of God (I Samuel 2 : 27) a prophet (Judges 6 : 7), and the boy Samuel (I Samuel 3 : 2-18). There are several times when he communicates through angels (Judges 2 : 1 ; 6 : 11, 20-22), though here as in Genesis 18 there is a switch back and forth between angel in 6 : 11, 12, 20-21, and the Lord speaking in 6 : 14-16). We also find communication through an angel to Samson's parents (Judges 13 : 2-20). God communicates with Gideon both by the sign of the dry and wet fleece (Judges 6 : 36-39) and a Midianite's dream (Judges 7,13-15). Sometimes, as in the case of Samson's choice of a wife (Judges 14 : 4) God does his will through the action of people. Cultic personnel and their equipment are also used to inquire of God (Judges 18 : 5 and probably 20 : 18 ; 23, 27-28). Finally, we find as in the case of the Gibeonite covenant in Joshua 9, that if Yahweh is not consulted, mistakes are made (Joshua 9 : 14).

A key figure in the operation of the theocracy was the 'judge'. It is not our task here to go deeply into the discussion as to what

⁷⁴ I Sam. 4 : 4, Ex. 25:21-22 ; II Sam. 6 : 2. This idea is supported by Noth, *The History of Israel*, p.91 ; McKenzie, *The World of the Judges*, p. 21y Newman, *The People of the Covenant*, p. 111, Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol. I, p. 195 and Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, p. 31.

a 'judge' was or the difference between the 'major' and the 'minor' judges. This information can be found elsewhere.⁷⁵ We would like to point out two ways in which the judge helped the operation of the theocracy. Firstly, he (or she) was Yahweh's agent of deliverance as seen in the acts of Ehud, Deborah-Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson. Sometimes, this ability to deliver was caused by the charismatic, 'and the spirit of the Lord came upon so and so.' With Ehud (Judges 3 : 10), Gideon (6 : 34), Jephthah (11 : 29) and Saul (11 : 6, at the relief of Jabesh Gilead), this spirit is related to deliverance of Israelites. With Samson (who did little actual deliverance) it occasions less important events such as the killing of a lion (Judges 14 : 6), killing thirty men to get spoil to pay his bet over a riddle (14 : 19) and to slay men with a jaw bone of an ass (15 : 14-15). The spirit also induces Saul to prophecy (I Samuel 10 : 6, 10) and comes upon David at his anointing by Samuel (16 : 13). The other activity of the judges is their role in actual adjudication, that is, in seeing that the law of God was observed. Though there has been some question about this role of the judge, there are several passages which support this idea. Deborah judged Israel sitting under a palm and the people of Israel came up to her for judgement (Judges 4 : 4-5). Samuel judged the people at Mizpah (I Samuel 7 : 6) and went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah and judged Israel in all these places (I Samuel 7 : 15). His sons were judges in Beersheba and they took bribes (I Samuel 8 : 1-3).

After an existence of about two centuries the theocracy of Israel gave way to a monarchy. What were the reasons for the turning from a theocracy to a monarchy? One of the most mentioned suggestions is the pressure of the outside Philistine military power.⁷⁶ This pressure called for an ongoing organized administration with a human administration that was readily available. This points to another problem which may have something to do with the demise of the theocracy, the difficulty of communicating with God the king. A third suggestion for the failure of theocracy, from the biblical tradition, is the influence of the environment, 'we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our

⁷⁵ Noth, *The History of Israel*, pp. 101-3; Alan J. Hauser, 'The Minor Judges — A Re-evaluation,' *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 94, No. 2 (June, 1975), 190-200; Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, pp. 283-4; Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, p. 96; Bright, *A History of Israel*, pp. 144-45; Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, p. 51; Giovanni Pettinato, 'Ebla and the Bible,' *Biblical Archaeologist*, 43, No. 4 (Fall, 1980), 208 gives a quotation from J. Albert Soggin; McKenzie, *The World of the Judges*, pp. 117-18; Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, p. 231; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, Vol. 1, p. 93.

⁷⁶ Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, pp. 237-38; Mendenhall, 'The Relation', p. 101.

battles' (I Samuel 8 : 19b-20). The fourth reason may be a breakdown in the religious process and relationship to God that is necessary for a theocracy. Mendenhall talks about the internal dissolution of the religious system.⁷⁷ Von Rad speaks of the falling gradient of the charismatic leader, 'The one who was a special instrument of Jahweh's will in history falls into sin, degradation, or some other disaster.'⁷⁸ Related to the religious problems of the theocracy, we see the inability of the people to trust in an unseen God, a problem that has continued to plague Israel and people ever since.

But the kingdom of God, the theocracy of the time of the judges, was a lasting influence upon Israelite politics and religion. Even in the time of the monarchy God remained king of Israel or Judah and only his anointed one was on the throne. 'God's anointed', unfortunately, often forgot God and went his own way. The king in the Israelite and Jewish kingdoms never had the power of other kings in western Asia and when Solomon and Rehoboam tried to claim this power they brought rebellion. Later Elijah, in the matter of Naboth's vineyard, reminded Ahab that there was an authority beyond him (I Kings 21). The literature of the Old Testament, particularly the Psalms and Deutero-Isaiah, has many references to God as king. The concept of theocracy which had been a reality in early Israel was again utilized in the post-exilic community, after the disappearance of a political state. As de Vaux, in speaking of the importance of theocracy to Israelite thought, says, 'from the beginning to the end of its history Israel remained a religious community,'⁷⁹ and so it remains to this day. The concept of the kingdom of God was also utilized by the New Testament,⁸⁰ and as George Mendenhall points out, 'If the kingdom of God seems hopelessly quaint and old-fashioned to contemporary society, let it be remembered that this was the only one of the religious traditions of the ancient world to survive in any influential way.'⁸¹

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol 1, p. 329.

⁷⁹ de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, Vol 1, p. 99.

⁸⁰ Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan*, pp. 10, 151 ; Mendenhall, 'The Relation', p. 102.

⁸¹ Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation*, p. 18.