

A Contrast Of Kings

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Most of us have been in the Church of God long enough not to need to be reminded that God will make us kings and priests in His kingdom. We have all read the verse in Revelation 5:10, "God has made us kings and priests unto our God." And, at least every year at the Feast of Tabernacles, we have sermons or sermonettes about this subject, and we often go through all the scriptures that promise us rulership under Christ, King David, and the Twelve Apostles in the Kingdom of God. So, we have become comfortable with this fact that our future status will be as kings and priests.

But, we are certainly not kings and priests yet, and the chances are mighty slim that even one of us will become a king in this lifetime. We just do not have the right lineage, or opportunity. We would probably not have a clue even how to be a king or queen over a nation. First of all, we have no training in that responsibility. If you want an interesting education, research the education that Prince Charles received, and what he has given his sons as well for their future roles.

We certainly do not have any responsibility, except over our families. I dare say that most of us have no inclination to want to even be a king. We are quite happy to remain mere peasants, subject to someone else, without any ambition to take on such a weighty task as having hundreds of thousands or millions of people hanging on our every word. We simply do not want the headache. It is a huge responsibility; and the way that this world is right now, we would not want to have any responsibility for anything happening in it, do we?

However, we in the Churches of God do not have the luxury of shirking or refusing such a responsibility. It is what God has called us to become. It is the office that He desires us to fulfill.

You will be a king!

He deems it, in fact, a fitting reward for our preparation for His kingdom, for that is what He is working on, and He is going to make sure that we have what it takes to do the job in the kingdom. In fact, if you think about it, He will have thousands of children to fill those positions of kingship in the Millennium. And that is, I believe, the major reason why the Millennium will be so wonderful, for there will be an abundance of truly Godly leadership all over the world. He can just insert one of His children as leader in a given

area, and He knows that the leadership in that area is going to be just like His own.

Today, we are going to take a look at the subject of kingship from a slightly different view than I have taken before. I actually gave the essence of this sermon to the folks at the campout this past summer in North Carolina, so I apologize beforehand for those who may have heard all this already. But, I have changed things just a bit, so maybe it will be fresh for you all.

Now, you have heard me speak about the principle of "first mention" before. It is a very important Bible study tenet. It is a study practice that places heavy emphasis on scriptures first mentioned of a subject or a term. The first mention of that term or subject sets the tone for the basic meaning for the remaining scriptures in the Bible following it. What we have in a first mention is a key or clue as to the Bible's approach to that particular subject or term.

For instance, the word, "serpent," first appears in Genesis 3:1, and it gives us a bit of definition there, "The serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field." And, as you search through, and study out, and think about that term and idea afterward through the rest of the Bible, it treats serpents in a very similar way throughout. Obviously, the serpent is a stand-in symbol for Satan the Devil. That is a clue. The fact that Satan used the form of a serpent to deceive Eve, and cause Adam to sin, is another clue. And so, in just about every instance thereafter, serpents are seen negatively as crafty, deceptive, and destructive creatures—evil, like Satan.

Even in the place where Jesus said that we should be, "Wise as serpents, harmless as dove..." though He gives it a bit of a positive spin, it still sprouts from the original understanding of how "serpents" are. So, the tone is set for us already in Genesis 3:1.

So the same principle is true for the word "king." If you think about it, kingship—rulership—is a major theme in the Bible. It is a major theme in history and society at large. You must have good leadership. So then, we should expect that the first mention of "king" to be significant.

And it is, indeed!

However, before we get into this, turn to Genesis 10 and see the brief biography of Nimrod. It is going to be here that we first find the word and term "kingdom."

Genesis 10:8-12 Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like

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Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LOORD." And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city).

Here we have the word "kingdom" in verse 10. In Hebrew, this contains the tri-literal, or tri-consonantal root, which is the same for the word "king." In this case, it is (transliterated) MLK. Often, what the Hebrews did was take this root, and by changing the vowel points they would form words with similar meanings, or tense. All words, then, with the Hebrew equivalent of MLK would have something to do with king, kingship, rulership, royalty, and so on.

Here, "kingdom" is translated from the word "mamlakah." This term can also be rendered as realm, dominion, reign, royal power, or simply as the adjective, royal. So, we have what we might call a precursor to the first mention of the word "king."

I would like to look at the context of this word a bit, because this first mention of the word "kingdom," or I should say, the first mention of this tri-consonantal root (MLK) appears in the midst of Nimrod's little biography. The subject is Nimrod who is described as a mighty one, and mighty hunter before the Lord. Since it has been discussed before, I will only mention that this phrase, "mighty hunter before [instead of] God" indicates that he was an enemy of God. He was in rebellion against God. He was against God and His way of life. And, He was actively working to make others think like him, and rebel against God, too.

Even Nimrod's name suggests rebellion and revolt. He was a tyrant.

Now, we should note that his hunting ability, being a "mighty hunter before the Lord," has been emphasized quite a bit, that he used his hunting abilities to protect the people to gain the people's adherence to his cause.

Well, God continues on from there and describes his kingdom. So, he was obviously more than just a local hunter. He was also a ruler. Notice what it says in verse 10, "The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar." What this tells us is that in the beginning he started in Babel, and then pulled in some nearby cities in the land of Shinar. But then it tells us in verse 11 that he went to Assyria, and he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen. So not only did he start with a few small cities down near Babel in Shinar, but he then added to his realm neighboring areas north of him in Assyria. And so over several years, he expanded from

just one city-state to an empire that covered the central Tigris and Euphrates river valleys—most of Mesopotamia.

What happened here? What we see between the lines is that Nimrod expanded his kingdom. But, how did he do that? Do you suppose he just went and said, "I see you have marauding animals. Let us kill a few." Does that sound like what he did? Did he go in and just kill a few lions, and so the people were willing, therefore, to give him allegiance? I do not think so. Reading between the lines, I believe he did this by forceful means—coercion, intimidation, and outright warfare. He was a warlord.

I do not think he hunted just beasts. I think he hunted men.

Consider this. I will not read Genesis 12 today, but you will find in the midst of chapter 12, starting in verse 10, that it talks about Abram going down to Egypt with Sarai, and when they got there Pharaoh found out how good looking Sarai was [she was 65!], and he wanted to add her to his harem. And so he takes her in, and as the story goes he does not release her until bad things begin to happen. Finally, Abram confesses that she is indeed his wife.

Okay now, I only need to say that Pharaoh is the Egyptian word that is generally understood as our word king. It means "great house." It implies that the ruler is the one who is over the greatest house of the kingdom. Here, we have another ruler in the Bible shown to us, an Egyptian king, and what is he shown doing? Taking things like a thief. What did he take? A person. He was a kidnapper. And what were his inclinations upon her? They were no good either. He was there only to get what he wanted, and to do with her as he pleased.

So here, already before we even get to the first instance of the word king, we have two examples of kings in revolt against God—one expanding his kingdom at the expense of others through some form of coercion, and the other being a tyrant and kidnapper with his evil designs on Sarai. So we get two examples before we get to the word "king."

This fits hand and glove with the first instance of the word king, found in Genesis 14.

Genesis 14:1-12 And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations, that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). All these joined together in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea) [the district of the Dead Sea].

Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled. In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him came and attacked the Rephaim in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh Kiriathaim, and the Horites in their mountain of Seir, as far as El Paran, which is by the wilderness. [Amazingly detailed is it not?] Then they turned back and came to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and attacked all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazezon Tamar. And the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out and joined together in battle in the Valley of Siddim against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of nations, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five.

Now the Valley of Siddim was full of asphalt pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled; some fell there, and the remainder fled to the mountains. Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. They also took Lot, Abram's brother's son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

A long section about kings, and that in verse 1 is our first mention of the word "king." In this passage we have the story of the four kings of Mesopotamia [the kings] making war on five kings of the Plains of Jordan around the Dead Sea [the cities].

We can surmise from the actions described that the kings were very powerful. They had become so powerful that they were able to project their power down from Mesopotamia into the land of Canaan on toward the Gulf of Aqaba. They had expanded quite far out of their home territory.

The cities, on the other hand, were very wealthy. The land was rich, and they were on or near a major caravan route, both bringing them a lot of wealth. If you will recall from Genesis 13 the story of Abraham and Lot, and the need to separate their households and flocks, and offering Lot the opportunity to choose where to go. And Lot chose Sodom, which was the wrong choice because with their wealth came much corruption also, which they were already known for, especially the homosexuality in the area of Sodom.

Lot chose that place because it was a well-watered land for grazing and watering his flocks. And it says there that "it was like the garden of the Lord." When people looked upon the area of the Plains of Jordan, they imagined the Garden of Eden; it was

paradise. So that is where he chose to settle down.

Then, this passage tells us what happened after that. These Mesopotamian kings had subjugated the cities, and that condition had remained so for about twelve years. In the thirteenth year they decided to rebel against these kings. Then, in the fourteenth year, those kings came back to reassert themselves over them, and teach them a lesson or two.

So, they marched down the east side of the Jordan, conquering as they went, and must have had a respectable sized army with them. However, they bypassed the cities of the plain temporarily and went all the way down to the Gulf of Aqaba. Then, they went northwestward into the Sinai to the area of Kadesh attacking all them. Then they came northeastward back toward those cities of the plain and attacked them from the rear.

The cities, then, met the kings in the valley where the Dead Sea is now. They were routed. They fled to the mountains, just as Lot did later. Without anyone to stop them, the kings entered the cities, took the food, valuables, and some of the people, and then began the return trip to Mesopotamia.

Then Abraham took his 318 man army, and caught them unawares, and recovered Lot, and the valuables.

So now, we need to focus on the kings and their actions. What did they do? They made war. They expanded their control. They subjugated many peoples. They plundered the cities. They killed and raped; they enslaved; they stole; they created mayhem and destruction.

This fits with what we saw with Nimrod and with Pharaoh. In our first three examples of carnal rulers or kings as shown in the Bible, we see kings of this earth, of this world, all doing the same things—using their power to control; to steal; to expand; to take, take, take, and take some more to themselves.

With these examples God provides an accurate description of earthly monarchs. They are rulers of power who want to expand their control, their wealth, and willing to run over anyone to achieve these goals. Their will is to dominate everything.

"What are we going to do tonight? We are going to make plans to take over the world, just like we do every night!" This is the sort of thing kings of this world think about—how can they have more power, how can they expand their rule, how can they get more people under their rule?

And why is this? For they believe they have all the answers. And besides this, once they get the big head, they want to be respected, and obeyed. They come to the point where they want to be revered and worshipped. That is what happened to Nimrod. He is our first example.

The second examples are the Pharaohs, who were also worshipped as gods. I do not know about those kings of Mesopotamia, but they probably had some of this thing going on, too.

They are "sons of the gods"—demi-gods as they have come to be known as—come down from heaven, greater in power than anybody else. They know best. So, follow them.

So we see a very vivid portrait of earthly kings.

Do you know that immediately after these passages, God gives us a very concise portrait of a Godly king? Please turn to Genesis 14 again.

Genesis 14:18-20 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he [Abram] gave Him [Melchizedek] a tithe of all.

To me, this is all very interesting, that once we see the true form of earthly kings that God gives us this contrast in Melchizedek just to set the record straight. In this little bit we see Melchizedek serving by bringing out bread and wine, and other hospitality; giving of His substance for their sustenance, and enjoying doing it too.

Do we see Him taking anything? Do we see Him expanding His control? Do we see Him killing? No. Melchizedek, Priest of God Most High blesses and gives. He blesses Abram and honors and glorifies God Most High—the one we know as the Father. If we are correct in understanding Melchizedek to be the One we know as Jesus Christ, then the One He is talking about is God the Father in heaven. "Blessed be Abram of God Most High." He saw that Abram was a fellow servant. And notice that He does not put Abram down, but He brings him into the relationship in fellowship with Him and in fellowship with the Father. They form their own community based on giving and blessing.

In addition to His giving behavior, He encourages Abram to give a tithe. So, you might

say that His witness made Abram turn around and also give. He taught giving to Abram, and Abram gave. And things only got better. There was no war. There were no bad feelings. There was cooperation.

We should also recall here that the name Melchizedek means "King of Righteousness." And, He was also, "King of Salem," which means king of peace. This all suggests that righteousness and peace are the two primary characteristics of the Godly king as shown in this passage. These are the ones that God wants us to focus on immediately. He is the King of Righteousness, and the King of Peace—righteousness and peace. He follows the law, He is just and fair, while on the other hand peace implies relationships, two parties coming together, and being at-one with one another.

These are the two ideas that we are to understand about becoming a Godly King. We need to be righteous, and we need to promote peace with one another.

All of this is opposed to the kings of this world who are invariably leaders in iniquity of all sorts, and who seem to thrive in times of conflict. They are just the opposite. They are sinners and war makers, not righteous and peaceful.

Juxtaposed like this, it is easy to see the contrast between worldly kings and Godly kings. In this chapter we have examples of what to avoid and what to model ourselves after.

Jesus verifies this for us in the New Testament. Here in this passage in Luke 22, the disciples were thinking like worldly kings. And so Christ sets them straight.

Luke 22:24-30 Now there was also a dispute [a rivalry] among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you [take this personally] a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

His style of leadership in a word is "service." This is the kind of King He is. We saw that

in the form of Melchizedek, and we also see it in the gospels.

Service is the sincere giving of the self to benefit others. It does not have to be monetary, it can be done in many other ways. What we see in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ is how He fulfilled this, and how He gave us a wonderful example of a godly King.

In fact, He served so rigorously throughout His entire life that He kept on serving all the way until death. He died serving mankind. His last act was the most magnificent act of service that there has ever been on the face of this earth.

Before closing, I want to mention that Jesus mentions in verse 26, "let him be as the younger." This suggests that He is speaking about people who have the least right to rule or to inherit. The youngest one in a household, even in a kingly line, though he may have some sort of nobility place upon him like a title, is far away from the throne. It was the oldest brother usually who would inherit. That is the same way in just about any family. Usually the best things were given to the firstborn, and then the others got what was left. And so He says, in this case, "You disciples should serve and behave as though you do not deserve what you have been given."

So look at it this way: Our kingship should be marked by humility in the fact that we have been given this great honor even though we do not deserve it. A person who realizes this and knows this, will serve. It will be at the forefront of his mind all the time, "By the grace of God, go I."

It is this kind of leadership that will set us apart from the world, make us a fitting witness for God, and prepare us for His Kingdom.