

FROM JUDGES TO MONARCHY

SHIMON BAKON

After resolving the inheritance of the daughters of Zelophehad, Moses addressed the Lord: *'Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them, and who may come in before them, and who may lead them out, and who may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd'* (Num. 27:16-17). The Midrash, with exquisite insight into the soul of Moses, comments: "What prompted Moses to make this request immediately after the chapter dealing with the laws of inheritance? Moses said: 'Now is the time to make my claims. If daughters inherit, then it is only right that my sons inherit my glory'" (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:14). God's response was that it was Joshua who would lead the people: *And the Lord said unto Moses: 'Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is spirit, and lay thy hand upon him'* [*ve-samakhta et-yadekha alav*]¹ (Num. 27:18).

Moses' request for a dynasty is rejected, implying that leadership is not a matter of inheritance but must be deserved. Indeed, it is the loyal Joshua who leads the Tribes of Israel into the Promised Land; and when he dies, unlike Moses, no new leader is proclaimed.

THE THEOCRACY OF THE JUDGES

Prior to the establishment of a kingdom, first of Saul and then of David, came the period of the Judges. These were the Judges: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson. Significantly, none of the judges (except Abimelech son of Gideon) were followed by heirs. As if to stress this point, the Bible goes out of its way to portray the sons of great fathers as being unworthy, even corrupt, to assume leadership. This holds true even of the sons of Eli the Priest and of Samuel. The ascent to power of Abimelech, the son of Gideon's concubine, was achieved by intrigue.

With the aid of money obtained from the house of Baal-berith, *Abimelech hired vain and light fellows, who followed him. And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal . . .* (Judg, 9:4-5). Abimelech was proclaimed king by the people of Shechem, but his rule was characterized by violence, deceit, and dishonor (Judges 9:22-55).

The Judges attain leadership as they were sent by the word of the Lord to act as saviors. It must be emphasized that this type of theocracy was not rule by a clergy but government by Divine guidance. Even Eli the Priest in Shiloh was an integral part of the Judges: *He had judged Israel forty years* (I Sam. 4:18). Yet there is no specific indication that he was head of the priests.

VOX POPULI

Moses and Aaron among His priests, And Samuel among them that call upon His name (Ps. 99:6). *Then said the Lord unto me: Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people; cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth* (Jer. 15:1). The Psalmist and Jeremiah did not exaggerate by placing Samuel in the ranks of our greatest leaders. Indeed, as his career is recorded in the Book of Samuel, he emerged as a great statesman. Samuel was a true kingmaker, anointing two monarchs: Saul and David. He was also a circuit judge, because *he went from year to year in circuit to Beth-el, and Gilgal, and Mizpah; and he judged Israel in all those places* (I Sam. 7:16). After the destruction of Shiloh, Samuel made Ramah, where he built an altar to the Lord, a religious center. He was the founder and head of a prophetic order: *And Saul sent messengers to take David; and [then] they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them,* (I Sam. 19:20). These prophets may have assisted Samuel in promoting the idea of theocracy.

Prompted by the dual threat of the Philistines to the south and the Ammonites to the east, *all the elders of Israel... came to Samuel unto Ramah. And they said unto him: 'Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways; now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.'* But Samuel was displeased (I Sam. 8:4-5). Rashi explains that Samuel was not opposed to monarchy as such but averse to the people's request for *a king to judge us like all the nations*. However, the plain reading of the text gives the impression that Samuel "took it as a personal affront"² and felt slighted when asked to retire

from his post as chief magistrate. After praying to the Lord for guidance, Samuel realized that this demand amounted to a rejection of God's sovereignty. However, the Lord advised him to pay heed to the voice of the people.

MISHPAT HA-MELUKHAH: THE MANNER OF THE KINGDOM

Samuel displayed commendable restraint by ignoring the affront to his dignity. Steeped in the age-old tradition of theocracy, and being its fervent proponent, he devoted himself to establishing a monarchy that would accord with his deepest convictions. What finally emerged was a special concept of monarchy that accepted Israelite kingship while rejecting the notion of *a king to judge us like all the nations*.

Saul's anointment by Samuel is a well known story in the Bible. Samuel is aware of Saul's impending arrival and that he is the one whom God has chosen to be king of Israel: *Now the Lord had revealed unto Samuel a day before Saul came, saying: 'Tomorrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be prince over My people Israel'* (I Sam. 9:15-16). Samuel anoints Saul and reveals three signs that will confirm his election. One is meeting a band of prophets which will lead him to prophesy among them. The fact that Saul is overwhelmed by the prophetic spirit (I Sam. 10:10-11) may herald the transition from prophetic leadership to monarchy, but a monarchy that will be subject to God's directives as transmitted through the prophets.

Now that he has found the right man, Samuel calls an assembly at Mizpah and upbraids the people for its rejection of God by insisting on the rule of a king. Samuel has each tribe and family draw lots until Saul is elected. The text does not elaborate on the precise way lots were drawn. Radak suggests that it was through the Urim and Thummim. At any rate, Samuel presents Saul to the people, declaring: *'See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?'* And all the people shouted, and said: *'Long live the king!'* (I Sam. 10:24). The casting of lots, after God has already chose Saul, serves only as a public demonstration that God has picked Saul to be king. The fact that the people loudly approve is not necessary here, since God has clearly indicated His choice. However, it does set a historic precedent, the people's approval of a new king being a significant element in his appointment.

THE RULES OF MONARCHY

Samuel then expounded to the people the rules of monarchy: *Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom* [mishpat ha-melukhah], *and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house* (I Sam. 10:25). What was written in this book? *Metzudat David* explains that it was the regulations copied from the Torah. Radak and Abrabanel state that it was about the rights of the king that Samuel warned the people in I Samuel 8:11-17, after prefacing that admonition with a reference to *mishpat ha-melek* ("the manner of the king"), virtually the same term as the one used here. I suggest that the book also contained the ideas found in the anointment narrative that we have seen: 1) The king is chosen by God; 2) The king is subject to the authority of God (theocracy); and 3) The king needs to be approved by the people: *'Long live the king!'* In a sense, this anticipates constitutional monarchy. After his successful campaign against the Ammonites, Saul receives the entire people's approval: *Then said Samuel to the people: 'Come and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there.'* *And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal* (I Sam. 11:14-15).

The institution of monarchy was now firmly established. Unfortunately, the great vision of Samuel fell into neglect, although some later awareness of the monarchy's limitations did exist. Thus even the powerful King Ahab could not legally appropriate Naboth's vineyard. Generally, however, kings did as they saw fit, ignoring the rules of the Torah.

Around 200 years after Samuel's time, as recorded in II Kings, chapter 11, there was a temporary revival of his vision. In 843 BCE, Athaliah, the daughter of Queen Jezebel, usurped the throne of Judah by extirpating all of the royal seed apart from Joash, a child kept hidden for six years with Jehoiada the chief priest. In the seventh year, Jehoiada succeeded in eliminating Athaliah. *Then he brought out the king's son, and put upon him the crown and the insignia* [edut]; *and they made him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said: 'Long live the king!'* (II Kgs. 11:12). There is some controversy as to what *edut* signified. Some say it was a Torah scroll, others maintain that it was the crown [*nezer*] (TB *Avodah Zara* 44a). I believe, and this is supported by Kiel and Gordon,³ that the *edut* was *Sefer ha-*

Malkhut, which contained the rules of monarchy compiled by Samuel, for we read: *And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people; between the king also and the people* (II Kgs. 11:17). In this way, Samuel's goal, establishing a kind of constitutional monarchy beholden to the Torah, was again fulfilled.

NOTES

1. The Hebrew term *semikhah* is used to denote the ordination of a rabbi.
2. Nosson Scherman, ed., *The Prophets: I-II Samuel* (Brooklyn, NY: ArtScroll Mesorah Publications, 2002) p. 49.
3. Yehudah Kiel, ed., *Da'at Mikra: Melakhim Bet* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1989) p. 597; S. L. Gordon, *Perush Sefer Melakhim* (Tel Aviv: Hotza'at Sifrei Galil, 1992) p. 61.



עשה תורתך קבע

THE TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

January	Psalms	56 – 83
February	Psalms	84 – 111
March	Psalms	112 – 139
April	Psalms	140 – 150
	Proverbs	1 – 17
May	Proverbs	18 – 31
	Job	1 – 14

