

Have you noticed that governments often want to control many facets of citizens' lives? That fact is, political movements tend to share one overarching worldview: that government should govern citizens' virtues! What they disagree about is just which virtues their particular movement or party wants to force!

Today, we're going to work to gain strategic understanding of how God has structured governance to work by looking at key markers in God's economy as to kings and laws. Yes, for some key insights, we'll compile key moments in the Bible and in political history pertaining to kings and laws. And to gain the best illumination, we actually *won't* start in chronological order. So here we go...

By about 1000 BC, God had delivered Israel from enemies for 270 years or so through judges like Gideon. But Israel asked for kings to "be like other nations." Samuel the prophet felt he'd been rejected, but God told him that it was all about Israel *rejecting God as their King*. Then God had Samuel tell Israel all the onerous things kings would do to them...from taxes to conscription. But Israel still wanted humans instead of God as King! *Wow...a chosen people with a long history with a faithful God wanted human kings instead!*

Second, we go back to the Garden of Eden. God gave Adam and Eve total dominion over everything...except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There was just that one rule from God: *do not eat of that tree* (Genesis 2:17). So, God-obedient, God-choosing self-governance was God's ideal plan for the Garden, including self-governance over a forbidden act. *That set the much-later stage for the Cross.*

Third, directly after Eden, God allowed humanity to continue to self-govern as to their behaviors. And a man named Enoch "walked with God" and was taken up to heaven without dying (Genesis 5:22-24). Yes, Enoch's God-choosing self-governing was clearly manifested in righteous, very close alignment with God.

But, besides Enoch in his era walking the earth, many rebelliously chose to reject righteous alignment with God as their path. So, God sent the Great Flood...yet still allowed the righteous Noah and his family to actually build their way out of the culture surrounding them—all according to God's plan! Noah's self-governed, God-choosing, righteous alignment with God unfolded for years in the very midst of gross evil!

Fourth, we are told of human kings ruling domains on the earth for the first time in Genesis 14. Abraham's nephew Lot was taken captive, so Abraham went to war and defeated several kings. Then on Abraham's victorious trek home, he encountered Melchizedek. *But just who was Melchizedek?* Well, he was either the Son of God or as close to what's called a Biblical "type" of Jesus as he could possibly be!

And why might we think that? Because Melchizedek's very name means *King of Righteousness* and he was *King of Salem*—yes, that means the *King of Peace*, and that physical domain was surely what is identified historically as *Jerusalem*. And Melchizedek, also called the *Priest of God Most High*, offered up bread and wine, and pronounced that God delivered Abraham from his enemies. So, here's the thing: in the New Testament *who else but the Son of God Jesus Christ* is King of Righteousness and King of Peace and God's High Priest and the ruler of Jerusalem for eternity? Well, *Abraham surely grasped something*: yes, he honored Melchizedek with a tenth of everything. And that tithe had nothing to do with the law...it happened long before the Law was given! Abraham was simply righteously honoring God for an alignment that was already there and fully functioning! *Melchizedek was both a King and a Priest in God's economy!*

Fifth, we move forward to some early Middle East history. The Israelites were subjected in slavery to the Pharaoh, Egypt's King-equivalent. Then God delivered the Israelites using His vessel, Moses. But after their miraculous Red Sea deliverance from the Pharaoh, *without delay* the Israelites grumbled against God and His provision! That means they discontentedly grumbled against God as King! Yes, they rejected smooth alignment and God-choosing righteousness! Only then—and here I do mean *only then*—did God give the Israelites the law! You see, God did not set up the Law of Moses as the best choice for governance—it was for the rebellious who didn't listen to God! Jeremiah 11:8 says this: "Yet [the Israelites] did not obey [My voice] or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart. Therefore I brought

upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not." Yes, the Law of Moses was not God's best choice for governance—the *first, sufficient choice was obeying God's voice!*

Sixth is a very key and timely repeat of our opening: even after the Law was given and the period of the Judges, Israel rejected God as King! *And Israel the nation continues to reject Jesus as King to this very day!*

Seventh, even while delivering both Israel and Judah numerous times in the times of the Old Testament, God allowed both kingdoms to fall to their enemies—Israel the Northern in 721 BC and Judah the Southern Kingdom in 588 BC. Clearly, their human kings and the people themselves were *not* obeying God's voice!

Eighth is the magnificent, utterly unique sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. The unshakeable Kingdom of God was heralded by Jesus Himself as being near (Mark 1:14-15)! But then and ever since, God has still allowed human kings—and doing that until He puts all of humanity's kingdoms under His feet.

Ninth, while under the established governance of the Roman empire, the early church often thrived in its mission given by God: yes, to go forth and make disciples from Jerusalem and the places beyond!

Tenth, the Roman Catholic church emerged and used its "throne and altar" approach to European politics and supported a so-called "divine right of kings," forging key alliances into the Holy Roman Empire which lasted from about 800 AD to 1806 AD—a span including the start of the Reformation. In the latter portion of that Empire, competing nations claiming either the Pope or the Reformers fought horrific political wars.

Eleventh, within that frame, actually in 1215, forty barons in Britain compelled King John to sign the Magna Carta, the "Great Charter"—the landmark document for the start of real liberty from earthly kings. About 400 years later, English jurist Edward Coke worked to establish the "rule of law" for English-speaking peoples; this was intended that the exercise of the law was orderly...not just arbitrary actions by rulers.

Twelfth, America declared its independence from England and won the ensuing war. Then the U.S. forged its Constitution as a republic, to include the First Amendment protecting religious freedom. But America's third President Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1819: "...rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will, within the limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add 'within the limits of the law'; because law is often but the tyrant's will, and always so when it violates the right of an individual."

Thirteenth, in the U.S., citizens experience an ever-growing tyranny of the law via the creation of massive regulation by the legislatures and the administrative bureaucracy of both state and national governments.

And last, from the beginnings of the Church—evidenced by Paul's letter to the Romans where he teaches that believers are "not under the law but under grace"—much of Christianity has had a very difficult time migrating away from their often-cherished choice of a hard yoke of the law of Moses that they themselves cannot even keep or migrating away from their culture strategy of working to impose virtue laws both on believers as well as the unbelievers in the nations they occupy. Accordingly, such unbelievers are often unaware of the clear gospel that's routinely neglected by Christians in favor of their forcing of virtue laws.

Hey, government is indeed mandated to "bear the sword" (Romans 13)—which of course would mean a sword actually borne for capital crimes like murder and rape—but surely not for a lack of belief or virtue! Civil law is surely not a "king" for a lack of perceived virtue! So, just what does it mean, then, when Jesus said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Mark 12:17) Yes, while Christians are to obey the governments over them, that supposed governing can easily devolve into incapable "virtue cram-downs" by unforgiving tyrannies of governments, whether that governing be by woke progressives or legalistic purists who themselves can't keep God's law. *But God's Way is aligned righteous to the Father found only through the crucified King, Jesus. And that's a liberating reality!*

So, are you yearning more for a king or for a government that sets its virtue rules for everyone to follow—whether Christian or not? Or are you yearning more for a government that bears the sword for capital crimes by murderers and rapists but leaves virtues to individuals and their freely-chosen associations?

A&A: Application & Action

1. Are you yearning more for a king or for a government that will set virtue rules for everyone to follow—whether “Christian” or not? Or are you yearning more for a government that bears the sword for capital crimes by murderers and rapists but leaves virtues to individuals and their freely-chosen associations and communities? Either way, give real-world, historical examples of your best ideals.
2. Are you known by your family, your neighbors, your workplace for a posture of loving grace and a righteousness aligned with a sacrificial Christ...or a posture of rules and legalism? Discuss.
3. Are you fully living Paul's teaching that as a believer, you are “not under the law, but under grace?” Have you been truly liberated in Christ, operating in a fullness of peace with the King of Righteousness, Jesus? Discuss.