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OUTLINE 1

The will of God regarding the office of king (Deuteronomy 17:14-20)

As mentioned in the preface, we start this study guide with an introductory outline. In this outline we will not focus on the history of David and Solomon, but direct our attention to a section from the Law of Moses.

The book of Deuteronomy contains the teachings of the law which Moses had to give to the Israelites shortly before they entered Canaan. For that reason, these laws are mostly directed towards their life in Canaan. The first words of our passage are characteristic of Deuteronomy: “When you enter the land...” The lifestyle of God’s people must be distinct from the Canaanites’. The Law of Moses emphasizes this point. The Church may not adopt worldly practices. The same principle applies to the office of king.

The section from the law which is under discussion is important, for it tells us what God’s purpose is with respect to the office of king. If the Israelites get a king then he must be a “king according to God’s will” (remember the title of this study guide). One could say that this passage provides a profile of an Israelite king.

1. Theme

The theme of our passage can be found in v.15. It is of extreme importance that the Israelites will only set over themselves a king whom the LORD will choose (see section 2). Yet, we do need to deal with v.14 also.

Upon reading v.14 you may draw the conclusion that it is not yet certain if Israel will ask for a king once they have entered the promised land. However, the question is not whether or not the Israelites will receive a king - they will.

He gave them promises concerning the office of king a long time ago, because the LORD knew that Israel would need a king. You can read this in Genesis 17:6 and 49:8 and 10.

The LORD does not disapprove of a request for a king as such. However, in 1 Samuel 8 the LORD **does** object to their request (v.7). We will find out how to reconcile this apparent contradiction.

The request of the Israelites in 1 Samuel 8 appears to be in agreement with the words of Deuteronomy 17:14 (look at the last words of v.5: "...such as all the other nations..."). They appear to be faithful to the words of the law when they lay their request before Samuel. However, this request was not based on sincere faith and trust in their heavenly Father. Look at the first words of v.5. The reaction of the LORD makes it clear that the Israelites did not have the proper intention in mind. The actual reason why they wanted a king did not conform to God's purpose for the office of king. The difference centers on this key element.

Why does God declare that Israel needs a king? For his plan of salvation. He saved his nation out of the house of bondage, out of Egypt. Israel may live in freedom and be at peace with the LORD. It is essential that Israel's salvation is preserved. The victory of the exodus must be preserved.

Israel has been set on a path that leads to the great Saviour, Jesus Christ. For that reason, Israel needs to cling to the law of the LORD; justice and peace must be maintained. While Israel did not have a king, justice and peace was in short supply. And that was definitely not God's fault. He regulated the lives of his people very well. For instance, read what the LORD prescribed with respect to justice in the previous passages (16:18-20; 17:8-13). But Israel is stubborn. Even the judges do not always take the law to heart. Read 1 Samuel 8:1-3 and compare this with Deuteronomy 16:19. What a difference!

Israel's reason for requesting a king has nothing to do with their zeal to maintain the law of the LORD. They want a military leader. Afterward they openly admit that. You can read that in 1 Samuel 2:20. They think they need a powerful king who can lead them in battle against their enemies. A number of judges

indeed filled that role, but only on a **temporary** basis. After he died, a judge was not immediately replaced by another judge. Thus, the LORD's reason for appointing a king in Israel is to cause ongoing reformation. The Israelites wanted a king in order to display their might on a permanent basis. Even though the LORD is their glory and strength, they want to impress the surrounding nations by having a king of their own. Consequently, this request for a king indicates a rejection of the LORD. The LORD confronts them with this conclusion (1 Samuel 8:7).

***Question 1:** To what extent may we conclude that we are dealing here with sin against the first commandment?*

***Question 2:** In v.16 the LORD says that a king “must not make the people return to Egypt to get more [horses]”. Does this ordinance have any bearing on the fact that Israel's salvation needs to be preserved? Justify your answer.*

2. Verses 14 and 15

We will now pay attention to the main idea of both verses. Not Israel, but God determines who will be suitable for the office of king. After all, this king must be a king according to God's will. It was for this reason, as you can read in 1 Samuel, that king Saul was chosen by the LORD (9:17; 10:24).

***Question 3:** Is 'being chosen by the LORD' the opposite of 'being chosen by people? What about our elders and deacons? They are chosen by the congregation. Does this imply that they are not chosen by the LORD?*

The king must be chosen from among the brethren. There must be unity between the Israelites and their king in the service of the LORD. A king ought to lead the people in that service.

3. Verses 16 and 17

Question 4: Wherein must a king NOT seek his strength? Wherein must he seek his strength (see v.18)? Compare this with other emperors of the East (e.g. Nebuchadnezzar).

5. The work of the LORD in this account

If you were to examine the history of the kings of Israel, you would conclude that many kings did not submit themselves to the ordinances given in Deuteronomy 17. Very often they did not reign as “kings according to God’s will”. David, however, does. This does not mean that he keeps the law of the LORD perfectly. His imperfections prove that he is not the great Saviour. God’s people had to wait for this Saviour until the coming of David’s Son and Lord: the Lord Jesus Christ. However, in his position as king, David did walk in the ways of the LORD (e.g. 1 Kings 3:14). In this manner, David is subservient to God’s plan of salvation. He seeks justice and peace for his nation and leads Israel onward on the road to the coming Saviour. In God’s eyes, that is the heart of the matter.

The Christ came to the earth as king according to the will of God. He was obedient in every aspect of his office. He did not seek his glory in worldly power. He was pleased to be one with those whom he called “brethren”, for whom he suffered and died. This king delivered us from our bondage to sin. Now that he is enthroned in heaven he does everything that is necessary to protect us and keep us in his salvation.

See the conclusion of HC, LD 12, Q&A 31. He guides us to the great day of salvation. Thus, our Saviour continues to work towards the completion of God’s plan of salvation.

6. For the introduction

1. In order to demonstrate that there was a need for a king, you can point to the phrase that is repeated in the book of Judges: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” (17:6 and 21:25; see also 18:1 and 19:1) Things were not going well in Israel without a king. 1 Samuel 2 shows that the Israelites expected to receive a king (v.10, 35: “my anointed”).