

## King as priest and judge, LeGrand Baker

The king's position as judge and religious leader was not just ornamental. In the Old Testament, there was only a fine, sometimes invisible, line between who was king and who was prophet. Saul assumed he could preside over the army's sacrifices contrary to Samuel's instructions.<sup>1</sup> Van Dam shows that David used the Urim and Thummim.<sup>2</sup> The "wisdom" Solomon sought from the Lord was the understanding to know how to judge his people in righteousness. Both Solomon and Hezekiah saw the Saviour (2 Chron. 1:7-12, Isaiah 38.<sup>3</sup>). In the Book of Mormon, Nephi, Benjamin, Mosiah all fit the ideal Old Testament pattern. The Temple at Jerusalem was next to the king's palace, and some have suggested it may have been used by the kings as a royal chapel. An evidence that the king was the presiding High Priest is that when Hezekiah received a letter from the Assyrian king threatening to invade Israel, he walked into the temple, took the letter into the Holy of Holies, "spread it before the Lord," and essentially said, "Read that and tell me what I am supposed to do about it."<sup>4</sup> It is also important to note that when Hezekiah was so sick he thought he was going to die, it was Isaiah through whom the Lord answered the king's prayer. That is an important story because it shows that while we know many things about the Old Testament religion, there are many things we do not know about the relationship between the king and the prophet, and how the church was organized.<sup>5</sup>

One thing we do know is that the king's paramount ecclesiastical duty was to preside over his nation as its righteous teacher and judge. Solomon understood this.

7 In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee.

8 And Solomon said unto God, Thou hast shewed great mercy unto David my father, and

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1 Samuel 12:1-35.

2 For a discussion of the use of the Urim and Thummim by kings and prophets of the Old Testament see, Cornelis Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim, A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Indiana, Eisenbrauns, 1997), p. 187-88, 247-250, 266-69.

3 The account does not actually say Hezekiah saw Jehovah. There is a first person account purportedly written by the king himself, in which he says that when he was ill, and expected to die. "I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living." He did not want to die at that time, and the reason seems to be that he wanted to see the Saviour before his death. The Lord heard his prayer and Isaiah promised him that he could live another 15 years. After that Hezekiah wrote, "What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it...for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." (Isaiah 38: 11, 15, 17) That last statement is the kind of assertion that is often associated with a *sode* experience.

4 2 Kings 19: 14-19. The way I wrote it is a far cry from being an actual quote! Seven hundred years later, in Jesus' time, tradition says that only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies. But by then there was no Jewish king and the High Priests had assumed much of the authority of the pre-exilic kings.

5 Except for a number of references to a group of people who are called "the prophets," there is no evidence of an organized church in the Old Testament. However, Nephi's comment when he was pretending to be Laban, that Zoram "supposing that I spake of the brethren of the church," (1 Nephi 4:26) supports the proposition that there was such an organization, at least at the end of the First Temple period.

hast made me to reign in his stead.

9 Now, O Lord God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude.

10 Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great?

11 And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king:

12 Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like. (2 Chronicles 1: 7-12 )

A judge upholds his society and helps it functioning peacefully. To do that the judge has four primary responsibilities: 1) He may find guilty, condemn, and punish those who do wrong. 2) He may exonerate or justify those who are wrongfully accused. When one is found “not guilty,” that judgement removes both the accusation and the stigma of the supposed crime. 3) He acknowledges, commends, and sometimes rewards, those who do right. He is an arbitrator; he chooses among options and sometimes decides what actions others will perform. 4) His authority is the umbrella under which the society functions. With that authority he both reinstates and sustains the innocent who have been accused; and with his authority he provides the environment which protects those who do right. A righteous – even an honorable society – can only exist if its judiciary is independent and free of bribes and corruption. In America, for example, the independent and powerful legal system, more than any other of our other institutions, has been responsible for preserving our freedom. In the ancient world, where the king was the supreme court, the integrity of the whole society rested upon the integrity of the king.

That two-fold nature of kingship – to be king/protector and priest/teacher/judge – was as true of the Eternal King Jehovah as it was true of his earthly emissaries, the kings of Israel. Jehovah had covenant name-titles which represented those responsibilities. For example, as commanding general he was “Lord of Hosts,” that simply meant “master of the armies.” As High Priest, he had a number of names including El Elyon (the Most High God), the God of Abraham, the Eternal Judge, the Saviour, the Redeemer, the advocate with the Father. As the deliverer of Israel and teacher of Moses, he was I AM, – the One who is sufficient unto himself – in that name-title he is both King and Priest.

In the end of time, when all the enemies of good are defeated, I suppose Jehovah's role as commanding general will become inoperative, but his functions as Judge – to uphold the righteous – will remain forever. Similarly, even though the earthly king's military duties might be temporarily central for the preservation of his nation, they were ultimately tentative. But his duties as judge remained constant. Abinadi suggests that when a king is brought before Jehovah to be judged it will be on his worthiness in his role as a judge. In terms of the ultimate meaning of this life, being a righteous judge may be the most fundamental principle of all. One finds it in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Psalm where it is explained as the reason the members of the Council are to be sent to the earth; in the Beatitudes where it is called “mercy”; in Moroni 7 it is called “charity”; in the D&C and elsewhere it is called “the Law of Consecration”; and in section 76 it is called being “just” in a context that describes it as the primary characteristic of the resurrected gods. <sup>6</sup>

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6 The verses I have in mind were 76:50-70. They contain almost every idea of sacral kingship

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and priesthood that is found elsewhere in the scriptures.