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HONOR THE KING. YES, BUT EMULATE THE KING?

Abstract

In seeking to discern God's will for their lives, top-echelon Christian leaders would do well to consider the biblical ideals embedded in the concept of kingship. The paper explores the biblical characteristics of the ideal king with the goal of identifying lessons for contemporary top-echelon leaders. It also reviews the connection between creation and kingship and the biblical concept of the Kingship of God, biblical guidance available in the selection, anointing and annual renewal of the king, and the duties and role of the king. It draws lessons regarding contemporary top-echelon Christian leaders in terms of personal traits, behaviors and relationships with the members of the communities or organizations they serve.

Keywords: Abraham, anointing, behaviors, coercive power, community, covenant, creation, David, dominion, duties, Hezekiah, international relations, Joash, Josiah, kingship, leadership, legitimate power, mediator, Messiah, moral authority, personal power, power, priests, referent power, reward power, relationships, role, royal Psalms, selection, shepherd, structural limits, top-echelon leaders, Torah, traits, wealth

Introduction

It's not popular to talk about biblical leadership in terms of kingly power and authority. We should honor the king (1 Peter 2:17), pray for the king (1 Timothy 2:1-2), and obey the king (Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13). If we engage in bad behavior we should fear the king (Proverbs 14:35; 20:2; Romans 13:3; 1 Peter 2:14). But emulating the king comes much farther down the list of what the Christian leader should do. Be like a servant, yes (1 Kings 12:7; Proverbs 15:33; 16:19; 22:4; 29:23; Matthew 23:11; Mark 9:35-37; 10:43; Luke 9:46-48; 22:24-27; Philippians 2:7-11; 1 Peter 4:8-11), but behave like a king, not so much. We are uncomfortable about kingly power, in part because of the narrative in 1 Samuel 8 indicating that the desire for an earthly king resulted from rejecting God as King. We are more comfortable encouraging lead-

ers to follow the model of Jesus the Gentle, Good Shepherd (1 Peter 5:2-3). Mention a king as the model of leadership and we get uncomfortable. And, for good reason: Many of the biblical kings were scoundrels. Further, since the Bible was written earthly monarchs, emperors, dictators, prime ministers, and even democratically elected presidents have not covered themselves in glory. We are ambivalent about trusting them as role models.

In seeking to discern God's will for their lives, top-echelon Christian leaders would do well to consider the *biblical ideals* embedded in the concept of kingship. Leaders at all organizational levels might benefit from such consideration. However, upper echelon leaders of complex organizations face different types and intensities of pressures compared with mid-level leaders. They must share leadership with their close subordinates. This means, among other things, that they must take the lead in navigating the collective cognitions, capabilities and interactions of the organization's top leadership team. The higher up in the organization chart they advance the more competing interests in the organization, and the organizational politics that result from these interests, impact the work of leaders (Nelson & Quick, 2004, p. 257; Perrow, 1986). Further, senior level leaders are responsible for thinking about their organization as a whole as it responds to changes in the outside environment. Their viewpoint encompasses all the work processes and how they interrelate, as well as systems both inside and outside the organization. With experience, they develop the skill of tolerating ambiguous situations while setting the strategic agenda for the future. These are the leaders who must use their discretion to find a way through the maze of multiple plausible alternatives (Hambrick, 2007). As they mature, top-level leaders change their thinking patterns from looking at mere events in their day-to-day work, to observing the behavioral patterns across the organization over time and eventually to see the broader systemic influences and structures at play (Senge, 1990; Table 1 shows the different levels of thinking described by Senge.). Such maturity often comes along with an increased degree of discretion in decision making and with those temptations to abuse their authority. Leaders facing these challenges may find inspiration and guidance from the biblical record of kingship.

Table 1

creates in order to serve His creation, so all human beings are to have dominion over the earth in a way that leads to harmony, peace and well-being. Humans serve each other not to oppress or diminish each other

men—are divinely appointed extensions of God’s kingship (Alexander, 1998; Psalm 45; Selman, 1989).

As Supreme King of the Universe, God is the one in charge of appointing earthly kings and removing them from earthly power (1 Samuel 2:7-8; Psalm 72:11; Proverbs 8:15-16; Daniel 2:21, 37). This concept began at creation and then continued when God called Abraham to leave his family and homeland. God promised to make of Abraham a great nation (Genesis 12:1-3), a divine promise that included the ownership of much land and many descendants. The books of Joshua, Judges and Samuel up to the reigns of David and Solomon portray the gradual fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. The books of 1 Kings and 2 Kings portray the reversal of this process beginning with the second twenty years of Solomon’s reign and continuing with the leadership of unfaithful kings, culminating eventually in the deportation of Israel to foreign nations (Alexander, 1998; see also Matthew 1:17).

While Abraham is not described in terms of being a king, he is presented in a role similar to his contemporaries who were kings (Genesis 14:1-24; 21:22-34; 23:6). In more direct terms God promises to Abraham that kings will come from his seed. The same promise is repeated to Jacob (Genesis 17:6, 16; 35:11). When David is installed as king, God, the King of the Universe, chooses him as prince, and makes a covenant with him in terms similar to the terms promised to Abraham. Although it is a mere human who sits on the royal throne, this throne is really God’s throne (1 Samuel 13:14; 2 Samuel 7:1-17; 1 Chronicles 17:4-14; 28:5; Psalm 132:12, Alexander, 1998).

The Bible writers portray God as the ultimate King who selects and appoints earthly kings to serve Him and His people. Even when the earthly kingship was initiated, the fundamental principles of the theocracy of the state, whereby God was the supreme Leader, were not expected to change.

Selection, Anointing, and Annual Renewal

Under the model of the ideal kingship, not just anyone could become

all citizens. From another point of view, the anointing was an essential characteristic of a king, marking him as in a special relationship with God to be the king and shepherd of Yahweh's people (2 Samuel 5:1-3; Psalm 2:6).

In the anointing, the emphasis was on God's relationship with the

Duties and Role of the King

Slight differences of opinion exist regarding the primary duty of the

because the standard of behavior among the community would rise no higher than that of the king, he was to be a model to others by observing the law. This would promote humility, reminding him that he was one from among many in the community.

We find references to the responsibilities of the king in several places in Scripture. When Samuel installed King Saul as the first king of Israel, he announced to the people the rights and duties of the king and then wrote these in a book (1 Samuel 10:25). In the second book of Samuel, we have recorded in some of David's last words a poetic description of the king's role (2 Samuel 23:3-4). Likewise, Proverbs records many duties of the king: see Proverbs 1-9:28; 14:35; 16:10, 12-15; 19:12; 20:2, 8, 26, 28; 21:1; 22:11; 25:2, 5-7; 29:4, 14 (Kenik, 1976).

When Joash was anointed king, he was brought to the tabernacle, where he was given two important royal symbols: a crown and the book of the testimony for reading and following, a probable reference to the written law of the covenant (2 Kings 11:12; see also Exodus 31:18; 32:15; Deuteronomy 4:45; 6:17, 20; 1 Kings 2:3-4; 1 Chronicles 22:13; Psalm 19:7; 119:13-16). Duties of the king are counted in several of the Psalms. In Isaiah 11:1-5 we see the potential of the monarchy to bring wellbeing and harmony to the land. This must be nothing less than shalom (peace) (cf. Psalm 1:1-3).

We often think of the High Priest as fulfilling the role of mediator between God and the people. While this is true, ancient kings also did the work of mediator through their role of preserving the primacy of the Torah in bringing about the life of covenantal shalom for the nation (Brueggemann, 1997, p. 600-621; Launderville, 2003). Examples of kings who were faithful in fulfilling their mediation role include David, who became the gold standard for all kings to emulate thereafter, Hezekiah, though he was criticized by Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 37:15-21; 38:2-7), and young Josiah, who implemented significant reforms in the land when he came to power.

If the king was to be faithful in leading the nation in following the Torah, his power must be limited to prevent him from becoming a tyrant. He was not authorized to develop such a large standing army that he could then use it to rule as a tyrant over the nation. He was not to take into marriage too many daughters of foreign kings, since doing so would create too many complicated entanglements for the nation. He also was limited in terms of the wealth he could develop, thus preventing him from taking extraordinary control over the economic system so that he could

Table 2
Structural Limits on Biblical Kingly Power

In these structural limitations we see tensions. First, the king should

land and the people (1 Kings 14:8; 15:3-5; Acts 13:22). David was sincerely and humbly repentant. He listened to the prophet who held up the mirror of his failings.

David, one of the most popular of Israel's kings, is highly revered even to this day. The people saw in David a fulfillment of Moses' desire for a national leader who served as a shepherd (Numbers 27:17; 2 Samuel 5:1-5). More is written in the Bible about David than about any other King. David was a complex individual who displayed a variety of character traits. On the one hand, he was a caring individual. On the other hand, he displayed the ability to use violence to consolidate his power. He showed the ability to form strong friendships. He exhibited extraordinary oratory skills and astute political skills. Yet he succumbed to temptations.

David had his failings but he was effective as a leader, becoming the most powerful of Israel's kings. He was not content to sit back and discuss the moral virtues of a situation, though he did plenty of contemplation, as illustrated in the many Psalms he wrote. He was a man of action as a change agent. He unified the nation and built it into a world power among the community of nations. He unified the government under a common set of religious values designed, in part, to administer justice.

One of the great turning points in David's life was his adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, whom he sent into battle to be killed. This act of treachery, coercion and disloyalty had a major impact on the nation. Violence and disloyalty plagued David the rest of his reign, even though he experienced a complete spiritual transformation through accepting responsibility for his actions and repenting. This violence began in his household and spread throughout the kingdom, becoming the chief reason David was unable to complete his dream of building a temple (McConkie & Boss, 2001).

David's humility was maintained when he was unable to prevent deception and dissent in his own family, including Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 13-15) which occurs, in part, because justice is not as extensive as David had hoped and dreamed (Bosworth, 2006; McConkie & Boss, 2001). Had justice been experienced throughout the whole kingdom, there would have been no occasion for Absalom to rebel. In spite of his failings, for David success resulted from God's action. It does not come from amassing power or living by one's own abilities, talents or rules (Klein, 2004). Although David's relationship with God was not always perfect (2 Samuel 12:1-12; 2 Samuel 7), he was close to God. Unlike his predecessor, David consulted with God before making key

decisions (1 Samuel 23:2,4; 30:8; 2 Samuel 2:1; 5:19; cf. 2 Samuel 22:10,15; Bosworth, 2006).

Just before king David died he added to the wise counsel of Moses, proclaiming that God's intent for national leaders was to fear God, rule over the nation with righteousness, and do good for the nation (2 Samuel 23:1-4). So loved was he that ever after David became the benchmark when considering the characteristics of the ideal king. The ideal king is a person whose heart is transformed by the Holy Spirit, signified by the anointing with oil at the coronation ceremony. He is God's Anointed One, holy to serve God, the ruler of the whole earth and the people, in a way similar to the priests being anointed for their spiritual service. He is a mediator between God and the nation. His close relationship with God gives him the power to bring peace, wellbeing, justice, and harmony to the land. With the covenant as his guide, the king is the protector and restorer of the people, not only from foreign powers but also from moral lapses. Under his reign good fortune would result for everyone (Mowinckel, 2005/1956).

In spite of the weaknesses of his leadership, the people loved David and looked forward to the day when someone like him would again rule in their land. Building his leadership on David's example of a spiritual

serve. They encourage followers to identify with the needs of the organization rather than the leader. Charismatic leaders like King Ahab who have a negative effect on followers focus their use of power on themselves, encouraging followers to become devoted to themselves rather than to the organization and its needs.

When charismatic leaders take actions that are perceived by followers to be too risky, they make enemies. For example, the leader who is overly optimistic in a way that is unwarranted may not see the flaws in his or her vision. One could speculate that Solomon may have experienced hubris. Also, if the leader does not listen to the community, he or she risks having followers who become disillusioned (Yukl, 2010). The experience of Rehoboam is hauntingly reminiscent of this behavior.

In the kingship we see present issues related to the types of power identified by French and Raven (1959). The king held the highest office or rank in the land; he had *legitimate power of position* as the people believed that the king was appointed and anointed by God. Support of the king by community leaders, such as prophets, priests and elders, validated God's choice. The people believed that a king such as David had supernatural power; he had *expert power* in organizing and war. As discussed above, the king's *personal power* came through his charismatic traits and behaviors that were accepted by the people. As the king's charisma had its impact with followers, they offered the king *referent power* by identifying with him and aspiring to be like him. The people believed that the king could bring to reality the rewards of the covenant promises. Such *reward power* was part of the hope Israel maintained for future kings. Israelite kings also had *coercive power* as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Through international diplomacy the king could make commitments that he expected citizens to help him fulfill. With a simple word the king could relegate any citizen either to a life of ease or a life of terror. If the king wanted to build a palace, he simply could coerce workers into slavery to perform the work necessary to achieve the goal.

Lessons for Contemporary Leaders

If we were to take the biblical ideal for the top-echelon leader and apply it to today's top-echelon leaders, what leadership traits, behaviors and relationships might we expect to see?

Following the biblical standard for the ideal king, contemporary top-echelon leaders will work to develop personal attributes of humility and integrity (DuBrin, 2010; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Russell, 2001; Woolfe,

2002). From the perspective of morality, the work of the top-level leaders in making decisions and taking actions is primarily a moral activity. Indeed, it is the top-level leader's responsibility to manage the moral values of the organization (Barnard, 1938; Boatright, 1988; Collier, 1959; Hosmer, 2008).

Top-level leaders who follow the biblical ideal will come to see their role as mediators of covenantal moral values in all that the organization does. They will take the lead in evaluating the decisions their organizations face. The more complex the organization, the more top-level leaders will focus on the moral values and ideology which are at the foundation of the organization's mission and vision.

Upper echelon leaders will develop a confident but humble understanding that goals are achieved not because of their personal attributes and actions but because the whole community subjects itself to higher principles. This will require that everyone be willing to be changed. In this personal change, leaders must take the lead. Successful leaders' willingness to be transformed will equal their desire for their organizations to be transformed. The top-echelon leader will come to understand his or her spiritual calling and how this calling is to be used in service to others.

One of the significant dimensions of biblical kingship was the voluntary subjection of the king to structural limitations outlined in Deuteronomy 17. Opportunities for abuse of authority and corruption abound in contemporary organizations (Aguilera & Vadera, 2008). The application of ethical norms in the form of structural constraints is an issue that continues to challenge boards of trustees, particularly where the upper echelon leaders are charismatic. Amassing great numbers of horses, wives and wealth may not be the specific temptations of contemporary top-level leaders of religious organizations; the fundamental principles and the inherent tensions, it seems, still apply, but in contemporary ways. For example, limiting the upper echelon's political power so that such power cannot be used against constituents in a religious nonprofit organization is as important as the political power that may be needed to protect that same organization from attacks of errant ideology or social unrest.

The top leaders in religious nonprofit organizations will not be involved in marrying daughters of upper echelon leaders in other organizations. However, the principle of structurally minimizing the inter-organizational entanglements applies when upper echelon leaders participate in interlocking directorates. Interlocking directorates involve

the top-echelon leader of one organization sitting as a member of the board of trustees of another organization and vice versa. If the two organizations are dependent upon each other for resources, the interlocking directorates may be needed for coordination of limited resources. At the same time, such interlocking memberships increase the risk of undermining accountability. For example, accountability can be undermined if the administrator of nonprofit organization A limits discussion of the moral issues involved with the allocation of resources in organization B, for fear that when the administrator of organization B comes to his board meeting, he may become an unwanted voice for moral reform.

In terms of leader behaviors and leader-follower relationships, the reader is invited to ponder how a leader's experience would change if he or she participated in an annual service of humility where at that service representatives of the followers subject the leader to open questions regarding the leader's behavior in terms of moral principles. Many contemporary leaders are comfortable calling a town hall-style meeting to discuss the organizational issues and strategic decisions. However, most would avoid personal questions, and most subordinates would avoid asking such questions for fear of reprisal. Top-echelon leaders can achieve this level of openness and integrity only by being firmly and confidently rooted in a standard of morality outside themselves—an objective standard that is embraced by followers. For the Christian leader this means firmly grounding the life of the leader in God's Word. Leaders would behave in ways that communicate to followers that the leader is one of them and not part of an elite class of human beings deserving of special treatment. Leaders would be careful not to allow a wide disparity between themselves and followers in terms of personal resources and perks. Top-echelon leaders, if they followed the biblical example of the ideal king, might hold themselves to a standard higher than those subordinates are given.

Table 3 attempts to summarize these and other elements of how the ideal kingship applies to contemporary leadership in terms of personal attributes, behaviors, and relationships.

kingship in mind. Contingency theories of leadership can be considered from the perspective of the ideal king. The biblical record of kingship appears on the surface to include a focus on traits as well as on relationships.

The definition of leadership should be reviewed in the light of the biblical record of kings and their ideal role. For example, should leadership be defined primarily as influence, as a set of individual leader traits, as a process, or as a relationship? (Northouse, 2007; Rost, 1993; Yukl, 2010). Should leadership be defined primarily in terms of being a

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