

Judaism and Democracy: Encounters, Obstacles, Possibilities

Unit 1: The Bible Against Monarchy

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I. The Stripped-Down King

1. Deuteronomy 17:14-20	1. דברים יז:יד-כ
¹⁴ If, after you have entered the land that your God יהוה has assigned to you, and taken possession of it and settled in it, you decide, “I will set a king over me, as do all the nations about me,” ¹⁵ you shall be free to set a king over yourself, one chosen by your God יהוה. Be sure to set as king over yourself one of your own people; you must not set a foreigner over you, one who is not your kin. ¹⁶ Moreover, he shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since יהוה has warned you, “You must not go back that way again.” ¹⁷ And he shall not have many wives, lest his heart go astray; nor shall he amass silver and gold to excess. ¹⁸ When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching written for him on a scroll by the levitical priests. ¹⁹ Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life,	¹⁴ כִּי־תָבֹא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ וּיְרַשְׁתָּהּ וַיִּשְׁבְּתָהּ בָּהּ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲשִׁימָה עָלַי מֶלֶךְ כָּכֹל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתַי: ¹⁵ שׁוּם תִּשֹּׂם עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ מִקְרֵב אַחֶיךָ תִּשִּׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ לֹא תוּכֹל לֵתֵת עָלֶיךָ אִישׁ נָכְרִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־אַחֶיךָ הוּא: ¹⁶ רַק לֹא־יִרְבֶּה־לוֹ סוּסִים וְלֹא־יֵשִׁיב אֶת־הָעָם מִצְרֵימָה לְמַעַן הַרְבּוֹת סוּס וַיְהִי אָמַר לָכֶם לֹא תִסְפּוּן לָשׁוּב בְּדֶרֶךְ הַזֶּה עוֹד: ¹⁷ וְלֹא יִרְבֶּה־לוֹ נָשִׁים וְלֹא יִסּוּר לִבּוֹ וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא יִרְבֶּה־לוֹ מְאֹד: ¹⁸ וְהָיָה כְּשִׁבְתּוֹ עַל כִּסֵּא מַמְלָכְתּוֹ וְכָתַב לוֹ אֶת־מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל־סֵפֶר מִלְפְּנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם:



so that he may learn to revere his God יהוה, to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching as well as these laws. ²⁰ Thus he will not act haughtily toward his fellows or deviate from the Instruction to the right or to the left, to the end that he and his descendants may reign long in the midst of Israel.	¹⁹ וְהִיְתָה עִמּוֹ וְקָרָא בּוֹ כָּל־יְמֵי חַיָּיו לְמַעַן יִלְמַד לִירְאָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת־הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה לַעֲשֹׂתָם: ²⁰ לְבִלְתִּי רוּם־לִבּוֹ מֵאֲחָיו וּלְבִלְתִּי סוּר מִן־הַמְצָחָה יָמִין וּשְׂמָאוֹל לְמַעַן יֵאָרֶיךָ יָמִים עַל־מַמְלַכְתּוֹ הוּא וּבָנָיו בְּקֶרֶב יִשְׂרָאֵל:
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Against Excess

Chariots:

2. Psalms 20:8	2. תהילים כ:ח
⁸They [call] on chariots, they [call] on horses, but we call on the name of the LORD our God.	⁸אֱלֹהִים בִּרְכֵב וְאֱלֹהִים בְּסוּסִים וְאֶנְחֵנוּ בְּשֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ נִזְכִּיר:

3. I Samuel 8:11	3. שמואל א ח:יא
¹¹He said, "This will be the practice of the king who will rule over you: He will take your sons and appoint them as his charioteers and horsemen, and they will serve as outrunners for his chariots.	¹¹וַיֹּאמֶר זֶה יְהִי־הַמַּשְׁפָּט הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִמְלֹךְ עֲלֵיכֶם אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם יִקַּח וְשָׂם לוֹ בְּמִרְכָּבָתוֹ וּבְפָרָשָׁיו וְרָצוּ לִפְנֵי מִרְכָּבָתוֹ:

Wives:

4. 1 Kings 11:3	4. מלכים א יא:ג
³He had seven hundred royal wives and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned his heart away.	³וַיְהִי־לּוֹ נָשִׁים שְׁרוֹת שֶׁבַע מֵאוֹת וּפְלִגְשִׁים שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וַיִּטּוּ נָשָׁיו אֶת־לִבּוֹ:



Wealth:

5. 1 Kings 12:4	5. מלכים א יב:ד
⁴“Your father made our yoke heavy. Now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke which your father laid on us, and we will serve you.”	⁴אֲבִיךָ הִקְשָׁה אֶת־עֲלֵנוּ וְאֶתָּה עֲתָה הִקְלֵם־עֲבֹדֹת אֲבִיךָ הִקְשָׁה וַיִּמְעֲלוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן עָלֵינוּ וְנַעֲבֹדָךְ׃

Instead...

Studying Torah:

6. Deuteronomy 6:7	6. דברים ו:ז
⁷Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up.	⁷וְשִׁנַּנְתֶּם לְבָנֵיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשֹׁבְתְךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבִלְכֹתְךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ׃

7. Patrick Miller, <i>Deuteronomy</i> (1990), pp. 148-149
The law of the king places upon that figure the obligations incumbent upon every Israelite. In that sense, Deuteronomy’s primary concern was that the king <i>be the model Israelite</i>. This is seen especially in the fact that the essential responsibility of the king is to read and study the law constantly, “that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them” (v. 19)... The fundamental task of the leader of the people, therefore, is to exemplify and demonstrate true obedience to the Lord for the sake of the well-being of both the dynasty and the kingdom. King and subject share a common goal: To learn to fear the Lord (v. 19).

8. Richard D. Nelson, <i>Deuteronomy</i> (2002), p. 222
The king becomes the ideal citizen, a model Israelite, more a student of the law than a ruler.



II. Monarchy and/as Rebellion Against God

9. I Samuel 8:1-22	9. שמואל א ח:א-כב
¹When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons judges over Israel. ²The name of his first-born son was Joel, and his second son's name was Abijah; they sat as judges in Beer-sheba. ³But his sons did not follow in his ways; they were bent on gain, they accepted bribes, and they subverted justice. ⁴All the elders of Israel assembled and came to Samuel at Ramah, ⁵and they said to him, "You have grown old, and your sons have not followed your ways. Therefore appoint a king for us, to govern us like all other nations." ⁶Samuel was displeased that they said "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to God, ⁷and God replied to Samuel, "Heed the demand of the people in everything they say to you. For it is not you that they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their king. ⁸Like everything else they have done ever since I brought them out of Egypt to this day—forsaking Me and worshiping other gods—so they are doing to you. ⁹Heed their demand; but warn them solemnly, and tell them about the practices of any king who will rule over them." ¹⁰Samuel reported all the words of God to the people, who were asking him for a king. ¹¹He said, "This will be the practice of the king who will rule over you: He will take your sons and appoint them as his charioteers and horsemen, and they will serve as	¹וַיְהִי כַאֲשֶׁר זָקֵן שְׁמוּאֵל וַיִּשָּׂם אֶת־בָּנָיו שֹׁפְטִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: ²וַיְהִי שְׁם־בְּנוֹ הַבְּכוֹר יוֹאֵל וְשֵׁם מְשֻׁנָּהוּ אַבְיָה שֹׁפְטִים בְּבֶאֱרַ שֶׁבַע: ³וְלֹא־הָלְכוּ בְּנָיו בְּדַרְכּוֹ וַיִּטּוּ אַחֲרֵי הַבָּצַע וַיִּקְחוּ־שֹׁחַד וַיִּטּוּ מִשְׁפָּט: ⁴וַיִּתְקַבְּצוּ כָל זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־שְׁמוּאֵל הַרְמָתָה: ⁵וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הִנֵּה אַתָּה זָקֵנָת וּבְנֶיךָ לֹא הָלְכוּ בְּדַרְכֶּיךָ עֲתָה שִׁמָּה־לָּנוּ מֶלֶךְ לְשֹׁפְטֵנוּ כָּכֹל־הַגּוֹיִם: ⁶וַיֵּרַע הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי שְׁמוּאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמְרוּ תִּנְהַלֵּנוּ מֶלֶךְ לְשֹׁפְטֵנוּ וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל־יְהוָה: ⁷וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־שְׁמוּאֵל שְׁמַע בְּקוֹל הָעָם לְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יֹאמְרוּ אֵלֶיךָ כִּי לֹא אֶתָּךְ מֵאִסּוּ כִּי־אֶתִּי מֵאִסּוּ מִמֶּלֶךְ עָלֵיהֶם: ⁸כָּכֹל־הַמַּעֲשִׂים אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ מִיּוֹם הָעֵלְתִּי אוֹתָם מִמִּצְרָיִם וְעַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וַיַּעֲזְבֵנִי וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים כִּן הָמָּה עֹשִׂים גַּם־לָּךְ: ⁹וַעֲתָה שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלָם אֲךָ כִּי־הָעֵד תַּעֲדִי בָהֶם וְהַגַּדְתִּי לָהֶם מִשְׁפַּט הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִמְלֹךְ עָלֵיהֶם: ¹⁰וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה אֶל־הָעָם הַשְׂאֵלִים מֵאִתּוֹ מֶלֶךְ: ¹¹וַיֹּאמֶר זֶה יְהִי מִשְׁפַּט הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִמְלֹךְ עָלֵיכֶם אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם יִקַּח וְשָׂם לוֹ בְּמִרְכָּבָתוֹ וּבִפְרָשָׁיו וְרָצוּ לִפְנֵי מִרְכָּבָתוֹ: ¹²וְלָשׂוֹם לוֹ שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים וְשָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְלַחֲרָשׁ חֲרִישׁוֹ וְלִקְצֹר קְצִירוֹ וְלַעֲשׂוֹת כָּל־יִמְלַחֲמָתוֹ וְכָלִי רִכְבּוֹ:



outrunners for his chariots.

¹²He will appoint them as his chiefs of thousands and of fifties; or they will have to plow his fields, reap his harvest, and make his weapons and the equipment for his chariots.

¹³He will take your daughters as perfumers, cooks, and bakers.

¹⁴He will seize your choice fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and give them to his courtiers.

¹⁵He will take a tenth part of your grain and vintage and give it to his eunuchs and courtiers.

¹⁶He will take your male and female slaves, your choice young men,^a and your asses, and put them to work for him.

¹⁷He will take a tenth part of your flocks, and you shall become his slaves.

¹⁸The day will come when you cry out because of the king whom you yourselves have chosen; and God will not answer you on that day.”

¹⁹But the people would not listen to Samuel’s warning.

“No,” they said. “We must have a king over us,

²⁰that we may be like all the other nations: Let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles.”

²¹When Samuel heard all that the people said, he reported it to God.

²²And God said to Samuel, “Heed their demands and appoint a king for them.” Samuel then said to the men of Israel, “All of you go home.”

¹³וְאֶת־בְּנוֹתֵיכֶם יִקַּח לְרֶקֶת וּלְטַבָּחוֹת
וְלֵאֲפוֹת:

¹⁴וְאֶת־שְׂדוֹתֵיכֶם וְאֶת־כְּרָמֵיכֶם וְזִיתֵיכֶם
הַטּוֹבִים יִקַּח וְנָתַן לַעֲבָדָיו:

¹⁵וְזָרְעֵיכֶם וְכְרָמֵיכֶם יַעֲשֶׂה וְנָתַן לְסָרִיסָיו
וְלַעֲבָדָיו:

¹⁶וְאֶת־עַבְדֵיכֶם וְאֶת־שִׁפְחוֹתֵיכֶם

וְאֶת־בְּחֹרֵיכֶם הַטּוֹבִים וְאֶת־חֲמוֹרֵיכֶם
יִקַּח וַעֲשֶׂה לְמַלְאָכָיו:

¹⁷צֹאנֶיכֶם יַעֲשֶׂה וְאֶתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לוֹ לַעֲבָדִים:

¹⁸וְזַעֲקֶתְם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא מִלִּפְנֵי מֶלֶכְכֶּם

אֲשֶׁר בְּחִרְתֶּם לָכֶם וְלֹא־יַעֲנֶה יְהוָה

אֶתְכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא:

¹⁹וַיִּמָּאֲנוּ הָעָם לִשְׁמֹעַ בְּקוֹל שְׁמוּאֵל

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא כִּי אִם־מֶלֶךְ יִהְיֶה עָלֵינוּ:

²⁰וַהֲיִינוּ גַם־אֲנַחְנוּ כְּכָל־הַגּוֹיִם וְשִׁפְטָנוּ

מִלְכָּנוּ וַיֵּצֵא לִפְנֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם

אֶת־מִלְחַמָּתָנוּ:

²¹וַיִּשְׁמַע שְׁמוּאֵל אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הָעָם

וַיַּדְבֵּרֵם בְּאָזְנוֹ יְהוָה:

²²וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־שְׁמוּאֵל שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי

וְהִמְלַכְתָּ לָהֶם מֶלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל

אֶל־אֲנָשֵׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵכוּ אִישׁ לְעִירוֹ:



III. Solomon's Failure

10. I Kings 11:1-13	10. מלכים א יא:א-יג
¹King Solomon loved many foreign women in addition to Pharaoh's daughter—Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Phoenician, and Hittite women, ²from the nations of which God had said to the Israelites, "None of you shall join them and none of them shall join you, lest they turn your heart away to follow their gods." Such Solomon clung to and loved. ³He had seven hundred royal wives and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned his heart away. ⁴In his old age, his wives turned away Solomon's heart after other gods, and he was not as wholeheartedly devoted to Adonai his God as his father David had been. ⁵Solomon followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Phoenicians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ⁶Solomon did what was displeasing to God and did not remain loyal to God like his father David. ⁷At that time, Solomon built a shrine for Chemosh the abomination of Moab on the hill near Jerusalem, and one for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites. ⁸And he did the same for all his foreign wives who offered and sacrificed to their gods. ⁹God was angry with Solomon, because his heart turned away from Adonai, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice ¹⁰and had commanded him about this matter, not to follow other gods; he did not obey what God had commanded. ¹¹And God said to Solomon, "Because you are guilty of	¹וְהַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה אָהֵב נָשִׁים נִכְרִיּוֹת רַבּוֹת וְאֶת־בֶּת־פַּרְעֹה מוֹאֲבִיּוֹת עַמֹּנִיּוֹת אֲדָמִית צִדְנִית חִתִּית: ²מִן־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר־יְהוָה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא־תִבְאוּ בָהֶם וְהֵם לֹא־יָבֹאוּ בָכֶם אֲכַן יִטּוּ אֶת־לִבְכֶּם אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶם בָּהֶם דָּבַק שְׁלֹמֹה לְאַהֲבָה: ³וַיְהִי־לוֹ נָשִׁים שְׁרוֹת שְׁבַע מֵאוֹת וּפְלִגְשִׁים שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וַיִּטּוּ נָשָׁיו אֶת־לְבוֹ: ⁴וַיְהִי לְעֵת זָקֵנָת שְׁלֹמֹה נָשָׁיו הִטּוּ אֶת־לְבָבוֹ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְלֹא־הָיָה לְבָבוֹ שָׁלֵם עִם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו כְּלָבִב דָּוִיד אָבִיו: ⁵וַיֵּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה אַחֲרֵי עַשְׁתֹּרֶת אֱלֹהֵי צִדְנִים וְאַחֲרֵי מִלְכָם שִׁקְץ עַמֹּנִים: {ס} ⁶אֵץ יָבִנָה שְׁלֹמֹה בִמָּה לְכַמּוֹשׁ שִׁקְץ מוֹאֲב בָּהֶר אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם וּלְמֶלֶךְ שִׁקְץ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן: ⁷וְכֵן עָשָׂה לְכָל־נָשָׁיו הַנִּכְרִיּוֹת מִקְטִירוֹת וּמִזְבְּחוֹת לְאֱלֹהֵיהֶן: ⁸וְכֵן עָשָׂה לְכָל־נָשָׁיו הַנִּכְרִיּוֹת מִקְטִירוֹת וּמִזְבְּחוֹת לְאֱלֹהֵיהֶן: ⁹וַיַּתְּאֲנֶף יְהוָה בְּשֹׁלֹמֹה כִּי־נָטָה לְבָבוֹ מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו פְּעָמִים: {פ} ¹⁰וַיֹּצֵא אֵלָיו עַל־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְבָלְתִּי־לָקֵת אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְלֹא שְׁמֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְהוָה: {פ} ¹¹וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְשֹׁלֹמֹה יַעַן אֲשֶׁר הִיָּתָה־זֹאת עִמָּךְ וְלֹא שְׁמַרְתָּ בְּרִיתִי



this —you have not kept My covenant and the laws that I enjoined upon you—I will tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants. ¹²But, for the sake of your father David, I will not do it in your lifetime; I will tear it away from your son. ¹³However, I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give your son one tribe, for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.”	וְחִקְתִּי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי עָלֶיךָ קִרְעַת אֶקְרַע אֶת־הַמְּמִלְכָּה מֵעָלֶיךָ וְנִתְּתִיהָ לְעַבְדְּךָ: ¹²אֶךְ־בִּימֶיךָ לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂנָּה לְמַעַן דָּוִד אֲבִיךָ מִיַּד בְּנֶךָ אֶקְרַעְנָה: ¹³רַק אֶת־כָּל־הַמְּמִלְכָּה לֹא אֶקְרַע נִשְׁבֹּט אֶחָד אֶתֵּן לְבְנֶךָ לְמַעַן דָּוִד עַבְדִּי וְלְמַעַן יְרוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר בְּחִרְתִּי:
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IV. The Useless and Destructive Thornbush

11. Judges 9:8-15	11. שופטים ט:ח-טו
⁸“Once the trees went to anoint a king over themselves. They said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us.’ ⁹But the olive tree replied, ‘Have I, through whom God and humans are honored, stopped yielding my rich oil, that I should go and wave above the trees?’ ¹⁰So the trees said to the fig tree, ‘You come and reign over us.’ ¹¹But the fig tree replied, ‘Have I stopped yielding my sweetness, my delicious fruit, that I should go and wave above the trees?’ ¹²So the trees said to the vine, ‘You come and reign over us.’ ¹³But the vine replied, ‘Have I stopped yielding my new wine, which gladdens God and humans, that I should go and wave above the trees?’ ¹⁴Then all the trees said to the thornbush, ‘You come and reign over us.’ ¹⁵And the thornbush said to the trees, ‘If you are acting honorably in anointing me king over you, come and	⁸הָלוֹךְ הָלְכוּ הָעֵצִים לְמַשֵּׁחַ עֲלֵיהֶם מֶלֶךְ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לַזַּיִת (מְלֹכָה) [עָלֵינוּ]: ⁹וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הַזַּיִת הַחֲדָלְתִּי אֶת־דִּשְׁנִי אֲשֶׁר־בִּי וַיְכַבְּדוּ אֱלֹהִים וְאָנָשִׁים וְהִלַּכְתִּי לְנוֹעַ עַל־הָעֵצִים: ¹⁰וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָעֵצִים לְתֵאנָה לְכִי־אֵת מֶלְכִּי עָלֵינוּ: ¹¹וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הַתֵּאנָה הַחֲדָלְתִּי אֶת־מִתְקִי וְאֶת־תְּנוּבָתִי הַטֹּבָה וְהִלַּכְתִּי לְנוֹעַ עַל־הָעֵצִים: ¹²וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָעֵצִים לְגָפֹן לְכִי־אֵת (מְלוּכִי) [מֶלְכִּי] עָלֵינוּ: ¹³וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הַגָּפֹן הַחֲדָלְתִּי אֶת־תִּירוּשֵׁי הַמְּשַׁמֵּחַ אֱלֹהִים וְאָנָשִׁים וְהִלַּכְתִּי לְנוֹעַ עַל־הָעֵצִים: ¹⁴וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל־הָעֵצִים אֶל־הָאֶטָּד לֵךְ אֵתָה מֶלֶךְ־עָלֵינוּ: ¹⁵וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֶטָּד אֶל־הָעֵצִים אִם בְּאֶמֶת אַתֶּם מַשְׁחִים אֹתִי לְמֶלֶךְ עָלֵיכֶם בָּאוּ



take shelter in my shade; but if not, may fire issue from the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!’

חֹסֶה בְּצִלִּי וְאִם-אֵין תִּצָּא אֵשׁ מִן-הָאֶטֶד
וְתֹאכַל אֶת-אֲרֶז־הַלְבָּנוֹן:

12. Robert Gnuse, *No Tolerance for Tyrants: The Biblical Assault on Kings and Kingship* (2011)

This parable can stand on its own with meaning apart from the narrative in which it is found. You do not need to know the references to the aspirations of Abimelech to be king and how he killed all his brothers and half-brothers, save Jotham, the one who crafted the fable. The critique of kingship is clear simply within the parable itself. The power of the critique is carried by the humor of the story. The olive tree, fig tree, and vine all see their everyday function as more important than being kind over the trees. What does this say about kinship in general? These plants view the institution as rather worthless. Only the pathetic bramble is willing to be king, and he is worthless. Perhaps only worthless individuals become kinds, the parable implies. The pomposity of the bramble entertains. “Take refuge in my shadow” says the bramble. How paltry is the shadow that can be cast by the scrawny bramble. Further, the bramble declares, “let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.” Imagine a tiny bramble bush sprouting fire, and then imagine this fire destroying the most majestic trees known to the biblical audience. This is true sarcasm of kings and the pompous pride with which they comport themselves.

13. Dennis T. Olson, “The Book of Judges,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible* (1998)

The story of Abimelech is sometimes interpreted as a general indictment of any form of kingship or centralized government within Israel. However, Judges 9 and its fable indict a specific form of kingship characterized by gaining power through brute force and violence... In the final analysis, the book of Judges will support certain forms of kingship and centralized authority. The positive attributes of such a model of kingship for the book of Judges would include the following elements: (1) a dynasty or family line of rulers whom God would choose; (2) a king who would unite all Israel, not by force or violence, but by persuasion and an earned loyalty, and (3) a king who would be faithful and subject to God’s guidance and who would lead the people in devotion to the one true God of Israel. Abimelech fell short in every category. The politics of Abimelech– ruthless violence, hunger



for power, back-stabbing vengeance, irrational assault, the worship of other gods– are roundly condemned in the strongest terms in Judges 9.

V. We Are All Royalty

14. Genesis 1:26-28	14. בראשית א:כו–כח
²⁶ And God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” ²⁷ And God created humankind in the divine image, creating it in the image of God—creating them male and female. ²⁸ God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”	²⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְּדֹגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ: ²⁷ וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם: ²⁸ וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹּשׁוּהָ וַיְרִדוּ בְּדֹגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיַּי הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

Appendix

The Tannaim and the Monarchy

15. Sifre Deuteronomy, Shoftim, #156	15. ספרי דברים פרשת שופטים: פיסקא קנו
“And you shall say, I will set a king over me” (Deuteronomy 17:15): R. Nehorai says: This is to Israel's discredit, as it says: “... for they have not rejected you but they have rejected Me, that I should not be king over them” (1 Samuel 8:7). Said R. Judah: But is it not a command of the Torah that they should request a king, for it says: “... you	ואמרת אשימה עלי מלך, רבי נהוריי אומר הרי זה דבר גנאי לישראל שנאמר כי לא אותך מאסו כי אותי מאסו ממלוך עליהם אמר רבי יהודה והלא מצוה מן התורה לשאול להם מלך שנאמר שום תשים עליך מלך, למה נענשו בימי שמואל לפי



shall surely place a king over you" (Deuteronomy 17:15)! Why then were they punished in Samuel's time? Because they rushed matters. "Like all the nations that are around me" (Deuteronomy 17:15): R. Nehorai says: They sought a king to lead them to idolatry, for it says: "... that we also may be like all the other nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Samuel 8:20).	שהקדימו על ידם. ככל הגוים אשר סביבותי, רבי נהוריי אומר לא בקשו להם מלך אלא להעבידם עבודה זרה שנאמר והיינו גם אנחנו ככל הגוים ושפטנו מלכנו ויצא לפנינו ונלחם את מלחמתינו
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16. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 20b	16. תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף כ עמוד ב
Thus R. Judah said: Three commandments were given to Israel when they entered the land: [i] to appoint a king, [ii] to cut off the seed of Amalek, and [iii] to build themselves the chosen house. While R. Nehorai said: This section was spoken only in anticipation of their future murmurings, as it is written, And shalt say, I will set a king over me etc.	כן היה רבי יהודה אומר: שלש מצות נצטוו ישראל בכניסתן לארץ: להעמיד להם מלך, ולהכרית זרעו של עמלק, ולבנות להם בית הבחירה. רבי נהוראי אומר: לא נאמרה פרשה זו אלא כנגד תרעומתן, שנאמר בואמרת אשימה עלי מלך וגו'.

17. Sifre Deuteronomy, Shoftim, #157	17. ספרי דברים פרשת שופטים פיסקא קנז
<i>Som Tasim.</i> If he dies, appoint another to succeed him... Another explanation, <i>som tasim</i>. This is a positive command.	שום תשים, מת מנה אחר תחתיו... דבר אחר שום תשים עליך מלך, מצות עשה

18. Mekhilta to Deuteronomy (ed. Solomon Schechter)
The Temple precedes kingship. This is reasonable: "awe" is predicated of heaven and "awe" is predicated of earth; the heavenly kingdom is spoken of and the earthly kingdom is spoken of. Now just as we find that awe of heaven precedes awe of the earthly, so does the kingdom of



heaven precede the earthly kingdom ... For we find that when they wished to crown ... a king ... for it says: "for they have not rejected you but they have rejected Me .. ."

19. Gerald J. Blidstein, "The Monarchic Imperative in Rabbinic Perspective," *AJS Review* 7-8 (1983), pp. 15-39, at pp. 29-30

It was probably no accident, nor the result of a purely immanent dynamic, that tannaim circa 140 C.E. circulated a doctrine teaching that Israel lay under a divine command to appoint a king, build a Temple, and eradicate Amalek. Each of these three components resonates compellingly in second century Jewish history: national independence, restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem, the defeat and annihilation of Rome—leading to the Kingdom of God. It is difficult to decide whether this doctrine reflects midrashic propaganda leading to the revolt, or rabbinic justification of its legitimacy (and a pledge of faith to its smoldering remains) after its failure. In either case, we see the emergence of a firm and normative doctrine which either reworks older exegesis or bends verses to its need. It is very doubtful that R. Judah and his contemporaries were intent on defining the obligations of those Israelites who first crossed the Jordan alone; both terminology and tannaitic texts alike lead to the conclusion that we are dealing with the permanent normative structure of Judaism as these tannaim defined it.

