







13. How God’s People Failed – Part 1

Previously...

Since the creation of the world, most of mankind has continuously chosen to rebel against the Creator-God of the universe. Choosing to live apart from Him means choosing the path that leads to eternal death, the path chosen by Satan and the demons.

But because God loves mankind, He offers everyone the opportunity to escape the path of eternal death. He offers people everywhere the choice to be reconciled to Him and have eternal life. That choice involves believing in His promises about the offspring of the woman, the Saviour, who would come to take care of mankind’s sin problem and destroy Satan and evil

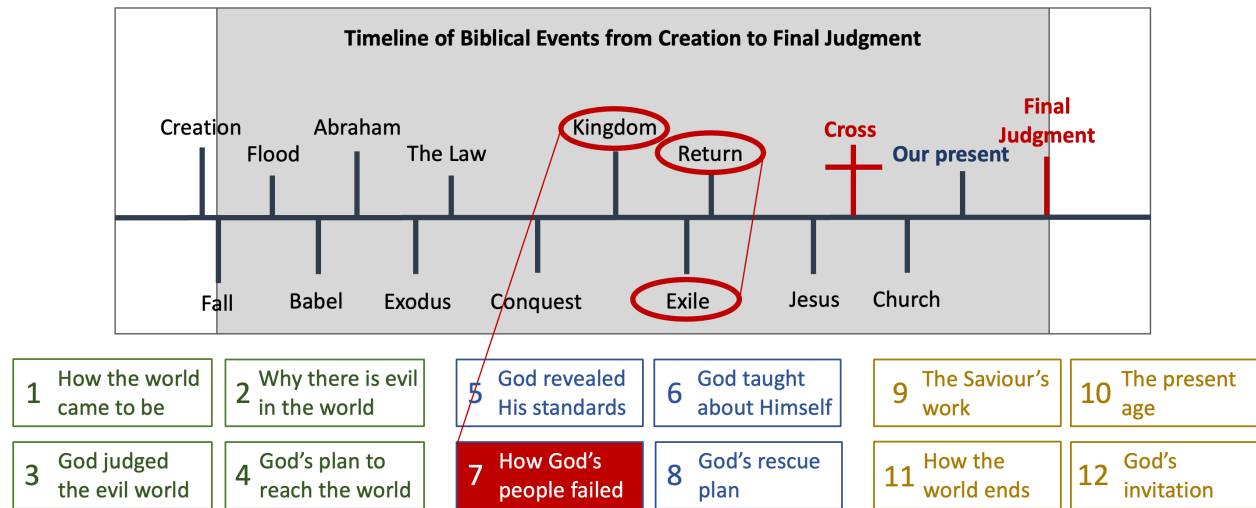
His plan involved working through Abraham and his descendants. First, God chose Abraham. Then He built Abraham’s family into the nation of Israel and rescued them from slavery in Egypt. After that, God led them through a time of nation building in the desert. He also gave them His good laws. Yahweh’s plan for Israel was to be a counterculture against the evil culture of the world. Israel was supposed to point people to Yahweh through the way they lived.

Kingdom of Man	Kingdom of God
Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Based on GRACE God would save man
Rejected God and His History and Truth	Election
 Babel	 God chose Abraham
 Egypt	 God saved Israel
 Canaan	God built Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Law ▪ National anthem ▪ Temple worship ▪ Feasts & festivals
	 God taught Israel about Himself: Period of the Conquest

Grey shows Israel becoming more and more like the Kingdom of Man

Later on, Yahweh led Israel into the land of Canaan, the land He had promised to Abraham and his descendants. As they moved into the land, God also used the Israelites to punish the evil Canaanites who had sinned beyond the limit that He was willing to temporarily tolerate. But God also warned the Israelites that they too would be ejected from the land if they became wicked.

We will see how, despite God's warning, the Israelites failed as well. And as God had warned, He did indeed kick them out of the land.



REBELLION AND CHAOS

When the Israelites settled into the Promised Land, things initially went quite well for them.

- They were no longer slaves to any other people group. They had freedom.
- They had a good law code that God had given them at Mount Sinai.
- They had a good education system based on God's wisdom.
- And they had good land and good food.

The Israelites should have thrived! But they did not. Why?

First, they did not obey Yahweh completely.

God told them to drive the Canaanites out so they would not learn from their evil ways. The Israelites failed to complete this job.

The orange shaded area of the map shows the land that God had told the Israelites to possess. The blue shaded area is the land they actually possessed.





Their disobedience had serious consequences. Instead of being the counterculture that God had wanted them to be, they started intermarrying with the Canaanites and worshipping the man-made idols of the Canaanites.

Second, the people grew so contented with their wealth that they abandoned God.

Yahweh had earlier warned the people that the time of peace would bring complacency, and this would lead the people to drift away from Him.

Deuteronomy 32:15

“But Israel soon became fat and unruly;
 the people grew heavy, plump, and stuffed!
 Then they abandoned the God who had made them;
 they made light of the Rock of their salvation.

This rebellion was terrible. The Israelites were supposed to tell the people of the world about Yahweh and how to be saved from eternal death. But they became just like the unbelieving world.

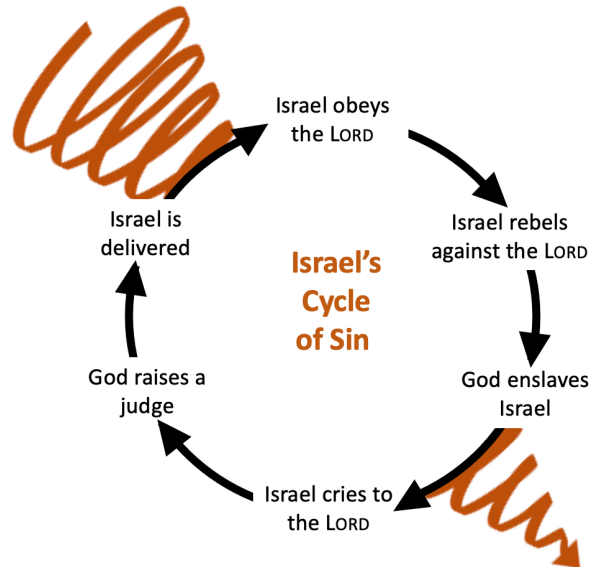
They were useless for the mission God had for them.



So God disciplined them.

How did He do this?

- Yahweh would send other people groups to attack or enslave Israel.
- In their distress, they would call out to the Lord.
- Yahweh would then raise up a judge (who was a military and political leader) to rescue the people.



Through this, God intended to cause the Israelites to turn back to Him.

However, after Yahweh delivered them from their enemies, after a very short time of obedience, they would once again turn against Him. This pattern repeated itself over the lifetimes of 15 successive judges. Here is an example of what happened.

Judges 2:11–12, 14–19

¹¹ The Israelites did evil in the LORD's sight and served the images of Baal. ¹² They abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods, worshiping the gods of the people around them. And they angered the LORD.

¹⁴ This made the LORD burn with anger against Israel, so he handed them over to raiders who stole their possessions. He turned them over to their enemies all around, and they were no longer able to resist them. ¹⁵ Every time Israel went out to battle, the LORD fought against them, causing them to be defeated, just as he had warned. And the people were in great distress.

¹⁶ Then the LORD raised up judges to rescue the Israelites from their attackers. ¹⁷ Yet Israel did not listen to the judges but prostituted themselves by worshiping other gods. How quickly they turned away from the path of their ancestors, who had walked in obedience to the LORD's commands.

¹⁸ Whenever the LORD raised up a judge over Israel, he was with that judge and rescued the people from their enemies throughout the judge's lifetime. For the LORD took pity on his people, who were burdened by oppression and suffering. ¹⁹ But when the judge died, the people returned to their corrupt ways, behaving worse than those who had lived before them. They went after other gods, serving and worshiping them. And they refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

The Bible says that this was the heart of the Israelites during this period:

Judges 21:25

In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.



The people independently decided what was right and wrong. And then, they lived life based on these personal standards. There was no agreement in society about what “good” and “bad” actually looked like. There was no objective standard. And they ignored the Creator's standards.

With no concern for God and His good laws, the Israelites became more and more like the Canaanites. The Bible records the people engaging in anarchy, idolatry, unfaithfulness, sexual perversion, sexual abuse, dismemberment, murder and theft.

In fact, things became so chaotic and unbearable for the Israelites that they finally cried out to God for a human king.

ISRAEL DEMANDS HUMAN KINGS

Ever since Yahweh rescued the nation of Israel from Egypt, He had been their divine king. He had built them up, protected them, guided them and been with them. And He had promised great supernatural blessings if they obeyed His good laws.

But the people chose to rebel instead. Even when they grew sick and tired of the chaotic lives they had built for themselves, they did not turn back to Yahweh.

Instead, they believed they had the solution to their problems: a strong central government in the form of a human king.



Why the people wanted kings

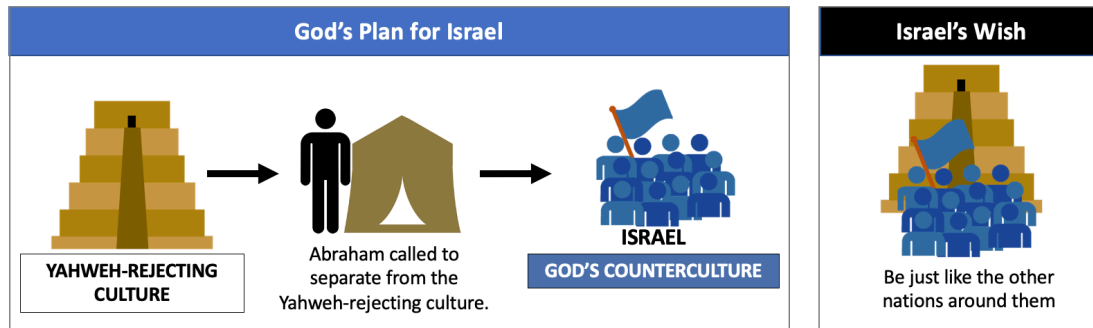
This is what the people said.

1 Samuel 8:20

“We want to be like the nations around us. Our king will judge us and lead us into battle.”

1. “Be like the nations around us”

The entire reason why Yahweh had called Abraham out of the culture he was living in was so that God could create a counterculture to preserve His history and truth through the Israelites. They were not supposed to be like the other nations. They were supposed to carry God's truth to the world. But these Israelites wanted to be exactly like the other nations that had rejected Yahweh.



This is what Yahweh told Samuel, the last judge over Israel.

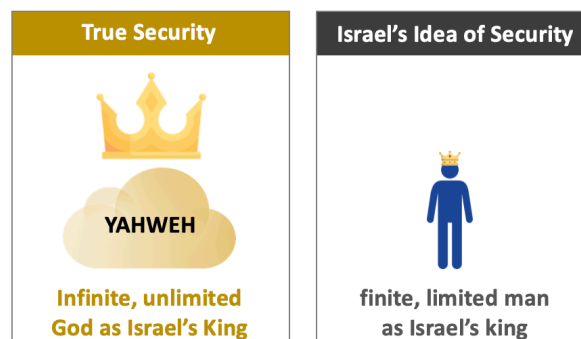
1 Samuel 8:6–7

⁶ Samuel was displeased with their request and went to the LORD for guidance. ⁷ “Do everything they say to you,” the LORD replied, “for they are rejecting me, not you. They don't want me to be their king any longer.”

2. “Lead us into battle”

The Israelites believed that a human king could give them military security by leading them into battle against invading enemies. The irony is that when they obeyed God, He had led them into battles and had given them great victories.

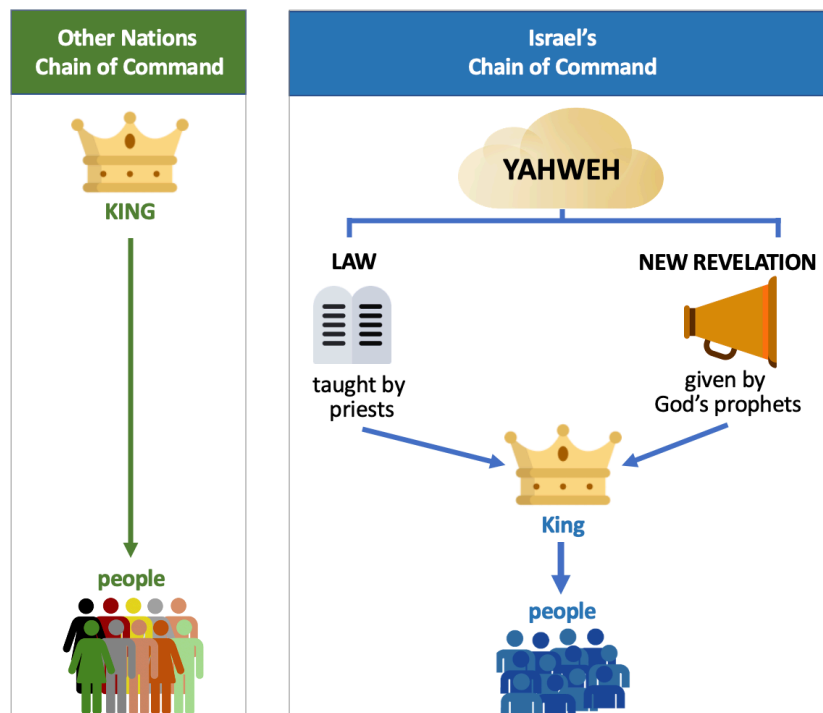
Yahweh could guarantee victory and security because He was the unlimited, infinite Creator-God of the universe. Yet, they preferred security from a limited, finite human king who was not at all as powerful as their God-King.



Yahweh allowed Israel to have human kings

God agreed to Israel's request. But He limited the power of their kings. The nations around Israel all had kings who were the ultimate authority over their people. Yahweh said Israel's kings were not to have unlimited nor uncontrolled power.

Instead, Israel's kings were to live by God's law. They would be answerable and accountable to Him. God instructed the kings not to abuse their position, not to take advantage of the people and not to lead them into sin and evil. The kings were not allowed to do whatever they wanted. Rather, they were to live by God's all-righteous standards of right and wrong.



Yahweh made the priests and prophets His representatives, placing them in authority over the king. In this way:

- one of the jobs of the priests was to teach and remind the king of God's law.
- one of the jobs of the prophets was to give the king new revelation from God.

This meant that the kings would not be allowed to just do whatever they pleased. They would be guided by Yahweh Himself through the priests and prophets. This also meant that the priests and prophets could rebuke the kings if they rebelled against God.

Yahweh also said that the kings would be chosen by Him. He appointed prophets as "king-makers" who would announce God's choice of king. Over the course of Israel's history, God appointed a wide range of different men to be kings: younger and older ones, shepherds, administrators, military men and more.



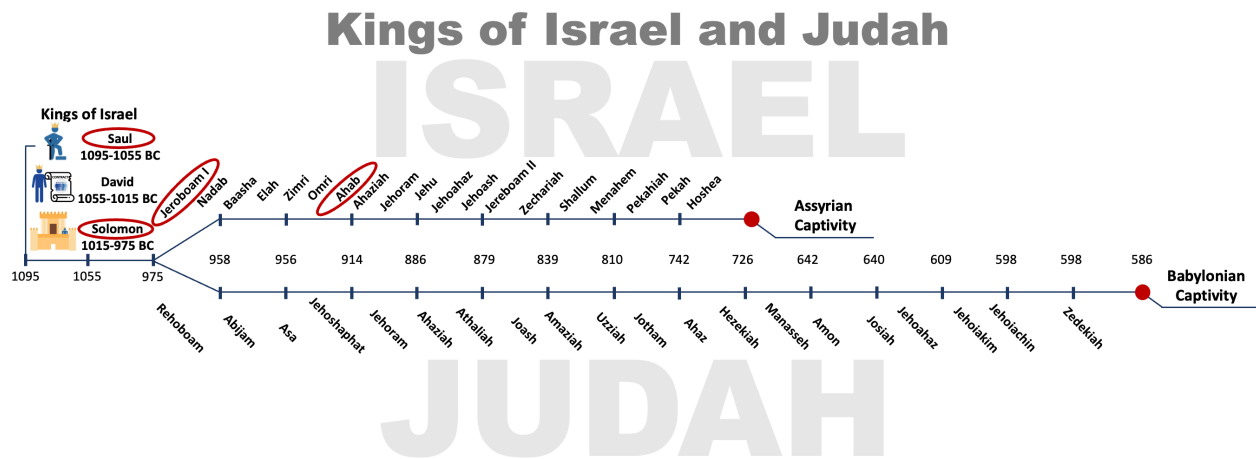
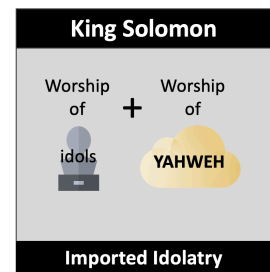
Yahweh was willing to work through Israel's human kings to guide, protect and bless Israel. In fact, He also promised to be with the kings if they obeyed Him and led the people well.

So, was the monarchy in Israel a success? Unfortunately, no.

The failure of the human kings

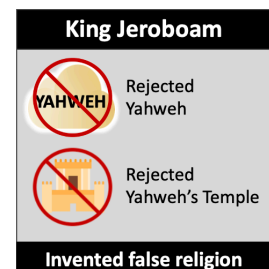
While there were some good kings in Israel's history, many of the kings were evil. Many chose to intentionally ignore God and rebel against Him.

- For example, the first king was a man named Saul. While he looked impressive on the outside, he was ambitious and self-preserving. He dishonoured and disobeyed God.
- Then Solomon, the third king, led Israel into spiritual rot. He introduced Israel to the worship of idols side by side with the worship of Yahweh. In fact, Solomon made God so angry that God tore the kingdom into two: Israel, which was made up of the ten northern tribes, and Judah, which comprised the two southern tribes.



But even tearing the kingdom into two did not lead to better kings. For example, most of the kings of Israel in the north were very wicked.

- King Jeroboam created a completely false religion and made all Israel follow his invention. He used some of Yahweh's vocabulary to make it seem like the people were worshipping Yahweh, but they were not.



- Then King Ahab did away with any pretence of worshipping Yahweh. He changed the national religion to the worship of an idol called Baal.



The southern kingdom of Judah had more good kings than bad kings. However, this did not prevent the monarchy as a whole from leading the nation into spiritual decline.



Yahweh's prophets were not silent throughout this time. They warned the kings of the consequences of disobedience. They told them that God was going to discipline them for rebellion if they didn't repent of their wickedness.



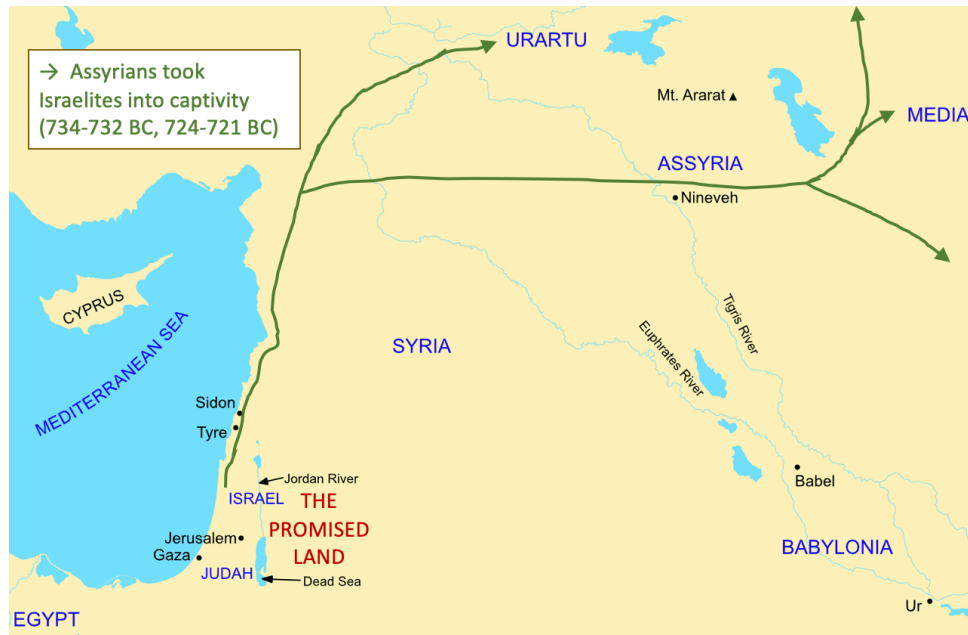
In some cases, the kings and the people did listen to the prophets and they repented. In response, God would withhold the punishment.

But in many other instances, the kings and the people refused to pay attention to God. In fact, they abused and even killed many of God's prophets.

As Yahweh had warned, step by step, He sent all five levels of cursings on the two kingdoms for breaking His law. The last stage of discipline was being exiled from the land He had given them.

 Blessings for keeping the covenant	Cursings for breaking the covenant 
Leviticus 26:1–13 (also Deuteronomy 28:1–14)	Leviticus 26:14–46 (also Deuteronomy 28:15–68)
<p>Blessings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic prosperity, good weather and cooperative nature (v4–5) • Military success and peace (v6–8) • Population growth (v9) • God's continued presence with them (v11–12) 	<p>5 Stages of disciplines or cursings:</p> <p>Stage 1: Disease and sickness (physical and psychological), military defeat, economic disaster (v14–17)</p> <p>Stage 2: Famine (v18–20)</p> <p>Stage 3: Death of children and livestock, population decrease (v21–22)</p> <p>Stage 4: Starvation, epidemics, crushing military defeat (v23–26)</p> <p>Stage 5: Cannibalism, death, enemy invasion, <u>exile</u>, terror and psychological problems, God's presence removed from them (v27–39)</p>

The northern kingdom of Israel fell first. God sent the violent and aggressive Assyrians to take the people out of their land.



Let's turn to our Bibles and read 2 Kings 17:13–23.

(The leader reads aloud. For reference, the verses are also here.)

2 Kings 17:13–23

¹³ Again and again the LORD had sent his prophets and seers to warn both Israel and Judah: “Turn from all your evil ways. Obey my commands and decrees—the entire law that I commanded your ancestors to obey, and that I gave you through my servants the prophets.”

¹⁴ But the Israelites would not listen. They were as stubborn as their ancestors who had refused to believe in the LORD their God. ¹⁵ They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors, and they despised all his warnings. They worshiped worthless idols, so they became worthless themselves. They followed the example of the nations around them, disobeying the LORD’s command not to imitate them.

¹⁶ They rejected all the commands of the LORD their God and made two calves from metal. They set up an Asherah pole and worshiped Baal and all the forces of heaven. ¹⁷ They even sacrificed their own sons and daughters in the fire. They consulted fortune-tellers and practiced sorcery and sold themselves to evil, arousing the LORD’s anger.

¹⁸ Because the LORD was very angry with Israel, he swept them away from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah remained in the land. ¹⁹ But even the people of Judah refused to obey the commands of the LORD their God, for they followed the evil practices that Israel had introduced. ²⁰ The LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel. He punished them by handing them over to their attackers until he had banished Israel from his presence.

²¹ For when the LORD tore Israel away from the kingdom of David, they chose Jeroboam son of Nebat as their king. But Jeroboam drew Israel away from following the LORD and made them commit a great sin. ²² And the people of Israel persisted in all the evil ways of Jeroboam. They did not turn from these sins ²³ until the LORD finally swept them away from his presence, just as all his prophets had warned. So Israel was exiled from their land to Assyria, where they remain to this day.

Earlier, God had used Israel to remove the wicked Canaanites from the land. But as He had warned, God now used the Assyrians to expel rebellious Israel out of their land.

About 200 years later, the southern kingdom of Judah also fell because of rebellion against God. Yahweh sent the equally aggressive Babylonians to exile them from the land.



2 Chronicles 36:15–20

¹⁵ The LORD, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent his prophets to warn them, for he had compassion on his people and his Temple. ¹⁶ But the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets until the LORD'S anger could no longer be restrained and nothing could be done.

¹⁷ So the LORD brought the king of Babylon against them. The Babylonians killed Judah's young men, even chasing after them into the Temple. They had no pity on the people, killing both young men and young women, the old and the infirm. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁸ The king took home to Babylon all the articles, large and small, used in the Temple of God, and the treasures from both the LORD'S Temple and from the palace of the king and his officials. ¹⁹ Then his army burned the Temple of God, tore down the walls of Jerusalem, burned all the palaces, and completely destroyed everything of value. ²⁰ The few who survived were taken as exiles to Babylon, and they became servants to the king and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power.

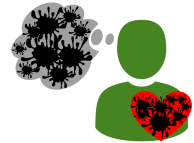
Having a central government and a monarchy did not solve any of Israel's problems.

Why did Yahweh allow Israel to have human kings?

Yahweh is all-knowing. He knows the future and He knew that Israel's request for kings would not work out well. The question is: why did Yahweh allow them to have kings?

1. Reveal the heart of mankind

One reason was because God knows the heart of mankind. People are proud and think too highly of themselves. They think they know better than Yahweh. People believe they can save themselves from their situations through their own ideas, work and effort.



So God allowed them to live through and experience their own "solutions". They would then be able to prove or disprove their own theories about themselves. For example:

- When God gave the people the law, they immediately said they would do all that God commanded. Could they? No.
- When God brought them into Canaan, He had set them up for success. Did they succeed in living well? No. They created chaos for themselves. They were fallen human beings.
- When they insisted on having a human king, believing that a human king would solve all their problems, God relented. Did having kings bring them peace and prosperity? No. The kings were fallen human beings. And they were leading a nation of fallen human beings.



Through these events and more, the people learnt that their "solutions" and their belief in themselves and their own ideas did not bring about the successful life and peaceful nation that they were seeking.

2. Use human kingship to give a picture of the future ruler of the world

Another reason why God allowed the people to have human kings was because God's plan to rescue the world involved a perfect, all-righteous, all-just king. This king would be the future ruler of the whole world.



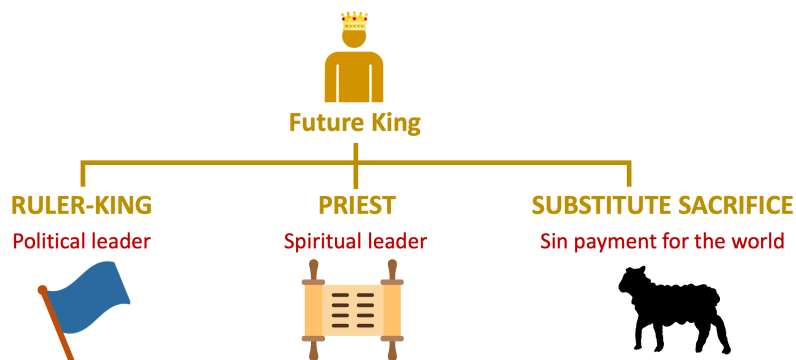
The human kingship... **...is a picture of...** ...the future ruler of the world

In contrast to human kings who were not able to bring about permanent solutions to the problems of mankind, this future king on earth would be very successful in permanently solving mankind's problems.

Specifically, Yahweh planned for this future king to fulfil three roles and hold three offices. He would be:

1. The political leader (Ruler-King)
2. The spiritual leader (Priest) and
3. The sin payment for the whole world, reconciling man to God (Substitute Sacrifice).

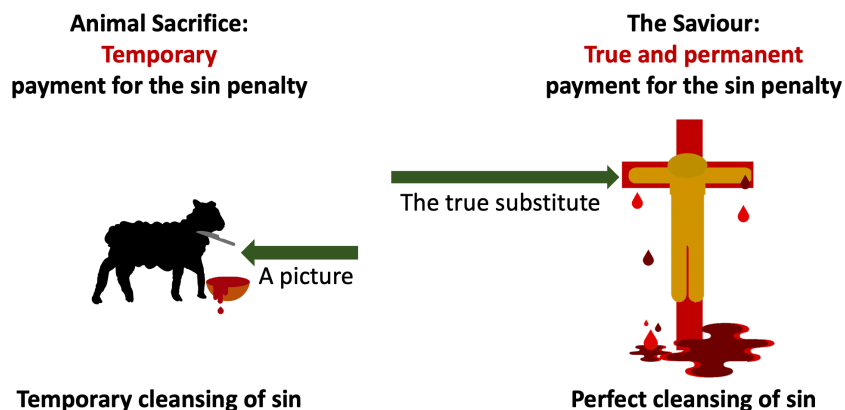
Aside from being the political and spiritual ruler of the whole world, God's chosen future king would also be the necessary substitute sacrifice for all mankind, paying for mankind's sin.



Recall that Yahweh told the Israelites that mankind's sin was so horrific that the only appropriate punishment would be death. Justice and restitution could only be achieved with the death of the guilty party.

However, in His mercy, Yahweh said that He would allow the death of an innocent, guiltless substitute in place of the guilty one.

To teach mankind this, God told them to sacrifice animals as a temporary payment and cleansing for their sin.



But Yahweh also pointed out that He would later send the real, permanent substitute. This person would be the saviour, the man who would be the substitute for all mankind, dying in their place.



By allowing Israel to have human kings, Yahweh wanted them to look forward to this future king who would reconcile people to God and also be the perfect, righteous political and spiritual leader for the world. This final king will solve all of mankind's problems permanently.

What happened next?

The nation of Israel did not turn out as Yahweh had wanted. He had planned for them to be His representatives. By living as a loving and obedient nation towards Him, they would point the people of the world to Him. But in their rebellion, they not only failed to live up to God's standards, they committed the very sins that God warned them about when they first moved into the land of Canaan. What would God do with this people? God had chosen Abraham's family and made them significant promises. Would God now throw away the promises He made to Abraham? We will see in the next lesson what Yahweh did next.



Bible reading for review

- Judges 2:1–3:6 (Israel failed to clear out the land as Yahweh commanded.)
- 1 Samuel 8 (Israel turned its back on Yahweh and asked for a human king.)
- 2 Kings 17 (Yahweh directed the fall and exile of Israel.)
- 2 Kings 25 (Yahweh directed the fall and exile of Judah.)

Is there a form of government that can produce a peaceful and prosperous society?

Throughout the different ages of human history, mankind has been striving to create the best type of government that can give people freedom, prosperity and happiness. History is filled with empires and nations trying different ways to build the perfect society. Even today, each country tries to build a society free from crime, poverty and other social problems. Why can't any of them succeed?

The Bible records why. It has examples of mankind trying to build the perfect society. For example, during the time of the Judges, the people rebelled against God's rule over them and each person did whatever they thought was right.

Judges 21:25

In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

With no central government and maximum personal freedom, this idea of a “democratic” society where everyone had the right to do whatever they wanted failed. Why? Because mankind is fallen and sinful. The Bible records how perverted, corrupted and wicked Jewish society became (Judges 17–21). It was so bad that the Israelites themselves grew sick and tired of the chaos.



However, instead of turning back to Yahweh and living under His righteous laws and gracious guidance, they rebelled against Him further. They went to the last judge, the prophet Samuel, and demanded to have a human king, a leader who would have centralised power to direct society. This was the exact opposite of the freedom they had.

1 Samuel 8:4–8a

⁴ Finally, all the elders of Israel met at Ramah to discuss the matter with Samuel.

⁵ “Look,” they told him, “you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have.”

⁶ Samuel was displeased with their request and went to the LORD for guidance. ⁷ “Do everything they say to you,” the LORD replied, “for they are rejecting me, not you. They don't want me to be their king any longer.” ⁸ Ever since I brought them from Egypt they have continually abandoned me and followed other gods.

As the Bible records, their idea of having centralised power or a “totalitarian” government also failed. Why? Because the leaders were also fallen and sinful. One bad king after another made the kingdom worse and worse till God exiled the people from their own land.



In fact, history shows that both the leaders and the common people were rebellious against God. Neither a central government, in the form of the monarchy, nor a system where everyone did whatever they pleased, worked. Sin and evil lived in mankind, so whichever system of government they tried, it still resulted in chaos and destruction.