

Kings in Sacred Scripture: A Brief Overview by Rick McKinney, 2025

The word king (Hebrew *melekl*, Aramaic *melek*, Greek *basileus*, Latin *rex*, and German *konig*) generally means a ruler and one who reigns and has authority over a kingdom or territory. Political kings have been around a long time and chapter 14 of the Book of Genesis relays how a confederation of four specific city kings defeated and took captive another confederation of five specific city kings including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah where Abram's nephew Lot resided, and how Abram (later renamed as Abraham) and his 318 servants pursued and rescued Lot and those kings. There is also the stories about Joseph and that of Moses, where the Pharaoh is known as the king of Egypt (Gen. 41:46, Ex. 6). As a matter of fact, during the period of Moses, Joshua, and the judges, most all nearby cities, nations, and territories had kings, but not Israel.

Israel, you see, was meant to be ruled by the LORD (Yahweh) as their king. And when the people of Israel, after much oppression by the nations around them, insist that Samuel, the last judge, anoint a king to rule over them and to lead them in battle, the LORD tells Samuel, "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king" (1 Kgs. 8:7). Samuel gives in to the people and eventually, under God's direction, anoints with olive oil, Saul as their king (1 Sam. 10:1), but there still remained a tension on whether King Saul, chosen because of the people's desire, or any king would follow the LORD in the way of God's heart.

After numerous failures by King Saul to follow the LORD's direction whole heartedly God rejects Saul as king and seeks another man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:13-14, 15:11). Samuel is eventually directed to anoint David, a mere youth, as king, as it is related, "So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David" (1 Sam. 16:11). David only succeeds Saul after many years of service to Saul and flight from Saul's wrath. In time, after Saul and his son, Jonathan, die in battle, David is anointed king of his own tribe of Judah (2 Sam. 2:4). After seven years, he is anointed king of all Israel and then conquers Jerusalem for his capital and reigns for 33 more years (2 Sam. 5:1-9).

In David, God finally finds a king after His own heart and when David sins and strays from God's heart, he fervently repents (2 Sam. 11-12, 24). It is David's desire to build a house for the LORD, but the LORD tells him through the prophet Nathan that it is the LORD who will build David a house, with a line of succession among his descendants, saying, "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:11). The line of Davidic kings does indeed last for some 400 years, but the forever promise is seen as messianic which does indeed last forever.

God's kingship of love and man's kingship differ on how they exercise authority. Jesus told his disciples, "The kings of the gentiles lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather, the greatest among you must become like the youngest and the leader like one who serves" (Lk. 22:23-24). When Jesus was an infant King Herod, known for his brutality, feared, "the child who had been born to be king of the Jews," and tried to destroy him (Mt. 2:1-16). Kings of this world fear any threat to their authority, but Jesus has a different kingship. When Pilate, the Roman procurator, asks Jesus if he is a king, Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world (Jn. 18:36), yet all four gospels note that Pilate had an inscription placed on the cross, stating, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The kingdom of heaven, not of this world, is his and our Father's kingdom of love and truth which has come, is come and will come on earth as it is in heaven (Mt. 4:17, 6:9-10, 8:11, Jn. 18:37, 20:17).

Jesus, the Son of God, has kingly authority and yet he is the one who serves even to the point of death, for, "the Son can do nothing on his own but only what he sees the Father doing (Jn. 5:19). He preached the kingdom of God coming alive by healing the sick, cleansing lepers, forgiving sins, casting out demons and giving his disciples the authority to do the same (Mt. 10:1). Jesus was recognized by the people as one who taught with authority and demonstrated it (Mk.1:22-26). Even the Roman centurion, someone who was under authority and had soldiers under his authority, saw himself as unworthy, but saw in Jesus as one who could with an authoritative word of command, heal his servant from a distance (Mt. 8:8-10). After Jesus is resurrected, he empowers his disciples with his authority, saying to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:18-19; see also Dn. 7:13-14).

Finally, it is noteworthy that it was David who when the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem, not only danced before it, but also "sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD" (2 Sam 6:17), which is normally the duty of priests. Thus, the priestly and kingly roles are once again united as it was in Melchizedek, the priest and king of Salem, which some authorities believe became Jerusalem. In addition, David, who wrote many messianic psalms, is called a prophet by St. Peter himself (Ac. 2:32,36). As it was with King David, so it is with Jesus, the anointed one and Son of David, who fulfills the three messianic roles of priest, prophet and king. And it is so today among his disciples for as St. Peter writes, "But you are a chosen race, a **royal priesthood**, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9), as we declare the truth into our own lives and into the lives of our families and communities, and this includes, like our King Jesus, the laying down of our lives in love.