

without any thought to what the next criminal will do to cheat with the new law. In most instances, more laws simply create a greater burden of compliance on law-abiding citizens, but simply alter the means whereby cheaters will cheat. **The secret to good government is to punish those caught doing evil, not to try to pass laws that prevent anyone from doing evil** (Eccl 8:11, again). If government is given too much power to “regulate” citizens, criminals simply join the government and do their dirty work there.

People Want a King

The government that God gave ancient Israel was a great success after they entered the promised land. This was one of the few times on earth where there was a human government that provided freedom, prosperity, peace and safety in a righteous environment. Everyone owned their own land, free and clear, from the division by lot (Josh 21). They all served God:

Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the LORD which He had done for Israel (Josh 24:31).

After this, during the time of the book of Judges, the people would go into sin, God would send famine or their enemies against them, they would repent, and God would send someone to deliver them. Rather than learn the lesson and remain individually diligent to follow God and retain His protection continually, the people thought that they needed an army to defend themselves—just like most people today think we need armed forces and/or “Homeland Security”. (Sadly, many Christians, today, may not have much more faith than ancient Israel.) To those who obey, God promises:

Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; your

enemies shall fall by the sword before you (Lev 26:8).

Nevertheless, God knew that people would eventually want a king and the military methods that they saw other nations use. He gave them these laws showing them the best way to choose a king:

“When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me **like all the nations that are around me,**’¹⁵ you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; *one* from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you **may not set a foreigner over you**, who is not your brother.¹⁶ But he shall **not multiply horses** [military power] for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’¹⁷ **Neither shall he multiply wives** for himself, lest his heart turn away; **nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold** for himself.¹⁸ Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that **he shall write for himself a copy of this law** in a book, from *the one* before the priests, the Levites.¹⁹ And it shall be with him, **and he shall read it all the days of his life**, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes,²⁰ that **his heart may not be lifted above his brethren**, that he may not turn aside from the commandment *to* the right hand or *to* the left, and that he may prolong *his* days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel (Deut 17:14-20).

Sadly, only a few kings of ancient Israel ever made an effort to follow those laws. Even though the laws of our nations are not the laws of the Bible, most leaders today do not even try to obey the portion of these biblical laws for kings that they could personally follow. Nor do the people of most nations seek a leader who promises to obey them. God clearly

blames the **people** for **desiring** a king, it was not a matter of a king taking over. (Even when David, whom God chose, became King, it was the elders who made him King (2Sam 5:3). The story of how ancient Israel made the transition from a primarily local secular government to a centralized monarchy is found here and is well worth reading:

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah,⁵ and said to him, “Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” So Samuel prayed to the LORD.⁷ And the LORD said to Samuel, “Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; **for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.**⁸ According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day — with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods — so they are doing to you also.⁹ Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them.”¹⁰ So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who asked him for a king.¹¹ And he said, “**This will be the behavior of the king** who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint *them* for his own chariots and *to be* his horsemen, and *some* will run before his chariots.¹² He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, *will set some* to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and *some* to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.¹³ He will take your daughters *to be* perfumers, cooks, and bakers.¹⁴ And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give *them* to his servants.¹⁵ He will