

DENVER SEMINARY

Women's Forum

CHALLENGE THE MIND, EXPAND THE HEART

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An Old Testament Perspective on Human Government

Thinking about Putting on Biblical Lenses for Fresh Perspectives on the Nature of Government

Political Conversations v. Christian Conversations

Evaluating the kinds of Governments (i.e., how do you understand/process Romans 13 for our own country and what we think is best?)

What is the basis and framework for these kinds of conversations, political decisions and political allegiances?

Political Theology v. Political Opinion

Basic Building Blocks for Government: Relating to Government through a Biblical Theology

Genesis 1 → the 'cultural mandate' to "subdue...rule over", vv. 26-28 (i.e., the rule of God in every sphere of life)

Genesis 2 → "on the day...you will surely die" literally translates: "dying you will die" (but no actual death in the following chapter; in fact, as the mother of all the living, Eve gives birth to human life [Gen.3])

Genesis 4 → The Birth of Civilization: Death as Cain kills Abel & the descendents of Cain (vv. 19-20)

○ Uncontrolled vengeance without any kind of boundaries (vv. 15 & 24)

Genesis 5 → Death from old age and disease

Genesis 6 → God tells Noah that he will judge the earth because it is filled with violence (v. 11)

○ In other words, death will be released into your existence in ways you cannot even imagine: the bloodlust of humans through killing

○ Humans are, by nature, violent; We invent ways of destruction (i.e., weaponry, videogames, abuse, racism)

Genesis 9 → The need to control violence: no harmony, just hard work (vv. 5-6)

○ Concept of a pure life in Gen. 1 to an assumption that humans will kill each other

Genesis 10-11 → The birth of nations

○ *Genesis 10* → parenthetical chapter on Noah's sons to preface the evil in ch. 11

○ *Genesis 11* → Tower of Babel (an echo of ch. 3): the temptation to be like God as individuals and corporately. The acting out of cruelty for the necessary gain to be

number one—arrogance and pride of desiring greatness—leads to the evil of forcing another to be second. The evil that they plan knows no limits (v 6).

Government has a dark side as humans have a propensity to do evil both individually and corporately

- *Romans 12-13* → Christians & the authorities: how do we control human violence, organize ourselves so we don't self destruct and come together so we don't degenerate into chaos?
- Decision regarding the basis of government → Role of government: to protect us from ourselves (Gen. 9)—protecting from evil and promoting the good
- The DNA of the nations of the world were born (and will end) in Babel
- How do we process Government? → Where is our dark side?
- What do you do with the church and state? Separation or not?

Relating Church & State: Where do you begin your theology of Government?

Understanding church history perspectives on the relationship between church & state: Roman Catholic, Reformed (Presbyterian), Lutheran, Anabaptist (Mennonite)

Roman Catholic: the church is the means of grace and is to directly engage government, be its conscience

Reformed: because of the cultural mandate, society is to be brought under the rule of God; government is a creation ordinance.

Lutheran: government is an order of preservation; the two kingdoms view of government

Anabaptist: the church is separate from the government as an alternative community

- Can a country be Christian?
- What *is* the Christian view of Government (One or Two Kingdoms)?—this depends on where you begin the story (Gen. 1 *or* 3)
- Making a decision: What is your theology of Government

Contrasting or Anti-Ideologies

Three things made a great king in the ancient world?

- (1) Army (power), (2) Women (harem), (3) Wealth (money)
- *Deuteronomy 17* → the king should not accumulate these three things that would make one great in the ancient world and make sure the king is an Israelite and should not think of himself better than anyone else (vv. 14-20)
 - Ex: 1 Kings 21 → Naboth's Vineyard – even though Ahab knew that it was not right for him to take one's land, his wife (Jezebel) was a Phoenician who understood government very differently in that a king should forcefully get what he wants
- *1 Samuel 8* → The Israelites want a king like everyone else
 - Roles of the king in the ancient world: establish justice and lead people in battle (justice & peace)
 - The reason the Israelites ask for a king is for justice and peace. Are they asking for a king in rejection of God (Samuel thinks this)? But they are asking what everyone else wants. The position of wanting a king within and of itself is okay; rather, it is the kind of king that they ask for that matters. (Deut 17 → when you ask for a king—like everyone else—this is the kind of king you should ask for).
- Prophetic critiques → The realities and warning about a king from Samuel: the key word is that the kings will “take” in their desire for power, women and wealth
- Prophetic Hope → the coming messiah: a time of peace and plenty (Isaiah 65:17-)
 - (In the ancient world, about 50 percent of children die before age 5)

A Different Kind of Government

We can learn from but not go back to the plethora of biblical models:

Patriarchs → as the Israelites were *not to go back* but to move forward to establish justice and peace

Role of the Law: *contrast* and *constitution*

Judges

The Monarchy → Saul → David had an Achilles heel: women (2 Sam 5:13) → Solomon like Pharaoh: marries Egyptian foreigner & further accumulates power, women & wealth

Exile and after exile → dependant province of the empire

New Testament → under the reign of the Romans

The Wisdom of the Founding Fathers → checks and balances of the judicial system because of the power and money hungry nature of humanity, individually and corporately

Where to Go From Here

What does the Old Testament/the Bible offer us?

What are the limitations of the Bible?

What are some things that the Bible can teach us about our own government and ideological choices?