

The Basic Function, Limitations, and Dangers of Civil Power Revealed in the Old Testament

Charles A. Clough

Introduction

"It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices [separation of powers proposed in the Constitution] should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself."¹

Thus wrote James Madison in 1788 as he advocated ratification of the U. S. Constitution and who would later sponsor the first 10 amendments to the Constitution. Along with that generation of the US founding fathers, Madison was well aware of the dangers of civil power given the condition of human nature. While we can quibble with him over his generic and benign evaluation of angels, we certainly can admire his concise statement of the "great difficulty" in framing a government.

As Christians in colonial America of Madison's day had to determine their course of citizenship action, so we too must do so in our day. Both colonial Christians and non-Christians had available to them in addition to the Bible an intellectual heritage from the classics (e.g., Plato and Aristotle) and the European Enlightenment (e.g., Kant, Rousseau, Hegel, Hobbes, Montesquieu, Mill and Locke). This heritage supplied them with a wealth of seasoned discussion of all facets of government. It enabled them to write the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution with a breadth of understanding that could only have been gleaned from a long history of experience with government.

Today it has become fashionable to casually attribute the weight of colonial political thought entirely to this extra-biblical heritage and ignore biblical influence.² Yes the colonial leaders did use this heritage in political analysis, but the influence of Christian piety together with their direct experience with political abuses of king, parliament, and the Anglican State Church kept them from absorbing wholesale European ideology. Rushdoony years ago wrote:

"Men speak not only in a verbal language but also in the language of history, in the context and meaning of their time and place. It was the language of American colonial

¹ James Madison, "Federalist 51," *The US Constitution: A Reader*, ed. Hillsdale College Politics Faculty (Hillsdale, MI: Hillsdale College Press, 2012), 288.

² A fine expose of errors in such alleged scholarly "revisionist" research is Peter A. Lillback, *George Washington's Sacred Fire* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Providence Forum Press, 2006). Lillback refutes the common opinion that Washington was not a Christian but a Deist by extensive research into his many letters. This tendency to re-write history to suppress all pointers to the Creator and Judge is to be expected by any serious reader of Romans 1:18ff.

history which was written into the Constitution of the United States. . .In spite of this pragmatic usage [of classical and European materials], there was. . .an element of philosophical indistinction which must be recognized. The epistemological self-consciousness granted by two centuries of development cannot be read backwards into history, nor, on the other hand, can modern secularism be so read into it. To speak therefore of an 'American Enlightenment' is to attempt to read into the Revolution a later development in American thought. Again, to see there the developed Christian orthodoxy of today is also to misread history."³

Colonial thinkers clearly tried to use insights from the two millennia long discussion of the idea of civil government in order to formulate a well-grounded constitutional republic. This paper will also use the classics and European thought but from a different perspective--from what Rushdoony called the developed "epistemological self-consciousness" of recent Christian thought. Twenty-five centuries of discussion virtually assures us that all the basic questions have been asked and all the answers derived from human thought have emerged. What Bible believing Christians now should do is to use those great questions as tools to help extract the truths of God's Word.

Coming to Terms with the Great Questions

To ask well-defined questions of the Scripture, one needs to use clearly defined terms to refer to the major concepts involved. To help accomplish this task in an efficient introductory manner I will utilize the essay on government written by the editors of the *Great Books of the Western World*.⁴ That essay presents the dialog over government from the pre-Socratics to the modern era.

Two terms that should be distinguished are *state* and *government*. The first term refers to the political community; the second, to political organization of that community. "The state can maintain its historic identity while it undergoes fundamental changes in its form of government."⁵ Israel maintained its community identity from Egypt to the exile while undergoing different political organization under Moses, Samuel, and the northern kingdom. A second word pair that should be distinguished is *authority* and *power*.

"No government at all is possible. . .unless men obey its directions or regulations. But one man may obey another either voluntarily or involuntarily--either because he recognizes the right invested in that other to give him commands or because he fears the consequences which he may suffer if he disobeys. . . .

³Rousas J. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1973), 7-8. He notes, for example, concerning the founders' widely recognized use of Locke "Where Locke defended liberty and property, he was widely quoted; where he championed majoritarianism [used by the English to justify absolute power of Parliament] he was by-passed. *The Americans, at every point, culled passages from widely divergent authorities to buttress each particular position without any departure from their own*" 20. (Emphasis original)

⁴ Mortimer J. Adler and William Gorman, "Government," Vol. 1 of *The Great Ideas: A Syntopicon of Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1952), 637-644.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 637.

These two modes of obedience correspond to the authority and power of government. Authority elicits voluntary compliance. Power either actually coerces or, by threatening coercion, compels involuntary obedience."⁶

Authority without force is ineffective; power without right is tyrannical. Yahweh sought a response to His authority; only after that did He exercise His power. King David had prophetically-authorized authority whereas King Ahab did not and thus had to rely solely on what power he could muster. Besides the matter of the authority of government what is important to the present topic is what the Bible says about civil power.

After terms are defined next comes the great questions about government raised by thinkers over the last two millennia. "Some of the great political theorists--for example, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau--find their fundamental principles in the consideration of the *origin of government*."⁷ By thinking about the origin of government they encountered questions such as "What makes it legitimate for one man to govern another? Is the exercise of political power both justified and limited by the end it serves?"⁸ Locke attributed the origin of government to the necessity of individual men to leave their natural state of freedom and equality where they were vulnerable to assault and join in community for protection. He writes:

"Man being. . .by nature all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this estate and subjected to the political power of another with his own consent, which is done by agreeing with other men, to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living. . . .When any number of men have so consented to make one. . .government, they thereby. . .make one body politic, wherein the majority have a right to act."⁹

When we ask the Word of God about the origin of government, we should look for answers to the questions raised by this group of thinkers.

Other prominent political thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Montesquieu, and Mill concerned themselves with another great question: "[What are] the criteria by which the justice or goodness of a government shall be judged. They compare various forms of government as more or less desirable, nearer to the ideal or nearer to the opposite extreme of corruption. In the course of these considerations they answer questions about the necessity, the legitimacy, and *the ends of government*."¹⁰ Plato questions whether the ideal form of government is even possible given the human condition. Aristotle concurs, adding that a government ought to be judged according to the historic circumstances that exist. Montesquieu and Mill carry the discussion further by arguing that a despotic government may be the best government for uncivilized barbarians.

"The great question here is whether the circumstances. . .can be improved so that a people may become fit. . .for a better form of government. . . .Since Montesquieu emphasizes. . .fixed racial characteristics. . . , whereas Mill stresses conditions which are

⁶ Ibid., 639.

⁷ Ibid., 638.

⁸ Ibid., 638.

⁹ John Locke, "Concerning Civil Government: Second Essay," Vol. 35 of *The Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1952), 46. The Declaration of Independence expresses Locke's idea in the clause that governments "derive their just powers from the consent of the governed."

¹⁰ Adler and Gorman, 638.

remediable by education, economic progress, and social reforms, these two writers tend to give opposite answers."¹¹

The question of the ends of government and the suitability of its form to the people governed should help us understand the wisdom in God's redemptive program that culminates the eschatological Kingdom where the government at last fits the governed.

The thing to notice about the millennia-long dialog about the origin, purpose, and form of government is that in trying to deal with practical political problems the political theorists had to delve into deeper questions. Politics drives one to search for *ethics* which drives one further to explore one's *epistemology* and *metaphysics*.¹² This process is illustrated in the development of early Greek thought. A significant portion of it was driven by the need for political harmony in the city-states rather than mere academic contemplation. Ethics was a very practical need. Yet the Greeks faced a problem of how to put some rationale into ethics in order to protect its foundation. So ethics is a manifestation of an underlying philosophical structure. The same process has occurred with post Enlightenment political discussion.

Figure 1 depicts the dynamic and, as we shall see shortly, explains why the cardinal sin in the Old Testament theocracy was idolatry rather than the prominent social sins. We observe this

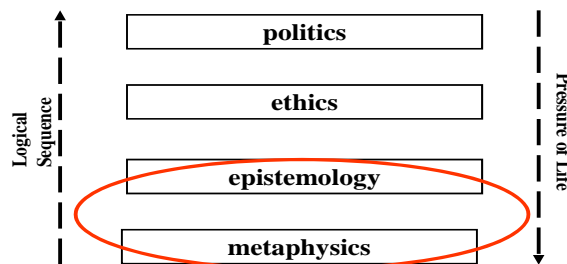


Figure 1. The historic pressure of political discussions pushing men to think more deeply and the logical structure resulting there from. The ellipse encircles the unavoidable foundational question area.

dynamic today in, for example, the homosexual rights debate. The *political* matter of creating homosexual rights for marriage and educational indoctrination quickly moves to the *ethical* question: what is the ethical evaluation of the homosexual life-style? But the ethical answer itself in turn depends upon what underlying *epistemological* authority should be used: divine revelation or man's imaginative interpretation of the homosexual orientation? This question, however, depends upon what underlying *metaphysic* supports the epistemological authority: a two-level Creator/creature reality or a one-level, nature-is-all-there-is reality?

Enter the Word of God

¹¹ Ibid., 643.

¹² Epistemology is the study of how we know something is true; metaphysics is the study of the nature of reality.

The rest of this paper will utilize the biblical framework of historic revelation--the show-and-tell program of God--to discover answers that the Word of God gives to the great questions concerning government. Let's keep in mind the distinction between civil government and the people group so governed. Let's also distinguish between the authority of civil government and its power. We now explore the answers the Bible gives concerning the origin of civil government and its function, limitations, destiny, and dangers. We will utilize the "great books" to help us mine the riches of the Greatest Book.

Pre-Israelite Origins of Civil Power

Rather than the embarrassing frontispiece to the Bible that some contemporary Christians consider Genesis to be, the first eleven chapters in this canonical book provide the metaphysical and epistemological foundation for the rest of the Bible. It is not only a sufficient foundation among other possible foundations; it is the necessary (and therefore the only) foundation for an intelligent depiction of civil government. Attempts to explain the origin of government by an imaginary journey into natural and human histories produced by speculation create more problems than they solve. Such efforts inevitably wind up in the dilemma described by Hobbes.

"It makes no difference, Hobbes argues, whether the sovereignty is held by one man or by an assembly. In either case 'the sovereign of a commonwealth. . .is not subject to the civil laws. For having the power to make and repeal laws, he may when he pleases, free himself from that subjection by repealing those laws that trouble him. . . .he that is bound to himself only is not bound.'"¹³

The Genesis text preserves eye-witness history of four events each of which informs us concerning the origin of government and related questions: creation, fall, inauguration of the Noahic Covenant, and the Tower of Babel incident.

Creation (Genesis 1-2).

The creation event reveals a governance prior to man. God governs His creation so governance per se originates with creation not with a post-creation event involving man. With the creation of man and woman and the directives to have dominion over nature and to be fruitful and multiply, we observe several important derivative forms of governance. Man is given authority to govern nature (contrary to the contemporary "green" movement) and govern himself in marriage and family. Also implied is self-governance. Governance, therefore, exists throughout the intelligently designed creation whereas no such concept would be at all possible with the unintelligent meaningless chaos of ancient and modern paganism.

Moreover, man's divinely authorized authority over self, nature, marriage and family *does not derive from civil government because it preceded that category of governance*. Present attempts of civil power to deny that man has authority to govern nature (i.e., develop resources) lack necessary ethical justification and are, therefore, arbitrary. Similarly, political efforts to redefine marriage are built upon irrational and therefore false metaphysics. The case for homosexuality to be "equal" with heterosexuality suffers from a contradiction in core behavior: homosexuality

¹³ Ibid. 640.

on one hand denies the creation design of the male and female and yet on the other hand affirms that same design in the dominant ("male") and passive ("female") homosexual roles. Increasing gambits by civil authorities to replace parental authority over children is but another attempt to arbitrarily expand civil authority. Arbitrary expansion, it must be remembered, lacks proper authority and therefore *must* rely upon sheer power.¹⁴

Fall (Genesis 3-7)

The fall of man in Genesis 3 is not a cute religious story. It describes an event so profound that it affected the entire cosmos. Violation of God's authority led to exercise of His power upon man and nature alike. Death began in both the spiritual and physical realms. That nature was cursed shows that man had been given authority over this domain so that judging it was a judgment against man.¹⁵

Particularly noteworthy for the theme of this paper is the installation of the angelic "security force" with lethal weaponry to block access to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). Creature angels were given the power to take human life to execute God's judgment. Here we see the first instance of capital punishment by the hands of creatures *prior to the origin of civil government*. To what degree angels were involved in the governance of post-fall antediluvian civilization is a matter of speculation, but the famous passage in Gen. 6:1-2 may indicate the tragic culmination of such angelic governance. What is known for sure is that the fall in some way granted Satan dominion over humankind (Matt. 4:8-9; 1 John 5:19). Human terrestrial rule in the visible realm was subsumed under Satanic terrestrial rule in the invisible realm. This consequence of the fall *enlarges the struggle for attaining the ideal society beyond any effort by civil government alone*.

Biblical hamartiology implies a criminology radically different from that of secular sociologists. The root cause of the first crime recorded in the Bible, the fratricide of Abel, was not a poor interpersonal relationship, social pressure of some sort, or psychological maladjustment. It was due to refusal to submit to God's authority regarding worship protocols and subsequent empowerment by sin and Satan. Cain then experienced (as the effect, not the cause) psychological and interpersonal relationship problems and finally lashed out at the nearest available reminder of God's authority (Gen. 4:5-7; 1 John 3:12). It was no more complicated than that. Crime ultimately springs from inner rebellion against God's authority, a process operating *beyond the range of civil government*.¹⁶

Between the fall and the flood antediluvian civilization was not a pretty sight. Although human communities existed (Gen. 4:17) and the technical arts flourished (Gen. 4:20-23), arrogance, vindictiveness, polygamy, and murder were rampant, eventually culminating in God's flood

¹⁴ The distinction between authority and power becomes important here. Authority requires a rationale, a justification ethically, epistemologically, and metaphysically as Figure 1 depicts in order to warrant voluntary compliance. Without such a rationale, the authority is merely an arbitrary claim and so needs power to compel compliance.

¹⁵ That God, not man, cursed nature and significantly altered it contrasts sharply with the "green" narrative that man is solely responsible for alteration of pristine nature.

¹⁶ The biblical witness to Satan's acquired dominion of the cosmos and the "echthra-theism" (Greek: echthra=enmity) of fallen humanity provides a radically different metaphysical environment for civil government than one usually encounters in the great books.

judgment (Jude 1:14). The fact that there must have been community organization with local leadership prior to the origin of civil government requires us to distinguish *community leadership* from *civil authority* with its power of lethal force.

Noahic Covenant (Genesis 8-9)

Faced with the failure of the antediluvian civilization God had at least three options regarding the future: (1) continue His gracious restraint and bring into existence a new postdiluvian civilization with the same kinds of governance that had existed in the antediluvian civilization; or (2) continue His gracious restraint but with a new form of governance over the postdiluvian civilization; or (3) end grace and terminate human history with the flood. Option (1) would repeat the anarchy of the antediluvian civilization. Nearly all the great books "concur in thinking that anarchy is . . . unsuitable to the nature of man."¹⁷ Few of them, however, distinguish between the pre-fall nature of man and the post-fall nature of man, omitting, as most do, the fall. This omission then leads them to incorrectly conclude that civil government is *inherently* necessary for man in community.

Option (3) would doom the entire redemptive program. However, Genesis 6:6-7 does report that God "was sorry that He had made man on the earth" and that He determined "to destroy man whom I have created, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." We must not take this speech lightly. It expresses divine revulsion for all mankind and all other living creatures under man's domain. Future redemption hung by a very narrow thread only because "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."¹⁸

God chose option (2) which gives the proper context for understanding the questions surrounding the origin of civil government. Just before establishing His contract with man and animals for the second civilization, God transferred authority for capital punishment from angels to man (Gen. 9:5-6). Civil government with respect to lethal force, therefore, did not arise because of mankind gathering into communities; that had occurred centuries prior. It did not come into existence because individual men voluntarily transferred a previously-existing sovereign right of executing lethal punishment on adversaries to the community or state (punishment in the sense of a judgment or revenge, not self-defense). Such a right to act as judge never existed though sinful men like Lamech apparently thought they had such a right (Gen. 4:23).

At this point I need to clarify the term "civil government" by addressing its relationship to "civil authority" and "civil power." A community or state can organize itself in different ways while maintaining its historic identity (e.g., Israel's pre-monarchial and monarchial configuration). Government refers to the directions and regulations which its members are expected to follow--the social organization necessary for a civilized society. Thus the adjective *civil* is added to distinguish this governance from the governance internal to the soul, internal to marriage and family, etc. To what, then, do the terms civil authority and civil power refer? Civil government

¹⁷ Adler and Gorman, 638.

¹⁸ All Scripture citations come from the *New King James Version*, ed., Earl Radmacher (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997).

requires authority from some source that is credible enough to secure voluntary submission. For enforcing compliance on the unwilling it also requires power.¹⁹

The new thing in Genesis 9:5-6 is the authorization from God to execute lethal judgment. The power to actually accomplish such judgment is apparently left to man to acquire. Once acquired, however, civil power has now become lethal force. Yet it is only part of civil government and should be distinguished from community leadership, i.e., the inspirational and hopefully wise role of leaders. It is with the lethal power of civil government that the rest of this paper is concerned.

We understand that this new thing came into existence *after* the other forms of government. It is a post-fall add-on! And contrary to popular sentiment about how barbaric capital punishment is, it has one of the greatest pro-life functions in society: to manifest the value of man who alone of all creatures is made in God's image (Genesis 9:5-6). Murder was the first public criminal act of history, and as we've seen above is ultimately supreme defiance of God himself. Thus coercive lethal force in response to it sets the precedent for civil power to restrain social evil. Capital punishment cannot be properly understood in a humanistic pagan sense. It is not society's vengeance or some such thing; it is the expression of divine concerns and judgment.

The Tower of Babel Incident (Gen. 10-11)

The last event pertinent to this discussion from the pre-Israelite era is the tower of Babel incident. It didn't take long for fallen mankind to pervert civil power. Out of the enmity toward God in their fallen mind they wished to define their existence on their terms ("make a name for ourselves" Gen. 11:4). Never mind having a contract with the Creator that provided geophysical security amidst what must have been awe-inspiring post-flood tectonic and climate adjustments. Never mind God's directive to "fill the earth", to re-colonize it and develop prosperous international trade between varied resource environments (Gen. 9:1).²⁰ No, they said, we want a world where we secure our existence and create our own access to heaven. So they redirected their dominion impulse toward a society-wide engineering project whose sole function was to express a new concept of the universe. Jacques Ellul puts it this way:

"The rebellious people are tired of being named, of being the recipient of a name. They want to name themselves. . . [This] means becoming independent. . . It is the desire to exclude God from his creation. And it is this solidarity in a name, this unity in separation from God, which was to keep men from ever again being separated on earth. . . It was in this, man's environment, built by man for man, with any other intervention or power excluded, that man could make a name for himself."²¹

And what was the grand instrument by which this project was to be accomplished? Genesis 10:9-10 and Josephus tell us. Citing pagan sources as well as Jewish tradition, he writes:

¹⁹ See footnote 6.

²⁰ See discussion in Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1960), I, iv.

²¹ Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1970), 15-16. Here again we witness the truth of Figure 1 that political agendas inherently rest upon underlying epistemological and metaphysical ideas.

"[Nimrod] gradually changed the government into tyranny,--seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence upon his power." And to insure against another flood judgment from God, "he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach."²²

The Babel incident shows how civil power, once given to man for the limited purpose of restraining evil to protect life, can be hijacked as a virtually unlimited tool for implementing apostate social salvation agendas. An instrument of *preservation* thus becomes an instrument of attempted *redemption by works*. Babel establishes the recurring pattern of pagan government throughout history until the culmination in the very same location (Rev. 17-18).

The Israelite Theocracy and Civil Power

Pagan culture with its "redemptive" attempts using civil power has persisted through the centuries until today. Hamilton notes:

"[Paganism] continued in underground form through the Middle Ages and lives on today. . . .The imagination of Western man was never fully Christianized. . . .The modern idolatrous imagination. . . .still looks to other powers and other authorities for support and guidance, transferring to them what belongs to the Creator alone."²³

It is not surprising, then, that modern political agendas with respect to their underlying epistemological and metaphysical foundations are not that different from those of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Injection of a Contentious Israelite Counter-culture (Gen. 12-Deut 34)

To save humanity from the paganization of Noahic civilization, God injected into history an opposing counter-culture beginning with the first Jew, Abraham. He called Abraham out of Mesopotamia where he and his father "served other gods" (Josh. 24:2,14). God's call to Abraham challenged directly the pagan impulse of Babel when He announced that He, not Abraham or any other man, would make his name great, i.e., define his existence (Gen. 12:2). And through the Jewish descendants of Abraham would come worldwide blessing (Gen. 12:3).

Two observations follow: First, God started not with a state but with a family. The family is the designed carrier of culture as we shall see by how God designs the Israelite theocracy. And the culture expresses the underlying philosophy of civil government. Second, God hereby began a most contentious feature: revelational exclusivity. He simply refused any longer to speak directly to the Noahic colonies throughout the world. Henceforth the Word of God would come only through Abraham's descendents, an epistemological and ethical offense to unbelief.²⁴

²² Josephus, I, iv. The Babel project's goal of building a high tower to reach *up* to the heavens is contrasted in the text by the Lord having to come *down* to see it!

²³ Kenneth Hamilton, *To Turn From Idols* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1973), 40-41.

²⁴ Unbelievers are ethically offended because they presume epistemologically that religious tenets emanate from human minds alone. All such minds are equal, so what right does one human mind have to pontificate to another? But this is fallacious reasoning since it begs the question: has God spoken His mind to man's mind? If so, then religious tenets do not all emanate from human minds alone.

Out of Egypt. The Abrahamic family was led into Egypt for molding it into a tribal community with its own associated civil government. Egypt of the pharaohs was a classic example of the tyrannical state where civil government incarnated the pagan metaphysic of one-level of existence (a continuity of nature-man-gods). In figure 2 we can observe this in Egyptian art. The diagram on the left shows a pharaoh with the same height as the gods indicating equal metaphysical value. The pillar on the right contains the message that the pharaoh named by the vertical hieroglyphics is the mediator (vertical scepters on each side of the hieroglyphics) between heaven (the top symbol) and earth (the bottom symbol).

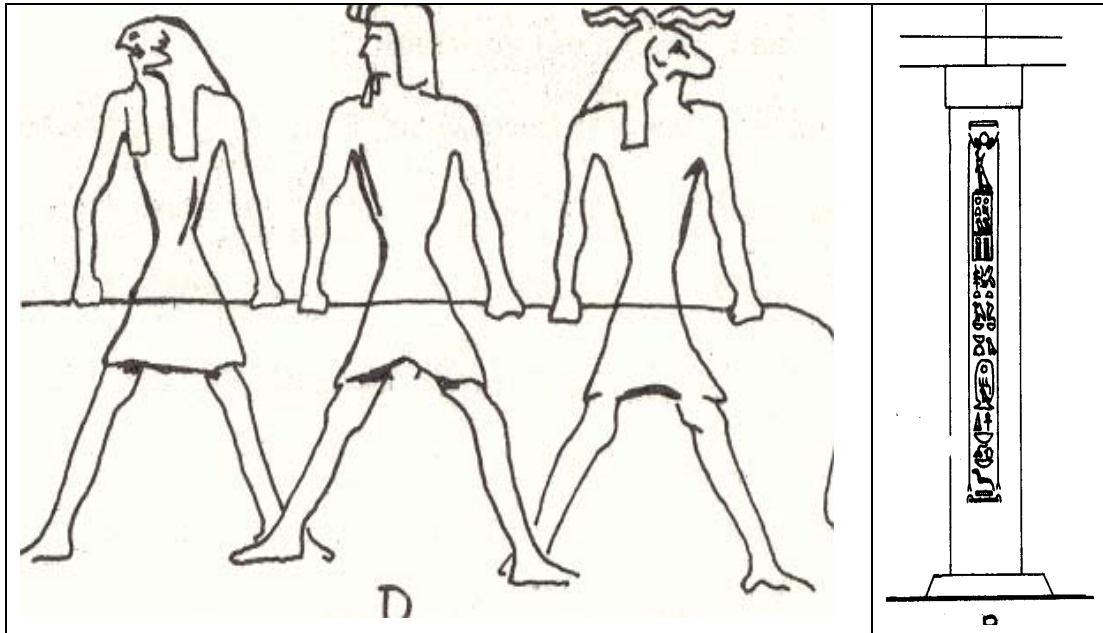


Figure 2. Samples of Egyptian art picturing religious beliefs about the state. Taken from Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), Figs. 14,19.

Egyptologist Frankfort describes the political-religious situation:

"[Pharaoh] was the fountainhead of all authority, all power, and all wealth. The famous saying of Louis XIV, *l'etat c'est moi* [I am the state], was levity and presumption when it was uttered, but could have been offered by Pharaoh as a statement of fact in which his subjects concurred. It would have summed up adequately [Egyptian] political philosophy."²⁵

The claim of total civil authority led to absolute civil power. Why? *Because these ideas directly follow from the pagan metaphysical presupposition.* When the Creator-creature distinction, the two-level existence, is denied, there can be no authority transcending the state. As Rushdoony writes:

"Wherever a society has a naturalistic religion, grounded on the concept of continuity, man faces the total power of the state. . . . Where there is no transcendental law and power in a separate and omnipotent being, then *power has a wholly immanent and immediate source in a state, group, or person, and it is beyond appeal.* The state becomes the

²⁵Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (Torchback ed., New York: Harper & Row, 1961 [1948]), 31.

saving power and the source of law; . . . [It] becomes god walking on earth. . . .In this faith, for man to be free means to be in the state."²⁶ [Emphasis supplied]

This is exactly the dilemma noted by Hobbes in footnote 12 above. And it is why the Bible alone with its transcendent authoritative verbal revelation from God provides an adequate foundation for civil government.

The exodus event by which Israel *physically* came out of Egypt thus marked a major disruption of pagan civilization. So profound was this cultural break that the first generation of Israel still could not *spiritually* come out of Egypt in their worldview. In spite of the public geophysical miracles, they continued to imagine God, man, and nature in Egyptian categories (Ex 32:1-6). They feared a freedom in which they would have to trust God for food, clothing, and survival and reverted to seeking the security of slavery: "Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic." (Num. 11:4-5). Rushdoony describes the political implications of this kind of thinking: "[Man] will perpetually demand of the state a redemptive role. What he cannot do personally, i.e., to save himself, he demands that the state do for him, so that the state, as man enlarged, becomes the human savior of man. . . .[This political arrangement] cultivates the slave mind in order to enslave men, and to have people themselves demand an end to liberty. . . .The slave mind clings to statist. . .slavery, cradle-to-grave welfare care, as a fearful child clings to his mother. The advantage of slavery is precisely this, security in the. . .state."²⁷

A Unique Civil Government. Israelites quickly discovered that Yahweh God was going to call the shots, not their Egypt-conditioned hearts. The exodus event had physically separated them from Egypt, and Sinai would begin a painful all-encompassing conflict with every surrounding Gentile culture. They learned that they had joined a really unique community. The Creator-creature distinction was no longer going to be suppressed. The profound effects upon civil government would impact the world for millennia to come.

If the exodus judgments upon Egypt demonstrated the public triumph of the truthfulness of monotheism over the delusion of man's pagan imagination, the Mt. Sinai event established the uniqueness of Israel in human history. No other nation has ever had a contract with God, and no other nation has ever had a millennia-long series of miraculous interactions with God.²⁸ Yahweh God gave the constitution and original legislature of the nation by direct revelation to the people in the ten commandments and indirectly through Moses in the statutes and judgments. *No other legal document in history can claim to be the publicly-heard words of God* (Deut. 5:22-27). This event is one of the most astounding occurrences in all of political history, and yet pagan

²⁶ Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1971), 60-61.

²⁷ Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1970), 28-29.

²⁸ Johns Hopkins archeologist, William Albright wrote, "Contracts and treaties were common everywhere, but only the Hebrews, as far as we know, made covenants with their gods or God." See his book, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1968), 108. Jewish scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann pointed out the unusual feature of Israel's history, "What makes the history of Israelite prophecy *sui generis* is the succession of apostles of God that come to the people through the ages. Such a line of apostle-prophets is unknown to paganism. . . .[The pagan prophet] incorporated a unique, self-contained divine power; therefore his 'mission' ended with him." See his work, *The Religion of Israel*, trans. and ed. Moshe Greenberg (paperback ed., New York: Schocken Books, 1972 [1960]), 212.

suppression continues to omit it as a supernatural public revelatory event from the educational system.

At Sinai Israel's form of civil government was a theocracy; later that form would change. What can we learn about the great questions of the ends of government and the suitability of its form to the people governed from this theocratic period? First, we must acknowledge that the theocracy had features peculiar to this special relationship with God. It was a public 'laboratory' demonstration to the world on a local scale and for a limited time of what establishment of the Kingdom of God in a fallen world entailed. As King Yahweh God had self-authenticating authority. He also had power limited only by His nature. Thus He could enforce his authority by His power to alter the health status of man and animal, the productivity of the soil, plants, and herds, and the effect of weather throughout the nation--all options unavailable to other civil authorities. (cf. Deut. 28).

However we can learn what "social justice" actually looks like, i.e., what should characterize a community under a well-run civil government. Although so-called Christian socialists insist upon defining social justice in terms of the Sermon on the Mount and other New Testament teachings on personal ethics, the proper source is the Old Testament since it addresses society at large, not just individuals. Moses stated that no other nation had "such statutes and righteous judgments as are in this law" (Deut. 4:8). In his recent study Wayne Grudem states the case well:

"Understanding exactly how Israel's laws might possibly be relevant to secular civil governments today is one of the most complex questions in biblical interpretation. . . .If the distinctions [between Israel and other nations] are kept in mind, the laws that God gave to Israel can still provide useful information for understanding the purposes of government and the nature of good and bad government. . . .Other sections of the Old Testament. . .speak in general terms about governments and kings. For example, . . .Proverbs. . .Psalms. . .Ecclesiastes. . . ." ²⁹

Derivations of the Ten Commandments. The ten commandments appear to have an implied commentary on the nature of a community. If one combines the first two commandments as a broad address of man's relationship to God's authority, a chiasm appears centering on life:

5:6-10 God alone is worthy of worship and service

5:11 Accuracy in language about God

5:12-15 Management of labor and property

5:16 Society depends upon functional marriage & family

5:17 Life is to be respected & preserved

5:18 Marriage is to be protected

5:19 Property is to be protected

5:20 Accuracy in language of judicial proceedings

5:21 Self is not worthy of worship and service

Like the life-affirming purpose of the civil authority of capital punishment in Genesis 9:5-6, the supreme value of human life is here, too, emphasized.

²⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 83-84.

Next, if one turns this chiasm a quarter turn to the left as in figure 3, there seems to be a depiction of the dynamics of the Hebrew community. At bottom is the *spiritual orientation of the hearts* of the people--are they submissive to Yahweh God, or do they reject Him and look elsewhere? Out from the heart comes words so the next layer addresses the people's language. Does it express truth beginning with the supreme truth about God and then in social relations beginning with the most crucial matter of court proceedings? No society can function without *integrity of language* whether in business accounting, contracts, or engineering computations.

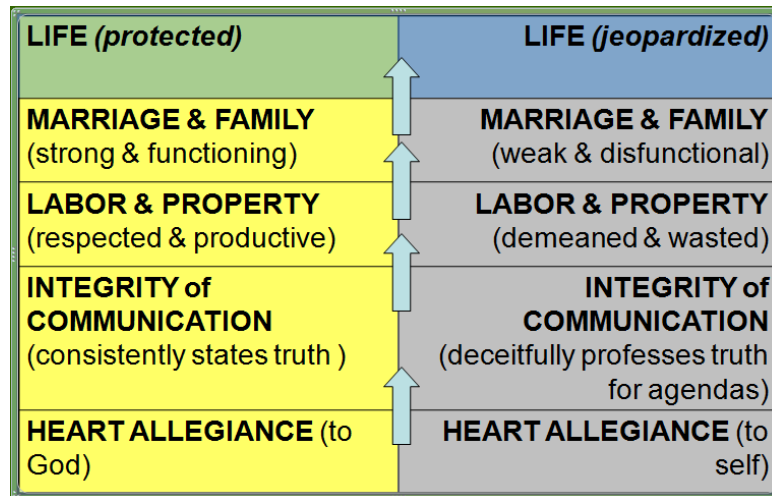


Figure 3. A possible implied structural design of society based upon the Ten Commandments.

Above integrity of language comes labor and the resulting property (wealth). With integrity of language secure, business can proceed. Above labor and wealth comes marriage and family. Marriage and family can prosper only when there is adequate wealth to sustain them. Finally, the production of properly functioning marriage and family is life. Without, however, the foundational heart orientation toward the Lord, the entire overlying social structure is jeopardized.

If the purpose of all civil government is ultimately to preserve life, we would expect that theocratic Israel's government included that end among its other special purposes. Some general wisdom principles derived from the Decalogue and its corollary laws would then follow concerning the great questions of government. Here is a sampling in the order of the areas in figure 3.

1. Heart Allegiance. Clearly the cardinal sin in the Old Testament is idolatry because idolatry undercut the very foundation of Israel--the nature of its God. One's view of existence and one's ultimate epistemological authority determines his life choices and priorities. That's reason for much of the political rancor today--the citizenry holds to radically opposed worldviews. That's also why the American founding fathers appealed to the widely held notion of *natural rights* as a transcendental standard over king and parliament. They had a simple argument: rights existed by virtue of creation, pre-existed government, and therefore did not owe their existence to government. Today Christian citizens must insure that political debate is deep enough to deal with basic worldview--do we base our politics on the pagan one-level view of reality that led to Babel, Egypt of the Pharaohs, and every other despotic government, or on the biblical two-level

view of reality that influenced Augustine to resist Rome, Samuel Rutherford and others to resist the divine right of kings, and the founders to resist an over-stepping government?

2. Integrity of Communication. A disease that afflicts political discourse today is the sound-bite quips and casual use of important terminology like *equality* without defining the intended meaning. It reminds one of ancient Greece when the Sophists concluded that reality was ultimately unknowable and so turned language into rhetoric of manipulation. Increasingly we hear of corporate and government altered books and statistics, scientists who falsify data, media talking heads that report gossip as truth, and the artificial terminology emerging from the political correctness movement. Mosaic law prohibited every misuse of language from religious appeals that used language to mislead to false weights and measures that distorted currency value to perjury (Deut. 13; 25:13; 19:16-21 cf. Lev. 19:35-36 and Isa. 1:22). Modern inflation policies of paper money are simply government approved deceit.

3. Labor and Property. Unlike Marxism that equates the fall of man with acquisition of private property and socialism that preaches envy of wealth, the Mosaic law affirms and protects private ownership. After all, there is no sense in prohibiting theft if there is no private property to steal! But the negative prohibition of theft was rooted on a positive concern for caring of a neighbor's lost property (Deut. 22:1-4). The year of Jubilee insured that each family would have the title of their property restored (Lev. 25). Why this concern? Because property is the result of one's labor; to steal it is to steal the life that went into its acquisition. Yet the law also prevented "workaholicism" by requiring rest periods patterned after God's post-creation rest and willing giving of one's wealth back to God and to care for those without means of support (Deut. 14:22-47--this was not government confiscation and redistribution of wealth; it was *charitable* giving by individuals! Charity and coercion are opposites).

4. Marriage and Family. Opposite to the contemporary idea that these institutions owe their existence to the government, God's law argues that the credibility of government authority owes much of its existence to the family! *In the family one first learns authority and only if that lesson is learned would Israelite society be able to function and survive in the land* (note the parallel structure in Deut. 5:16 and 16:20). The family, not the state, was charged with the primary responsibility for basic education (Deut. 6:6-9).³⁰ If the family production of a responsible next generation son failed, in some cases the young man would be eliminated rather than being dumped on society for it to become a surrogate parent for him or for him to help generate a criminal class of useless people (Deut. 21:18-21). Local municipal governments apparently enforced divorce laws and other safeguards on sexual life (Deut. 22:13-30). To insure a good start to a marriage, the husband was granted a year free from military and outside business obligations (Deut. 22:5). Needless to say, marriage was in accord with creation design

³⁰ By contrast consider these statements advocating expansion of government *power* with no justification for the corresponding *authority*: "If a parent subscribes to an absolutist belief system premised on the notion that it was handed down by a creator, that it (like the Ten Commandments) is etched in stone and that all other systems are wrong, the essential lessons of a civic education. . . often seem deeply challenging and suspect. . . Such 'private truths' have no place in the public arena, including the public schools." Catherine Ross, "Fundamentalist Challenges to Core Democratic Values: Exit and Homeschooling", *William and Mary Bill of Rights Journal* 18 (May 2010); and "There must be legal and constitutional limits on the ability of homeschooling parents "to teach their children idiosyncratic and illiberal beliefs and values" . . . [Government control must be exercised against] "parents [who] want to teach against the enlightenment. . . . Parental control over children's basic education flows from the state (rather than visa versa). States delegate power over children's basic education to parents. . . ." Kimberly A. Yurako, "Education Off the Grid...", *California Law Review* 96 (February 2008) (She is a professor at the Northwestern University School of Law).

of the male and female so homosexuality was explicitly prohibited as well as cross-dressing (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deut. 22:5).³¹

5. Life. The chief end of all civil government is protection of life. The American founders wisely understood the protection of life to include "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" by which they did *not* mean dependency on a welfare state. They recognized that life entailed a requirement to be free of external coercion and assault. So also did the Mosaic law stipulate specific government protections for life. Capital punishment for murder faced strict rules of evidence to avoid fatal misjudgments--rules, by the way, that would make such punishment very rare even today with ubiquitous cameras (Deut. 17:6-7)! Judicial proceedings insured easy accessibility, evidence protection, possibility of appeal, and integrity of witnesses (Deut. 19). Military policy defined war and limited destruction of life-sustaining resources (Deut. 20).

The kind of community implied by the Decalogue had a localized system of civil government based in the tribal cities. Authorization of judicial actions was delegated by Yahweh God through the Mosaic covenant; it was not a product of some sort of social contract. *The unity of the diverse tribes did not depend upon a central government; it was solely the product of a common religious faith.* The Decalogue and its associated statutes and judgments is the model of the rule of law. It was compact, understandable to all, permanent, and transcended all civil power. By contrast, today's ever-growing body of civil law and regulations are voluminous, not understandable, ever changing, and project civil power---mostly of unelected, unaccountable, and usually unqualified bureaucracies.

Compromise with the World: Monarchy (Judges-2 Chron. 36)

Theocratic Israel had been given a clear exposition of Yahweh's will for community life. The concepts of justice, equality, and fairness which arise again and again in political discourse were all made clear. *Justice* was based upon self-revelation of the holy nature of Yahweh. Anything else, any theological perversion, would therefore lead to judicial perversion. [Observe the apparent interruption in the authorization of judicial procedures in Deut. 16:18-17:13 with the admonition in 16:21-22 to prohibit apostate religion.] Human speculations of the fallen mind necessarily distort one's view of justice. Justice in Israel meant *equal treatment in judicial proceedings*--not equal economic status (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:16-17).³² *Fairness* in taxation meant equal tax *rates* for all, rich and poor alike (there was no "progressive" tithe rate).³³

Because the terms of civil government (political and ethical levels in figure 1) were dependent upon the underlying faith in Yahweh's self-revelation (epistemological and metaphysical levels

³¹In a widely circulated column Dennis Prager cited several scholars who agreed that prohibition of homosexuality in the ancient world occurred only inside the Hebrew community. See his article, "Why Judaism Rejected Homosexuality," on the internet. One such location with discussion is:

<http://www.lukeford.net/Dennis/indexp22.html>

³²Those who use the term "social justice" today to promulgate social ideology do not know what they are asking for! As sinners, they should be calling for grace, not justice!

³³ The silly slogan today about the rich paying more "to be fair" rests on ignorance of third grade arithmetic. When one multiplies a larger number by the same multiplier as for a smaller number, one obtains a bigger number. Of course the problem is the tax code that has enough loopholes in it to resemble Swiss cheese--loopholes put into it by lobbying pressure upon legislators for political favors. No such loopholes could exist in the flat rate tithes of Israel.

in figure 1), it follows that failure to purge the land of pagan theology would have disastrous results. Sure enough the book of Judges records the failure to execute the conquest and destroy pagan culture as mandated in Deut. 12-13. Because of the contractual relationship between Israel and Yahweh, defiance of His authority led to experience with His power. Judges ends with the nation in basic anarchy (Jud. 21:25).³⁴

Changing the Form of Government a False Solution. The Hebrew elders who were directly involved in the civil structure proposed a solution: adopt the monarchial form of government that existed in the surrounding pagan nations (1 Sam. 8:4-5).

Their reasoning apparently went as follows. Experience of the judges period empirically showed a correlation between the presence of a judge and freedom from pagan domination. But the judges were not consistently present. Therefore the solution would be to have a powerful leader continuously present, i.e., a king.

Their political analysis was erroneous. Correlations are tricky and need careful interpretation because correlation doesn't prove causation. The elders' reasoning was secular and therefore could not correctly analyze the situation.[The book of Judges with its prophet insights into the real dynamics of the period probably had not been written.] They apparently forgot that Moses had said that God would raise up a prophetic line to advise in these situations.

Samuel was the prophet for their day. Through him God provided the correct interpretation of the judge-peace correlation. The observed judge-peace correlation was due to Yahweh's gracious deliverance; the calamities were due to adoption of residual Canaanite idolatries (Jud. 2:11-23). The elders' proposal of a change in the form of civil government, therefore, was not a solution and moreover would lead to more problems.

Yahweh God identifies to Samuel the fallacy in the elders' political discourse. It completely omits the Yahweh-Israel theocratic relationship. Changing the form of government to a monarchy would reduce the Hebrews to slaves of a bloated, bureaucratic civil power. Placing all the tribes under one man's dynasty would concentrate all power in a corruptible elite. And it would do nothing to deal with the primary problem. It would, though, gave an unruly people the totalitarian government they deserved, the principle discussed by Montesquieu and Mill above.³⁵

Another Change in Government and the Disastrous Results. If change to a monarchy wasn't enough, a second change in Israel's civil government occurred after the death of King Solomon. As divine discipline upon him for absorbing pagan idolatrous culture, God recruited one of his senior managers, Jeroboam, to head up a 10-tribe coalition that would break away from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (1 Kings 11). God made it clear to Jeroboam that he could begin his own dynasty like that of David if he would keep the Mosaic law (11:29-39). There would be two kingdoms--Judah in the south with David and Israel in the north with Jeroboam.

³⁴ Thus demonstrating the consequences of a free society *in the fallen world*. Libertarian proponent Ayn Rand of *Atlas Shrugged* fame, by her failure to recognize the difference between man as originally created and as fallen creature projects a confusing notion of how her version of a "free society" differs significantly from anarchy.

³⁵ This theme of the suitability of the form of government to the condition of the people continues through the Bible.

Jeroboam was still under the laws of the Covenant (11:38). The message was plain: *although there would be two kingdoms, there was to be only one Lord and one Covenant*. However, Jeroboam noted that this one-nation-under-Yahweh religion would continue to be based in Jerusalem which was located in Judah, not in his northern kingdom. Failing to trust the Lord's promises to sustain his kingship, he feared that when his subjects periodically visited the central Temple in Jerusalem for the required feasts (Deut. 16:16), they would re-align themselves with Judah (12:26-27). So, thinking in the same secular fashion as the elders of Samuel's day, he made a change in the civil government. *Jeroboam as an agent of civil government redesigned the religion of his people*. He employed government craftsmen to fabricate an image using the old Egyptian deity model of the exodus generation, replaced the cultus at Jerusalem with two government built shrines within easy travel distance--one in the north and one in the south (1 Kings 12:29), and replaced the Levites with government bureaucratic priests (1 Kings 12:28-33). Civil government, as it always does in the one-level view of reality, becomes the epistemological authority that defines the "authorized" religion of the community.

God's reaction to this half-Yahweh-half-golden-calf bastard government religion is given in the story of the prophet in 1 Kings 13 and the frequent repetition throughout 1 Kings (14:16; 15:30,34; 16:2,19,31) and 2 Kings (3:3; 10:29,31; 13:2,6,11; 14:24; 15:9,18,24,28; 17:22) of the phrase "the sin of Jeroboam." The political turmoil that followed in the northern kingdom of Israel (9 different dynasties filled with murderous intrigue) contrasts sharply with the solitary Davidic dynasty in the southern kingdom of Judah. Civil authority and power in one controlled religion; in the other religion, at least nominally, controlled civil authority and power.

The transformation of civil government into a totally pagan state in the north occurred shortly afterward. King Ahab, following the political marriage customs of Solomon, married the daughter of the pagan king-priest of Tyre and Sidon (1 Kings 16:31). However, whereas Solomon had married unbelievers and allowed an ecumenical mixture of biblical and pagan presuppositions to control the royal family, *Ahab allowed Jezebel to make Baalism the supreme state religion over all others*. Instead of a mixed apostasy like that of Solomon or a man-made counterfeit of biblical religion like that of Jeroboam, Ahab dropped all pretense of following the Word of God and capitulated completely to his queen's demands. The Lord Himself was now officially rejected, and Baal enthroned as the god of Israel.

Ahab constructed an official temple to Baal thus employing civil power to serve pagan religion. The official analysis of his reign is given by the prophet authors of Kings: "Ahab did more to provoke Yahweh God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him" and "there was none like Ahab who sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord" (16:32-33; 21:25). A major milestone in apostasy had been crossed: any true Yahwehist would now be considered disloyal to the state, a traitor worthy of death. Geophysical and political judgments of the Mosaic covenant accompanied by the bloody confrontation between Elijah and Baalist government priests eventually brought down this paganized Hebrew government.

As discussed earlier with the exodus from Egypt, a civil government operating upon a one-level view of reality with no transcendental law above it becomes a virtual god in itself. And being the product of fallen man, this god has perverted notions of justice. The Naboth vineyard story

illustrates the effect on justice for private property ownership: *eminent domain*. Eminent domain, writes Rushdoony,

"is the claim to sovereignty by the state over all property within the state, and it is the assertion of the right to appropriate all or any part thereof to any public or state use deemed necessary by the state. . . . The eminent domain of the state was not recognized in Israel, as the incident of Naboth's vineyard makes clear (I Kings 21), although it is prophesied as one of the consequences of apostasy from God the King (I Sam. 8:14). It is specifically forbidden in Ezekiel 46:18."³⁶

Ahab wanted the property of his neighbor, Naboth, and offered remuneration as is customarily done by Gentile civil authorities. Naboth refused on the basis that the land was divinely authorized inheritance for his family. Seeing her husband pout, Jezebel arranged Naboth's death by stoning deceitfully authorizing local civil judicial action. Yahweh God sent Elijah with the message: dogs shall lick the blood of Ahab after he is killed and they will eat Jezebel, too (21:17-24). Within a century Assyria would erase the northern kingdom from history. The southern kingdom would follow a little over a century later. The most unique government the world has ever known, a genuine theocracy with the very physical Presence of God on earth, was gone for the time being.

The Future Final Solution (Isa. 1:1-Mal. 4:5).

Much can be learned about civil power from the eight-centuries of theocracy. Here we had an actual community, a state, established by God as a local model of His Kingdom, one ruled by Him in an arrangement unique in world history. In the closing centuries of its declining existence we observe more and more prophetic focusing upon a future solution to be brought about by divine intervention. Out of the historical experience of corruptible rulers there emerges the concept of a coming *Ideal Ruler* through some sort of convergence of Yahweh God's intent to dwell with man and the Davidic dynasty (Ps. 110). In the face of the historical experience of the tribal society's inability to live righteously enough to receive the blessings of Yahweh, a New Covenant is announced which will somehow create *a righteous society* that is at last compatible with God's just nature (Jer. 33). The theocratic story ends on note of hope for those who long for an existence fitting our created design and on a note of terror for those who imagine that man can forever define his own existence on his own terms.

What did the Israelite theocracy teach about civil government and civil power in particular?

Here are some points to ponder:

1. At Sinai Yahweh plainly showed His *authority* as the supernatural king of the nation and through the exodus and subsequent wilderness experience showed his *power* over both man and nature. His careful interlinking of the two in passages like Lev. 26 and Deut. 28 models the proper compatibility of these two political elements: power, even with God, is rationally connected to genuine authority.

³⁶ It was prohibited in the theocracy and will be in the Israel of coming millennial kingdom because God is the owner of the land and allocates it to whom He wills. Rouses J Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1973), 499f. The US Constitution, Fifth Amendment, attempts to limit eminent domain to taking private land "for public use" but even that restriction was dissolved by the Supreme Court in 2005 in *Kelo v. City of New London* which allowed the City of New London to seize the property of Mrs. Kelo and give it to a private developer who supposedly would make the property more valuable (for higher property tax revenues).

2. The theocracy never sought to revoke or modify man's *created authority* over self, nature, marriage, and family. It affirmed these spheres of authority as independent of civil government.
3. Even when direct revelation of God's will was available through priest and prophet man would not choose it over the siren songs of evil spirits. The supra-human domain of evil reaching far beyond the sphere of civil government since *the fall* was affirmed and the inability of it to control evil.³⁷
4. That civil power up to the level of the taking of life instituted after *the flood* was repeatedly legitimized by God's directives for holy war and judgments against lesser sins. These expanded uses were special cases resulting from the suspension of the ethics of grace in order to reveal what real social justice at the end of history will look like. Yet we observe that even this exercise of civil power did not bring about a righteous society.
5. Finally, the theocratic "experiment" refuted the Tower of Babel dream that sheer civil power in the hands of a corruptible elite can produce the utopian society.³⁸

Times of the Gentiles--the Conclusion

With the withdrawal of the physical glory of God from the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezk. 8:5-18; 9:3; 10:4; 11:23) and the end of the Solomonic dynasty (Jer. 22:24-30), the theocracy disappeared from history. Simultaneously, the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, had his famous dream (Dan. 2) which by God's help Daniel interpreted to be a panorama of history from that day (603 BC) until the final re-establishment of the Kingdom of God in all its completeness. The dream's central theme was the transfer of political supremacy from Israel to four successive Gentile (pagan) kingdoms:

“You, O King, are king of kings. For the God of Heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, He has given them into thy hand, and has made you rule over them all” Dan. 2:37-38 (emphasis supplied) (cf. Jer. 27:4-7).

Centuries earlier such power could never have been given to a Gentile nation because of God's promises to Israel: “if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments. . . ., the LORD will set you high above all nations of the earth. . . .you shall be above only, and not be beneath. . . .” Deut. 28:1,13 (Cf. Ps. 89:27).³⁹ A new political order had begun in the world, one that continues up the present hour.

³⁷ A lesson here for the ubiquitous tendency to imagine intricate conspiracies of men and governments as the explanation for crucial events: conspiracies there may be, but they would also involve the invisible realms of evil as 1 Kings 22 makes clear.

³⁸ Thus the wise counsel of John Adams that even a constitutional republic with its balance of powers cannot work by itself: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and righteous people. It is wholly inadequate for the governance of any other." John Adams, *The Words of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, ed., Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little Brown, 1854), IX:229 (Oct. 11, 1798) cited in Grudem, 97.

³⁹ McClain observes concerning the previous centuries leading up to the exile:

“During that long period the power and authority of the Theocracy was never in question. No nation, regardless of its size or strength, could stand successfully against Israel as long as that people followed the will of its divine King. . . .Israel went down in defeat only when she turned aside from the divinely written charter of her kingdom.” Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 125.

Gentile hegemony means that all civil government is now related to God through *general providence* rather than through a particular contract (other than the Noahic Covenant which encompasses man's physical environment). The cause-effect between moral choices and resulting consequences is less conspicuous due to the time-lag involved and lack of prophets to receive revealed interpretations of events.⁴⁰

Gentile Civil Power.

Political Supremacy. Three things need to be noted about this new form. First, the transfer of political supremacy in Daniel 2 to four specific, successive Gentile kingdoms meant that imperialism unrestricted by Israel's existence would be the *modus vivendi* in international relations. Although the previous Babel curse was still in effect, forbidding one world government based upon one world culture and language, now one nation was given dominion to impose its own culture upon weaker nations. Rather than a pure world government created by mutually consenting nations (a vision shared by "one worlders" since Dante and Kant), there would be one nation and one culture which would attempt to dominate the globe at any given time. Here is eminent domain with a vengeance--*imperial empire on a global scale*. Due to this dominance of Gentile nations, Jesus called the era from the exile onward "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24).

Tense Nature of Community Life. Second, each empire and founding leader is pictured zoomorphically in Daniel's own dream whereas only the final kingdom from God has human form (Dan. 7). I suggest that the imagery pictures the ethical character of each kingdom. Every kingdom but the fifth one is *sub-human* and not really fitting God's design for the communities of man. The pagan character of Noahic civilization continues in spite of the testimony of God's counter-culture. In all four there would be an irreconcilable tension between citizens following the Word of God brought through Israel and those immersed in pagan religious concepts. In both Babylon and Medio-Persia the civil government in the hands of pagans and individual believers were at serious odds. In the post-Alexandrian Greek empire there arose a violent conflict between Jews and the most God-defying, Satanic leader of the ancient world, Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 8). The New Testament and subsequent Church history both testify to continuing tension between believers and civil rulers.

Borrowed Foundation. A repercussion of the exile was the explosion of new religions throughout the world along with the rise of philosophy in Greece. The older, more mystical pagan religions that were perversions of revelation inherited from Noah had remained fairly stable throughout the centuries from the call of Abraham to the exile. Suddenly in the sixth century, however, everything changed. As Robert Brow says:

"In the sixth century B.C. there was a tidal wave of revolt against the priest craft of the ancient world. This wave shattered the power of the old religions, though their cults

⁴⁰McClain contrasts this less clear link between choice and consequences that "holds good generally in all nations in every age" with the explicit link in Israel during the theocracy. McClain, 86f.

continued to exist as backwaters for centuries. *Seven world religions appeared within fifty years of each other and all continue to this day.*"⁴¹

Although differing in details these seven religions and philosophy all had one thing in common: *they emphasized Man as Savior*. They were potent new versions of paganism which arose to sustain the pagan undercurrent. Some were "pessimistic" and "irrationalist" such as Buddhism which stressed the illusory character of the human ego and the limitations of human thought. For Buddhism man saves himself by losing individual desire. Taoism and Vedanta Monism developed the basic pagan idea of the Continuity of Being into a full fledged pantheism in which God is the creation. Others were "optimistic" and "rationalist" such as those which stressed ethics and doing good (Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Confucianism, and Judaism). In these man saves himself by his good works. Whether optimistic or pessimistic, however, all of the religions that developed in the exilic period promoted man to a more active role than the older pagan religions. They mirrored the transfer of political supremacy to the Gentiles and rise of an imperialist spirit of the age.

Greek philosophy coincidentally arose at the same time and shows the man-as-savior theme ever more clearly by showing the underlying foundation on which he builds.⁴² Frankfort wrote of this Greek innovation:

"[The early Greek philosophers] proceeded with preposterous boldness on an entirely unproven assumption. They held that the universe is an intelligible whole. In other words, they presumed that a single order underlies the chaos of our perceptions and, furthermore, that we are able to comprehend that order. . . . [They attempted] to reach a vantage point where the phenomena would reveal their hidden coherence. It was the unshakeable conviction of the Ionians, Pythagoreans, and early Eleatics that such a vantage point existed; and they searched for the road leading to it, not in the manner of scientists but in that of conquistadors."⁴³

That this idea of the intelligible nature of the world is responsible for the cultural and engineering accomplishments of mankind is indisputable.

What more likely fifth century BC source of this idea that "a single order underlies" all of reality than the OT revelation that the world is a creation and is providentially controlled by God in a rational way? During the theocracy undoubtedly Solomon's international trade spread Hebrew thought throughout the Gentile world. And surely the post-exile Diaspora provided Hebrew scripture in many Gentile cities. Before he died Albright had planned to write a book on this link.⁴⁴ How ironic that the foundation of modern world culture is "borrowed" from the Bible!

⁴¹ Brow lists their founders: Zoroaster (600-583 B.C.--*Zoroastrianism*), Mahavira (Vardhamana) (599-527 B.C.--*Jainism*); Gautama the Buddha (560-480 B.C.--*Buddhism*); various Hindu reformers created the Upanishads (*Vedanta Monism*); Lao-Tzu (604-517 B.C.--*Taoism*); Confucius (551-479 B.C.--*Confucianism*); and exilic and post-exilic rabbis (*Judaism*). Roger Brow, *Religion: Origin and Ideas* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1966), 27.

⁴² Gordon Clark with characteristic wit states, "Greek philosophy began on May 28, 585 B.C. at six-thirteen in the evening." He refers to Thales' successful prediction of a solar eclipse. Gordon H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957), 3.

⁴³ Henri Frankfort et al., *Before Philosophy* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1964) [original title, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, 1946], 251, 254.

⁴⁴ Albright, 259.

Lessons Hopefully Learned: The Function, Limitations, and Dangers of Civil Power

In thinking through our Christian citizenship today from the Old Testament, this paper has limited itself to a focus on civil power rather than to a more comprehensive view that would have also discussed in equal detail civil authority. Civil power, after all, is where coercion occurs as political policies are expressed and thus where citizens most clearly feel the effects of those policies. Civil government obviously encompasses more than the power of coercion; it also can include inspirational leadership and the politician's "bully pulpit." That kind of activity pre-existed the institution of civil governance and goes back to family leadership given at creation.

But we need to understand that *no matter how benign and innocent a law or regulation appears, civil power up to and including lethal force always lies behind it whether exercised or not.* If you doubt that, try refusing to comply and watch what happens. Eventually government enforcement will use the power to arrest you. What happens if you elevate your resistance to enforcement? That potentially lethal power is rooted in every one of the millions of regulations and laws is a sobering fact too often overlooked.

The wise Christian citizen, therefore, needs to reflect on the implications of constantly expanding regulations in every area of life. Does this regulation or that law truly fit the God-designed function of civil power? Is it trying to do something that lies beyond the limitations of civil power's capacities in this fallen world? What lessons can we learn from the biblical worldview about the inherent dangers of such power?

The Function of Civil Power.

The Old Testament is clear. The function of civil power up to and including lethal force is *to protect God's image in human life.* Human life differs from plants and animals in spite of some contemporary environmental thought. In fact, if the pagan position of evolution were true, there could be no ethical justification to protect any part of creation. As Greg Bahnsen once stated in a debate at UCLA, what one bag of evolving protoplasm does to another bag is ethically irrelevant! Human life is special to God.⁴⁵

Exercise of lethal force in the OT is an expression of God's justice in time. It must, therefore, be used with restraint lest it take innocent life and thus defeat its true function.⁴⁶ The life that is to be so protected fits within a designed context of family, marriage, private property, labor, integrity of language, and orientation of heart as Fig. 2 shows. Human life, therefore, is best protected when political policies support and not hinder those aspects of society.

How does the function of civil power vary with the condition of a society as Montesquieu and Mill discussed? The shift in the form of government from a loose tribal confederacy to an oppressive monarchy shows that people without self-government bring onto themselves despotic government. Greater power is needed to govern an unruly people. But how can an unruly

⁴⁵ This point shows once again the necessity for political discussion to become conscious of the underlying epistemological and metaphysical assumptions as Fig. 1 depicts.

⁴⁶ Such restraint was demonstrated in the Mosaic law code by installation of careful judicial protocols and military policies (e.g., Deut. 17:1-13; 20:19-20).

people become fit for a freer form of government? The New Covenant announcement resolves this classic dilemma by promising a supernatural transformation of the people that qualifies them for an ideal government.

The Limitations of Civil Power.

Civil power, regardless of the form of government, can only accomplish so much. Rightly exercised it can reinforce the distinction between good and evil behavior at least in those with properly working consciences. For that same group of citizens it can open the way for life to flourish by protecting family, marriage, private property, labor, and integrity of language. But right exercise of power is contingent upon the intent, integrity and wisdom of those who exercise it. There we have two major limitations of that power: the ethical quality of the governed and that of the governing.

Since Babel the unbelieving world has too frequently thought that somehow civil power could be turned into a tool of social redemption. Fed up with the frequent wars of Europe, Kant was one of the earliest proponents of starting world government in the form of a league of nations. Having no illusions about the difficulty of raising the ethical character of people, he simply tried to use civil power instead.

“[The problem of organizing a state] does not require that we know how to attain the moral improvement of men but only that we should know the mechanism of nature in order to *use it on men*, organizing the conflict of hostile intentions present in a people in such a way that *they must compel themselves to submit to coercive laws*. Thus a state of peace is established in which laws have force.”⁴⁷ [Emphasis supplied.]

Subsequent efforts to implement Kant's idea have all floundered on this limitation that is resolved only in the Bible by the New Covenant promise.

The problem here is the nature of at least two features of evil. First, there is the irreversible effects of the fall. Humanity, both unregenerate and regenerate, possess what the New Testament calls "flesh," deliverance from which is possible only by the supernatural work of God. No government policy, no matter how well intentioned, can fix this problem. And no government policy can fix the second problem: the extra-human dimension of evil involving unseen demonic agents fully capable of deceiving the nations (Rev. 20:3,8).⁴⁸

The Dangers of Civil Power

⁴⁷ Immanuel Kant, Perpetual Peace, 1795. Unfortunately, I have lost the other bibliographical information for this rare booklet which I once obtained via inter-library loan.

⁴⁸ When socialism threatened English churches after the Fabian Society was formed in 1884, Spurgeon went after it from the pulpit: "German rationalism which has ripened into *Socialism* may yet pollute the mass of mankind and lead them to overturn the foundations of society. . . .To attempt national regeneration without personal regeneration is to dream of erecting a house without separate bricks." "The Headstone of the Corner," Sermon No. 1420, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit (MTP)* 24 (1878), 453, and "One Lost Sheep," No. 2083, *MTP* 35 (1889), 310 both cited in Joel McDurmon, *God Versus Socialism: A Biblical Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press, 2009). McDurmon cites an incident when Marx's co-writer Friedrich Engels was asked during a parlor game whom he most hated in life, he answered, "Spurgeon", 211. Such is the reaction when committed pastors preach the whole counsel of God, including its political implications, from the pulpit.

Civil power can obviously be misused. Contemporary punishment for murder is a prime example. When, instead of the careful judicial protocols given in the Mosaic code, mere circumstantial evidence presented by the authorities in the absence of skilled defense attorneys becomes the justification for a capital sentence, we have careless use of civil power.⁴⁹ Then opponents use such abuses to banish all capital punishment, thus insulating society from God's interpretation of the significance of murder.⁵⁰

When civil power is misused, whether by sloppy application in a legitimate case or by attempted use in illegitimate cases, the state and its citizens pay an unnecessary price as Samuel warned in 1 Sam. 8. Comparing what he called "the simple requirements of government under Saul with the gigantic and costly machine under Solomon" McClain writes:

"Only fools suppose that by committing a matter to the government, they can get it done for nothing. . . . Human government not only makes the people pay for everything done for them, but it always makes them pay more than it should cost. For only a part of the wealth taken by the government ever comes back to the people in services. No lesson in human history is taught more clearly than this, yet the lesson apparently is never learned."⁵¹

There are more dangers of civil power than just the greater costs from its inefficiencies. Whenever the "Babel temptation" re-appears--whether in fascism, Communism, or Euro-socialism--*civil government with its power is redirected against God and His designs for society*. By attempting to overstep its limitations to "fix" everything it thinks is wrong in the society of fallen men, it causes unnecessary collateral damage. Liberty of conscience is compromised as civil government assumes the position of the ultimate ethical authority.⁵² Tax discrimination against marriage occurs due to a hopelessly complex tax code, parental authority becomes increasingly tenuous due to mandatory public education policies,⁵³ government assumes the right to limit family estates via so-called death taxes, etc. Each of these excesses accomplishes nothing but destruction of the nourishment of life by these other governances.

Such arbitrary concentration of authority in civil government makes society more vulnerable to evil since the governing elite are no less sinful than those they presume to govern. As fallen beings they are as open to deception from the unseen powers of evil as everyone else, but with the civil power to implement such deceptions they can be far more destructive in spite of good intentions. It is no accident that the Bible consistently addresses demonic agents through addressing political leaders (Isa. 14:3-21; Ez. 28:1-19; Dan. 10:2-14). The proverb is right "If a ruler pays attention to lies, all his servants become wicked" (Prov. 29:12).

⁴⁹ See the account of the famous Bloodsworth case in which a former Marine was sentenced to death on the basis of circumstantial evidence for the rape-murder of a nine-year old girl but years later DNA evidence exonerated him at <http://www.law.northwestern.edu/wrongfulconvictions/exonerations/mdBloodsworthSummary.html>.

⁵⁰ Interestingly, God foreknew when He gave capital punishment authority to man that His own Son would die under a miscarriage of justice yet He went ahead with the authorization.

⁵¹ McClain, 110, 108.

⁵² See for a discussion that anticipated the present issue with ObamaCare Ron Merryman, *The Protection of Conscience* (Casa Grande, AZ: Merryman Ministries, 2009).

⁵³ See current example in footnote 29 above.

Far more than political theoreticians today, the founding fathers like Madison were concerned about who would control the controllers (government). They therefore embedded separation of powers in the Constitution and provided the Tenth Amendment for the separate states which is about the most that can be done on a human level, and Adams presciently saw its limits.⁵⁴ Even a constitutional republican form of government cannot stop from being corrupted. That "many seek the ruler's favor" (Prov. 29:25) still happens with ever present lobbyists. The lust for power to keep one's position makes dispensing of economic favors for votes an overwhelming temptation for some ("to show partiality is not good, because for a piece of bread a man will transgress" Prov. 28:21). And when at last corruption eventually permeates both the governing and governed in a carefully constructed republic, the age-old Babel temptation emerges with yet another idea on changing the form of government to bring about the ideal man-defined society.⁵⁵

We know the Babel temptation will eventually cause a world-wide, political-economic order of some sort with an apparent but temporary success (Rev. 17). We also know, however, that God is the sovereign chess-player who will use this end-time chaos to bring about a global awareness that will be necessary to appreciate the return of Jesus Christ and His worldwide kingdom. He, too, will have civil power (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 19:15), but it will function properly, respecting its limits and avoiding the dangers of collateral damage.

⁵⁴ Footnote 37.

⁵⁵ Read carefully the important 2011 address of President Obama in Osawatomie, Kansas at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/07/full-text-barack-obama-speech/print>