

Abraham: Prophet, Priest and King

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Abraham ministered as prophet, priest and king to thousands of servant-saints in his household. As a prophet he was endowed with the prophetic, messianic promise that “in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). As a prophet, he prayed for Abimelech, Sarah’s abductor (Genesis 20:7). As priest Abraham reared up altars to call upon the name of the LORD God (Genesis 12:7-8; 13:4,18). And, our father Abraham as “a mighty prince” (Genesis 23:6) resolved conflicts such as the grazing rights’ “strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle” (Genesis 13:6-12). He later mobilized his men to rescue Lot’s household from enslavement by invading kings (Genesis 14:8-16).

Centuries later Moses served as prophet and Israel’s supreme judge. But, the ministry of Israel’s priesthood was assigned to Aaron and his descendants (I Samuel 2:27-28). Moses was overwhelmed in his efforts to sustain a judicial ministry for some 3 million quarrelsome Israelites. His father in law, Jethro advised, “this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it” (Exodus 18:18). So, Moses appointed lower ranking judges, who “judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves” (Exodus 18:26). Only Judges could make legal appeals in hard cases (Deuteronomy 1:17). Judges were admonished to “judge the people with just judgment. . . neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise . . . that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Deuteronomy 16:18-20).

Moses was also a prophet “whom the LORD knew face to face” (Deuteronomy 34:10). The next named prophet was Samuel whose twenty years of preaching prompted Israel to “put away Baalim and Ashtaroth” together with horrible infant sacrifice. (I Samuel 7:4). As the last Judge in Israel, Samuel “went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places” (I Samuel 7:16). But, sadly, Samuel’s two sons serving as junior judges in Beersheba “took bribes, and perverted judgment” (I Samuel 8:3). So, Israel demanded Samuel make them a king “That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles” (I Samuel 8:20). Samuel acceded to their demands at the Lord’s direction. But first, he warned Israel of the manner of the king (I Samuel 8:9).

In addition to being a king maker, Samuel also left Israel a company of prophets (I Samuel 19:20) later known as the “sons of the prophets” (II Kings 2:3). This little noted community of prophets and their families were secreted in a cave from Jezebel’s deadly persecution (I Kings 18:4) by Obadiah until after Elijah’s spectacular victory over Baal’s prophets on Mt. Carmel (I Kings 18:20f). Then “sons of the prophets” emerged to establish a community of faithful prophets at both Bethel and Jericho (II Kings 2:1ff).

Elijah usurped judicial power when he ordered execution of baby-killing priests of Baal at the brook, Kishon, (I Kings 18:40). Jezebel’s next-day death threat was God’s wake up call. Samuel was the last prophet also authorized to be a judge. He warned Israel that they would cry out to God because of their king, but “the LORD will not hear you in that day” (I Samuel 8:18). From that day until now preachers of God’s Word are admonished to remember that just as kings are not to meddle with the prophets’ message, so the prophets are not authorized to enforce laws of civil government through execution of offenders however murderous.

One day all ministerial authority and power will once again become united in Christ. He is the Prophet whose coming was predicted by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18). Jesus is revealed to be “a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Hebrews 7:17). Our Lord Jesus Christ ultimately is “KING OF KINGS” (Revelation 19:16) to whom we “shall give account . . . in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36). Until that day, reformers whose programs usurp lawful ministerial power are doomed with Elijah to disappointment.

This confusion of ministries helps explain glaring failures of government-run programs of health, education and welfare; formerly ministries of the Church. Meaningful reform of these ministries must also abandon bureaucratic business routine as an organizational template. After all, students, patients and the impoverished

are not widgets whose production will at length turn a profit. Impersonal, cost-efficient routine can quickly strangle these perform personal ministries.