

MICHAEL E. CAFFERKY

# HONOR THE KING. YES, BUT EMULATE THE KING?

## Abstract

In seeking to discern God's will for their lives, top-echelon Christian leaders would do well to consider the biblical ideals embedded in the concept of kingship. The paper explores the biblical characteristics of the ideal king with the goal of identifying lessons for contemporary top-echelon leaders. It also reviews the connection between creation and kingship and the biblical concept of the Kingship of God, biblical guidance available in the selection, anointing and annual renewal of the king, and the duties and role of the king. It draws lessons regarding contemporary top-echelon Christian leaders in terms of personal traits, behaviors and relationships with the members of the communities or organizations they serve.

**Keywords:** *Abraham, anointing, behaviors, coercive power, community, covenant, creation, David, dominion, duties, Hezekiah, international relations, Joash, Josiah, kingship, leadership, legitimate power, mediator, Messiah, moral authority, personal power, power, priests, referent power, reward power, relationships, role, royal Psalms, selection, shepherd, structural limits, top-echelon leaders, Torah, traits, wealth*

## Introduction

It's not popular to talk about biblical leadership in terms of kingly power and authority. We should honor the king (1 Peter 2:17), pray for the king (1 Timothy 2:1-2), and obey the king (Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13). If we engage in bad behavior we should fear the king (Proverbs 14:35; 20:2; Romans 13:3; 1 Peter 2:14). But emulating the king comes much farther down the list of what the Christian leader should do. Be like a servant, yes (1 Kings 12:7; Proverbs 15:33; 16:19; 22:4; 29:23; Matthew 23:11; Mark 9:35-37; 10:43; Luke 9:46-48; 22:24-27; Philippians 2:7-11; 1 Peter 4:8-11), but behave like a king, not so much. We are uncomfortable about kingly power, in part because of the narrative in 1 Samuel 8 indicating that the desire for an earthly king resulted from rejecting God as King. We are more comfortable encouraging lead-

ers to follow the model of Jesus the Gentle, Good Shepherd (1 Peter 5:2-3). Mention a king as the model of leadership and we get uncomfortable. And, for good reason: Many of the biblical kings were scoundrels. Further, since the Bible was written earthly monarchs, emperors, dictators, prime ministers, and even democratically elected presidents have not covered themselves in glory. We are ambivalent about trusting them as role models.

In seeking to discern God's will for their lives, top-echelon Christian leaders would do well to consider the *biblical ideals* embedded in the concept of kingship. Leaders at all organizational levels might benefit from such consideration. However, upper echelon leaders of complex organizations face different types and intensities of pressures compared with mid-level leaders. They must share leadership with their close subordinates. This means, among other things, that they must take the lead in navigating the collective cognitions, capabilities and interactions of the organization's top leadership team. The higher up in the organization chart they advance the more competing interests in the organization, and the organizational politics that result from these interests, impact the work of leaders (Nelson & Quick, 2004, p. 257; Perrow, 1986). Further, senior level leaders are responsible for thinking about their organization as a whole as it responds to changes in the outside environment. Their viewpoint encompasses all the work processes and how they interrelate, as well as systems both inside and outside the organization. With experience, they develop the skill of tolerating ambiguous situations while setting the strategic agenda for the future. These are the leaders who must use their discretion to find a way through the maze of multiple plausible alternatives (Hambrick, 2007). As they mature, top-level leaders change their thinking patterns from looking at mere events in their day-to-day work, to observing the behavioral patterns across the organization over time and eventually to see the broader systemic influences and structures at play (Senge, 1990; Table 1 shows the different levels of thinking described by Senge.). Such maturity often comes along with an increased degree of discretion in decision making and with those temptations to abuse their authority. Leaders facing these challenges may find inspiration and guidance from the biblical record of kingship.

Table 1

*Thinking Patterns at Various Organizational Levels*

THINKING PATTERNS	LEADERSHIP LEVEL
<i>Events</i> that affect individual workers and work teams on a day-to-day basis	Front-line level supervisors
<i>Behavior Patterns</i> of work units and work processes	Middle level managers
Internal and external <i>Systemic Structures</i> that influence behavior patterns and work processes	Senior level leaders

The purpose of this paper is to explore the biblical characteristics of the ideal king with the goal of identifying lessons for contemporary top-echelon leaders. A secondary purpose is to provide a biblical foundation for other scholars to use when evaluating leadership theories through the lens of Scripture, particularly theories that have implications for top-level leaders, such as upper echelons theory (Hambrick, 2007) and transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985, 1990, 1996; Burns, 1978). To achieve this purpose the paper first will review the connection between creation and kingship and the biblical concept of the Kingship of God. It will review the biblical guidance available in the selection, anointing and annual renewal of the king. The paper will explore the biblical duties and role of the king. It will then review the experience of King David, who became the prototype of the ideal king. The paper will draw lessons regarding contemporary top-echelon Christian leaders in terms of personal traits, behaviors and relationships with the members of the communities or organizations they serve. Finally, the paper will offer opportunities for research for consideration.

## Creation and Kingship

Some scholars see planted in Genesis the seed that later developed into the idea of kingship. The human being as king reigning on earth is both a present reality and an eschatological hope for the future. The present reality is portrayed in the first chapter of Genesis:

And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. (Genesis 1:28)

When God created humans, He created us in His own image and in royal fashion gave both men and women the royal status of having dominion over the whole earth as God’s representatives. Just as God

creates in order to serve His creation, so all human beings are to have dominion over the earth in a way that leads to harmony, peace and well-being. Humans serve each other not to oppress or diminish each other but to treat everyone with royal dignity. For example, when we talk about the “customer is king,” in biblical terms this is a true statement, though in a slightly different way than we often mean. If we truly viewed every human being as having royal dominion, we would treat each person with the royal dignity they deserve.

If Genesis Chapter 1 presents the beginning of the kingship concept, Revelation portrays its eschatological culmination:

And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:5)

Here the writer of Revelation portrays humans who successfully experience the consummation of God’s great work of salvation as ruling as kings on the new earth for eternity. The context of this promise draws upon language reminiscent of the Garden of Eden as the setting in which the first royal commission was given. (See also Bandstra, 1992.)

The creation ideal of kingship offers interesting food for thought by contemporary leaders who want to be covenantal in their leadership. First, kingship is a gift of God. Second, the essential relationship that we have with each other is that of kings relating to kings under the authority and divine influence of the King of the Universe. These two elements of kingship appear to remain all through the Bible, especially when the Bible writers present the concept of earthly state kings.

## **Kingship of God**

We cannot discuss the biblical concept of king unless we also explore the role of Yahweh as King (Gray, 1961; Kenik, 1976; Perdue, 1974; Roberts, 2002). It is the kingship of God that is the foundation for the good earthly kings. For example, Psalm 45 portrays the kingdom and the throne of God as being present in the throne of David. When the earthly king exhibits the principles of truth, humility, righteousness and justice, the divine kingdom is present and active among the people (Selman, 1989, p. 176).

The kingship of God and the corresponding concept of the kingdom of God is a comprehensive Old Testament theme integrated into the thinking of many Bible writers in both the Old and New Testaments. Earthly kings and the symbol of their power—their thrones, visible to

men—are divinely appointed extensions of God’s kingship (Alexander, 1998; Psalm 45; Selman, 1989).

As Supreme King of the Universe, God is the one in charge of appointing earthly kings and removing them from earthly power (1 Samuel 2:7-8; Psalm 72:11; Proverbs 8:15-16; Daniel 2:21, 37). This concept began at creation and then continued when God called Abraham to leave his family and homeland. God promised to make of Abraham a great nation (Genesis 12:1-3), a divine promise that included the ownership of much land and many descendants. The books of Joshua, Judges and Samuel up to the reigns of David and Solomon portray the gradual fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. The books of 1 Kings and 2 Kings portray the reversal of this process beginning with the second twenty years of Solomon’s reign and continuing with the leadership of unfaithful kings, culminating eventually in the deportation of Israel to foreign nations (Alexander, 1998; see also Matthew 1:17).

While Abraham is not described in terms of being a king, he is presented in a role similar to his contemporaries who were kings (Genesis 14:1-24; 21:22-34; 23:6). In more direct terms God promises to Abraham that kings will come from his seed. The same promise is repeated to Jacob (Genesis 17:6, 16; 35:11). When David is installed as king, God, the King of the Universe, chooses him as prince, and makes a covenant with him in terms similar to the terms promised to Abraham. Although it is a mere human who sits on the royal throne, this throne is really God’s throne (1 Samuel 13:14; 2 Samuel 7:1-17; 1 Chronicles 17:4-14; 28:5; Psalm 132:12, Alexander, 1998).

The Bible writers portray God as the ultimate King who selects and appoints earthly kings to serve Him and His people. Even when the earthly kingship was initiated, the fundamental principles of the theocracy of the state, whereby God was the supreme Leader, were not expected to change.

## **Selection, Anointing, and Annual Renewal**

Under the model of the ideal kingship, not just anyone could become king through force of his own will. The true king was to be chosen by God from among the community. However, God works through recognized community leaders to execute His will in the selection process. For example, Samuel is the one who identifies Saul and then David to be the first of Israel’s kings.

Biblical kings were anointed rather than crowned. From one point of view, the king was merely one man among many, a man representing

all citizens. From another point of view, the anointing was an essential characteristic of a king, marking him as in a special relationship with God to be the king and shepherd of Yahweh's people (2 Samuel 5:1-3; Psalm 2:6).

In the anointing, the emphasis was on God's relationship with the king rather than the king's preeminence over his subjects. Instead of accepting a crown of authority, the king subjected himself to a ceremonial purification rite whereby God's power was conferred upon him to accomplish all the good envisioned in the covenant promises for the people and for their land.

In some ways the anointing was recognition of God's authority. To lay hands on the king or refuse to obey the king was taboo (1 Samuel 9:16; 10:1; 24:6; 26:9; 2 Samuel 1:14; 4:9). Anointing by a priest or prophet in the holy city, Jerusalem, signified that it was God who was anointing this person for service. The king represented his people before God (Launderville, 2003, pp. 289-340; Mowinckel, 2005/1956). Anointing set him apart (holy) in a way similar to that of a priest. Anointing also signified God's blessing and influence in his life, and was a symbol of the transfer of the power of the Holy Spirit onto the king, giving him a new heart and divine power to make decisions and take actions—all signifying that he had a new relationship with God (1 Samuel 10:6, 9).

The anointing occurred at the beginning of his reign and may have been repeated annually in a ritual of humiliation where the king was expected to proclaim the spiritual platform of his leadership, proclaiming an oath of innocence before God that he had not abused his power. He declared himself to be a faithful follower of God, loyal to the principles of the covenant. He then swore an oath of continued fidelity to the covenant and devotion to fostering justice in the land (Kenik, 1976; Launderville, 2003; Mowinckel, 2005/1956; Selz, 2008).

The people expected the king to come before them annually to renew his commitment to follow the covenant relationship with God. In this service of humility, which took place at the New Year Festival and in response to questions by a priest regarding his moral conduct, the king swore an oath of fidelity to the covenant. He expressed his sincere desire to promote justice and peace by his personal conduct throughout the land. The "Royal Psalms" record the speeches and hymns that kings presented at this annual event. See, for example, Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 132, and 144, and also 2 Samuel 23 (Kenik, 1976; Rengstorf, 1962; Selz, 2008).

## Duties and Role of the King

Slight differences of opinion exist regarding the primary duty of the Israelite king. Levinson (2001) states that the primary duty was to administer justice by ensuring that social policies provided equal access to legal protection for those on the margins of society, such as widows and orphans (Psalm 72:4). In his deeds the ideal king was truly a prince of peace (compare with Zechariah 9:10). His actions were covenantal in nature, bringing shalom of well-being and harmony to the land that was envisioned in covenant promises (Isaiah 11:1-5). The king also protected the interests of the state as a whole. If the state was threatened, the people expected God to work through the king's political, economic or military influence to save the nation (Launderville, 2003; Kenik, 1976).

With a slightly different though not contradictory emphasis, Brueggemann (1997) states that the primary activity of the king was to study the Torah and submit to the demands and conditions of the covenant (p. 607). Israel's king was the anointed human agent to do God's will on earth. His fundamental focus was to "assure in Israel a covenantal mode of communal existence" (p. 697).

The fundamental expectation of the king finds its roots in the directions that Moses provided during his last days as the nation's leader (Deuteronomy 17:14-20; see on this passage Block, 2005; Brueggemann, 1997; Dutcher-Walls, 2002):

Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left; in order that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel. (NASB)

The King was to make his own personal copy of the Law. This would provide him accessibility to the principles of the law on a daily basis. The copy of the Law placed him on the same plane as that enjoyed by the Levitical priests, thus subjecting him to an objective standard of morality. He was to copy the manuscript in the presence of the Levitical priests. This would assure the larger community that the king had not changed the law to suit his desires. Here we see a balance of power shared with the priests. The king was expected to read the law every day in order to learn piety; daily devotions are needed for someone who faces perplexing problems and complicated political issues. Further,

because the standard of behavior among the community would rise no higher than that of the king, he was to be a model to others by observing the law. This would promote humility, reminding him that he was one from among many in the community.

We find references to the responsibilities of the king in several places in Scripture. When Samuel installed King Saul as the first king of Israel, he announced to the people the rights and duties of the king and then wrote these in a book (1 Samuel 10:25). In the second book of Samuel, we have recorded in some of David's last words a poetic description of the king's role (2 Samuel 23:3-4). Likewise, Proverbs records many duties of the king: see Proverbs 1-9:28; 14:35; 16:10, 12-15; 19:12; 20:2, 8, 26, 28; 21:1; 22:11; 25:2, 5-7; 29:4, 14 (Kenik, 1976).

When Joash was anointed king, he was brought to the tabernacle, where he was given two important royal symbols: a crown and the book of the testimony for reading and following, a probable reference to the written law of the covenant (2 Kings 11:12; see also Exodus 31:18; 32:15; Deuteronomy 4:45; 6:17, 20; 1 Kings 2:3-4; 1 Chronicles 22:13; Psalm 19:7; 119:13-16). Duties of the king are counted in several of the Psalms. In Isaiah 11:1-5 we see the potential of the monarchy to bring wellbeing and harmony to the land. This must be nothing less than shalom (peace) (cf. Psalm 1:1-3).

We often think of the High Priest as fulfilling the role of mediator between God and the people. While this is true, ancient kings also did the work of mediator through their role of preserving the primacy of the Torah in bringing about the life of covenantal shalom for the nation (Brueggemann, 1997, p. 600-621; Launderville, 2003). Examples of kings who were faithful in fulfilling their mediation role include David, who became the gold standard for all kings to emulate thereafter, Hezekiah, though he was criticized by Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 37:15-21; 38:2-7), and young Josiah, who implemented significant reforms in the land when he came to power.

If the king was to be faithful in leading the nation in following the Torah, his power must be limited to prevent him from becoming a tyrant. He was not authorized to develop such a large standing army that he could then use it to rule as a tyrant over the nation. He was not to take into marriage too many daughters of foreign kings, since doing so would create too many complicated entanglements for the nation. He also was limited in terms of the wealth he could develop, thus preventing him from taking extraordinary control over the economic system so that he could gain power and status above his fellow countrymen (see Table 2).



**Table 2**

*Structural Limits on Biblical Kingly Power*

POWER SOURCE	STRUCTURAL LIMITS FROM DEUTERONOMY 17:16-17
Horses: Used primarily for military purposes such as pulling chariots	“Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall never again return that way.’” (v. 16)
Wives: Arranging marriages with daughters of foreign kings would increase his power	“Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away” (v. 17)
Wealth: Large amounts of capital would give the king extraordinary power of exclusion over common people	“Nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.” (v. 17)

In these structural limitations we see tensions. First, the king should adequately defend the nation against foreign intrusion but at the same time not have such a powerful military that he could use it to abuse his power. Second, the king should extend his influence into other nations while not becoming entangled in international politics through marriages. Third, the king was an important force for economic prosperity but was not to build his personal wealth above his fellow citizens (Dutcher-Walls, 2002; Launderville, 2003).

In many ways the work of the king was primarily and essentially a covenantal, moral work. Decisions about national and international relations were at their root moral decisions. While the priests and prophets had an important role to play in educating the people about the covenant, it was the King who was responsible for ensuring that the people understood God’s law.

**David the Prototype**

David’s ascension to power overlaps the fall of King Saul. In many ways David is similar to Saul. What differentiates them is that David’s heart follows Yahweh’s heart. David asks for counsel from God before making decisions while Saul does not (George, 2002). Except for the high-profile sins of murder and adultery, David is considered the prototype of the Messiah-King who would come in the future to restore the

land and the people (1 Kings 14:8; 15:3-5; Acts 13:22). David was sincerely and humbly repentant. He listened to the prophet who held up the mirror of his failings.

David, one of the most popular of Israel's kings, is highly revered even to this day. The people saw in David a fulfillment of Moses' desire for a national leader who served as a shepherd (Numbers 27:17; 2 Samuel 5:1-5). More is written in the Bible about David than about any other King. David was a complex individual who displayed a variety of character traits. On the one hand, he was a caring individual. On the other hand, he displayed the ability to use violence to consolidate his power. He showed the ability to form strong friendships. He exhibited extraordinary oratory skills and astute political skills. Yet he succumbed to temptations.

David had his failings but he was effective as a leader, becoming the most powerful of Israel's kings. He was not content to sit back and discuss the moral virtues of a situation, though he did plenty of contemplation, as illustrated in the many Psalms he wrote. He was a man of action as a change agent. He unified the nation and built it into a world power among the community of nations. He unified the government under a common set of religious values designed, in part, to administer justice.

One of the great turning points in David's life was his adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, whom he sent into battle to be killed. This act of treachery, coercion and disloyalty had a major impact on the nation. Violence and disloyalty plagued David the rest of his reign, even though he experienced a complete spiritual transformation through accepting responsibility for his actions and repenting. This violence began in his household and spread throughout the kingdom, becoming the chief reason David was unable to complete his dream of building a temple (McConkie & Boss, 2001).

David's humility was maintained when he was unable to prevent deception and dissent in his own family, including Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 13-15) which occurs, in part, because justice is not as extensive as David had hoped and dreamed (Bosworth, 2006; McConkie & Boss, 2001). Had justice been experienced throughout the whole kingdom, there would have been no occasion for Absalom to rebel. In spite of his failings, for David success resulted from God's action. It does not come from amassing power or living by one's own abilities, talents or rules (Klein, 2004). Although David's relationship with God was not always perfect (2 Samuel 12:1-12; 2 Samuel 7), he was close to God. Unlike his predecessor, David consulted with God before making key

decisions (1 Samuel 23:2,4; 30:8; 2 Samuel 2:1; 5:19; cf. 2 Samuel 22:10,15; Bosworth, 2006).

Just before king David died he added to the wise counsel of Moses, proclaiming that God's intent for national leaders was to fear God, rule over the nation with righteousness, and do good for the nation (2 Samuel 23:1-4). So loved was he that ever after David became the benchmark when considering the characteristics of the ideal king. The ideal king is a person whose heart is transformed by the Holy Spirit, signified by the anointing with oil at the coronation ceremony. He is God's Anointed One, holy to serve God, the ruler of the whole earth and the people, in a way similar to the priests being anointed for their spiritual service. He is a mediator between God and the nation. His close relationship with God gives him the power to bring peace, wellbeing, justice, and harmony to the land. With the covenant as his guide, the king is the protector and restorer of the people, not only from foreign powers but also from moral lapses. Under his reign good fortune would result for everyone (Mowinckel, 2005/1956).

In spite of the weaknesses of his leadership, the people loved David and looked forward to the day when someone like him would again rule in their land. Building his leadership on David's example of a spiritual foundation, Hezekiah also listened to the prophet. He engaged in intercessory prayer on behalf of Jerusalem. When he was healed miraculously, this became a sign of God's favor. Even so, Hezekiah was not the complete fulfillment of the Davidic ideal.

Josiah mediated on behalf of people not just by prayer but by action. He based his reforms on the book of Deuteronomy that had been found in the Temple (Deuteronomy 12-26). Josiah meditated daily on the Torah (Deuteronomy 17:18-20; cf. 2 Kings 22:10), he instituted centralized or corporate worship (Deuteronomy 12:4-6; cf. 2 Kings 23:8-9), and he fostered the unity of the nation (Deuteronomy 12:10-14; cf. 2 Kings 23:16-20; Launderville, 2003).

Unfortunately, not every king measured up to David's standard. Even David was not always consistent with the ideal. When Israel's kings strayed from their primary calling as mediators of the covenant, they exploited the people and abused their power (Jeremiah 22:13-14; Ezekiel 34:1-6; Brueggemann, 1997). David's son and successor, King Solomon, was the first to fall away from the ideal, especially during the second half of his reign. As a result the kingdom was destroyed and divided. Solomon, arguably the most successful in terms of economic development, was the first to openly defy the counsel of Moses regard-

ing the limitations on the king. The warnings that Samuel gave the people when the first king was enthroned were fulfilled in Solomon (1 Samuel 8:7-20). He built a large standing army, took many wives, and became the wealthiest king Israel would ever know (Deuteronomy 17:16-18; 1 Kings 10:21-28; 11:1-4, 9-12; 2 Chronicles 9:25). He also taxed the people heavily and conscripted slave labor (Bosworth, 2006; Brindle, 1984, p. 228-233; Hauer, 1980).

Some kings allowed their status and power to corrupt their relationships. Instead of working for the good of the people, they worked for their self-interests. Like the kings of countries surrounding Israel, some kings deified themselves, thus crossing over the line between being God's Anointed Servant upon whom God's Spirit rests and being God. In the minds of the people, the line between human and divine became blurry (Brisch, 2008; Launderville, 2003; Selz, 2008). They gave their kings tremendous power to influence their behavior. Under some kings this resulted in harm to the nation.

So marked was the Davidic kingship in the minds of the people, the future hope of the Anointed One came to be seen as a David-like King. The hope of national moral, economic, and political restoration came to be associated with God's Anointed One. The qualities of the ideal king also were applied to the Messiah, who was always thought of as a descendant of David, not only in the biological sense but also in the spiritual sense (Isaiah 11:1, 10; 9:6; 16:5; 55:3ff; Micah 5:1; Jeremiah 17:25; 23:5; 33:17; 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23ff; 37:24ff; Amos 9:11; Launderville, 2003; Mowinckel, 2005/1956). When Jesus appeared in Galilee, the people quickly came to associate Him with the promise of the Anointed One. This association had deep significance to all who heard Him teach or saw Him heal. The eschatological hope for one like the Anointed One from the line of David to return and reign was forever after associated by the Christians with Jesus the Messiah. This theme is taken up one last time by John in the book of Revelation when he describes Jesus Christ culminating the great plan of salvation in Davidic terms (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 9:7; Jeremiah 23:5; 30:9; 33:15; Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Hosea 3:5; Matthew 1:1, 17; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:42-45; Luke 1:32-33; 4:15-22; 18:38-39; Acts 2:29-36; 5:31; 13:22-23; Romans 1:3; 4:6; Revelation 5:5; 22:16; Bauer, 1995; Matera, 1982; Visser 't Hooft, 1947).

Leaders can have either a positive or a negative impact on followers. Charismatic leaders who have a positive impact on followers use their power by focusing on the good of the organization or community they

serve. They encourage followers to identify with the needs of the organization rather than the leader. Charismatic leaders like King Ahab who have a negative effect on followers focus their use of power on themselves, encouraging followers to become devoted to themselves rather than to the organization and its needs.

When charismatic leaders take actions that are perceived by followers to be too risky, they make enemies. For example, the leader who is overly optimistic in a way that is unwarranted may not see the flaws in his or her vision. One could speculate that Solomon may have experienced hubris. Also, if the leader does not listen to the community, he or she risks having followers who become disillusioned (Yukl, 2010). The experience of Rehoboam is hauntingly reminiscent of this behavior.

In the kingship we see present issues related to the types of power identified by French and Raven (1959). The king held the highest office or rank in the land; he had *legitimate power of position* as the people believed that the king was appointed and anointed by God. Support of the king by community leaders, such as prophets, priests and elders, validated God's choice. The people believed that a king such as David had supernatural power; he had *expert power* in organizing and war. As discussed above, the king's *personal power* came through his charismatic traits and behaviors that were accepted by the people. As the king's charisma had its impact with followers, they offered the king *referent power* by identifying with him and aspiring to be like him. The people believed that the king could bring to reality the rewards of the covenant promises. Such *reward power* was part of the hope Israel maintained for future kings. Israelite kings also had *coercive power* as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Through international diplomacy the king could make commitments that he expected citizens to help him fulfill. With a simple word the king could relegate any citizen either to a life of ease or a life of terror. If the king wanted to build a palace, he simply could coerce workers into slavery to perform the work necessary to achieve the goal.

## Lessons for Contemporary Leaders

If we were to take the biblical ideal for the top-echelon leader and apply it to today's top-echelon leaders, what leadership traits, behaviors and relationships might we expect to see?

Following the biblical standard for the ideal king, contemporary top-echelon leaders will work to develop personal attributes of humility and integrity (DuBrin, 2010; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Russell, 2001; Woolfe,

2002). From the perspective of morality, the work of the top-level leaders in making decisions and taking actions is primarily a moral activity. Indeed, it is the top-level leader's responsibility to manage the moral values of the organization (Barnard, 1938; Boatright, 1988; Collier, 1959; Hosmer, 2008).

Top-level leaders who follow the biblical ideal will come to see their role as mediators of covenantal moral values in all that the organization does. They will take the lead in evaluating the decisions their organizations face. The more complex the organization, the more top-level leaders will focus on the moral values and ideology which are at the foundation of the organization's mission and vision.

Upper echelon leaders will develop a confident but humble understanding that goals are achieved not because of their personal attributes and actions but because the whole community subjects itself to higher principles. This will require that everyone be willing to be changed. In this personal change, leaders must take the lead. Successful leaders' willingness to be transformed will equal their desire for their organizations to be transformed. The top-echelon leader will come to understand his or her spiritual calling and how this calling is to be used in service to others.

One of the significant dimensions of biblical kingship was the voluntary subjection of the king to structural limitations outlined in Deuteronomy 17. Opportunities for abuse of authority and corruption abound in contemporary organizations (Aguilera & Vadera, 2008). The application of ethical norms in the form of structural constraints is an issue that continues to challenge boards of trustees, particularly where the upper echelon leaders are charismatic. Amassing great numbers of horses, wives and wealth may not be the specific temptations of contemporary top-level leaders of religious organizations; the fundamental principles and the inherent tensions, it seems, still apply, but in contemporary ways. For example, limiting the upper echelon's political power so that such power cannot be used against constituents in a religious nonprofit organization is as important as the political power that may be needed to protect that same organization from attacks of errant ideology or social unrest.

The top leaders in religious nonprofit organizations will not be involved in marrying daughters of upper echelon leaders in other organizations. However, the principle of structurally minimizing the inter-organizational entanglements applies when upper echelon leaders participate in interlocking directorates. Interlocking directorates involve

the top-echelon leader of one organization sitting as a member of the board of trustees of another organization and vice versa. If the two organizations are dependent upon each other for resources, the interlocking directorates may be needed for coordination of limited resources. At the same time, such interlocking memberships increase the risk of undermining accountability. For example, accountability can be undermined if the administrator of nonprofit organization A limits discussion of the moral issues involved with the allocation of resources in organization B, for fear that when the administrator of organization B comes to his board meeting, he may become an unwanted voice for moral reform.

In terms of leader behaviors and leader-follower relationships, the reader is invited to ponder how a leader's experience would change if he or she participated in an annual service of humility where at that service representatives of the followers subject the leader to open questions regarding the leader's behavior in terms of moral principles. Many contemporary leaders are comfortable calling a town hall-style meeting to discuss the organizational issues and strategic decisions. However, most would avoid personal questions, and most subordinates would avoid asking such questions for fear of reprisal. Top-echelon leaders can achieve this level of openness and integrity only by being firmly and confidently rooted in a standard of morality outside themselves—an objective standard that is embraced by followers. For the Christian leader this means firmly grounding the life of the leader in God's Word. Leaders would behave in ways that communicate to followers that the leader is one of them and not part of an elite class of human beings deserving of special treatment. Leaders would be careful not to allow a wide disparity between themselves and followers in terms of personal resources and perks. Top-echelon leaders, if they followed the biblical example of the ideal king, might hold themselves to a standard higher than those subordinates are given.

Table 3 attempts to summarize these and other elements of how the ideal kingship applies to contemporary leadership in terms of personal attributes, behaviors, and relationships.

**Table 3**  
*Ideal King and Ideal Leader Comparison*

<b>IDEAL KING</b>	<b>IDEAL LEADER</b>
Chosen from among fellow citizens; fosters long-term covenantal relationship with followers and with those outside the organization	Behavior, Relationship: Maintains solid awareness of the close, never-ending connection with the community he or she serves
Meditates daily on Covenant to maintain a close connection with God. Consults God's will before taking action	Behavior: Bases leadership on God's revealed will; engages in daily Bible study and meditation to obtain a constant stream of leadership guidance
Heart and mind transformed by the Holy Spirit	Attribute: Heart and mind transformed by the Holy Spirit
Displays in behavior the personal traits consistent with a renewed heart that follows the covenant	Behavior: Emulates the principles of the covenant; models the same moral principles that followers should follow
Anointed for spiritual service to Yahweh, who is the ultimate King of the whole earth; annually participates in service of humility	Attribute, Behavior, Relationships: Has a clear sense of spiritual calling which drives leadership; recognizes that leadership work and relationships are maintained in service to God; fulfills work that is essentially spiritual in nature; annually participates in service of humility renewing commitment to fundamental moral principles
An intercessor on behalf of the people; mediator of the process that keeps the Covenant alive in the community	Behavior: Keeps in focus the needs of the community as first priority; acts as an advocate on behalf of the community and its interests
Success is brought about by divine power and fostering covenantal relationships	Attribute: Maintains an awareness that success is not obtained by grasping for earthly political power or reliance on personal talents
Subjects himself to structural limits on military, foreign relations, and economic power to avoid being a tyrant	Behavior: Places structural limits on power with respect to the community, outside organizations, and personal wealth to avoid abusing power; shares power with followers
Works to bring peace (shalom), justice, wellbeing, and harmony for the good of all people who have been created as royalty	Attribute, Behavior: Focuses on the needs of the community instead of only self-interests; treats others with respect and dignity that royalty deserves
Protector and restorer of moral authority; works to administer justice	Behavior: Has the courage to ground decisions on solid moral values; willing to make corrections for previous moral mistakes
Leads the people as a shepherd leads flocks	Attribute, Behavior: Cares for the community, provides for their needs
Engages in strategic diplomacy, negotiates with those outside the community, and protects the community from foreign aggression	Behavior: Connects the community with those on the outside; monitors the external environment and engages in diplomacy on behalf of the community



Upper echelon leaders will foster long-term covenantal relationships with followers and those outside the organization. A covenant relationship is deeper than one that is based on obligations to perform tasks in exchange for payment. In a covenant relationship, both parties attempt to build trust and loyalty. This requires time. Both seek to do things that will enhance the relationship rather than merely fulfill a list of obligations in a contract. In a covenant, the relationship is paramount and needs faithfulness, nurturing, and loving kindness.

## **Conclusion**

The concept of kingship first appears in Genesis, where human beings are given a divinely-ordained kingly commission. The biblical concept of earthly kingship is rooted in and can never be separated from the earthly king's relationship with the divine heavenly King of the Universe. The selection, anointing and annual renewal of the king's relationship with God and with his citizens increases the richness of the biblical concept of leadership. The internalized values of ancient Israelite citizens played an important role in the acceptance of the king as an effective leader. In the explicit expectations of the king outlined in his role and duties, we find further guidance for contemporary top-echelon leaders. The experience of David, though he was not perfect as a leader, presents the biblical prototype of the ideal king for all followers to emulate. Although they were not perfect in all their ways, Kings Josiah and Hezekiah followed closely the Davidic pattern. From this review we can draw some tentative lessons regarding contemporary Christian leaders in terms of their personal traits, their behaviors, and their relationships with the members of the communities they serve.

## **For Further Research**

The work of evaluating contemporary leadership theory and practice in the light of biblical teaching is far from complete. Reviewing the biblical concept of kingship may provide a useful lens through which to consider contemporary leadership theory and practice. For example, upper echelon theory deserves a review through the lens of biblical kingship. Charismatic leadership theory and transformational leadership are perspectives that also might be reviewed in light of the biblical evidence on kingship.

Other leadership issues deserve a second look through the lens of kingship. For example, the traditional dichotomy of task-orientation vs. relationship-orientation can be reviewed with the principles of ideal

kingship in mind. Contingency theories of leadership can be considered from the perspective of the ideal king. The biblical record of kingship appears on the surface to include a focus on traits as well as on relationships.

The definition of leadership should be reviewed in the light of the biblical record of kings and their ideal role. For example, should leadership be defined primarily as influence, as a set of individual leader traits, as a process, or as a relationship? (Northouse, 2007; Rost, 1993; Yukl, 2010). Should leadership be defined primarily in terms of being a protector of covenantal morality? If so, what are the implications for leadership training?

In addition to the conceptual study envisioned above, opportunities for empirical research exist. Descriptive research can add to our understanding of contemporary leader behaviors. For example, what annual renewal activities do contemporary top-echelon leaders employ to refocus their organizations on mission? Are Christian chief executives different from non-Christian counterparts in terms of annual renewal behaviors? What are the typical top-echelon behaviors related to the protection of moral standards for their organizations? To what degree do such behaviors influence lower-level leaders and front-line employees to make moral decisions for their organization? What impact does a top management team retreat have on effectiveness in keeping corporate values in focus during strategic planning? What are the structural limitations that governing boards place on contemporary upper echelon leaders and what tradeoffs exist within the tensions that are created as a result?

Normative research may offer additional avenues for improving our understanding. For example, comparing organizations which have faced legal or public relations challenges due to alleged wrongdoing with organizations in the same sector that lacked these challenges, to what degree, if any, do structural limitations on CEOs act as a measure to prevent moral lapses? Of the three types of structural limitations described in Deuteronomy, which one is the most important for contemporary top-echelon leaders?

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