

Theocracy in Israel vs “God’s organization”

(2023 re-edit)

Hi Scott

Max, Vivian and I went over the relevant chapter on the 'Organization' [in a recent JW publication], noting that they do not use the word 'theocracy', though their thinking about how God works is thoroughly permeated with the idea. I believe their superficial understanding of the OT makes them VERY vulnerable to our using the actual history of Israel to undermine their concept of theocracy. The first paragraph of the chapter sets up the discussion by noting that God 'organized' Israel. They have already mentioned that Israel was a 'nation' before it was 'organized'. They have missed the obvious point -- that the nation had 'organization' in Egypt, generations before it became a theocracy. 'T would be good to go over with your JW friends the ways that even the later 'theocracy' differed from the way 'organizations' are set up today:

- 1/ As a 'nation' Israel already had a system of rulership before Sinai, a body of elders with whom Moses and Aaron had to deal before they went to Pharaoh. The patriarchal system, for hundreds of years, was the method by which Israel was organized before the Mosaic theocracy came to exist.
- 2/ Even before Sinai, the authority of Moses is established by the events of the Exodus. Israel now had, in addition to a body of ruling elders, an official 'prophet' [accredited by divine miracles].
- 3/ At Sinai, Moses and the elders are introduced to a NEW authority which supplements, but does not replace, their already existing authorities. The Levitical priesthood comes to represent a third aspect of God's rule over Israel. One tribe now functions as the 'clergy' of Israel, as it were, but the other tribes still are governed by the elders. (Exodus 18-19, Numbers 1 & 11). Thus, as of the entry into the promised land, Israel had 3 branches of theocratic government: the **Prophet** (Moses, who was NOT a priest); the **Priesthood** & its support structure, the Levites (a single tribe); the **Patriarchal elders**, representing all tribes, and serving as judges and local rulers.
- 4/ When urban life became normal in the land [around the time of Solomon] a 4th 'axis of authority' became visible in the 'theocracy': aristocratic princes, related in the flesh to the 'Royal Family' of David, or other prominent families. This 4th branch of Israelite authority, became the 'axis of evil' in the theocracy, as God had foretold through Samuel. Now the 'holy nation' was more like the pagan nations, e.g. Egypt, in being effectively ruled by a 'divine' hierarchy, gods in the flesh, empowered by a fawning priesthood and an incestuous 'royal family'. The only counterweight to this newly out-of-balance 'axis of authority' was the increased muscular presence of the prophets, who suddenly become unusually active during the civil wars and power struggles among Solomon's successors.

Where does all this leave the Watchtower? Well, as you pointed out in our last phone conversation, the 'theocracy' which the Watchtower has built is strikingly similar to the Roman Catholic hierarchy in its structure. NOT at all similar to the above 4 'axes of authority' in Israel, which preserved -- even in the depths of national apostasy -- a balance of power, a perpetual 'tug of war', a system of checks and balances, which have more in common with English and Canadian parliaments & municipal governments than they have in common with absolute systems such as the Watchtower 'theocracy'. By consolidating the kings & priests of Rev 5:9,10 with the number 144,000 of Rev 7, and then calling this 'spiritual Israel' God's "**prophet class**", the Watchtower has effectively eliminated any possibility of the balance of power which characterized the only true theocracy ever ruled by God

Himself. The WT priests, kings and prophets are the same guys with 3 different titles! NEVER the case in ancient Israel.

I believe this subject -- with substantial scriptural reference, of course -- could easily occupy several weeks of rich discussion among you and your visitors. In 1987, when Vivian and I were at the nadir of our marriage, arguing constantly because I was out, she was still in, the Lord gave me a nudge toward a more positive way of presenting her dilemma with the 'Tower. I simply told her to go to the District Assembly that summer and keep a tally of how many times the 'theocratic talks' mentioned Jehovah, Jesus and 'the Organization'. She did -- and verified my prediction that Jesus would not win. 'Jehovah' and 'God's organization' ran neck and neck for preeminence. Jesus was a very distant third. The reason this subject is extremely useful for discussion with ANY JW is that once you plant the idea that 'organization' is their gospel, and that their organization does NOT reflect the theocracy of the Bible, it will be extremely hard for them to get your "buzz" topic out of their heads. Every meeting, every article in the WT, every public talk will reinforce your point -- the subject is never dropped. Not like evangelicals' pet subjects -- salvation by faith alone, Trinity, the Holy Spirit's work -- subjects which rarely come up in JW contexts, only occasionally door-to-door. So we can use the Watchtower's 'pet' notion -- Jehovah who cannot apparently exist without His heavenly wife, the 'Organization' -- as a veritable buzzsaw in the brain which the JW cannot ever turn off while active in the WT. It was my experience with Vivian and her family in our crisis period, 1986-1988, which convinced me that perhaps our greatest ally is the Watchtower itself: the constant repetition of ideas means we have regular watering of seeds we plant -- assuming, of course, we choose the appropriate seeds.

I hope all this will give you much to chew on and discuss. It is similar to an experience Vivian had with her dad around the same time in 1987-88. He had told her that she was too concerned about 1914, that it wasn't that big an issue. He denied that the Watchtower emphasized it much. But in a subsequent conversation he admitted that he now noticed how often the subject comes up. The power of suggestion! (Remind me to tell you how we experienced another 1987 revelation with the 'planting' of another suggestion -- the WT's 2 favourite 'good news' subjects, Armageddon and Paradise Earth. And Vivian had a similar experience with her older sister, Lonni, who insisted the phrases 'Governing Body' and 'faithful and discreet slave **class**' were in the Bible!)

P.S. This subject also sets the stage for an even more bottom line subject than 'Organization' -- the name 'Jehovah's Witnesses'. Just how were Israel witnesses of Jehovah after 700 years of continued unfaithfulness? Yet Isaiah says "You ARE my witnesses" -- not "You were ..." or "You should be ...". I believe the context of their most fundamental "badge" (identity) text (Isaiah 43) supplies us with an 'ace up the sleeve' for future discussion -- God's grace to Israel, and by extension, the centrality of grace to the gospel. (Vivian suggests we discuss in this context an old Apologia tract, "The Greatness & Grace of God in Genesis", which sermon detailed the various names of God through the patriarchal period until the Exodus).

-- David