

Der alttestamentliche Unterbau des Reiches Gottes
Julius Boehmer
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The author of this treatise has made previous valuable contributions in the department of Old Testament Theology. Besides several suggestive articles in periodicals on the criticism of the prophets, we have from his hand a monograph on the Biblical formula "In the Name of" and another on the Conception of the Kingdom of God and the Son of Man in Daniel. He is also the translator of Cheyne's "Introduction to the Book of Isaiah" into German. In the present work he sets himself the task of tracing the Old Testament antecedents for our Lord's characteristic use of the phrase "the kingdom of God." He justly complains that the indiscriminate carrying back of this phrase into Old Testament history, so as to designate by it the order of redemption from Paradise onward as an already existing organization is unhistorical and must needs obscure the peculiar content of the idea where it does appear. It is also true, that what the average discussions of Jesus' doctrine of the kingdom bring in the way of exposition of the Old Testament basis for the later usage stands altogether too much under the spell of this vague theological terminology and represents but very seldom careful and independent examination of the Old Testament facts. That the deficiency of this treatment of the matter has been so long overlooked is due in part to the modern disposition to minimize our Lord's direct dependence on the canonical writings of the Old Testament and to magnify His indebtedness to the development of later Judaism as reflected in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature. The author has some wholesome remarks on this modern tendency and on the wrong perspective it may easily bring into our interpretation of New Testament teaching, especially that of Jesus. For, whether we assume an influence of Judaism upon the mind of Jesus or not, it after all remains undeniable that He and the New Testament writers in general recognized only the canonical books as Scripture, and meant to be in absolute harmony with their ideas, an attitude which must have differed in their own consciousness from the attitude assumed toward the extra-canonical literature of Judaism. Looking at it from a purely human standpoint, it is difficult to see why such an original mind as that of Jesus should not have been able deliberately to detach itself from the current Jewish beliefs and to work its way back to the as yet un-Judaized world of thought of the Old Testament.

Before entering upon the discussion proper the author gives carefully prepared statistical tables, in which the Old Testament vocabulary of all words expressing kingship or rule is exhibited not merely as predicated of God but also of man. The discussion itself is divided into three parts: From the earliest time until David – From David until Deutero-Isaiah – From Deutero-Isaiah until Daniel. In the first part the author sets forth how *Melekh* was originally a common-Semitic designation of the deity, shared in by the Israelites, who used it with application to Jahve both as a proper name and with appellative force. Even in this common-Semitic form the word emphasized historical origin of the relation of authority of the deity over its subjects, in distinction from *Ab* which represented this same relation as one existing by nature. God is king in so far as He has by some specific act seized the government. This is important because it offers the first point of contact for the later idea that the kingdom of God is the result of divine acts in the sphere of history, an idea on which ultimately the whole eschatological and soteriological usage of the conception is seen to rest. Among the other Semites this *Melekh* assumed more and more the character of a violent, cruel, bloodthirsty deity. The author thinks that in the time of Samuel and David, as a result of the strengthening of the Jahve

religion, a reaction took place against the use of *Melekh* in proper names, because it was felt that Jahve could not in justice to his character be identified in name with this Semitic *Melekh* deity. He tries to prove this from the disappearance of the names compounded with *Melekh* and the substitution of names compounded with Jahve and El in the later period. But it will occur at once that it was precisely Samuel who deprecated the institution of the human kingdom on the ground that the spirit in which it was desired encroached upon the kingship or God. Therefore, to Samuel and his followers Jahve was preeminently *Melekh*. The author endeavors to remove this contradiction by sharply distinguishing here between *Melekh* as appellative and *Melekh* as proper name for the deity. The former Samuel favored, the latter he disapproved of. We might reason, however, that on this view of the matter the proper course for the strict Jahvists would have been, not to discard the *Melekh* designation altogether, but to emphasize its appellative signification, and to continue the use of it as such in proper names, all the more since an urgent reason existed for upholding Jahve's kingship. We are not convinced that the few scattering data which can be gathered in this matter of theophoric names warrant any such definite conclusion as the author would draw. The relative increase of names with Jahve and El and the consequent decrease of names with *Melekh*, if an actual fact, may have simply been the result of the greater popularity of the Jahve-name from this time onward, and does not in itself compel us to assume that there was any conscious reaction against the title of *Melekh* as applied to Jahve. When the author further argues that the institution of the human kingdom of itself must have had the effect of bringing the conception of Jahve as king into disuse, because the divine and the human kingships could not be harmonized, this seems to us again an illogical mode of reasoning. The protest against the kingdom of Saul ought to have had precisely the opposite result, that of emphatic insistence, by means of proper names and otherwise, upon Jahve's exclusive right to be considered the true king of Israel. And if, on the one hand, the conflict between Saul's kingdom and the prophetic representatives of Jahvism forced Jahve's kingship into the background, why should not, on the other hand, the harmony between these two forces, which was effected in the kingdom of David, have had the opposite result of bringing Jahve's kingship once more into prominence? The writer gives us the impression on pp. 49, 50, that this is actually his opinion: "Henceforth Jahve's kingship and that of David hang so closely together as to become occasionally more or less interchangeable conceptions." "Since the time of David the kingship of Jahve was no longer a mere idea, it had become a powerful reality." We are scarcely prepared after this for the remarkable statement on the same page, that "the *Melekh*-name of Jahve had to disappear as soon as the conflict which arose from the introduction of the human kingdom had come to an end through the reign of David," and that "the king in Israel could be called *Melekh* only, if Jahve was deprived of this title." It is certainly impossible to believe that, while Jahve and David shared the *substance* of kingship, the name was exclusively given to David and denied to Jahve. This same premise of the mutual exclusiveness of the human kingship and the denomination of Jahve as king also seriously affects the whole subsequent discussion of the period from David to Deutero-Isaiah. First of all, when God appears in the prophets as king, even in those prophets who predict a Messianic king in the future, the author is bound by his premise to look for a special reason why the prophets should have revived this *Melekh*-title, and he finds it in the prophetic conception of Jahve as a stern judge, and even suggests that this prophetic use attached itself formally to the pagan conception of the *Melekh*-deity as a destructive power. He finds it significant that the prophets began to do this since the time of Ahaz—i.e., since the time when the worship of the pagan *Melekh* began to be introduced among Israel. Must we believe that the prophets under such circumstances made the innovation of calling Jahve *Melekh*—to be sure in Boehmer's view with a certain contrast to the pagan

deity, Jahve being “the *true* destroyer,” but after all with the contrast merely implied and not explicitly formulated? It seems to us that ordinary caution will have prevented the prophets from favoring in this way a religious syncretism which had just then assumed a new threatening form. And there is no reason whatever to ascribe to the prophets such an intention. If the *Melekh*-title had continued to belong to Jahve notwithstanding the human kingdom, the prophets could freely make use of it without being misunderstood. Even so it lent itself admirably to their message of judgment, although in our opinion the author too exclusively emphasizes this feature. In Isaiah 33:22, the kingship of Jahve is explicitly associated with his saving character, but unfortunately here the writer’s critical view about the late origin of the prophecy prevents him from making it a corrective for his one-sided interpretation of the other passages. The close connection between the names Jahve Sebaoth and the *Melekh*-title in Isaiah alone proves that *Melekh* must express in a comprehensive way the supreme majesty and glory of Jahve. He is the King with the innumerable hosts of angels as his retinue; the title cannot, therefore, be restricted to his function as a judge of Israel. What is said about the individual prophets contains many valuable suggestions, e.g., that in Hosea there was less room for the development of this attribute of Jahve, because this prophet depicts the relation between God and Israel under the mystical figure of marriage. Of the greatest importance and most permanent value in this middle chapter of the book we consider the discussion of the features which the human kingdom bore to Israel and the manner in which this influenced the idea of Jahve’s kingship. True, the material for this is drawn partly from “the sources J E in the Pentateuch” as documents of the prophetic period. But this need not hinder us from profiting by the lucid manner in which the author here groups a wealth of material derived from observation of the common popular attitude toward the king and therefore easily overlooked, thus giving us a more concrete knowledge of what a king meant for Israel and what was meant when this title was attributed to God. Our modern usage, as it makes us think of the king almost exclusively under the aspect of a constitutional ruler and executive of the law, more or less obscures the fact that to Israel the kingship was “a source of happiness, a fountain of blessing, a retreat for salvation.” The kingship was a democratic institution. The king naturally took the part of the poor and oppressed, not of the powerful and violent; the king existed for the sake of Israel, not the reverse. It need not be pointed out how extremely important this fact is for a correct appreciation of the idea in our Lord’s teaching. The fullness of soteriological import which it there possesses is thus naturally explained, and it will be neither necessary to say, with Johannes Weiss and other modern writers, that the kingdom-idea represents the perishable element in Jesus’ teaching in contrast with the fatherhood-idea which is of everlasting significance, nor necessary with the Ritschlians to over-ethicize the kingdom-conception so as to empty it of all its soteriological and eschatological content.

In the period beginning with Deutero-Isaiah and closing with Daniel the author again tries to carry through his favorite idea that Jahve for a thorough recognition of his kingship was dependent on the disappearance of the human king. Even discounting the question of the genuineness of the second part of Isaiah, and assuming for a moment that this prophecy dates from or at least moves in the exilic kingless period, we need not on that account hold that, where it emphasizes Jahve’s kingship, this is done because the kingship had come to an end, and because the prophet did not expect its future restoration as an instrument for the rule of Jahve. All that can be said on this theory is that, while the instrument for the present was wanting, the prophet naturally emphasizes the source of the salvation expected and so speaks of the kingship of Jahve absolutely without reflection upon its concrete realization. That an exclusion of the latter in the form of the Davidic kingship cannot be

intended is proven by Isaiah 52:12, “the sure mercies of David.” For we cannot see our way clear to accepting the author’s exegesis of this phrase. Boehmer thinks that here the promises once given to David are now transferred to the people; the people themselves became the true house of David. But on this view the qualification of these mercies as “sure” would sound almost ironical; if their “sureness” in David’s case did not exclude their abrogation, so far as his family was concerned, then the people could not have felt much confidence in their own permanent retention of them, on which nevertheless the prophet throws great emphasis by calling them “sure.” Other prophecies, which in their present connection show us the idea of Jahve’s future kingship side by side with the expectation of a Davidic king, are brought down by the author to the post-exilic king and quoted for the same purpose, viz., to make out a later doctrine of Jahve’s kingship independent of the Messiah’s kingship and virtually excluding the latter, e.g., Micah 4:6, 7. Those who hold to the genuineness of these prophecies will have little use for this part of the discussion. On the other hand this very part of the book has great value, because it so convincingly shows how in many prophecies and Psalms the term king is eschatologically applied to God, and that in the specific sense not of Ruler but of Saviour. Such passages as Isaiah 43:15, “I am Jehovah, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King,” and 52:7, “Thy God becomes King,” are conclusive in this respect. Still the author seems to us to press this eschatological meaning too much, when he thinks of it primarily or exclusively in Ps. 29, 145, 103. The “My king and my God” of Ps. 5:3, shows that even in a context which Boehmer interprets eschatologically the present kingship of God is a living reality to the Psalmist’s mind.

From p. 175 onward the author discusses the revival of the conception of the Davidic king in “the post-exilic” period. What is here said corrects to a large extent the one-sided impression produced in the preceding pages concerning the Jahve-king of “Deutero-Isaiah” and many of the Psalms, as entirely detachable from and actually detached from the Messianic king. Nevertheless, the circles in which this revival of the Messianic hope took place are characterized even here as circles to which the preaching of Deutero-Isaiah had not penetrated or by which it had not been accepted. Besides Isaiah 33, already referred to, such important pieces as Isaiah 11:10-16, and Ps. 2, 18 (in its present form), 20, 45, 61, 72, 89, 110, 132 are brought down to this period, as is also the song of Hanna, 1 Sam. 2:1-6, with its reference to “the anointed of Jahve.” Haggai and Zechariah are assumed to have connected Messianic expectations with the person of Zerubbabel. The writer places a more or less depreciating estimate upon this whole post-exilic development; it did not rise to the former height of the prophetic preaching. And still more disapprovingly does he express himself with regard to those pieces, Messianic or non-Messianic, in which the kingship of Jahve is associated with the subjugation of the Gentiles rather than with the salvation of Israel. In this he finds the remnant of the old-Semitic *Melekh*-conception come to new power. Strangely enough that beautiful passage, Ex. 19:3-8, once regarded as the *sedes* for the most ancient Mosaic conception of the kingdom of God, is treated by the author as belonging to this development and is the first to fall under his condemnation. “A kingdom of priests” and “a holy nation” are made to mean, that in time future Israel will be to the Gentiles as priests are to their slaves; the Gentiles will have to toil and do service for their lords, who will receive from Jahve all the wealth of the nations for exclusive enjoyment. Truly, if this were the correct exegesis of the passage, and if the passage were actually post-exilic, we should have to exclaim with the author that this is indeed “a fall from the height of the prophetic religion.” After all, however, the main reason for finding this thought in it is its unwarranted association with the prophecies in the second part of the “Deutero-Isaiah,” from whose highly figurative language the same literal interpretation of a mere physical and political rule of Israel over the Gentiles is extracted.

Instead of distributing these several representations of Jahve's kingship over the earlier and later periods, and making them contradictory one to the other in religious spirit and ethical tendency, it seems to us much more satisfactory and much more in keeping with the dignity of divine revelation to make them descriptive of various aspects of the same fundamental idea, intended to supplement and interpret one another. This can be easily done if only the critical hypothesis, which brings down so many of the strongest most politically colored Messianic prophecies to the post-exilic age and finds in them the spirit of the later Judaism, be abandoned. Kept in their proper setting as the work of the earlier prophets, they lose their one-sidedness and offensiveness. And, perhaps we may say, that on this view, the relative absence of a pronounced Messianic prophecy in the personal sense from the later prophets was a divine safeguard against the Jewish tendency toward political self-exaltation. The prominence of the idea of the kingship of Jahve himself in the later prophecy, which, while not contradicting or excluding the earlier Messianic hope, yet keeps it more or less in the background, would thus be naturally explained. Did not our Lord Himself find it necessary, from a similar motive, to throw during the larger part of His public teaching nearly all the emphasis upon the idea of the kingdom of *God*, so as to hold the idea of His own Messianic kingship in reserve, until the time when, the conception of the kingdom having been fully set forth in its spiritual import and carefully guarded against all political misconceptions, the idea of the Messiahship could be safely brought forward and placed in the light of the regenerated kingdom-idea? Is it not possible to believe that this method was anticipated in the development of Old Testament prophecy?

Even more severe is the author's judgment on the Book of Daniel as representing the last offshoot of the Old Testament development of the idea of the divine kingship. Here also the idea in his opinion has not only political import, but, besides that, a political import devoid of all deeper ethical and religious value. Jahve's kingship here is identified with the world-supremacy, first given to the pagan powers, ultimately destined for Israel. The only ideal reason why the former cannot retain it and the latter must receive it lies in that with Israel alone is the knowledge of the true God, and in this Boehmer thinks to discover the influence of Hellenism. The great missionary thought which "Deutero-Isaiah" had connected with the conception is entirely lost sight of. One cannot help asking, if this be a correct appreciation of the spirit of Daniel, how it came about that of all Old Testament books, this book most strongly influenced our Lord in His teaching both with reference to the kingdom and with reference to His Messiahship. If the title "Son of man" with all the richness of its religious and ethical content was drawn from this source, then obviously Jesus must have held an infinitely higher opinion about the spiritual character of the book. And is it not true that the figure "like unto a Son of man," in contrast with the beasts representing the world-kingdoms, points to a deep ethical interpretation of the nature and end of that rule which is to come to Israel? To many, we have no doubt, the opinion of Jesus in a matter of this kind will seem irrelevant; we on our part do not hesitate to pronounce it decisive. In conclusion we call attention to the interesting view worked out in the author's treatise on Daniel, and here repeated, that the mysterious figure appearing in chaps. 8:15; 10:5, and 12:6, is identical with the Son-of-man figure in chap. 7. This is important, because, if correct, it ascribes to the Messiah historic activity on behalf of Israel before His coming with the clouds of heaven, and therefore involves His preexistence.