



JEWISH POLITICAL THEORY: HILKHOT MELAKHIM

Introduction

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Since the debate between the prophet Samuel and the Jewish People about appointing a king, the nature of the ideal Jewish polity has been in dispute. In fact, many commentators detect ambivalence in the Torah itself towards the institution of monarchy.

Because the Jews were in exile for almost 2,000 years, they had little opportunity to apply the laws of government in practice. Nevertheless, numerous halakhists and thinkers applied themselves toward the study of this issue. They considered questions of the role of government, its authority, structure, limits, etc. The Rambam even devoted an entire section of his halakhic code, the Mishneh Torah, to the Laws of Kings and their Wars.

In our day, with the founding of the State of Israel, all these issues have turned from theoretical debates into burning practical problems in the public arena. Recently, questions of democracy and theocracy, the authority of a non-religious autonomous Jewish government, etc., have become part of the general public discourse in Israel. In this series, we will undertake a rigorous examination of the classic halakhic and philosophic sources, and will hopefully emerge with a better understanding of our times and of our ideals.

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