# Biblical References for Authority, Church and State Summary from Rob Mannix

## Old Testament References

Big picture is God is the leader in the Hebrew scriptures (old testament), but works through earthly leaders at first very directly, later more indirectly. Moses is the leader of what you might call a “country” of nomadic people made up of tribes. He turns things over to Joshua, who is replaced by a sequence of Judges, with prophets by their side in some cases. Then the people want to be like the other people groups and have a king over them, so God gives them kings. This entire time it is a *Theocracy* with the laws all benign, religious and secular combined, upheld by the same authority. That authority is often deadly based on the laws and stories.

**Exodus 18** relates a great story of Jethro, Moses’ Father-in-law, visiting Moses and telling him he needed to appoint judges over the people in smaller groups so Moses did not need to decide everything. It sounds a lot like municipalities, or local courts, appeals courts and superior courts.

**Numbers 27** is a story of succession in the bible from Moses to Joshua. Moses asks God to tell him who to appoint, and God tells him to appoint Joshua the leader of the people. Theocracy at its best. No separation of church and state. This is the theme and norm for the first five books of the Bible, especially. The same story of succession is repeated in **Deuteronomy 31**.

In **Joshua 24:15** …as for me and my family we will serve and worship the LORD…

(I just love that verse)

The book of **Samuel** is the transition from judges to kings. A consolidation of power, and a high point in the Hebrew story with kings Saul, David and Solomon. **1 Samuel 8** is the story of the people wanting a king to be like the other people. God chooses Saul to be king, but then Saul does some bad stuff, and God then picks David to be king. Some Game of Thrones stuff happens around this time. Check it out in **1 Samuel 16.**

It only gets worse from there, though, as David’s successor is being chosen (that other HBO show - Succession). You can read all about it in **2 Samuel 13**. The end result is Solomon, one of David’s sons becomes king and God makes him very wise, but not wise enough to not make mistakes. If you are looking for a good story to talk about making judgments in a difficult case read **1 Kings 3:18** about a custody battle.

Having kings, especially the ones Israel had, did not protect them from being taken into exile. The Hebrew Scriptures are stories of survival during hardship, and the book of **Ezra** is a great example. The king that captured Israel was subsequently overtaken by a successor, who had a different plan which involved sending people back to Israel to build it back up. Cyrus of Persia sends Ezra to do the job in chapter 1 of the book. Chapter 6 talks about Cyrus’ successor continuing the efforts to return people to Jerusalem. The Theocracy is reestablished, and the history portion is complete, sort of.

We can now look at the next section of the Bible which includes Wisdom scriptures - **Proverbs 14: 28.** Rulers of powerful nations are held in honor; rulers of weak nations are nothing at all. Maybe we need to use this on our international stage?

**Chapter 16: 10** Rulers speak with authority and are never wrong. I am sorry but maybe this verse is misinterpreted? They may be speaking with authority but they are often wrong. Maybe the wisdom of that verse is that the might a ruler yields does make the ruler right. In some cases, does might mean right?

**Chapter 21 of Proverbs**: The LORD controls rulers, just as he determines the course of rivers. *You asked me to find you verses, please don’t ask me to defend each one.*

**Chapter 29:12** A ruler who listens to lies will have corrupt officials.

**Ecclesiastes 8:2** (another book of wisdom) starts a section about obeying the king. If you obey the king you will stay out of trouble.

## New Testament References

* **Matthew 5: 17** refers to obeying the law of Moses. Jesus did not come to abolish the law.
* **Matthew 5: 23** talks about how we should solve disputes ourselves before we get taken to court, and forced to pay everything we owe.
* **Matthew 17: 24** is a story about Jesus and Peter paying the temple tax with a coin found in the mouth of a caught fish. The story is about who should pay taxes.
* In **Matthew 22: 13** (and **Mark 12:13, Luke 20: 20**) there is another story of paying taxes, this time to the emperor. This is the better known story of whose face is on the coin. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's.

An interesting point is made about God’s laws and laws made by people in **Mark 7: 8** (similarly in **Matthew 15: 1-9**). Jesus is arguing with folks who hold people to higher standards that the poor could not achieve.

**Luke 6: 37** (and **Matthew 7:1**) are verses about judging others. “Can one blind person lead another blind person? Won’t they both fall in a ditch?” Sometimes politics feels like this.

**Luke 18:1** is the story of the persistent widow who keeps knocking on a judge's door until she finally gets justice. This compares a bad judge still giving justice, not because he is good, but because he is bothered, with God who wants good things for us.

The Gospel of John includes far fewer references. One interesting fact is revealed in **John 18: 31**. Jesus is before Pilate who does not want to preside over a sentence for Jesus since he does not see what he has done wrong. When he tells the Jews to judge him by their laws they say we are not allowed to put him to death.

There are several stories of apostles being thrown in jail for different things in the Acts of the Apostles. **Acts 12: 6** is the start of the fantastical story of Peter being rescued from jail.

Paul frequently gets into trouble in **Acts. Chapter 17, verse 8** includes a claim by someone he is in an argument with that Paul is not following the laws of the emperor since he says Jesus is King.

In **chapter 19** there is a story about a riot that involves the civil authority breaking things up.

Trouble continues to follow Paul around, and in **chapter 23** there is a plot to kill Paul. A Roman commander who knew Paul was a roman citizen arrested Paul to protect him. Roman citizens were provided more rights than the folks who lived in the occupied territory. This sounds very much out of the news of today. As the story goes on Paul actually uses this to stay in custody and to be taken to Rome, see **Acts 25: 10.**

I looked through all the letters and did not find many passages referring to secular law.
**Romans 13: 1-7:** Obey rulers who have authority over you…. Paul justifies this by saying God is the one who put the authority there. *This would be a great passage to study.* I think Paul is assuming that the leader is doing the right thing, which is an improper assumption in my opinion. Paul was also much less concerned about the earthly realm since he is looking for an imminent return of Christ.

The only other passage I can point out is **1 Corinthians 6: 1-11**. Don’t take each other to court. We as Christians should be able to settle our problems amongst ourselves. We should rely on each other’s wisdom, not the courts. This may be hard to read in our litigious society.