

# Deuteronomy 33:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together.

## Analysis

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**And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together.**

The enigmatic pronoun "he" most naturally refers to Yahweh (from context of verses 2-4), establishing divine kingship over Israel. Jeshurun (יֵשׁוּרֻן) is a poetic name for Israel appearing only in Deuteronomy (32:15; 33:5, 26) and Isaiah 44:2, derived from yashar (upright, straight). This honorific title describes Israel's covenant ideal—the nation as it should be, walking uprightly before God, in contrast to their frequent rebellion.

The phrase melekh biYeshurun ("king in Jeshurun") establishes theocratic reality before Israel had human kings. Yahweh reigned as true king from the Exodus forward (Exodus 15:18), though Israel later demanded a human monarch "like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5-7). The tribal assembly context (be'hitassef rashei am, "when gathered the heads of the people") suggests formal covenant ratification ceremonies where Israel corporately acknowledged Yahweh's sovereignty.

Some interpreters see "he" referring to Moses, making him king in a mediatorial sense, but this contradicts Moses' role as covenant servant, not sovereign. Others see prophetic reference to Messiah as ultimate King in Israel—Jesus fulfills this as King of kings who rules the true 'upright ones' (Revelation 19:16). The ambiguity may be intentional, emphasizing divine kingship mediated through Davidic line and ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

## Historical Context

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This verse dates to Moses' farewell circa 1406 BC, before Israel had human kings (monarchy begins with Saul circa 1050 BC). The reference to Yahweh as king reflects ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaty language, where divine kings ruled through earthly representatives. Israel's tribal assembly structure (heads of people, tribal leaders) provided governance until the monarchy.

The name Jeshurun's etymology from 'upright' suggests ironic contrast with Israel's actual behavior—they are called to be 'upright ones' but consistently rebel. This tension drives Deuteronomy's message: will Israel live up to their covenant identity or prove faithless like the wilderness generation? The theocratic ideal of Yahweh as king eventually gives way to human monarchy, yet the prophets maintain hope for Messiah's righteous reign.

## Related Passages

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**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

## Study Questions

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1. How does Yahweh's kingship over Israel inform our understanding of Christ's kingdom and the church's identity?
2. What does the name 'Jeshurun' (upright ones) teach about God's calling versus our performance, and how does this anticipate justification by faith?

## Interlinear Text

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וַיְהִי י	בִּישׁוּרִן	מֶלֶךְ	בְּהִתְאַסְּף	כְּ אֲשִׁי	עַם
H1961	in Jeshurun	And he was king	were gathered	when the heads	of the people
	H3484	H4428	H622	H7218	H5971
יחד	שְׁבֵטֵי י	יִשְׂרָאֵל:			
together	and the tribes	of Israel			
H3162	H7626	H3478			

## Additional Cross-References

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**Deuteronomy 32:15** (Parallel theme): But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.

**Judges 17:6** (Kingdom): In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.