

1 Samuel 8
May 22, 2022

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

In our nation, we are fortunate to have a system that allows each of us to have a voice as to who we want as our leader. We simply exercise our right to vote. But imagine living in Samuel's day and age where that system is not in place! Samuel is following God's leadership to lead Israel as a prophet and judge, but his sons are not. They are wicked and pervert justice. Consequently, the people decide to *reject Samuel* as their chosen leader.

Q: How do you think you would handle rejection by a large number of people who no longer desire your leadership? [Let people engage]

Transition: God had cared for the nation since its beginning; but now the elders of the nation wanted a king to lead them. Their request was motivated by a couple of factors: (1) Samuel's sons were not godly and the elders feared that they would lead the nation astray when Samuel died; (2) Israel wanted to be like the other nations and have a king to honor. The powerful nations around Israel were a constant threat, and the elders felt that a king would give greater security.

In essence, they were rejecting Samuel and forcing him into retirement! Samuel had a choice on how to handle it. Let's see how he navigated this difficult circumstance. Let's begin.

BOOK:

Israel Asks for a King

8 When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel. ² The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. ³ But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

⁴ So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵ They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead (traditionally judge) us, such as all the other nations have."

⁶ But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. ⁷ And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸ As they have done from the day, I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. ⁹ Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do."

¹⁰ Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹ He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. ¹² Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. ¹³

He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. ¹⁵ He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. ¹⁶ Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. ¹⁷ He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. ¹⁸ When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” they said. “We want a king over us. ²⁰ Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”

²¹ When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. ²² The LORD answered, “Listen to them and give them a king.”

Then Samuel said to the men of Israel, “Everyone go back to his town.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about God in this passage? [Let people engage]

- God’s permissive will
- When His plan is being overturned by human will, He considers it a rejection of Him!

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

The request for a human king was not in itself improper, for God had promised such a leader. But the refusal to wait for God’s timing was clearly displeasing to the Lord and to His prophet, Samuel. We can never go wrong seeking God’s leadership through prayer. We need to hear His voice first and foremost, and then obey.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (1 Sa 8)*. Victor Books.

I. The Request for a King (8)

Jehovah God had been King of Israel and had cared for the nation since its beginning; but now the elders of the nation wanted a king to lead them. Their request was motivated by several factors: (1) Samuel's sons were not godly and the elders feared that they would lead the nation astray when Samuel died; (2) the nation had been through a series of temporary leaders during the period of the Judges, and the elders wanted a more permanent ruler; and (3) Israel wanted to be like the other nations and have a king to honor. The powerful nations around Israel were a constant threat, and the elders felt that a king would give greater security. Samuel's reaction to their request shows that he fully understood their unbelief and rebellion: they were rejecting Jehovah. In choosing Saul, the nation rejected the Father; much later in choosing Barabbas, they rejected the Son; and when they chose their own leaders instead of the witness of the Apostles, they rejected the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51).

Here is an illustration of God's permissive will: He granted them their request, but He warned them of the cost. See Deut. 17:14–20 for Moses' prophecy of this event. The nation listened to Samuel and then asked for a king just the same! They wanted to be like the other nations, even though God had called them to be separate from the nations.

Merrill, E. H. (1985). *1 Samuel*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 439-440) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

1. THE DEMAND FOR A KING (8:1–9)

8:1–6. Shortly before 1051 B.C., the year Saul became king (**when Samuel** was 65–70 years **old**), the people of **Israel**, aware of Samuel's advanced age and of the wickedness of **his sons** (vv. 3, 5) demanded of the prophet that he select **a king** to rule over them. Samuel's sons, who had been serving as judges **at Beersheba** in Judah, no doubt reminded Israel of the sons of Eli (2:12, 22). Probably the people were afraid that they might return to the wicked days the nation had known before Samuel had been raised up by the Lord. Samuel's sons, **Joel** and **Abijah** were **dishonest** judges, accepting **bribes** and perverting, rather than upholding, **justice**. **Samuel**, of course, was grieved that they should seek **a king**, for God, who had redeemed them from Egypt to be His people, was their King.

8:7–9. But **the LORD told** Samuel that **the people** were rejecting **not him but** God. Furthermore, God would permit them to have a **king**, but they would live to regret their hasty impulse.

The request for a human king was not in itself improper, for God had promised such a leader (see *Introduction*). But the refusal to wait for God's timing was clearly displeasing to the Lord and to His prophet. In the face of impending conflict with the Ammonites (see 12:12–13) the people wanted a king "such as all the other nations have" (8:5). Even after witnessing the leadership of the Lord in stunning victory over the Philistines at Ebenezer, Israel demanded a fallible, human leader.

2. THE NATURE OF THE KING (8:10–18)

8:10–18. At last **Samuel** relented. He told **the people** God would give them what they wanted, but **the king** would be a despot, a demanding dictator who would enrich himself at the people's expense. He would press them into his military and domestic enterprises (vv. 11–13, 16, 17). He would appropriate their properties to his own use (vv. 14, 16) and would inflict heavy taxes on them (vv. 15, 17). And **when** all this happened it would be too late to complain, for the people would have reaped the consequences of their own fleshly desires (v.18). Shortly after Saul ascended the throne many of these predictions came to pass (14:52) and continued to mark the long history of the monarchy in both Israel and Judah (2 Sam. 15:1; 1 Kings 12:12–15; 21:7).

3. THE INTRODUCTION OF THE KING (8:19–9:2)

8:19–9:2. After **the LORD** had agreed to let **the people** have a king ... like all the other nations, **Saul** was introduced in the story. He was a tall and striking **Benjamite** (9:1) who appeared quite naive and unkingly in many ways. He hailed from the town of Gibeah (10:26), where the concubine of a Levite who had sought hospitality was raped and killed (Jud. 19). Excavations at Tel el-Ful, just three miles north of Jerusalem, have established it as the site of ancient Gibeah. Though a son of **Kish**, a man of some influence (1 Sam. 9:1), Saul had little to commend him to the high position of **king** except his physical impressiveness (9:2). God had to convince both Saul and **the people** that he was the proper candidate.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 111–112). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

God Permits a King (8:1–22). The people requested a king because Samuel's judgeship had begun to fail. He was old; and his sons, like Eli's, were wicked men who perverted justice. Also, the people wanted the benefits of a central authority like the other nations had. Although Samuel resisted, God graciously permitted Israel to have a king. Samuel warned the people of the troubles of kingship, but they persisted; so God granted their request.

Philbeck, B. F. (1972). 1 Samuel. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 167–168). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Samuel's Influence Fades (1 Sam. 8:1–22)

The passage—Israel's political situation had stabilized for a time under Samuel's influence, but her underlying problem had not been solved. No system had been devised to provide a steady supply of capable, honest officials for public service. As Samuel grew old, the problem again became acute. He had installed his sons Joel and Abijah as judges in Beersheba, but they soon proved to be corrupt. Filled with despair, the elders of Israel asked for a king.

A change in Israel's form of government was no matter of little consequence. Every area of ancient life was affected. Under the judges, God had theoretically been Israel's absolute ruler. He had worked through the personalities of the elders who functioned roughly as a representative democracy. Their decisions were assumed to represent a disclosure of the divine will. Although a judge certainly influenced the decisions of the elders, he was by no means an independent agent.

He operated within the framework of authority which they established. This system embodied the values which grew out of Israel's religious experience. The rights of the ordinary citizen were protected from arbitrary decisions resulting from the centralization of authority into one office.

Samuel rightfully recognized the inherent dangers in the proposed change in the form of Israel's government. Her entire political, civil, and religious philosophy could be sacrificed in the process. He, therefore, carefully outlined the impact that a typical Oriental monarch would have on the lives of ordinary men (vv. 10–18). Political stability would be achieved at the expense of personal liberty. The people would not be diverted, however and the Lord allowed them to have a king.

Special points—The anti-monarchic attitude of this passage is abundantly clear (see also chap. 12). Other biblical passages, however, are much more favorably inclined toward the kingship (the major portions of chaps. 9–11 and Judg. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). In time God would make it clear that he would work with the new system just as he had with the old (12:14–15).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Samuel 8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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