

October 23, 2022

"Who is King?"

I Samuel 8:4-7

Lesson 4 of Unit

I Samuel 10:17-24

Intro

Today's text is from 1 Samuel, which shows the transition from a theocracy with God as Israel's ruler to a monarchy with a human king as their leader. Samuel comes to a position of leadership in Israel at the end of the period of the judges. As such, he is sometimes referred to as the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. There was no king when Samuel came to leadership, and the people were morally weak: "everyone did as they saw fit" says Judges 21:25. Today's passage shows how Israel came to have a king.

Read I Samuel 8:4-7

1. vs. 4: The elders come to Ramah

It was Samuel's birthplace, and a primary site for his judging

The elders were the heads of families/clans

They were older and seen to have wisdom

They acted as a council in the day-to-day decisions of the people

Saying "all the elders" suggests that there were leaders from all 12 tribes

The tribes acted independently for the most part; there was no national leader

2. vs. 5: The elders have two concerns

1. Samuel is old

It may be that they know that Israel fell into sin after a judge dies

They might want to make sure who will lead after Samuel dies

2. His sons do not follow his (godly) ways

The sons, Joel and Abijah, are currently serving as judges also

However, they use their position in greedy ways

The people don't trust them to lead righteously and with justice

The elders' solution is to have Samuel appoint a king over the nation

This is the normal way—"as all the other nations have"

3. vs. 6: Samuel hears the request, Samuel is "displeased" and prays to God

The people's request to be like the other nations is what displeases Samuel

Israel was made by God to be different from other nations, not like them

This request shows a lack of faith in God

Also, the people don't respect Samuel's wisdom

They come to him with a choice of action already decided on

Samuel sees the people's request as a rejection of God's intentions for His people

So Samuel prays

He seeks God and His will/wisdom rather than getting angry with the leaders

4. vs. 7: God's response is initially surprising

“Listen to the people; they are rejecting Me, not you.”

First, God will accomplish what He wants, even with rebellious people

Second, God reminds Samuel of some key ideas

Wanting a king is a rejection of God as their king, not Samuel as a prophet

Samuel might have felt the people were commenting about Samuel as a father

His sons were not as righteous as their father (vs. 5)

The elders asking for a king have only considered the positives, not the negatives

They see a king as giving stability, especially in a military sense

They don't see that a king could become tyrannical or oppressive

Between chapter 8 and chapter 10, Samuel meets Saul, God's choice for king over Israel. Samuel secretly anoints Saul as king in 10:1-16, prior to the next section of our study.

Read I Samuel 10:17-24

5. vs. 17: Samuel calls the people “to the Lord” at Mizpah

The amount of time between the elders asking for a king and this meeting is unclear

There has certainly been some time passed

Mizpah is where Samuel led a victory over the Philistines in chapter 7

Saying the meeting was “to the Lord” indicates God is calling for this, not Samuel

6. vs. 18: God tells the people (through Samuel) of what He has done for them in the past

“I brought Israel up out of Egypt”

“I delivered you from the power of Egypt”

These are reminders that Israel won't be vulnerable without Samuel or a king

God has always protected and delivered them

7. vs. 19: That was then, this is now... “But you have rejected your God who saves you...”

“You have said, ‘No, appoint a king over us’”

The people will get what they asked of God, but it won't be as good as they think at first

It's important to remember that God works His will in two distinct ways

Some events God desires and works to bring these about

Think of Jesus' incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection

Some events people want, and God chooses to work through

Giving the people a king fits this second category

God will use this to bring the Christ into the world

He finishes this verse by telling the people to present themselves, to see who will be king

8. vs. 20-21: God has Samuel gradually narrow down the options

First the tribe of Benjamin

Then the clan of Matri

Then Saul is chosen—but he's not present to be taken!

9. vs. 22: Saul is not present because he's hiding with the supplies (luggage?!)

Note that God knows where Saul is hiding—one cannot escape God's notice

The text doesn't say why he's hiding
This is not an impressive way to begin the reign of a king

10. vs. 23: The people go get Saul and bring him out
He is taller than everyone else by a lot—a full head
His physical presence would give the people confidence
He *looks* like a leader, a king

12. vs. 24: Samuel's words here can be taken two ways
"There is no one like him"
These could indicate praise and approval of Saul
They could merely be referring to Saul's height compared to others
These words are true, but they aren't a full-bodied endorsement of Saul

The people are pleased and shout, "Long live the king!"
This phrase is a prayer, a desire of the people for God to bless this king
This could seem inconsistent, as they people rejected God for a king
We too can have mixed motives in what we ask and seek
We are seldom totally righteous or totally flawed
God sees their (and our) hearts
We trust Him to cleanse us of wrong desires as we live a life of faith

Application: God chooses not to abandon the people even after they have rejected Him. He sometimes will punish to correct, just as He does with us. Even when we make decisions that grieve God, He does not abandon us or stop working through us individually or the church collectively.

Also, Samuel and the elders were both concerned about Israel's future, but had very different plans for how to address that concern. This could also happen in a church body, as people or groups see differing solutions to a mutually understood issue. We are to seek God's wisdom through the Spirit in every situation, rather than using worldly wisdom to address spiritual concerns.

Prayer: Father God, help us to seek and value Your judgement and perspective more than our own or the world's. Help us to be open to allowing the Spirit to show us where we are motivated toward something that leads us to a rejection of You and Your ways. In Jesus' name, Amen.