

1 Samuel 8:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

Analysis

That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

Israel articulates three reasons for wanting a king, each revealing theological confusion. First, "like all the nations" ("kekol-hagoyim") expresses the desire to abandon covenant distinctiveness—the very identity God intended when He called them to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Second, "judge us" ("ushephatanu") seeks human justice when God Himself was their Judge (Judges 11:27). Third, "fight our battles" ("venilcham et-milchamotenu") rejects God as divine Warrior who had promised "The LORD shall fight for you" (Exodus 14:14). Each request displaces a divine role onto a human substitute. The irony intensifies when we recognize that God had already provided victory without a king (1 Samuel 7:10-13). Their demand reveals a crisis of faith—preferring visible human leadership to invisible divine sovereignty. Yet even this rebellion becomes part of God's redemptive plan, as the monarchy eventually produces David's line and ultimately the Messiah.

Historical Context

Israel's demand for military leadership came in the context of Philistine pressure and Ammonite threats (1 Samuel 12:12). Surrounding nations' kings were warrior-leaders who personally led armies. Israel's tribal militia system had proven

effective under judges but seemed outdated compared to professional standing armies of neighboring kingdoms.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. In what areas of life are you tempted to want visible, human solutions instead of trusting in God's invisible provision?
2. How does the desire to be "like all the nations" manifest in contemporary Christian communities?

Interlinear Text

וְשִׁפְטֵת כָּא	הָגֹן מ	כָּל אֲנָשָׁן גָּם וְהַיִּיכָּא	כָּל אֲנָשָׁן גָּם וְהַיִּיכָּא	H1961 H1571 H587 H3605	That we also may be like all the nations	H1471	may judge	H8199
and that our king	us and go out	before	us and fight	H4428 H3318 H6440 H3898	מֶלֶךְ נָא	לִפְנֵי יְהוָה	אֶת מִלְּחָמָתֵנוּ	אֶת מִלְּחָמָתֵנוּ our battles

Additional Cross-References

1 Samuel 8:5 (Judgment): And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.