

# Israel Demands a King

In his old age, Samuel's corrupt sons fail as judges. The people demand a king like other nations, rejecting God's direct rule through prophets and judges.

1 Samuel 8:1-22

CHARACTERS: Samuel, Joel, Abijah, Elders of Israel

THEMES: Obedience, Rejection of God, Human government, Consequences, God's sovereignty

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WHEN SAMUEL GREW old, he appointed his sons as judges over Israel. Joel and Abijah served at Beersheba. But Samuel's sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain, accepted bribes, and perverted justice. The pattern was repeating—Eli's sons had been corrupt, and now Samuel's sons followed the same path.

The elders of Israel gathered and came to Samuel at Ramah. 'You are old,' they said, 'and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.'

Their request displeased Samuel. When he prayed to the Lord, God answered: '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. 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. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights.'

Samuel told the people all the words of the Lord. He warned them what a king would do: 'He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. He will take the best of your fields, vineyards, and olive groves

and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and vintage. He will take your male and female servants and your best cattle and donkeys for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day.'

It was a sober warning about the cost of human monarchy. Kings would demand military service, forced labor, taxation, and confiscation of property. The very freedom they enjoyed under God's direct rule would be compromised.

But the people refused to listen to Samuel. 'No!' they said. 'We want a king over us. 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.'

There it was—the heart of the issue. 'We want to be like all the other nations.' They wanted to fit in, to have what others had, to trust in visible, tangible leadership rather than invisible divine rule. They wanted a king they could see rather than a God they had to trust.

They forgot that being different was precisely the point. God had called Israel to be a holy nation, set apart, a kingdom of priests. Their distinctiveness was their glory. God Himself was their king—an arrangement no other nation could claim. But they saw it as a liability, not a privilege.

When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. The Lord answered, 'Listen to them and give them a king.'

Sometimes God gives us what we demand, even when it's not what we need. He allows us to learn through experience what we won't learn through instruction. Israel wanted a king; they would get one—with all the consequences Samuel had warned about.

Samuel sent the people away, each to his own town. The age of the judges was ending. The monarchy was beginning. It would bring glory under David, disaster under many others, and ultimately division and exile. But it began here, with a people who rejected their divine King to have a human one instead.

Yet even in granting their request, God's purposes would not be thwarted. From Israel's monarchy would come David, and from David's line would come the Messiah—the King of Kings, whose kingdom would have no end. Human rebellion could not stop God's redemptive plan. He would work even through their rejection to bring about salvation.

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