

## We Want A Human King

Lesson for October 23, 2022

**Unit II:** Out of Slavery to Nationhood

**Scriptural Background:** 1 Samuel 8:1-9; 10:17-26

**Printed Text:** 1 Samuel 8:4-7; 10:17-24

**Key verse:** “But you have today rejected your God, who Himself saved you from all your adversities and your tribulations; and you have said to Him, ‘No, set a king over us!’” (1 Samuel 10:19a, NKJV)

### Word Study

#### Hook

It is vain, O men, that you seek within yourselves the cure for your miseries. All your insight only leads you to the knowledge that it is not in yourselves that you will discover the true and the good.

Though not recognized in today’s lesson, the Israelites will come to recognize that the answer to their “miseries” is not in a human king.

#### Key terms

1. **Give** (8:6) – Freely transfer the possession of (something) to (someone); hand over to.
2. **Hearken** (8:7) – Be attentive; listen; hear heed.
3. **Judge** (8:5) – Form an opinion or conclusion about; to govern; decide, “lead” (NIV).
4. **Look** (8:5) – Behold; direct one's gaze toward someone or something or in a specified direction.
5. **Prayed** (8:6) – Addressed a solemn request or expression of thanks to God; intervened; mediated; interceded; interposed.
6. **Saved** (10:19) – Delivered; brought salvation; helped; preserve (a person's soul) from damnation.

#### Lesson Background

The book of 1 Samuel recounts the ministry of the prophet Samuel, who restored law and order and regular religious worship in the land after the Israelites had forgotten the Lord and worshipped idols many times throughout the reign of the judges. One of the major themes of 1 Samuel is the importance of honoring the Lord. In 1 Samuel 2:30 we read, “Them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (see also 1 Samuel 2:9). In other words, the Lord will bless those who honor Him and keep His commandments, and those who do not, will not receive His blessings.

The book of 1 Samuel can be divided into three main sections, each of which focuses on a different person. Chapters 1–7 recount the actions of Samuel, the righteous priest, prophet, and judge. Chapters 8–15 focus on Saul, the first king of Israel. Chapters 16–31 describe the rise of David.

As 1 Samuel begins, Israel was at a low point spiritually. The priesthood was corrupt (1 Samuel 2:12-17; 22-26), the Ark of the Covenant was not at the tabernacle (1 Samuel 4:3-7:2), idolatry was practiced (1 Samuel 7:3-4), and the judges were dishonest (1 Samuel 8:2-3).

As this week's lesson begins Samuel is old. He makes his sons judges over Israel. But there is a problem. Samuel was one of the godliest men in the entire Bible. Yet his action here may be a sin on his part. We never have the pattern of judges being appointed by men or of the office of judge being passed from father to son. Samuel was not right to appoint his sons judges over Israel. His sons are not like him. His children did not follow in his ways. His sons turned away from the Lord, seeking money, taking bribes, and perverting justice. This was why Samuel was wrong to appoint his sons as judges over Israel. Samuel probably could not look objectively at his sons. He excused sins in them that he saw in others.

This is an important declaration. Samuel has been contrasted to Eli and his sons. Samuel is born to a barren woman. Samuel lives in the presence of the Lord. Samuel follows the Lord and does not seek his own way like Eli and his sons. Further, a prophecy was given in 1 Samuel 2:35 that God would raise up for himself a faithful priest who will do what is in God's heart and mind. His dynasty will not end, and he will serve before the Lord's anointed. Everything seems to be pointing to Samuel and his lineage. But now we see that Samuel's lineage is not going to be the hope for Israel. Further, Samuel is never declared to be the priest of God. He is the prophet of God, and he is judge over Israel. The text is making it clear that Samuel is not the answer. In fact, Israel now understands that Samuel is not the answer.

## Lesson in Depth

### I. Association Begets Assimilation (1 Samuel 8:4-7)

**Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together:** At some place of rendezvous appointed; these were the heads of the tribes, and fathers of the houses and families of Israel, the principal persons of age and authority. It was wise for the elders of Israel to do this. They did not have to accept leaders who were obviously ungodly and unfit to lead.

**And came to Samuel unto Ramah:** The place of Samuel's birth and residence, and where he now dwelt, and judged Israel; they went in a very respectable body to meet him. At the time this happened, Samuel had almost complete rule over the Israelites. He had not abused his leadership though. They are coming to complain of the actions of his sons.

**Make us a king:** There was a difference between a king and a judge. A judge was a leader raised up by God, usually to meet a specific need in a time of crisis. When the crisis was over usually the judge went back to doing what he did before. A king not only held his office as king as long as he lived, he also passed his throne down to his descendants.

**Now make us a king ... like all the nations:** When Israel entered the land, they encountered Canaanite city-states that were led by kings (see Joshua 12:7-24). Additionally, during the period of the judges, Israel was enslaved by nations that were led by kings (Judges 3:8, 12; 4:2; 8:5; 11:12). However, at the time of the judges there was no king in Israel (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). As Israel lived in the land surrounded by nations that had kings, the desire arose for a king in Israel also. According to (Deuteronomy 17:14), God knew this would be their desire and He would allow it to occur. However, later verses in Chapter 8 (verse 20), revealed a motive which was definitely counter to the Lord's will.

It is very interesting, to me, that the elders had enough confidence in Samuel to do right, that they even told him of the sins of his sons. They are not complaining about the rule of Samuel. If Samuel were younger, they would not need a king. He would rule them fairly. His sons were not dedicated as he was. They were greedy for filthy lucre. God does not want them to have an earthly king. He is their King. They want to be as the other nations around them who was ruled by a king.

**But the thing displeased Samuel:** Not that they called him an old man, and suggested that he was incapacitated for his office, nor for observing the unbecoming walk of his sons, but for what follows: when they said, give us a king to judge us. What displeased him was, that they were for changing their form of government, not only to remove it from him, and his sons, but from the Lord himself, who was king over them. The ill consequences of which, many of them at least, he easily foresaw, and which gave him great uneasiness, both on account of the glory of God, and their own good. According to the historian Josephus, Samuel could neither eat nor sleep, but watched all night, and spent it in prayer.

**And Samuel prayed unto the Lord:** To know God's mind and will, and what answer he should return unto them. Samuel was not displeased about their complaints about his sons. He was disappointed, that they did not realize that the LORD was their King. Samuel is a very dedicated man of the LORD. He never made a decision like this without first finding the will of the Lord in the matter.

This is the right thing to do whenever we are displeased. We should never carry such troubles with us. Instead, we should do what Samuel did when he prayed to the Lord.

**And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people:** The Lord had predicted that there would be kings over Israel (Genesis 35:11; 36:31; 49:10; Numbers 24:7-9, 17; Deuteronomy 17:14; 28:36). Here, the Lord told Samuel to obey the request of the people and give them a king. This was not because their request was good or right, but because God would teach Israel through this. Sometimes when we insist on having something bad God will allow us to have it and then teach us through it.

**They have not rejected thee, but ... Me:** The nature of this rejection of the Lord by Israel is explained (in verses 19-20). The Lord agrees with Samuel, that the request of the people is wrong. He explains to Samuel that they wanted a king, not to get rid of Samuel. They were a rebellious house against the rule of the Lord. They could not see that they were so much better off than the heathen countries around them. They did not want a sovereign God. They wanted an

earthly king. God had a purpose in not giving Israel a king up to that point. It was because He did not want them to put an ungodly trust in the king instead of a godly trust in the Lord. Now, Israel rejected God's plan and declared they did not want the Lord God to reign over them.

Summarily, the elders of Israel come to Samuel as recorded in verses 4-5. They tell Samuel that he is old and cannot be relied upon any longer. His sons are a problem and do not walk in the ways of the Lord like Samuel does. So, Israel has an answer. They have a solution to the problem. They want Samuel to appoint a king to judge them like how other nations have a king. Think about what is happening here and how different it is from what is found in Chapter 7. In Chapter 7 when the people were troubled, they came to Samuel and asked him to plead to the Lord on their behalf regarding the Philistine problem. But the elders do not do that this time. They do not come to Samuel and tell him that there is a problem with Samuel's sons so plead to the Lord for an answer about who will lead us. Rather, the people have their own solution. The people are going to tell Samuel, which is ultimately telling God, what their answer is from their own desires and their own wisdom. The elders do not seek what God's answer would be. They have their answer, and they are telling their answer to God. We want a king.

The second problem about this request is that they desire for a king because they want to be like the other nations. Now it is important to note that God anticipated that the people would demand a king and even made provision for it in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. But God did not want the people to have a king who would act like the other kings of the nations. The king was to act on behalf of God and completely trust in God. The problem is that Israel did not need the kind of king the people were looking for. Remember that the book of Deuteronomy declared to Israel that if they would obey the Lord, God would repel their enemies (Deuteronomy 28). Obedience and repentance would solve their problems. But the problem is that they want to be like the nations. God had called Israel to be high above the nations (Deuteronomy 26:19), not like them. God wanted Israel to stand out and be different. But Israel did not want to be different. Israel did not want to stand out.

Samuel understands these problems and hates their request. Samuel prays to God about what the people are demanding. Listen to verse 7. The people have not rejected Samuel but have rejected God from being king over them. God's message to Samuel is that Samuel would not take this personally. This is not really an issue with Samuel. The first three verses make it sound like the problem is Samuel and his sons. But that is not really the problem. The problem is that the people do not want God to be their king. Rejecting Samuel is a picture of the people's rejection of God. Rejecting God's prophet and judge is rejecting God himself.

## **II. Biting the Hand that Feeds (I Samuel 10:17-19a)**

In the remainder of Chapter 8, God commanded Samuel to explain to the Israelites all the manner of a "human" king (who is like all the other nation's kings – this is what they asked for). Samuel told them the king they appoint over them will take their sons and put them in war and work his palace.

The king they appoint will take their daughters to work his palace as cooks, bakers, and confectionaries, and he will slightly oppress the people. The king will take their land and give to his own servants, this is what the kings of other nations do.

After hearing all of this, the people still moved forward with their desire for a human king, like all the other nations. God told Samuel, so be it, give them a king. In all of this, God gave them what they wanted.

Chapters 9-10 show the anointing of Israel's new king. 1 Samuel chapter 9 begins with the selection of the first human king of the people of Israel. The selection came out of the tribe of Benjamin, of the family of Kish. Kish himself was a mighty man of power in Israel, and there was a son of Kish named Saul. The chapter described Saul as a choice young man, goodly, handsome, and tall.

1 Samuel 10 begins with Samuel anointing Saul so that no one else knows that he has been anointed. It is an anointing that is done in private. He is to be the prince over Israel who will save God's people from their enemies (10:1). Samuel continues by telling Saul about the signs that will occur so that he can know that he is chosen by God to be the prince over Israel. There is a sign about lost donkeys and about people giving him two loaves of bread. But the most notable sign is stated in verses 6-7. The Spirit of the Lord will rush upon Saul, and he will be changed and will prophesy. "Then God is with you, and you will succeed in whatever you do."

All of this happens just as Samuel said. As Saul turns to leave Samuel, the Spirit of the Lord rushes on Saul and he begins to prophesy among the group of prophets (10:10) People are now asking questions about Saul. Is Saul now a prophet? Who is his father? But Saul does not immediately reveal what has happened. He does not tell his family that he was anointed to be king over Israel. He keeps all of this to himself for the moment (10:14-16).

It is at this point that this week's lesson picks up.

**Samuel called the people together unto the LORD to Mizpah:** The Lord's choice of Saul was made public at Mizpah, the place of the spiritual revival before Israel's victory over the Philistines (7:5-8). This seemed to be their favorite place to call them together. They know when Samuel calls them, they will hear from the Lord.

**And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel:** Before proceeding to the election, Samuel again reminds Israel of its foolishness and ingratitude in their voluntarily rejecting the glorious Eternal King for an earthly sovereign. It was perfectly true that, under the present circumstances of Israel, the establishment of a mortal king was needful for the development of the Hebrew power. But it was nonetheless true that such a change in the Hebrew constitution would never have been necessary had not the nation forsaken their own Eternal Sovereign, who in time past had saved them out of far greater perils than any threatening them at that time. Now they deemed a change in the government of Israel was necessary, therefore God gave them their desire. But the change would involve the loss forever of the higher blessedness for which the people had shown to be utterly unworthy.

**I brought Israel out of Egypt:** Before God appointed a king for Israel, God reminded them of all He did for them. The Lord had separated them out as a people, who had no king, except the Lord. He had delivered them from great bondage in Egypt and brought them to their Promised Land. He blessed them beyond all other nations, as long as they stayed faithful to Him, and obeyed His commandments.

God reminded Israel that He was still more than qualified to be their king and their rejection of Him was all because of *them* and not because of the Lord.

**But you have rejected your God, who Himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations:** The Lord, speaking through Samuel, showed Israel how their rejection of Him made so little sense. It makes no sense to reject the one who Himself saved you from all your adversities and your tribulations.

**Ye have said unto him, nay, but set a king over us:** They did as good as if to say God should not be their King, but they would have one set over them like the kings of the nations about them. Samuel reminds them of this their request and resolution to have a king, which they had expressed some time ago, that it might appear to them that this was wholly of their own seeking. The motion came from them, and not from the Lord, nor from Samuel, and therefore, whatever ill consequences might follow, they had no one to blame but themselves.

### III. Looks are Deceiving (I Samuel 10:19b-24)

**Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands:** By the heads of their tribes, and by the rulers of the thousands into which their tribes were divided, that it might be known either by Urim and Thummim. Or rather by casting lots, out of which tribe, and out of which thousand, house, and family in it, their king was to be chosen. And by which method as it would clearly appear to be a choice directed by the Lord, so it would prevent all contention and discord among themselves.

In spite of all the wonderful things He had done for them, they have rejected Him as their King. They wanted to be like all the heathen nations around them and have an earthly king. They are not to say later, they did not know. All the tribes are gathered here at Mizpeh. Each tribe is to come individually and stand before Samuel.

**And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken:** The heads and representatives of them were taken to the place where the lots were cast.

**The tribe of Benjamin was taken:** The lot fell upon that tribe for the choice of a king out of it; not the tribe of Reuben, who was the firstborn, nor the tribe of Judah, to whom the kingdom was promised, but the tribe of Benjamin. The least of all the tribes, and which sprung from the youngest son of Jacob, contrary as it were probable, to the expectation of all. All of the twelve tribes came before Him, and Samuel chose out the little tribe of Benjamin.

**The family of Matri was taken:** That is by lot; the lot fell upon that family for the choice of a king out of them: in the account of the families of the tribe of Benjamin (1 Chronicles 8:1). No mention is made of this family here, or anywhere else, and yet no doubt there was such a family, and Saul was of it. It seems to have its name from the butt or mark arrows were shot at; some of the Benjamites being famous for their skill in darting and slinging, and perhaps this family might be so.

**And Saul the son of Kish was taken:** The lot being cast upon the men in the family of Matri, though it is not expressed, fell upon Saul; for though he was not there, as Jarchi observes, the lot fell upon him. For their names were written on a piece of paper, and put into a box, and the prophet put in his hand and took out one, and on that was the name of Saul, and this was the manner of the lot.

Saul was already anointed king over Israel. But God did this to show the whole nation that Saul was the right man. It showed that *God* chose Saul and not any man.

**Was chosen:** It is important to say that Saul did not become king because of the choosing by lot. Instead, he was chosen king because of God's word to the prophet Samuel. The choosing by lot simply confirmed the word of the Lord through Samuel.

**And when they sought him, he could not be found:** Saul was separated out from all of the people of the Benjamites. He is so unsure of himself that he has hidden away, rather than be proclaimed as king before all of his people.

Because he had hidden himself, as in the next verse; it is very probable, and indeed plain, that he was in this assembly at the first opening of it. And knowing what Samuel had said and done to him and perceiving in what way the lot was going concerning the same, the tribe of Benjamin being taken, he concluded how it would ensue, and therefore left the assembly, and hid himself. We would have to say, he was a reluctant king. The question was answered by the LORD speaking through the Urim and the Thummim of the priest. The LORD knows exactly where he is. He was out where the wagon loads of provisions were. He was hiding. He cannot hide from the Lord.

**Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff:** Overwhelmed, Saul had hidden himself in the military supplies. Here Saul showed a healthy embarrassment and humility. He did not look forward to being "center stage" in front of the nation; he seemed to dread it. Saul was not made king because of his personal ambition or to gratify a desire for the limelight.

**he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward:** Saul's physical stature was impressive; being head and shoulders above the rest gave Saul a kingly presence. Saul showed he was exactly what the people wanted – a king that looked good to the other nations.

**Do you see him...there is no one like him among all the people:** Samuel perhaps said this with a note of sarcasm in his voice. He wanted the nation to **see** the king, and according to what they could **see**, he was a great king. But from his long conversations with Saul (1 Samuel 9:25-26)

Samuel probably knew him well enough to mean something else when he said, **there is no one like him among all the people.**

**And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king:** Let the king live, that is to say, live long and prosperously. Herewith they accept and own him for their king, and promise subjection to him. In their desire for the image and pageantry of a human king, Israel longed to shout these words for a long time. They knew all the other nations got to have royal ceremonies and functions. Now they got to have it all as well.

## **Lesson Summary**

In 1 Samuel 8, the Israelites declare that they want to have a king because all of the surrounding people groups had their own kings. This request deeply troubled, angered, and upset Samuel (1 Samuel 8:6). Out of his troubled heart, Samuel prayed to the Lord (1 Samuel 8:7).

It is without a doubt that Israel's request for a king displeased Samuel (1 Samuel 8:4-6). After praying, the Lord tells Samuel, "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.

Samuel summons the people of Israel to Mizpeh. This is the place where the children of Israel first joined Samuel in a revival that consisted of rejection of idolatry and provided a great defeat for the Philistines who thought that they had them cornered there. (See Chapter 7). The people meet Samuel and Samuel tells them that God, in His grace is giving them a king and they are going to draw by lot. First they choose by tribe, then by clan, and eventually, Saul is chosen... but, where is Saul? He is nowhere to be found, and the Lord reveals to them that Saul is hiding in the supplies. What a great way start as the leader of an entire nation!

What does this lesson teach us? Just as Israel rejected God as their king, we too can fall into the trap of seeing other things, people, or accomplishments as being our king rather than God. Israel wanted an earthly king even though they already had God because they wanted to be like the other surrounding nations.

Similarly, we may want to conform to the people around us and establish things as "king" or "god" in our lives when they are not. Money, appearance, or accomplishments can all sneak into our lives as being "king."

Even though Israel rejected God as King does not mean we have to reject Him. Whatever may be the "king" or "god" in your own life, you need to surrender it to God. Do not conform to the people of the world who establish false gods and deities in their lives.

Rather than seeing the greatness of God as their King, they wanted to be like the surrounding people groups. Israel had free choice to make their own decisions and in the same way, we do too. We have to choose if we will be like Israel and reject God or will we choose to accept God as our righteous and perfect King.



Saul had been chosen and empowered by God to lead His people. But when this was to be made public, he hid among the supplies. We also have been chosen and empowered by God to serve Him. According to 1 Peter 2:9: *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*