

Give Us A King

Opener: In your opinion, what makes a good leader?

Scripture: When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons, Joel and Abijah, as Israel's leaders. ³ But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. ⁴ So all the elders came to Samuel. ⁵ They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." 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, 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 claim as his rights."

¹⁰ Samuel told the people all the Lord said. ¹¹ He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: 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 command thousands, others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and others to make weapons and equipment for his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take your best fields, vineyards, olive groves and give them to his attendants. ¹⁵ He will take a tenth of your grain and vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. ¹⁶ Your male and female servants and your best 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, but 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 to the Lord. ²² The Lord answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." I Sam. 8 (condensed)

Discussion Questions

1. This is a transitional chapter. Israel goes from Samuel to Saul, from judgeship to kingship, from being a theocracy (God is king) to being a monarchy (man is king). Is it surprising to learn that Samuel's sons, like Eli's, were corrupt? Why would taking bribes and perverting justice wreak havoc in a nation? Examples? I Samuel 8:1-3
2. Samuel was old and his sons were corrupt. The elders recognized this as both a problem and an opportunity, so they made their request: "Appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." Was this a sinful request? Why did they want to be like other nations? Is it always wrong to want what others have? Why or why not? I Samuel 8:4-5
3. Israel asked for something against God's will, and God actually said yes! Why would He do that when their request meant they were rejecting Him? Has God ever let you have something that wasn't His will for your life? Examples? I Samuel 8:6-9
4. Samuel warns them about the potential abuses that come with having a human king. How does this apply to political realities in our time? What can we learn from this warning about placing too much trust in human systems of governance? I Samuel 8:10-18
5. Why were the Israelites willing to ignore the warning about a king? When we're inclined to do something to be "like everyone else" what does that desire communicate to God? I Samuel 8:19-21
6. What form of government do you think God favors? What's the proper relationship between the church and the State? How should Christians interact with government?

Wrap Up: Israel's motivation and timing were wrong. They wanted a king now and they weren't willing to wait. If they had been patient, God would have given them a king like David, a king after His own heart. Ultimately, He would have given them Jesus. Saying "now" to God can be just as wrong as saying "no" to Him. Also, there's a big difference between asking God for help and telling Him how to help. Israel had a problem and they came up with their own plan and then demanded that God do things their way. But don't we do the same thing? How many times have we told God how to do His job?