

# 1 Samuel 8 • The Demand for a King

## Introduction

There are many parallels to situations in the modern Western church to Israel's demand for a king. At the heart of the issue is a desire to have something perceived to be "as good as" the world's. We see this today not just in the fact that most church leadership structures are modeled more like Western corporations than New Testament churches, but in the desire to be "as good as" the world in things such as music, production values, marketing, etc. What do you do when people within the body are no longer satisfied with pursuing things according to God's Word and instead desire to have what others have?

<sup>1</sup>And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. <sup>2</sup>Now the name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba. <sup>3</sup>His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice.

<sup>4</sup>Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; <sup>5</sup>and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations."

## [Read v.1-5]

**Q: What are some of the reasons that it was at this particular time that Israel desired to have a king appointed over them?**

1. Those chosen by Samuel to continue after him – his sons – were not godly and the elders feared such bad leadership would lead the people astray after Samuel died.
2. Having been through a series of temporary leaders during the times of the Judges, they probably desired a permanent ruler thinking it would break the cycle of only being faithful during the lifetime of a given Judge.
3. But mostly they wanted to be "*like all the nations*" and have their own king.
4. Other reasons?

**Q: Was this something completely unexpected?**

A: No. In fact, God had already warned them through Moses of the consequences **WHEN**, not if, they appointed a king.

*"When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.' He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself. Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.*

*Deuteronomy 17:14-20*

**Q: What is the key characteristic God spoke through Moses which the king should possess? How is this missed by the elder's request of Samuel?**

A: The key is that the king is to be a man of God's Word, someone who studies and puts it into practice. In other words, the key characteristic is a faithful relationship to God. The elders of Samuel's time miss this by instead requesting a king "*like all the nations*". Their vision is for a king as

defined by the world, not by the Word.

**Application:** *There's a difference between requesting right, spiritual leadership as opposed to a leadership structure which mimics the world. Do you see why using corporate standards for qualifying leaders is often at odds with the biblical principles of selecting godly men qualified according to God's standards?*

<sup>6</sup>But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD.

<sup>7</sup>The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. <sup>8</sup>Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day—in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also. <sup>9</sup>Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them."

**[Read v.6-9]**

**Q: What does a righteous man do even when a situation is obviously distasteful to him personally?**

A: He goes to the Lord in prayer. He always seeks God's counsel above his own thoughts and feelings, especially where the body of believers is concerned.

**Q: What does God liken their actions to?**

A: Idolatry. That is what God is referring to when he reminds Samuel that since the beginning "*they have forsaken Me and served other gods*". They are forsaking the King of Heaven for a king of the earth, substituting yet another god for the One True God.

**Q: What is the righteous man required to do in situations like this?**

A: He is required to tell them the truth. In this case, it's the "*procedure of the king*". There is always an obligation to present the truth regardless of whether or not it will be accepted.

**Point:** *This is the first of what will eventually be a complete rejection of every Person of the Trinity by Israel. In this instance in choosing Saul, they are rejecting the Father. Later in choosing Barabbas they will reject the Son. And finally in choosing their own leaders instead of the witness of the Apostles they will reject the Holy Spirit. (Acts 7:51) Substituting earthly leadership models for God's ways is always a form of idolatry, of choosing another god in His place.*

<sup>10</sup>So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king. <sup>11</sup>He said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. <sup>12</sup>He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. <sup>13</sup>He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. <sup>14</sup>He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give them to his servants. <sup>15</sup>He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. <sup>16</sup>He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use them for his work. <sup>17</sup>He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves

**[Read v.10-18]**

**Q: How is this an example of God's permissive will?**

A: God granted them their request, but warned them of the cost.

**Q: Why do you suppose the first warning in v.11 concerns "your sons"?**

A: In this culture and society, there were very few things more important than having sons to carry on the family name, the family business, and even more importantly to inherit the land and continue the family legacy for generations to come.

**Q: How is the warning extended in v.13 to "your daughters"?**

A: It's a warning of the further possible erosion of the family as the king takes whom he pleases into his service. In other words, no family structure will be secure under such a system so that the people and resources one would normally count on to help the family, particularly into old age, will not be available.

**Q: What is in danger in v.14-17?**

A: Their personal property which just doesn't include their lands, but their servants and livestock as well. It's a further erosion of their security, that the things on which they most depend could be confiscated and permanently taken away.

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will become his servants. <sup>18</sup>Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

<sup>19</sup>Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, “No, but there shall be a king over us, <sup>20</sup>that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

<sup>21</sup>Now after Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the LORD’S hearing. <sup>22</sup>The LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to their voice and appoint them a king.” So Samuel said to the men of Israel, “Go every man to his city.”

**Point:** Under current Mosaic Law without a king, property was always returned back to the original owners. But with the introduction of a king, permanent loss could be incurred that was not previously possible. By forsaking faith in God the King to take care of them, their security is being compromised both in this life and the one to come.

**Q: What will be the inevitable result?**

A: The yoke of the king will become so oppressive and intolerable that the people will eventually cry out to the Lord for relief. But no relief will be coming because they will have to suffer the inevitable consequences of their personal choice.

**Application:** As is so often taught throughout Scripture, the physical is often a reflection of the spiritual.

**[Read v.19-22]**

**Q: What might be surprising to us about the people’s actions at this point?**

A: They listened to Samuel but then still asked for a king just the same!

**Q: Why might it also be surprising that they’re asking Samuel to appoint the king?**

A: They’re rejecting God’s Word presented through Samuel the prophet, but they still want the credibility they think a prophet will bring to making their choice a reality. They want the appearance of God’s approval even though they’re not actually getting it.

**Point:** It’s interesting that people will approach a prophet ostensibly seeking a Word from God but will then reject what the prophet says if it does not conform to what they actually want to hear. People often treat leadership in this manner, wanting the appearance of credibility rather than the actual biblical credibility itself.

**Q: What is the chief spiritual problem of the people at this time?**

A: They’re more desirous of being “like all the nations” rather than being set apart and devoted exclusively to God as originally called.

**Q: What is ironic about their assigning to a king the duties to “judge us and go out before us and fight our battles”? (v.20)**

A: These are things that were already taken care of by the judges appointed by God. So in reality the only thing they’re really asking for that is different is a king that will make them look and feel like the other nations around them. This truly betrays the condition of their heart.

**Q: What does a righteous man do when faced with his own people’s demands?**

A: He brings it before the Lord in prayer. He never rushes to conclusions without prayerfully submitting **everything** to God first.

**Application:** True spiritual leaders allow God to dictate when a break in fellowship is required. The righteous man allows God to work every opportunity for reconciliation until no such opportunity is any longer available.



## **Overall Application**

- *How do you handle situations where people in your local congregation desire to duplicate processes, things, or structures which other organizations have? Or that exist mainly in the world which they'd like to adapt for church use?*
- *How must spiritual leaders handle the requests of congregants which don't conform to God's Word and ways?*
- *What are the biblical guidelines for selecting leaders?*