

We'd Rather Have a King
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1 Samuel 8:4-20

⁴So all the Israelite elders got together and went to Samuel at Ramah.⁵ They said to him, "Listen. You are old now, and your sons don't follow in your footsteps. So, appoint us a king to judge us like all the other nations have."⁶ It seemed very bad to Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us," so he prayed to the Lord.

⁷The Lord answered Samuel, "Comply with the people's request—everything they ask of you—because they haven't rejected you. No, they've rejected me as king over them.⁸ They are doing to you only what they've been doing to me^(a) from the day I brought them out of Egypt to this very minute, abandoning me and worshipping other gods.⁹ So comply with their request, but give them a clear warning, telling them how the king will rule over them."^(b)

¹⁰Then Samuel explained everything the Lord had said to the people who were asking for a king.¹¹ "This is how the king will rule over you," Samuel said:

"He will take your sons and will use them for his chariots and his cavalry and as runners for his chariot.¹² He will use them as his commanders of troops of one thousand and troops of fifty, or to do his plowing and his harvesting, or to make his weapons or parts for his chariots.¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, or bakers.¹⁴ He will take your best fields, vineyards, and olive groves and give them to his servants.¹⁵ He will give one-tenth of your grain and your vineyards to his officials and servants.¹⁶ He will take your male and female servants, along with the best of your cattle^(c) and donkeys, and make them do his work.¹⁷ He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and then you yourselves will become his slaves!¹⁸ When that day comes, you will cry out because of the king you chose for yourselves, but on that day the Lord won't answer you."

¹⁹But the people refused to listen to Samuel and said, "No! There must be a king over us²⁰ so we can be like all the other nations. Our king will judge us and lead us and fight our battles."

1 Samuel 11:14-15

¹⁴"Let's go to Gilgal," Samuel told the people, "and renew the monarchy there."¹⁵ So everyone went to Gilgal, and there at Gilgal they made Saul king in the Lord's presence. They offered well-being sacrifices in the Lord's presence, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration there.

Some history and context:

- The tribes of Israel were ruled and lead by judges and prophets. We're likely familiar with Joshua, Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and a myriad of other judges from the books of Joshua and Judges.
- In the book of 1st Samuel, we learn of Eli, judge and prophet at the sanctuary in Shiloh.

- When Eli began to get older, he appointed his two sons to succeed him.
- Eli blessed Hannah (barren) and she gave birth to Samuel – after being weaned, Samuel was left at the sanctuary for Eli to care for him and to work in the temple under Eli.
- At ~11, Samuel heard the voice of God. God told Samuel that Eli’s sons were corrupt and under their rule, the Israelites would fall to destruction. Samuel reported this revelation to Eli. Eli accepted that this was God’s decree. Throughout the nation, this prophecy established Samuel as a prophet of the Lord.
- Upon the death of Eli’s sons in battle with the Philistines and the capture of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines, Eli died. Samuel and the Israelites then lived under the oppressive rule of the Philistines for about 20 years until Samuel gathered the people into an army. Samuel and the Israelites defeated the Philistines and Samuel was recognized as their God-sent leader.
- The Israelites lived in relative peace with Samuel as their judge, prophet and leader.
- “Surprisingly,” Samuel got older. He appointed his two sons as successors, like Eli had and...like Eli’s son, Samuel’s sons were corrupt, as well.
- Now we’re caught up to today’s scripture reading.

Why are the people “dissatisfied” with Joel and Abijah, Samuel’s sons? Because they:

- refused to follow in the Holy ways like their father, Samuel
- became greedy and focused on money as the way “to get things get done” – demanding bribes
- perverted justice

So, let’s not forget scripture tells us that it’s the **elders** who got together to review this situation. The elders, being the wise and learned among the peoples, it was **the elders** who concluded that the way to resolve things was to have a king.

That’s it! We need a king – not a judge or a prophet, but a “KING” like all the other nations have. After all, all the “kings” of those other nations – they ALL follow the Holy Ways of YHWH ... NONE of them is greedy or accepts bribes... ALL of them are righteous, they NEVER perverting justice.

By the way, how easy was it for **the elders** to conveniently forget that they DID have a king – YHWH!!!! God was their king ... *But it’s so much better to have an earthly king!*

It feels like I’m “Monday-Morning quarter-backing,” but in that moment and time, did the elders really think that the kings of other nations were truly so pious and righteous? Could they really have been that naïve?

Unless ... there was more going on. What **the elders** REALLY wanted is found in verse 20 - an earthly leader who was more militaristic, more aggressive, commanding, intimidating and **demonstrated** visible power; someone to fight our battles.

It’s not like WE have anyone to fight our battles.

HMMM...sounds a lot like why Jesus was rejected as the Messiah – a “king,” a “ruler,” must meet THE PEOPLE’S expectations and definitions ... we’re not going to trust God and alter what we **WANT** from “a king” or **HOW** we envision a king to behave.

It's of no surprise that when the elders went to Samuel with their demands, he was offended. I mean, wouldn't you be if you were in his position. Samuel had devoted his life to the sanctuary – to following the ways of God. He judged the people righteously and fairly. AND...he was able to gather an army together to fight the Philistines – he prayed to YHWH, who intervened and helped the Israelites to successfully defeat the Philistines. That sounds like a king to me!

Samuel – you're too old! You're too old to continue leading us, but you're still good enough to go to God and do our bidding.

That's a fine slap in the face.

Samuel knew that this wasn't a good idea. He knew it. So, he went to YHWH and prayed. He talked with God. And what did God tell Samuel?

GO AHEAD AND GIVE THEM WHAT THEY ASK FOR! BUT REMEMBER – THEY'RE NOT REJECTING YOU – THEY'RE REJECTING ME (AGAIN).

If Samuel feels crushed and rejected, imagine how God must feel? God HAS fought their battles. God HAS blessed them. God HAS protected them. God HAS gone before them *in the Ark of the Covenant!!!*

And yet, having been rejected by the Israelites yet again, God STILL shows care and concern by telling Samuel, "WARN THEM." WARN THEM OF WHAT AN EARTHLY KING WILL BE LIKE.

The KIND of king that you're asking for, will ...

- TAKE your sons and FORCE them fight for HIM
- TAKE your sons and ENSLAVE them – farming HIS lands, making weapons for HIS wars, making luxury items for HIS enjoyment
- TAKE your daughters and MAKE them work as HIS cook, HIS beautician, HIS server (or MAKE them serve those HE wants).
- TAKE your best lands to use for HIMSELF and to give away to HIS friends.
- TAKE your best employees, your best animals, your best resources for HIS use.
- TAKE all of this ... and then tax you – TAKE your money for HIM and his purposes.

ALL of the things you seek from that kind of king are not for YOUR benefit and to what end?

- So that you can claim to be a nation that wins wars?
- So that you can claim to be a nation that is economically dominant?
- So that you can claim to be a nation that is number one?

Rather than being a nation or having a ruler known for honesty, integrity, compassion, and justice, you'd rather be known for dominance, oppression, financial success and being envied.

This doesn't sound like you want to be "like other nations." It sounds like you want to be special ... like a people that were set apart for greatness, flourishing and limitless blessings.

HMMMM – isn't that what YHWH intended all along? Isn't that what YHWH had been doing all along?

What is it that we want when it comes to leaders and leadership?

Why can't we accept and embrace God's definition of a king or God's preferred style of leadership?

What is it that we expect of ourselves?

We are called to be different; we are called to stand out. The world and its kings will say if someone wrongs you, you are supposed to get even, to get revenge. We are told by our God not to seek revenge and to forgive the person who wronged us. The world and its kings will tell us it is ok to get money in less than honest ways, but we have been told to work at our best and earn what we gain.

The world and its kings will tell us it is acceptable to succeed by any means necessary and to strive to be "first and foremost," but we have been told by God, it is the last who shall be first and the first shall be last. The world and its kings convince us that fame, fortune and good looks are far more important than compassion, generosity and sacrificial love.

To be one of God's children means we have to leave the world behind. We are set apart from the world, from *IT'S expectations and rules*. We have to reimagine and redefine what it means to lead and what a king/queen/leader should look like....according to the ultimate and only standard – God's.

Jesus tells us "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other". We cannot follow the ways of God and the ways of the world. We cannot hide the light of God that is supposed to shine through us for the sake of gaining acceptance in the world. We cannot be like others, and we should expect the same from our leaders.

The Children of Israel made a mistake when they demanded a king to judge over them. Their desire to "be like other nations" was one that ended up costing them their kingdom and their freedoms. The kings that abandoned God dominated the people and when the kings grew weak other empires conquered the territory and enslaved the people. Also, the people were led astray, they allowed themselves to be moved away from God and God's Word because being set-apart and unique wasn't enough.¹

God of old, God of today and God of forever – help us be quick to listen and slow to speak. May we be wise enough to recognize, accept, explore and enjoy you as our Lord, our Queen, our King – our leader above all things and persons.

AMEN

¹ Adaptions and quotes from "Standing on the Cliff" by Jeff Hatos.