

1 Samuel 8

We Want a King Over Us

Introduction

People of God, in the beginning, when our first parents were still in their immaturity, not yet having their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish between good and evil, the Serpent tempted them to seize from the Kingly Tree of Knowledge before they were ready for divine rule.

But the promise of God's salvation has always been to restore humanity as co-rulers of the world under Him. And His plan for Israel had likewise always been to give them a king, because through their kings, would come the greatest king of all – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Summary and Overview of 1 Samuel 8

The Lord had had ordained that this stage of civilizational development would eventually come to Israel, and so he gave provisions for it, saying in Deut. 17:

“When you come to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ ¹⁵you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; - Deut. 17:14-15

God makes some qualifications about the king of His choosing: he must be a brother Israelite, not a foreigner. Also the king of God's choosing was not to rule through the accumulation of military might, massive wealth, and multiples wives.

He was also to be totally subservient to the law of God, even writing out a copy of the law for himself, reading from it all the days of his life, so that he not depart from the commandments of God.

Thus Israel's sin in 1 Samuel 8 lay not in the desire for a king, but in the *kind* of king they desired. They wanted the kind of king all the other nations had—one who ruled with self-glory and tyranny.

With this in mind we see that 1 Samuel 8 mirrors the Fall in Genesis 3. Just as Adam prematurely grasped at kingship on his own terms and fell, so too did Israel. They impatiently rejected God's rule and demanded a king before the appointed time, thus bringing judgment upon themselves.

Why were they impatient? When was the appointed time when they could have a king? The Scriptures repeatedly teach that the king was going to come from the Tribe of

Judah. But the whole tribe of Judah was under a ten-generation ban, as stated in Deuteronomy 23:2 –

One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord.

The Patriarch Judah had two sons, Perez and Zerah, born out of wedlock with his daughter-in-law Tamar, thus disqualifying the whole tribe from holding office in Israel for 10 generations. Though God promised the king would come from Judah, the people had to wait ten generations for that king. The end of Ruth traces this timeline, ending with David, the tenth generation, who was the first qualified to be the king in that line.

However, when Israel demanded a king in 1 Samuel 8, they were premature—David wasn't born yet, and the tenth generation had not come to pass. This impatience mirrored the pattern in Genesis, where Adam seized the forbidden fruit before the appointed time. Israel's demand for a king was an act of faithless impatience, choosing the ways of man embodied in Saul, rather than trusting in God's timing, to give them David in another generation.

I. The Failure of Samuel's Sons as Judges (8:1-3)

Now the occasion for Israel asking for a king is the failure of Samuel's sons as judges.

As Samuel aged, he appointed his sons, Joel and Abijah, as judges. Unlike their father, they became corrupt — pursuing dishonest gain, taking bribes, and perverting justice (Deut. 16:19). Their failure echoed Eli's sons, but unlike Eli, Samuel is not blamed for their corruption. He did right, yet they chose wickedness over righteousness.

Sometimes, parents faithfully raise their children in the Lord, yet their children still rebel. The covenant is not automatic—each person is responsible for their own sins and behaviors before God. Though the LORD rebuked Eli because he failed to restrain his sons, He did not rebuke Samuel, because He right in the eyes of the Lord.

II. Israel's Elders Demand a King (8:4-6)

As it was, the elders of Israel used the failure of Samuel's sons as a pretext for them to request a king to rule over them. They said, *"Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the other nations"* (v. 5).

Though their concerns about corrupt leadership are valid, the solution they propose is worse than the problem.

Instead of asking for righteous judges, they reject God's kingship over them, and demand a human king instead.

At its core, their desire reflects the sin in every human heart—we **do not want God to rule over us**. In Luke 19, Jesus tells a parable, representing himself as a nobleman receiving a kingdom, and going off to a far country, but he put his citizens in charge, saying, occupy until I come. But his citizens reject him, saying, *“We will not have this man to reign over us.”*

Such is the case with us all. It is the primeval sin the Serpent tempted us within the Garden. I will not have this God reign over me. I can be my own God and king.

Samuel is deeply saddened by the request. But, instead of reacting in anger, he wisely turns to the Lord in prayer (v. 6), demonstrating his role as a faithful prophet who seeks divine guidance before making decisions. Something a king like all the other nations would most certainly not do.

III. The Behavior of That King (8:7-18)

God tells Samuel that the people's rejection is not of him but of God as their King (v. 7) – behavior that has stretched back as far as Egypt. God says, *“⁸ According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them*

up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also.”

Yet, God instructs Samuel to grant their request while warning them of the consequences (v. 9).

Samuel makes it clear: A monarchy like the kind you want will require a vast bureaucracy, consuming all their resources. This king will “take.” “Your king will take your sons for his army, take your daughters for his service, take your best fields, take your servants, take your livestock, and take a tenth of your produce.”

A monarchy would demand extensive human and material resources. It required both military and administrative personnel—royal guards, cavalry, officers, weapons manufacturers, and food supply managers (vv. 11-13).

Beyond manpower, vast material resources were needed. Though the king would own land, the people would bear the burden of sustaining the system, tithing their grain, wine, and flocks to the king.

Since they were rejecting God as King, it was fitting they would now tithe to a human king, since he is taking the place of God. But with all that they give, they will not receive back a fair amount in return. This king would not bring freedom or security or glory they suppose—he would

take everything from them, reducing them to slaves. And when the people got fed up with it and cry out, as they did under Pharaoh, God would not answer them (vv. 11-18).

Heavy taxation is the inevitable consequence of rejecting the freedom of God's rule and provision. When we cast off God as King, we do not become free—we merely trade His just dominion for the insatiable grasp of the State.

A Statist system is not self-sufficient like the Lord; it cannot create, only consume. Like a parasite, it feeds off its host, bleeding us dry to maintain its tyrannical grip. And so, it will devour everything God has given for your prosperity to sustain its bloated bureaucracy.

The State will not stop at your wealth. It will break the family—taking your sons for its wars, your daughters for its labor, your wives for its ambitions. It will seize your land, tax your income, and rob you through eminent domain, slaughter your flocks and herds, handing your inheritance to corporate cronies who build airports, strip malls, and highways, or because their friends are in the big Ag business and they can't abide any competitors. All this in the name of capitalism, in the name of freedom. The State does not give—it takes, redistributing your toil to enrich its favored few.

God's design for Israel was far different. He intended His people to keep their wealth, keep their families, and keep their resources for themselves under His immediate kingship and protection, that they might flourish.

God needs nothing from us—He gives to all men liberally. But the State is not so. While the State itself may be Liberal, and give, give, give, away benefits to people, it can only do that because it takes, takes, takes your wealth away from you. It does not sustain; it drains. Rejecting God's rule does not result in political or spiritual liberty—it invites bondage and slavery.

IV. The People Persist (8:19:20)

Israel refuses to listen, insisting, "No! We want a king over us" (v. 19). They will get a king over them – one who is over them like a bird of prey over a carcass. Their stubbornness reveals their spiritual blindness. They desire a king to "lead us and go out before us and fight our battles" (v. 20).

But hadn't God just done this in chapter 7?

Didn't He thunder from Heaven and defeat the Philistines?

Didn't He decimate their gods and land and people when the Ark went through a seven-month tour of duty in Philistia?

Didn't God send the thunderstorm in Deborah and Barak's time to stop Sisera's chariots?

Didn't He overthrow Egypt with plagues, kill Pharaoh, and drown his chariots in the Red Sea?

Didn't He cause panic among the Midianites, leading them to destroy themselves when Gideon and his 300 men blew trumpets and shattered jars?

Didn't God send the Angel of the LORD to go out before them to deliver Israel from their enemies in the land?

Israel already had a King whose glory went out before them, and who fought their battles for them.

Yet Israel, in their hardness of heart, cast aside the Lord's mighty hand for the frail arms of man.

Their request, therefore, doesn't reveal a desire to grow into greater maturity and self-rule under God. Rather, it is an explicit rejection of that. They are showing that they want to remain in their immaturity and trust in some

governmental bureaucracy to take care of them from cradle to grave.

Also, it reflects their desire to conform to the world, rather than to remain separate as a unique and holy people under God's direct rule (Lev. 20:26; Num. 23:9). It also reflects the sinfulness of our hearts—thinking we know better than God, and that we can get what God had intended to give us, apart from God's will and ways.

V. The Lord Gives Them What They Want (8:21-22)

In the end, God grants their request. He allows them to have their king, knowing it will lead to hardship and slavery. Samuel dismisses the people, sending them back to their towns, preparing for the unfolding drama of Israel's monarchy (v. 22).

Application

Now there are 4 main reasons why their request for a king were wrong.

First, because they wanted to be like the other nations.

Second, they wanted a king to judge them.

Third, they wanted a king to go out before them and to fight their battles for them.

Fourth, because they were impatient.

They Wanted to Be Like the Other Nations

Israel's demand for a king wasn't just about leadership—it was about identity. They wanted to blend in with the nations rather than stand apart as God's chosen people. They feared looking weak without a human king and craved the respect of the world more than obedience to God.

And isn't that our struggle too? We reshape our families, churches, and lives to fit the culture, fearing rejection more than unfaithfulness. We pursue the world's definition of success—wealth, comfort, reputation—before seeking God's kingdom. We compromise biblical truth to avoid being labeled intolerant or extreme.

But Scripture is clear: **Friendship with the world is enmity with God** (James 4:4). The more we seek the world's approval, the further we drift from Christ's lordship. We cannot serve two masters. Either we stand as Free Men under God, or we conform to a world that is perishing, and be slaves of men.

They Wanted a king to Judge Them

Israel had Samuel as their judge, but they used his sons as an excuse to demand something new. We do the same when we dismiss the counsel of faithful pastors, elders, and churches when they don't do what we want them to do. Instead of submitting to the authority which God has placed over us, and trusting the Lord to guide us through our circumstance, we choose to reject the leaders God has placed over and instead hunt for new leaders who tell us what we want to hear.

We ignore wise counsel because it doesn't align with our preferences. We leave churches over personal grievances, or through wounded pride, rather than serious doctrinal concerns.

Israel's rebellion wasn't about Samuel's sons—it was about their own sinful hearts. And when we reject the rulers that God has ordained to be over us for our good, especially those who have proven themselves faithful over many years, most of the time it's not because they have failed us—it's because we want to rule ourselves, and the leaders God has established are getting in the way.

They Wanted a King to Fight Their Battles

Israel wanted a king to fight their battles, even though God had already delivered them time and time again. We do the same when we act as though the church's survival depends on political victories, cultural influence, or the right kind of strategy or program. We put our hope and trust in presidents, influential pastors who have big media platforms, acting as if the kingdom of God rises and falls on this man and his ministry.

We also panic when the church loses favor in the world, or with that influential pastor and his followers, as if Christ is not still reigning. Israel wanted Saul; we want our own version of him today—someone we can see and trust more than the unseen hand of God. Or we act like it because we fear that man more than we fear the Lord.

We are Impatient

God had a king in mind for Israel, but they would not wait. Likewise, we run ahead of God in our own lives. We rush into sexual relationships before marriage, and so make a mess of our lives. Or, because we are impatient, we refuse to wait for the right person to come along, and so get involved with, or marry someone who is no good for us. We take shortcuts in our careers because we can't stand being overlooked. We manipulate situations to get what we want rather than trusting in God's timing and ways.

Like Adam grasping the forbidden fruit, we think God is holding out on us, so we grab what is not yet ours to possess. But what comes quickly through impatience always brings regret.

Sin only takes.

And finally, we need to understand that because we do not want God to be king over us, all other lesser kings – ourselves, our sin, or some other man or woman – they will only ever take from you. We always think sin will give us what we want – more pleasure, more comfort, more self-respect. We think it will make us happy in some way, filling in some missing part of our life. But Sin only takes from you.

It takes away your dignity, your self-respect, your purity. It takes from you a clear conscience, peace of heart, and a calm soul. Sin will steal your joy, and deprive you of your purpose to live, and of life itself. Sin promises big promises – you will be like God. But in the end, they are all lies that lead to your slavery and destruction. God was right when he said, in the day you eat of it, dying you shall die.

This is the problem of our sin. When we set ourselves up as petty tyrants our sin takes everything from us, until we have nothing left but our shame and misery and regret.

Think about it—every false king we serve demands something from us. Our pride demands that we preserve our image at all costs, leaving us exhausted and fearful of being exposed. Lust promises fulfillment but leaves us empty, always craving more. Greed whispers that we just need a little more to be happy, but we are never satisfied. Bitterness chains us to past wounds, and selfish ambition keeps us running on a treadmill that never leads to rest. **Have you ever stopped to consider what your sin is taking from you, as it falsely promises something else it can never deliver?**

Conclusion

But Christ is not like these false masters. He does not take—He gives. He does not enslave—He redeems. He does not burden—He carries our burdens upon His own shoulders. He is the Good Shephard (John 10:11). He does not devour His flock; He lays down His life for the sheep. He is the Friend of sinners, the One who comes to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He is the King who does not demand our sons and daughters as tribute but instead gives Himself as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

And here is the glorious truth: In Christ, we are not left in shame, misery, and regret. He takes the ashes of our ruined lives and gives us beauty (Isaiah 61:3). He takes our

brokenness and makes us whole. He takes the death we deserve and gives us eternal life, he takes our afflictions, and gives us life, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. He takes our sins on himself on the cross, and gives us His righteousness. **So why would we continue be slaves to sin, when Christ is offering us to rule with Him?**

We are not merely subjects of our Lord's kingdom—we are co-heirs, co-regents, rulers-in-training for the age to come. We who are united to Christ will reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12). He has made us a kingdom of priests to our God, and we shall reign on the earth (Revelation 5:10).

Our destiny is not to be consumed by the tyrants of this age. Our destiny is not to be crushed under the weight of unjust rulers, or the powers of sin and death. Our destiny, as it is so beautifully portrayed to us in the Transfiguration of Christ, is to be clothed in the glorious light of God's righteousness so that we can sit with Christ on His glorious throne, judging the nations in righteousness.

So stand firm, saints of God. Repent of every false king you have enthroned in your life who only ever takes from you. Cast down your idols. Stop believing the lies of sin. Surrender to Christ, the true and rightful King. His yoke is easy, and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). He does not take from you; He gives to you. He does not oppress you;

He lifts you up. He does not lead you into slavery; He brings you into the glorious freedom of the sons of God.

Bow before King Jesus, and find in Him everything that sin has stolen from you—peace, joy, purpose, and life everlasting. Amen.