

1 Samuel Chapter 8

Verses 8:1 – 15:35:

This division of the book concentrates on the interaction between Israel, Samuel and Saul.

These chapters begin with the elders of Israel coming to Samuel at Ramah (8:4), and conclude with Samuel's leaving Saul and returning to Ramah (15:34).

Verses 8:1 - 12:25:

Describe the establishment of the kingship over the nation of Israel and the advent of Saul as the first king.

These chapters are linked by reference to Samuel's being old (8:1; 12:2), and listening to "the voice of the people" (8:7, 9, 22; 12:1, 14-15).

Chapters 13:1-15:35 recount the failures of Saul as king over Israel.

The events of these chapters are bracketed by two interactions between Saul and Samuel that both take place in Gilgal (13:4, 7-8, 12, 15; 15:12, 21, 33).

1 Samuel 8:1 "And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel."

"Samuel was old":

Samuel was about 60 years of age (1043 B.C.).

He appointed his two sons to serve as judges in Beer-sheba, a city that was about 57 miles south of Ramah.

The question is, how old is old here.

Some have placed his age at just over 50 years of age.

Other scholars have placed his age at as much as 70.

It is not an unnatural thing for a father to delegate some of his work to his sons when they become old enough to handle the job.

1 Samuel 8:2 "Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: [they were] judges in Beer-sheba."

"Joel":

The name means “the LORD is God” and “Abiah: the name means “my Father is the LORD.”

There are any times in the Old Testament, the meaning of people's names enter into the meaning of the Scripture.

We can tell from these names that Samuel was fully aware of who the LORD was.

He had named his sons with names that expressed the way he felt about the LORD.

Beer-sheba was in the land of Judah not far from Ramah where Samuel lived.

1 Samuel 8:3 "And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment."

Like Eli before him, Samuel was too preoccupied with his ministry to properly oversee the spiritual upbringing of his own children.

“His sons walked not in his ways”:

The perverted desire for riches led Samuel’s sons to take bribes and thereby pervert justice.

These actions were strictly forbidden for judges (in Deut. 16:19).

The sins of Samuel’s sons became the pretext for Israel’s demand for a king (verses 4-5).

Taking bribes was strictly forbidden.

The Israelites prided themselves on the fairness of their judgments.

This was a disgrace to Samuel.

Deut. 16:19 "Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous."

Samuel had lived an upright life.

His sons are not following in their father's footsteps.

Verses 4-5: Like the surrounding nations, the people of Israel wanted “a king” who would visibly symbolize power and security and lead them into battle (Deut. 17:14-15).

The Israelites, influenced by other nations, were no longer listening to Samuel.

1 Samuel 8:4 "Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah,"

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.

"And came to Samuel unto Ramah":

The place of his nativity and abode, 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.

He is at his hometown of Ramah.

Verses 5-18: Although God had made provision long before for His own anointed "king" (Gen. 17:7; 49:10; Num. 24:17), and had laid down specific regulations for the kingdom (Deut. 17:14-20), the people's request was for a kingdom patterned after the "nations" around them.

Such a king, of course, was to serve under God as the earthly representative of the true sovereign of the nation and of the universe (Psalms 2:6-9; 110:1; 146:10; Dan. 4:25); but such a one they did not request.

Accordingly, both God and Samuel were displeased, and the people were given solemn warning as to just what their choice entailed.

Archaeological confirmation of the accuracy of the warnings spelled out (in verses 11-18), comes from the excavations of ancient Alalakh and Ugarit.

1 Samuel 8:5 "And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

"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 (Deut. 17:14), God knew this would be their desire and He would allow it to occur.

However (verse 20), revealed a motive which was definitely counter to the LORD's will (see note on 8:20).

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.

Verses 6-9: A literal rendering of "displeased Samuel" is "evil in his sight".

He knew the decision to appoint a king was a rejection of God's authority, with dire consequences for the nation.

Compounding his sorrow was Samuel's awareness that his sons were not fit to succeed him.

1 Samuel 8:6 "But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD."

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.

Insomuch, as Josephus says, he could neither eat nor sleep, but watched all night, and spent it in prayer to the LORD.

"And Samuel prayed unto the LORD":

To know his 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 makes a decision like this without first finding the will of the LORD in the matter.

1 Samuel 8:7 "And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."

"Hearken unto the voice of the people":

The LORD had predicted that there would be kings over Israel (Gen. 35:11; 36:31; 49:10; Num. 24:7-9, 17; Deut. 17:14; 28:36).

Here, the LORD told Samuel to obey the request of the people and give them a king.

"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.

1 Samuel 8:8 "According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee."

This was no new thing; all that they had done since they were wonderfully favored of God, as to be brought out of Egyptian bondage, was all of a piece with this.

One continued series of ingratitude, of rebellion against God, and against his servants, that he employed under him, as Moses, Aaron, etc.

"Even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods":

This is what this people were always addicted to, the easing off of worship and service of God, and go into idolatry.

"So do they also unto thee":

Acted the like ungrateful part to him for all the service he had done them, from his childhood to that time.

Wherefore, as the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord, if such things as before observed were done to Jehovah himself, Samuel could not expect to meet with better treatment, other than he had (see Matt. 10:24).

Even in the midst of all the miracles coming through the wilderness wanderings, they had rebelled against God.

He had forgiven them over and over and they just went back into idol worship.

They had never been faithful to God.

He punished them when they fell into the worship of false gods, but they did not learn from this.

He forgave them every time they cried out to him. They just would not remain faithful to God.

1 Samuel 8:9 "Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them."

"Protest solemnly unto them":

Samuel obeyed the LORD by describing the behavior of a human king in verses 10-18.

A king would:

1. Draft young men and women for his service (verses 11-13);
2. Tax the people's crops and flocks (verses 14-15, 17a);

3. Appropriate the best of their animals and servants (verse 16;
4. Place limitations on their personal freedom (verse 17b).

The LORD is telling Samuel to tell them they can have an earthly king if they insist.

He will explain to them exactly what they will be facing with a king.

They have never served an earthly king and they have no idea what that means.

Samuel will warn them of the consequences, if they do not take his advice, they will have to take the consequences.

1 Samuel 8:10 "And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king."

“That asked of him a king”:

Just as Hannah asked for a son (1:20), Israel asked for a king (see note on 9:2).

Samuel is always eager to do the will of God.

Again, he does just exactly as God has told him.

Verses 11-18: God warned Israel that a king would pervert justice (8:14), and exact taxes (8:15).

Indeed, Israel had 43 kings over a period of 450 years, and only eight followed the LORD.

A human leader only created more problems for the nation.

1 Samuel 8:11 "And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint [them] for himself, for his chariots, and [to be] his horsemen; and [some] shall run before his chariots."

Not in which he ought to proceed, but what he will do: and this not the manner of one king, or of the first only, but of all of them.

Of kings in general, who are commonly inclined to arbitrary power.

So Aristotle in opposition to theocracy describes a full and absolute kingdom, as he calls it, when a king does all things according to his will.

And observes, that he that would have the mind or reason preside, would have God and the laws rule; but he that would have a man to reign, adds also a lust, or one led by his own lust.

"He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself":

For his own use and service, to wait upon him, to be his pages, or grooms, or guards.

"For his chariots":

To take care of them, and drive them, though not without paying them for it.

Yet this being but a mean and servile employment, and what they should be obliged to, whether they would or not.

This is observed to show the tyranny and bondage to which they would be subject, when their sons otherwise might be free men, and possessed of estates and carriages of their own.

"And to be his horsemen":

Or rather "for his horses", to take care of them, and go out along with him, and attend his person, whether when going to war, or on pleasure.

"And some shall run before his chariots":

Be his running footmen, being swift of foot, and trained up for that service; some are naturally swift, as Asahel was (2 Samuel 2:18).

Pliny speaks of some swifter than horses; and of the swiftness of some he elsewhere gives many surprising instances.

It seems as if it was usual to have fifty such men to run before them (see 2 Sam. 15:1).

This is speaking of them not being able to choose whether they work for the king or not.

He chooses whomever he wants and they must obey his command.

The judges had lived simple lives and had not taken their sons to work for them.

The king would have literally thousands, who were to serve him personally.

They would lose their free way of life.

1 Samuel 8:12 "And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and [will set them] to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots."

Which though posts of honor, yet when they are not matter of choice, and especially being precarious, and depending on the arbitrary will of a prince, are not eligible, and less so to persons that choose another sort of life.

"And will set them to ear his ground":

To plough it; not the same persons made captains of thousands and fifties, but others, whom he will employ in tilling and manuring his fields, and oblige them to it.

"And to reap his harvest":

When it is ripe, and gathers it in, and brings it home into his barns and garners.

"And to make his instruments of war":

As swords, spears, bows and arrows, most commonly used in those times.

"And instruments of chariots":

Which seem to design chariots of war, and the iron spikes and scythes which were joined to them, to cut down the foot soldiers, when driven among them in battle, which are commonly called chariots of iron (see Joshua 17:16).

This will be almost like slave labor.

They will not be free to raise their own crops.

Those, whom the king chooses, will grow his crops and harvest them.

They will lose all of their independence.

They will not be building for themselves, but for the king.

1 Samuel 8:13 "And he will take your daughters [to be] confectionaries, and [to be] cooks, and [to be] bakers."

He will exercise as arbitrary a power over the women as over the men; whom he will make to serve in such employments as he shall think fit; either for nothing, or such wages as he shall please to give them.

And then to have their daughters taken in this manner would be peculiarly grievous to their parents, and dangerous to themselves, because of the tenderness of their sex, and their liableness to many injuries.

"Confectionaries" here, are speaking of makers of perfumes and ointments.

The cooking and baking are just speaking of working in the king's kitchen.

Some of the kings were fond of women and had a large harem.

1 Samuel 8:14 "And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, [even] the best [of them], and give [them] to his servants."

Which includes the whole increase of their land, their corn, and wine, and oil; and it is these, the fruits of their fields, vineyards, and oliveyards, which are here meant.

For otherwise kings might not, and did not by their absolute authority, take away those from their subjects; otherwise Ahab would not have taken away Naboth's vineyard at once, nor would Jezebel have needed to have taken such a method she did, to put Ahab into the possession of it.

"Even the best of them, and give them to his servants":

For their service; and which some restrain to times of war, when necessity obliged to the use of such methods.

Their land that they inherited from God will not be theirs to grow their own things.

They will be working to benefit the king.

The king will claim all of the good land for himself.

1 Samuel 8:15 "And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants."

Besides the several tenths which God hath reserved for his service and servants, he will, when he pleaseth, impose another tenth upon you.

"And give to his officers":

Or to his eunuchs":

Which may be properly understood, and may imply a further injury, that he should, against the command of God, make some of his people eunuchs, and take those into his court and favor which God would have cast out of the congregation.

This is speaking of a tax being levied on the people.

This tax will be used to pay for the government the king sets up.

1 Samuel 8:16 "And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put [them] to his work."

Into his own family, for his own use and service, if he wants them, or likes them better than what he has.

"And your goodliest young men":

That are tall and lusty, comely and beautiful, of a proper stature and good aspect.

And such in all countries used to be chosen for officers in courts, or attendants there; and so the Turks to this day pitch upon young men to attend on great personages, who are of a comely form, have admirable features, and are well shaped (see Dan. 1:4).

"And your asses, and put them to his work":

Employ them in ploughing his fields, drawing his carriages, or bearing his burdens.

And so any other cattle that would serve the same purposes, as oxen, camels, etc.

This will be forced labor for the king.

They will lose their freedom.

The king will choose the best of the young men and women to serve him.

1 Samuel 8:17 "He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants."

As well as of their seed and vineyards; and not the tithe of their flocks only, but of their herds also, which are here included.

This statement generally includes all that has gone before.

In other words, "Ye elders and chiefs of the people must make up your minds, in the event of electing a king, to the loss of all political and social freedom."

How bitterly the nation, even in the successful and glorious reign of King Solomon.

Who felt the pressure of the royal yoke, so truly foretold by their last judge, is shown in the history of the times which followed the death of Solomon, when the public discontent at the brilliant but despotic rule of the great king led to the revolution which split up the people into two nations (See 1 Kings 12:4).

Under this type of rule, there is only one who makes all the decisions, and he is the king.

He will take what and whom he wants, whenever he wants to.

1 Samuel 8:18 "And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day."

"Ye shall cry out ... because of your king which ye shall have chosen":

Samuel warned the people that they would live to regret their decision for a king and would later cry out for freedom from his rule (1 Kings 2:4).

“The LORD will not hear you”:

In contrast to the LORD’s response to Israel during the period of the judges (Judges 2:18), the LORD would not be moved to pity and therefore would refuse to deliver the people out of the hand of their king who oppressed them.

There will be no need to cry out to the LORD in that day.

These people (even after being severely warned), still chose an earthly king over their LORD.

They have rejected the rulership of the LORD.

He will not free them from something they willfully had gotten themselves into.

1 Samuel 8:19 "Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us;"

“We will have a king over us”:

In spite of Samuel’s warnings, the people demanded a king.

This house had been rebellious against God from the beginning.

They believe they are rejecting Samuel here, when in fact, they are rejecting God.

They have rejected being a people separate from the world.

They want to be of the world, like everyone else.

1 Samuel 8:20 "That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles."

“Fight our battles”:

Up until this point, the LORD Himself had fought the battles for Israel and given continual victory (Joshua 10:14; 1 Sam. 7:10).

Israel no longer wanted the LORD to be their warrior, replacing Him with a human king was their desire.

It was in this way that Israel rejected the LORD (see verse 7).

The problem was not in having a king; but, rather the reason the people wanted a king, i.e., to be like other nations.

They also foolishly assumed there would be some greater power in a king leading them in battle.

This statement is exactly what God did not want them to do.

The other nations around them depended on earthly strength to fight their battles.

They were led by kings, who put their trust in horses and chariots.

God had proved, over and over, that all Israel needed was Him.

He was their strength in battle.

No earthly king fights the battles.

Their chosen army fights the battle.

The king just gives the commands.

1 Samuel 8:21 "And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD."

They sneered at Samuel's description as a cause of obsessive fear to frighten them.

Determined, at all hazards, to gain their object, they insisted on being made like all the other nations, though it was their glory and happiness to be unlike other nations in having the LORD for their King and Lawgiver (Nun. 23:9; Deut. 33:28).

Their demand was conceded, for the government of a king had been provided for in the law; and they were dismissed to wait the appointment, which God had reserved to Himself (see Deuteronomy 17:14-20).

“And he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD”:

Patiently, and without interruption; attentively heard them, took notice of them, laid them up in his memory.

But gave no answer to them, but reported them to the LORD, privately, in a free and familiar manner, with great exactness, as they were expressed.

This he did, not before the people publicly, but in secret prayer, seeking for direction what he should further do, or what answer he should return to them.

Samuel listened carefully to the answer of the warning the LORD had given them through him.

He tries to give the answer, exactly as he had heard it.

1 Samuel 8:22 "And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city."

These are God's words of resignation as He grants the people's request.

God sometimes lets people have their way so they will one day recognize their need for Him, so that the foolishness of men may be seen in clear distinction to God's holy purposes and standards (Prov. 9:9-10; Acts 17:26-27).

They have rejected the LORD for an earthly king.

The LORD now gives His consent for Samuel to get them a king.

God put within each of us a will.

We can choose to follow Him or we can choose to follow the world.

They have chosen to follow the world.

Notice that the man of God will not be their civil leader.

Samuel will remain in power as their spiritual leader.

He will be judge as long as he lives.

He will remain a prophet of God.

A prophet or priest was not to accept the office of king.

Samuel sends them all to their homes, until the LORD selects the king.

Daniel 2:21 "And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:"

1 Samuel Chapter 8 Questions

1. When did Samuel make his sons judges over Israel?
2. What were some of the opinions of different scholars of how old Samuel is in verse 1 here?
3. What were the names of his sons?
4. Where did they judge?
5. What does "Joel" mean?
6. What does "Abiah" mean?

7. What do the names of the sons reveal to us about Samuel?
8. What kind of men were Samuel's sons?
9. Where did the elders come to meet with Samuel?
10. What did the elders request of Samuel?
11. Why does God not want Israel to have an earthly king?
12. How did Samuel feel about them wanting an earthly king?
13. Why does Samuel not instantly respond to the elder's request?
14. They did not want a _____ God. They wanted an earthly king.
15. How long had the Israelites rebelled against God?
16. Will God allow them to have an earthly king?
17. What must Samuel tell them, before they decide, whether they want an earthly king, or not?
18. What were some of the hardships they would have under an earthly king?
19. What is verse 15 speaking of?
20. When they cry out to God to deliver them from the king, will He listen?
21. What did the people decide to do, even after God had warned them?
22. What message did Samuel bring back to God?
23. What did the LORD tell Samuel to do about this?