

FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 8

Israel Demands a King

When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. 2 The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. 3 Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice. 4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah 5 and said to him, “Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations.” 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” And Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD said to Samuel, “Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. 8 According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. 9 Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”

8:1–12:25 Samuel was the last of the judges but the first kingmaker. We witness the events of this transitional time in these significant chapters. (TLSB)

8:1 *When Samuel became old.* Probably about 20 years after the victory at Mizpah, when Samuel was approximately 65 years old. (CSB)

8:2 *Beersheba.* Samuel’s sons were given responsibility for this extreme southern region, while Samuel maintained his established judicial circuit headquartered in the central region held by the Benjaminites, north of Jerusalem (7:15–17).(TLSB)

8:3 *accepted bribes.* Perversion of justice through bribery was explicitly forbidden in Pentateuchal law (see Ex 23:8; Dt 16:19). (CSB)

Samuel’s sons openly rejected the way of the Lord. Samuel tried to establish a judicial dynasty by declaring Joel and Abijah his successors, something God had not commanded (cf Jgs 8:22–23). Samuel’s sons had pious names (Jo El, “Yahweh is God,” and Abi Yahweh, “My father is Yahweh”), yet their lives were far from godly. Though Samuel had witnessed Eli’s poor fathering of Hophni and Phinehas, he fell into the same predicament. (TLSB)

turned aside after gain. Summarizes the unethical acts the Lord had forbidden. (TLSB)

8:4–5 Senior members of the community come to Samuel at his judicial headquarters and express their concerns, citing his age and his sons’ misconduct. (TLSB)

8:5 *appoint for us a king to judge us.* The elders cite Samuel’s age and the misconduct of his sons as justifications for their request for a king. It soon becomes apparent, however, that the more basic reason for their request was a desire to be like the surrounding nations—to have a human king as a symbol of national power and unity who would lead them in battle and guarantee their security. (CSB)

8:7 *obey the voice of the people in all that they say.* Anticipations of kingship in Israel are present already in the Pentateuch (Ge 49:10; Nu 24:7, 17; Dt 17:14–20); Samuel is therefore instructed to listen to the people’s request (see vv. 9, 22). (CSB)

it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Cf. Jdg 8:23. The sin of Israel in requesting a king (see 10:19; 12:12, 17, 19–20) did not rest in any evil inherent in kingship itself, but rather in the kind of kingship the people envisioned and their reasons for requesting it. Their desire was for a form of kingship that denied their covenant relationship with the Lord, who himself was pledged to be their savior and deliverer. In requesting a king “like all the other nations” (v. 20) they broke the covenant, rejected the Lord who was their King (12:12; Nu 23:21; Dt 33:5) and forgot his constant provision for their protection in the past (10:18; 12:8–11). (CSB)

Hbr emphasizes “you” and “Me.” Samuel felt his leadership was being questioned, but there was a greater problem. Luth: “Their sin was not their desire to have a king, for after all God gave them one, but rather, that they set their trust on human help and government when they should have trusted in God alone. This was a grave sin” (AE 52:187). The Lord had promised a king for Israel centuries earlier (Gn 49:10; Nu 24:7, 17; Dt 17:14–20). (TLSB)

8:8–9 Judges were recognized and respected because the Lord established them as leaders (i.e., as those endowed with administrative gifts by the Spirit and also as those embraced as natural leaders by popular support). As judges were raised up, God conferred the gifts of the Holy Spirit on them (Jgs 6:34; 11:29; 14:6, 19; 15:14). A king, as a unifying political leader for the loose tribal federation, would not necessarily be God’s earthly representative. The Israelites already had such a hereditary office in the priesthood. (TLSB)

8:1–9 With an unseemly desire to be like other nations, Israel’s elders ask Samuel for a king, their action being a rebuke to Samuel and a rejection of the Lord as their King. Leadership should be tempered by faith, which calls on the Lord, His guidance, and His blessing. Nothing is as precious to us as the Lord, who treasures us and leads us by His only-begotten Son. Whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. • Heavenly Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, lead us to see how much we are worth to You in Jesus. Amen. (TLSB)

Samuel's Warning Against Kings

10 So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him. 11 He said, “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. 12 And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. 15 He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. 16 He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 18 And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

8:10 Samuel was not called to be king, yet he was recognized as the divine authority in Israel, so elders conferred with him regarding their decision. (TLSB)

asking. Hbr *sha'al*, a wordplay on “Saul.” (TLSB)

8:11–17 *he will take.* Repeated six times in these verses. The king extracts funds from the people and conscripts their sons and daughters for service. Government taxation, nearly unknown among the Israelites, would become exorbitant. An additional 10 percent would be levied on top of the tithe already required for the Lord (Lv 27:30–32; Nu 18:26; Dt 14:22, 28; 26:12; 2Ch 31:5–6; Am 4:4; Mal 3:8).

Within two generations, Solomon's rule became extremely burdensome and oppressive (cf 1Ki 4:22–23; 12:4). Royal records discovered at Alakakh, Ugarit, and Mari show similar problems under kings in neighboring regions. Samuel demonstrates awareness of regional politics. (TLSB)

8:11 *ways of king ... reign over you.* Using a description of the policies of contemporary Canaanite kings (vv. 11–17), Samuel warns the people of the burdens associated with the type of kingship they long for. (CSB)

8:12 *commanders of thousands.* Military rank also known from Ugarit. (TLSB)

8:15 *tenth.* This king's portion would be over and above the tenth Israel was to devote to the Lord (Lev 27:30–32; Nu 18:26; Dt 14:22, 28; 26:12). In fact, the demands of the king would parallel all that Israel was to consecrate to the Lord as her Great King (persons, lands, crops, livestock)—even the whole population (v. 17). (CSB)

8:17 *you shall be his slaves.* People saw only positive reasons for having a king. Here, Samuel describes the true relationship: they will be vassals, and the king will be their master. (TLSB)

8:18 *cry out because of your king.* See 1Ki 12:4; Jer 22:13–17. (CSB)

Cries for deliverance will go unheeded because they chose the king over the Lord. (TLSB)

8:10–18 The Lord tells Samuel to agree to the request for a king, but also to warn the people about what a king will do. Like the people of Israel, our actions often say to God, “Not Your will, but mine be done,” as we insist on things that may not be good for us. God is surprisingly flexible and generous. He often gives us what we want, but even more graciously, He gives us what we need—forgiveness, life, and salvation. • Dear Jesus, help me to see the blessings in my life, even when I do not get what I want. Strengthen me to join You in praying, “Not my will, but Yours be done.” Amen. (TLSB)

The LORD Grants Israel's Request

19 But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, “No! But there shall be a king over us, **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.” **21** And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. **22** And the LORD said to Samuel, “Obey their voice and make them a king.” Samuel then said to the men of Israel, “Go every man to his city.”

8:20 *like all the other nations.* Request for a king is based on two false, almost childlike premises. (1) They thought the king would act as a substitute agent and fight for them, despite God's promises to fight (Ex 14:14; Dt 1:30). (2) They wanted to be more like their pagan neighbors, having a king to symbolize desired unity. Yet, they were breaking covenant with the Lord, who was their King (Nu 23:21; Dt 33:5). The promise of a king that God had made in the wilderness (Dt 17:14–20) is fulfilled, not by God's initiative as Samuel expected, but by the people themselves.

8:21 By repeating the people's rejection, Samuel again seeks the Lord's guidance. As in many prayers, our desires are repeated before the Lord not to inform Him but to show our submission to His will.

8:19–22 People insist on a king, and God tells Samuel to go along with them. Some of those who seem most successful in the world refuse to acknowledge God or to follow His Son, our Lord. Even in the Church are those whose plans and teachings go against our Lord's revealed will. Nevertheless, like a chess master, the Lord sees the larger picture and achieves His objectives even through human error. Similarly, Jesus' death on the cross was brought about by human intrigue, yet it accomplished the very thing that God desired, the redemption of the world. • Thank You, Lord, for

working through human instruments and accomplishing Your holy, divine, and good will for the world. In Jesus' name. Amen. (TLSB)