

Israel's First King



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1 Samuel 8:4-22

After years of service in God's temple, Samuel was chosen by God to become high priest and judge of the nation of Israel. He was completely obedient and faithful to God. But...

One day the nation's leaders came to Samuel at Ramah and said, "You are an old man. You set a good example for your sons, but they haven't followed it. Now we want a king to be our leader, just like all the other nations. Choose one for us!" Samuel was upset to hear the leaders say they wanted a king, so he prayed about it.

The Lord answered: "Samuel, do everything they want you to do. I am really the one they have rejected as their king. Ever since the day I rescued my people from Egypt, they have turned from me to worship idols. Now they are turning away from you. Do everything they ask, but warn them and tell them how a king will treat them."

Samuel told the people who were asking for a king what the Lord had said: "If you have a king, this is how he will treat you. He will force your sons to join his army. Some of them will ride in his chariots, some will serve in the cavalry, and others will run ahead of his own chariot. Some of them will be officers in charge of a thousand soldiers, and others will be in charge of fifty. Still others will have to farm the king's land and harvest his crops, or make weapons and parts for his chariots. Your daughters will have to make perfume or do his cooking and baking.

"The king will take your best fields, as well as your vineyards, and olive orchards and give them to his own officials. He will also take a tenth of your grain and grapes and give it to his officers and officials.

"The king will take your slaves and your best young men and your donkeys and make them do his work. He will also take a tenth of your sheep and goats. You will become the king's

slaves, and you will finally cry out for the Lord to save you from the king you wanted. But the Lord won't answer your prayers."

The people would not listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want to be like other nations. We want a king to rule us and lead us in battle." Samuel listened to them and then told the Lord exactly what they had said. "Do what they want," the Lord answered. "Give them a king."

Commentary

Samuel was the last of the judges for the people of Israel. He was a great spiritual leader who had guided the nation well and had been a faithful spokesman for God. However, towards the end of Samuel's life, and with no obvious successor to this great man, the people turned away from God and what was best for them and demanded that Israel become a monarchy with a human figurehead. Israel wanted to be a 'grown-up' country like others in the region, and this meant having a king and an army. God had always wanted his people to be different, because God was their king, and in this way to model a different sort of kingdom to those living around them. Samuel warned them of all the dangers there would be when power was in the hands of an earthly ruler, but they refused to listen. God never forces us to do things against our will, so he gave the people what they wanted. Saul was eventually appointed as the first king, but it turned out badly, just as Samuel had predicted.

Questions

- ▶ The people of Israel wanted what everybody else had—a king and an army. Why do you think God wasn't enough for them any more?
- ▶ How do you think Samuel felt when the people demanded a human king?
- ▶ What did Samuel say were the dangers of having a king?
- ▶ Why do you think God gave in to the people and let them have what was not for the best?



Visual aid

Turn an ordinary chair into a grand throne for a king or queen. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having someone on the throne of a country?



Activity idea

Play a game together of “If I were king/queen for the day, I would...”, with each member of the family in turn saying what he or she would do if they were in charge. Challenge each other about what their decisions would mean and how they might deal with people who don’t do as they’re told. Lead on to a conversation about what difference it makes if, instead of this, God is king, every day.



Prayer idea

The people of Israel had let themselves be influenced by what others had, and they had forgotten their special relationship with God as king. Ask God’s help to discover his best for each of you without being distracted by what others are saying. Using some paper or cardboard, make a simple crown and hold on to it as a way of saying that you want God to be king in every part of your lives—in your use of money and time, your choice of clothes and friends, and in all the big decisions faced by your family.

Key verse

“Samuel was upset to hear the leaders say they wanted a king, so he prayed about it” (1 Samuel 8:6).

New Testament story link

Matthew 6:31-33: Jesus tells us that if we put God’s kingdom first, then God will give us all that we really need.

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