



Community Group Discussion Guide

September 22, 2024

1 Samuel 8:1-22 | Israel Demands a King

MOTIVATE

Starter Questions:

- ⇒ *Share about a time when you “jumped on the bandwagon” for a trend, team, or idea. Was the end result positive or negative or a blend of both?*

DISCUSS

1 Samuel 8:1-22 presents a pivotal point in Israel’s history as they began the transition from tribal confederacy to theological monarchy. About twenty years passed between the events recorded in 1 Samuel 7 and 1 Samuel 8. Samuel was still leading the Israelites as judge and prophet but he was entering the later years of his life. His advancing age and the rebellion of his sons caused the elders to fear for the future of their nation. They decided the current mode of leadership ordained by God was insufficient and they demanded that Samuel give them a king like the other nations.

Details on the logistics of this upheaval of leadership are sparse, as the author is primarily focused on the theological impacts of this change. The people of God took an additional step away from their covenant promise to be holy and set apart for God, and instead took a step toward assimilation to the nations around them. God is sovereign and monarchy was part of His plan all along. However, the people’s demand was sinful in nature, and therefore they suffered the consequences of the desire to be like the other nations. (See [1 Samuel Overview](#) for additional information.)

- ⇒ *Why is it dangerous for God’s people to want to be like the rest of the world?*

1 Samuel 8:1-3 *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.*

Samuel set his sons, Joel and Abijah, in positions of leadership in an important city. Beersheba was 75 miles south of Jerusalem and one of the bigger cities in the southernmost part of Israel’s territory. It was set in the Negev, a semidesert area, on a crossway to Egypt which made it a center of commerce.

It is unclear if Samuel’s sons were untrustworthy prior to their appointment as judges or if the position of authority began to corrupt them. Most scholars lean toward the latter view as Samuel was a righteous man and he clearly trusted his sons to lead in this influential place of leadership. Either way, judges were supposed to be fair, impartial, and pursue justice. But Abijah and Joel pursued their own self-interests, perverting justice by accepting bribes. Their immoral behavior was a departure from God’s standards and it inevitably created problems.

- ⇒ *Why does power often make it hard to act righteously?*
- ⇒ *How can leaders avoid falling into the temptation to misuse their God-given authority?*
- ⇒ *How can we encourage our leaders to remain faithful? What should we do if our leaders are not faithful?*

1 Samuel 8:4-5 *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.”*

Although he might not have been directly responsible for his sons' decisions, the elders of Israel held Samuel accountable. They were right to be concerned and to bring this to Samuel's attention, but they attempted to correct one wrong with another. There is no evidence that they cried out to God or sought His direction for the appointment of a righteous leader. Instead, they took matters into their own hands, and demanded that Samuel appoint a king to lead them "like all the nations."

- ⇒ ***What are some reasons a king would have been appealing to the Israelites?***
- ⇒ ***How might this situation have looked differently if the elders had sought the Lord for guidance on their leadership?***

The ideology of a king was not inherently wrong. In fact, God was not opposed to a monarchy in Israel. He had promised Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob that kings would come from their descendants (Genesis 17:6; 35:11). Moses even prepared the nation for a king when he addressed the generation that would be entering the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). It was not even the request for a king that angered God, but rather the motivation behind the request and the rejection of their covenant relationship.

- ⇒ ***Why was this request sinful if God intended to initiate a monarchy eventually?***
- ⇒ ***Why is this an important point to remember when studying this passage of Scripture?***

Ultimately, the people were motivated by fear and a desire to look like other nations. We could give the Israelites the benefit of the doubt by acknowledging that a twelve tribe confederacy was a challenging form of government. Between internal tribal territory squabbles, corrupt judges, selfish priests, and the general struggle of life at the time, it would have been easy to feel like the existing political structure was failing, leading to a desire for a new form of government.

Additionally, the Israelites were still threatened by powerful adversaries, like the Ammonites and the Philistines, and Israel had no designated army. They saw the nations around them and desired to be like them. They thought a king would unite the tribes, institute a legal system, and defend the people against enemies.

But Israel forgot that God had ordained this structure and provided all that they needed. The elders forgot it was God who won their battles through their tribal military in the first place. They failed to realize it was their own disobedience that led them into suffering, not the structure of their government. Israel was supposed to be set apart from the nations as God's covenant people (Leviticus 20:26). This nation was created in God's image, but the Israelites desired a king made in their image.

- ⇒ ***What are some modern day situations in which we tend to look toward earthly leaders for answers instead of seeking God's guidance?***

1 Samuel 8:6-9 *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."*

Samuel was grieved by this request and immediately turned to God for guidance. Samuel was displeased because he knew this desire was evidence of the spiritual deterioration of the Israelites. God reminded Samuel that the people were not rejecting the old prophet, but were ultimately rejecting Him, just as they had done for generations.

- ⇒ ***Why is the request for a king painful to Samuel? How is it ultimately a rejection of God?***
- ⇒ ***Think through Israel's history with God from the time of their Exodus from Egypt to this point. What are some of the ways they rejected God or disobeyed Him?***

God instructed Samuel to “solemnly warn” the people of the dangers of becoming like the nations around them and looking to an earthly king for security. The original Hebrew can also be translated as “strongly testify.” This is a somber legal expression that entailed giving someone full knowledge of an action. God mercifully gave His people another chance to wait on His timing and leadership by instructing Samuel to give them a full picture of what it would mean to have a king like the other nations.

- ⇒ **Putting yourself in the shoes of the Israelites, how might you have responded in this situation?**
- ⇒ **What does God’s continued faithfulness to His rebellious people reveal about Him?**

1 Samuel 8:10-18 *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 on 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.”*

At God’s direction, Samuel gave the people of Israel a speech describing what a king would be like. “Take” is the key word here, which Samuel repeated seven times. The king would take their sons to serve in his guard and army, take their daughters to serve in demeaning roles within the court, and take the best of their crops and herds for himself. Nothing would be beyond the grasp of the king. He would not stop when the needs of his administration were met, but would continue to take for his own satisfaction. The severity of the king’s indulgence would be such a burden that it would be likened to slavery.

- ⇒ **What experiences had Israel already been through as slaves? How could it be that this warning did not give them pause?**

The Israelites already gave tithes from their crops and herds to support the tabernacle sacrifices and priests (Deuteronomy 14:22-29), so an additional levy to support the royal court would take a significant toll on the people and the economy. Rather than just external threats, the Israelites would also end up suffering from internal royal oppression (Examples: 1 Kings 4:7-23; 12:1-15).

- ⇒ **How might a “king like the other nations” be different from a leader that God appoints?**
- ⇒ **What are some examples of kings of Israel fulfilling Samuel’s warning? (Examples: David taking Bathsheba or Ahab taking Naboth’s vineyard.)**

1 Samuel 8:19-22 *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.”*

Samuel clearly laid out the negative consequences of having a king like other nations, but the people were not dissuaded. They stubbornly ignored the dangers and persisted in their demand, too blinded by desire for influence and protection to listen to Samuel or to count the cost of ignoring the LORD’s instructions.

- ⇒ ***Can you share an example from your own life when you were too stubborn to listen to godly wisdom or to the Word of God?***
- ⇒ ***How is it that God's people can get to a place like this?***

Samuel spoke further to God about the people's defiant request. God indicated that He would grant the people's demand for a king in spite of their rebellion. They were to return to their homes until Samuel received further guidance from the LORD.

- ⇒ ***If God did not approve of this request, why would He allow it?***
- ⇒ ***When have you gotten something you wanted, but it turned out to not be what you expected? What did God teach you in this situation?***

It is important to note that God did not change His mind in granting Israel a king. He always knows what His people will choose and is never at a loss for what to do next (Psalm 33:10). He knew the Israelites would not relent and His permission was not an endorsement of their choice. God had always intended to fulfill His promise to Abraham, Jacob, and Sarah through the line of David, but the timing was not right in 1 Samuel. As we will see in future chapters, God would give them a king, but He would do it His way.

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: The Israelites wanted to be like the nations around them, but they forgot that as God's covenant people they were called to be like their Creator. They thought a king would bring about change to unite the tribes, but the source of their trouble was their disobedience, not their administration. They needed a united faith, not a united rule.

We face the same challenge today, but on a more individual level. Believers are God's covenant people through the new covenant instituted by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Through this covenant, we are united with Jesus and offered eternal security, hope, provision, and protection. It is tempting to look for security in our bank account, hope in our relationships, provision from our jobs, and protection through our politics. It's tempting to blend into the culture around us by watering down biblical truth, engaging in worldly behavior, or using our authority for our own gain. But as God's covenant people, we must remain separate from the nations around us, and trust in Jesus, our true King, to provide all that we need.

- ⇒ ***Is it hard for you to trust in God as King? What are you tempted to trust in for protection and security?***
- ⇒ ***In what ways are you tempted to blend into the world around you?***
- ⇒ ***If you're experiencing a struggle or suffering, could it be a natural consequence of an idol that you have pursued instead of righteousness?***
- ⇒ ***How can we pursue a united faith individually and corporately?***

2. Pray: Praise God for being the one true King. Confess the people, ideas, or materials that you have turned to for security or hope instead of God. Ask God to help you trust and hope in Him. Pray for wisdom and humility for the leaders of our church specifically, but also for all Christians in positions of authority. Pray for courage and strengthened faith for Christians to remain holy and distinct from the world around them.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *Christian Standard Study Bible (2017), pages 420-421.*
- *English Standard Version Study Bible (2008), pages 566-567.*
- *ESV Expository Commentary: 1 Samuel-2 Chronicles (2019), pages 101-108.*
- *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary (2015), pages 184-185, 1333, 1408.*
- *Holman Old Testament Commentary I & II Samuel (2009), pages 68-71.*
- *NIV Application Commentary I & II Samuel (2021), pages 147-157.*

- *New International Version Life Application Study Bible (1997) pages 446-448.*
- *Wiersbe NT Bible Commentary (2007), pages 506-50.7*