

THE ISRAELITES' REQUEST FOR A KING

[BIBLE TEXT](#): I Samuel 8:1-22

LESSON 203 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

1 Samuel 8:1-22

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

² Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: *they were* judges in Beersheba.

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

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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

¹⁰ And Samuel told all the words of

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I Perverted Judgment

1 In his old age, Samuel had appointed his sons as judges over Israel, I Samuel 8:1, 2;

2 Chronicles 19:5-7

⁵ And he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city,

⁶ And said to the judges, Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment.

⁷ Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do *it*: for *there is* no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.

2 Samuel's sons did not walk in the fear of the Lord, I Samuel 8:3;

Deuteronomy 16:19

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.

Isaiah 33:14-16

¹⁴ The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

¹⁵ He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil;

¹⁶ He shall dwell on high: his place of defence *shall be* the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters *shall be* sure.

1 Timothy 6:10

¹⁰ For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

3 The elders of Israel used this fact for a pretext to ask for a king, I Samuel 8:4, 5;

Deuteronomy 17:14-15

¹⁴ When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that *are* about me;

¹⁵ Thou shalt in any wise set *him* king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: *one* from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which *is* not thy brother.

Acts 13:20-21

²⁰ And after that he gave *unto them* judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.

²¹ And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king.

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.

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.

¹³ And he will take your daughters *to be* confectionaries, and *to be* cooks, and *to be* bakers.

¹⁴ And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, *even the best of them*, and give *them* to his servants.

¹⁵ And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants.

¹⁶ And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put *them* to his work.

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

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.

¹⁹ Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have 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 Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD.

II Samuel's Prayer and God's Answer

1 Samuel had no answer for the elders' displeasing request, so he sought God's counsel, I Samuel 8:6;

Exodus 32:30-33

³⁰ And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin.

³¹ And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold.

³² Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.

³³ And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.

Ezra 9:3-5

³ And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.

⁴ Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

⁵ And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God,

Luke 6:12

¹² And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

2 The answer was returned that the people had rejected God, I Samuel 8:7, 8;

Exodus 16:8

⁸ And Moses said, *This shall be*, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what *are* we? your murmurings *are* not against us, but against the LORD.

Luke 10:16

¹⁶ He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.

3 Samuel was instructed to grant Israel's request but warn them of the consequences, I Samuel 8:9;

Ezekiel 45:9

⁹ Thus saith the Lord GOD; Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice, take away your exactions from my people, saith the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 46:18

¹⁸ Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession; *but* he shall give his sons inheritance out of his own possession: that my people be not scattered every man from his possession.

III The Manner of an Earthly King

1 The King of Heaven ruled with favor; but an earthly king would rule with rigor, I Samuel 8:10-18;

1 Kings 9:22

²² But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no bondmen: but they *were* men of war, and his servants, and his princes, and his captains, and rulers of his chariots, and his horsemen.

1 Kings 12:4

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.

⁴ Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.

1 Kings 12:12-14

¹² So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day.

¹³ And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him;

¹⁴ And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father *also* chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

1 Kings 21:7

⁷ And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, *and* eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.

1 Kings 21:15

¹⁵ And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead.

2 The people refused to hearken to Samuel, but insisted upon having a king, I Samuel 8:19, 20;

Psalms 81:11-12

¹¹ But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.

¹² So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: *and* they walked in their own counsels.

Jeremiah 44:16

¹⁶ *As for* the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee.

Ezekiel 33:31

³¹ And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee *as* my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, *but* their heart goeth after their covetousness.

3 The Lord condescended to the request of the people, I Samuel 8:21, 22;

Hosea 13:9-11

⁹ O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me *is* thine help.

¹⁰ I will be thy king: where *is any other* that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes?

¹¹ I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took *him* away in my wrath.

NOTES:

Judges

As the years of Samuel's life advanced he probably wondered who would succeed him as judge of Israel. Samuel knew the history of Israel, that many times the spiritual well-being of the people had declined as a faithful judge passed from the scene. The Children of Israel had often lapsed into idolatry until trouble and captivity had come upon them; then they had cried to God for deliverance, and a new judge and deliverer had been raised up for them. Samuel was concerned that this should not happen when his days were fulfilled, so he appointed his sons as judges while he still lived.

No doubt Samuel had taught his sons thoroughly in the matters of the Law and felt that they would do justice to the people. They probably had heard the story from their father's lips of the disastrous end that had come to Eli's sons because they had

failed to walk in the ways of the Lord. Samuel must have felt confident that his sons would do the thing that was right and true. How long these sons remained as judges in Beer-sheba is not told; but it was soon evident that they were not walking in the ways of their godly father, but had turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.

A King

The elders of Israel seemed to be waiting for this chance to bring about a change in their government. They brought two things to Samuel's attention: that he was growing old, and that his sons walked not in his ways. They could find no flaw in Samuel's life. His character was of sterling quality and he was a pattern that Israel should have been glad to follow. If he was old, he had grown old in service to God and man; if his age prevented him from riding the circuits as he once had, that same age would hold a wealth of experience and wisdom that could not be found elsewhere in the land. Samuel was only about 60 years old at this time — an age that could hardly be termed great enough to prevent him from being useful.

The elders of Israel came with the demand that Samuel make a king for them. They did not seem to take the charge too much to heart that Samuel's sons were taking bribes and perverting judgment. If they had pressed this charge as their only desire, one would feel sure that Samuel would have reduced the authority of his sons. The elders brought up these charges for one reason — an excuse to ask for a king. The old Prophet, in communion with the God of Heaven, and greatly respected by the majority of the Israelites, was no longer desired by the elders of the people. They wanted a king. They did not specify a righteous king who would rule them better than Samuel's sons had ruled; but they said merely, "Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." Under pretense of making a change for the better, Israel in reality changed something good for something bad. The human family will do this every time when left to their own devices and when following their own counsel. "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). In contrast, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way" (Psalm 37:23).

An Unwise Choice

Samuel could see the error of the people's desire, though he probably did not see how far-reaching was that error until he went to God in prayer. The desire for a king meant that the people were asking for the termination of the Theocracy under which they lived. Samuel thought that the people were rejecting him, that they were weary of his judgeship; but the Lord pointed out that the true circumstance was the rejection of Himself. Why would the Children of Israel consider taking themselves out from under God's rulership? Because they could not accustom themselves to the thought of an unseen Monarch, though He had proved Himself strong in their behalf on numerous occasions. The Children of Israel were willing that the government of God be superseded by that of an earthly king, one whom they could see — a poor exchange. They desired a king to go out before them and fight their battles. Had they forgotten the many times that the Lord had fought for them and their fathers, and all that they had had to do was "stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD"?

That same difficulty of living one day at a time with quiet trust and faith in God confronts many Christians today. The great majority of people feel secure when they have the treasures of

this world gathered about them; but they place no value upon God's precious promises. A big balance in some temporal bank looks much better to them than any page on the checkbook of faith. They pride themselves on their prudence and foresight, when actually they should be ashamed of their distrust of God. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matthew 6:19, 20).

Majority or Minority

Another reason that the Children of Israel would have an earthly king to reign over them was that they might be like the other nations around them. An itinerant judge and prophet in a lowly mantle did not compare very favorably with the regal splendors of the haughty kings among the neighboring nations; therefore the Children of Israel felt they could endure no longer to be singular in this matter. It may be hard, in some ways, to be always in the minority and keep your faith in God, when all around are glittering examples of seeming success that attends the opposite course; but a Christian should keep the final reward in view.

The Christian standard is one which does not conform to the ways, modes, and fashions of this world. The love of Christ in a man so completely changes the outlook and desires of his heart that he is no longer the same; but "he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). To keep himself in the love of God, the Christian is commanded: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15).

Many people stumble over this separation from the world. They would be happy to welcome Jesus into their hearts if they could continue with the appointments and praises of their worldly friends, but the contempt, and taunts of the sinners directed toward the plain ways and manners of the Christian cannot be endured by this class of people. Like the elders of Israel, they want to fit in with the rest of the world. But remember, God does not approve of the ways of the world. He is seeking a people who are willing to separate themselves from the world.

God's Answer

Samuel had no answer for the Children of Israel when they first presented their petition. Had he denied their request without consulting God, the people could rightly say that Samuel took too much authority upon himself. But had he conceded to their wishes without knowing the mind of God, Samuel would have been a betrayer of his trust and an accomplice in the change. Samuel knew the strait that he was in, so he went to God in prayer for the solution of the problem. The answer was not long in coming. God was displeased with the suggestion for an earthly king, but He told Samuel to hearken unto their words, "yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them."

Samuel did show the Children of Israel the manner of the king that should reign over them. Instead of the unseen King of Heaven who gave all good and perfect gifts, the people were suing for a king who would receive all gifts and give nothing. Samuel drew the picture of the usual despot who ruled those eastern countries surrounding Palestine during that period. The

Children of Israel had to expect that the king would take of their choice sons to be his guards, soldiers, and officers; they had to expect that the king would take their daughters to be cooks and bakers to keep up his lavish appointments; that the king would appropriate the best lands to give to his servants; and that he would subscribe the tenth of their income to himself. More than that, the Lord said that when the Children of Israel would see the error of their choice and cry unto God about it, He would not hear their cry. With reproof of that kind from God, one would think that the Children of Israel would quickly have said, "We will stop right here."

Contending with God

Here we have an example of people in general: they have a desire contrary to the will of the Lord. They persist in that desire, with eyes open to the consequences, until at last the Lord accedes to the demand and allows the request. Just because God permits something, however, is not a sure indication that it is according to His will. A particular thing might be absolutely Contrary to God's will; but if He sees a person or persons set upon that thing, He will let them go ahead, just as He did the Prophet Balaam. Balaam was set on having that reward; the Lord finally allowed him to go to the king of Moab, but Salaam never received the reward.

When a person contends with God for some particular thing until the demand is allowed, the thing is not enjoyed even when it is received. "He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Psalm 106:15). The Children of Israel received their request for a king, but the generation that contended did not live long enough to enjoy their king. The first king of Israel was Saul, whose long reign of 40 years was filled with unrest, strife, turmoil, and war. It was not until the reign of David that the land enjoyed its king.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why did Samuel make his sons judges over Israel?
- 2 What complaint did the Children of Israel bring to Samuel in regard to his sons?
- 3 Name several reasons why the elders of Israel wanted a king.
- 4 What was Samuel's reaction toward this proposal? What was God's attitude?
- 5 What did God instruct Samuel to do?
- 6 Did the Children of Israel obey the voice of God when Samuel brought His words to them?
- 7 Why is it so dangerous for a man to contend for his own ways in spite of what God desires?
- 8 Did the elders of Israel enjoy their king when he was given to them?
- 9 What king is the Christian looking forward to seeing one day soon?

Overruling Providence

"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee" (Psalm 76:10). This is another illustration of how the overruling providence of God takes the works of men, though adverse to His will, and forms them into a tool for His work. God was not ready to give Israel an earthly king at this time, yet God knew that there would be a King David, and that in David's royal line, Jesus Christ our Lord would be the Savior of the world. Had Israel been willing to bide God's time, they would have received their heart's desire and not incurred God's wrath.

In effect, the men of Jesus' day sent the message after the Son of God, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). The antagonism of the Jews and the Romans sent Jesus to the cross; but once again the wrath of man praised God, for in that day was a "fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zechariah 13:1). How sad for those who thus carry out God's work! They perish in their transgressions; and their deeds are nonetheless sin even though God has deigned to use their deeds in the fulfillment of His Word. How much greater to give God first place in our hearts, that our works might praise Him!

