

## Who is King?

**Fall Quarter: God's Exceptional Choice**

**Unit 2: Out of slavery to nationhood**

**Lesson 8**

**Sunday School Lesson for the week of October 23, 2022**

**By Craig Rikard**

**Lesson Scripture: 1 Samuel 8:1-9; 10: 17-26**

**Key Text:** *You have now rejected your God, who saves you from all disasters and calamities. And you have said, "No, appoint a king over us." 1 Samuel 10:19a*

### **Lesson Aims:**

1. To learn the importance of praying before making decisions.
2. To understand the importance of remembering God's past acts of goodness to enrich our faith in the present and future.
3. To understand that God can take our sins and mistakes and accomplish a higher good.

### **Introduction: Background**

As we learned in the call of Gideon, the book of Judges consists of the repetitive pattern: Grace – Sin – Redemption. Israel's negligent behavior in relation to the Law always resulted in pain and chaos. God would then raise a judge from among the people to lead them out of the chaos and back into a life of grace. These kings were usually military rulers and often also a prophet.

After the judge leads them out of the consequences of Israel's sinful behavior, the people lived as a loose confederation of tribes. Each tribe had its elder(s) and on occasion they gathered to address the welfare of Israel. However, the sinful behavior of Israel often resulted in consequences far too great for the capabilities of the elders. Thus, God called forth the judge.

Samuel was a prophet/judge for Israel during the period between the judges and the emergence of the kings. He was known as a fair, righteous man. He judged from a pure heart. The people respected Samuel, and the period of his ministry was a time of relative calm and prosperity.

However, Samuel's sons did not possess the same character and desire for God's justice as their father. As Samuel entered the latter stage of his life, the people of Israel became concerned about their future. They were asking, "Who will oversee us after Samuel's death? Certainly not his sons!" Consequently, the elders met with Samuel and voiced their concern. They were respectful enough of Samuel that they did not attempt to circumvent him or usurp his authority. Again, their addressing Samuel speaks volume about the esteem in which they held him.

The elders, however, had already devised an answer to safeguard the future. "Other nations are ruled by kings. Let us also have a king!"

Our narrative begins with the conversation between Samuel and the elders.

## **The Narrative and Its Message**

### *Why Choose a King?*

Actually, it is God's conversation with Samuel, and then relayed to the people, that reveals the meaning of the elder's request. God reminds Israel that the Lord has led them through every painful and chaotic moment in their life. Beginning with the Exodus, Israel's history contains a wealth of events revealing God's grace. Notice again that the Exodus is perceived as the pivotal and highest redemptive moment for the Israelites. The prophets and psalmists often anchored their praise of God for the Lord's goodness in the Exodus. God continued to remind them that He had empowered them against all their enemies. It was the Lord that provided them with the land upon which they stand and live.

Basically, God appears to be asking, "Is that not enough to own your faith and trust?" and "What more must I do for you to trust in me?" The request of the people and elders was perceived by God as doubt. What God had performed in their past should grant them hope and serenity about their future!

I cannot state that the request for a king was a haughty act on the part of Israel. Perhaps it was a sincere sign of their desire to protect their future. Though the elders did not circumvent Samuel, they had failed to consult God. They failed to entertain the thought, "How does our desire for a king effect our relationship with God?"

If we were to "humanize" God, the Lord almost sounds like a hurt parent who has given everything for his children's welfare only to have them leave home without talking with them.

**How would you feel if you were a kind, giving parent only to have your kids leave home without consultation? Have you ever been so afraid of the future, or even current events, that you sought your own answers? Have you ever considered how your decisions, made without prayer, would affect your spiritual life? Do you believe God through Jesus has done enough to possess your trust?**

From our beginning, we have learned through Holy Scripture that we are allowed to choose actions that govern our life. However, we have equally learned to take such actions after much prayer. Remember the Israelites running about in terror and panic at the sea. "What are we to do?" was the great question they asked. God asked them to be still and see the salvation of the Lord. Prayer is absolutely necessary and beneficial when making all decisions, especially those decisions that could result in life-changing consequences. We do not know that God would have rejected their request for a king. After all, the Lord does grant them their king. However, the Lord did dislike the way and reasons they asked. Again, they asked without consulting the Lord, and their reasons were very secular. Other nations have kings, why shouldn't we? They asked Samuel for the king, not God.

Without doubt, in 1 Samuel this request is viewed negatively. It is perceived as a rejection of God as their king. Israel has been a theocracy from the beginning. Now, they are asking for the governing structure as the rest of their neighbors. “They have a king, and we want a king.”

The elder’s request for a king does make us question their thinking and motivation. How did they believe a king could serve them better than their judges, and especially God? Had God disappointed them in some manner? Absolutely not! It is obvious they were afraid of Samuel’s sons leading them, and rightly so. The sons were not righteous, and most likely they would not serve them well as prophet/judges. But what assurance did they have that the kings chosen would rule in a godly manner? Looking ahead, the reign of Saul started well but ended in a painful manner. Consistently, the Bible reveals that decisions made apart from God almost always end in less-than-ideal results. In reading the narrative, we can see the need for prayer. We can see the need of the elders to talk with the Lord FIRST.

One of the issues that came to mind for me was humankind’s belief that God owes us more than we have already received. My mind turns to Jesus on the cross, while those at the foot yelled to see one more grand miracle. Did Jesus owe them anything? He is giving them the greatest treasure he has: His love and life. This narrative makes me ask, “How much did God need to do for Israel to trust Him above all?” That same question can be applied to me, and most likely, all of us.

**Are we guilty of a “convenient faith?” After all God has done for us in Christ, are we guilty of failing to contemplate just how much God has loved us, how much God has forgiven us? Do we find ourselves expecting God to rescue us from bad decisions made apart from prayer?**

Furthermore, I can almost hear in the narrative a tone of “you have done well by us thus far, we’ll take it from here.” Of course, I don’t believe this was the major intent of Israel. But it does appear that they are now taking things into their own hands since the future judges might prove disastrous.

Let us also not forget the formidable power of fear. Fear can cause us to react and not act. There exists a great difference between the two. In reaction, we rarely think and certainly rarely pray other than “Help me now God!” Action involves prayer, thought, and wisdom. The elders did not have to react at all. They had time to consider the matter and to pray over the request. Samuel was still living so there was no need for a rash reaction. There were a lot of hypotheticals at work in this narrative. What if Samuel dies very soon? What if his sons choose to remain unrighteous and rule us in such a manner? What if a king could ensure our future? What we are reading is a lot of hypotheticals, void of prayer.

**Have you made a decision you now regret? What role did prayer play in your decision? Have you made an attempt to ensure a prosperous future apart from your relationship with God? Are you guilty of acting first and praying later? Has fear ever caused you to react rashly? What do you think is the difference between reacting and acting?**

*God’s Response*

From a human perspective I can understand God refusing to answer their request for a king. Yet, I always underestimate the grace of God. God chooses to give Israel its king. God's response leads us to consider two questions. First, did God agree with the request and choose to overlook their rejection of Him? Or, secondly, did God give Israel its king to teach them that their request, made by rejecting God's lordship, was not as wise as they thought and ultimately led Israel back to the Lord's leadership? We don't know with certainty God's reason, but without a doubt it was for the ultimate good of Israel.

We cannot escape the repetitive pattern of God taking us from the midst of our poor decisions and ensuing chaos and then accomplishing a greater good. Again, we do not know the exact rationale of God in granting them a king, but we can know with certainty the Lord will lead them into grace and redemption. Of course, Israel would learn from their experiences, and they would eventually own a greater collective wisdom. However, how long it takes for Israel to recognize their mistakes and God's loving response are related to the Lord's will and Israel's seeking the Lord.

**Have you ever learned greater wisdom from a mistake? Have you learned of God's grace in your life and learned God's will for the world and yourself through a mistake or sin? Do you believe God has allowed you to make a mistake for your future good? How do you see God's grace at work in your poor decisions? Out of the two reasons offered for God's granting Israel her king, which do you think is most likely possible? Did God finally agree with Israel and their plan for their future, or did God choose to grant them their desire in order to reveal their frailty followed by His grace and redemption? What experiences in your life affirm your answer?**

### *Choosing the King*

We might expect a far more "spiritual" way of choosing a king than casting lots. The using of lots simply reveals the Lord using the customs of the people to reveal the divine will. The people were seeking God's will for their life, and, though primitive, the lots were a means the people understood. The process involved the gradual moving from the general to the particular. First, the tribe would be identified from which the king would come, then the family in the tribe, followed by the individual.

Initially, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. Some might have wondered if the lots were an effective manner of finding a king. After all, the lots landed on the smallest of tribes: Benjamin. Next, they cast lots on the clans of Benjamin. The clan of Matri was chosen next. Finally, the lot chose Saul.

If left up to us, most of us would expect the first king of Israel to be standing among the crowd. However, he has hidden himself away in the supplies. Our text offers no reason as to why Saul was hiding. Our book offers possible answers. Still, the book also admits the text does not reveal the answer. Whatever the reason, this is a strange place to find one chosen to become king of a nation.

Nevertheless, the cast lot has revealed Saul, and without doubt it is assumed he must be the king. As Saul is brought before the Israelites, he is noted to be handsome and head and shoulders taller than the others. Physically, he is the perfect secular king. He looks the part!

Thus, whatever doubt may have reared its head in the process of the lots, Saul's appearance eradicates it. He must be our king because he looks like a king! This type of thinking and choosing of a natural leader might seem very primitive and unwise. However, let us not forget that candidates for public office today usually have teams that devise a way for their candidate to look the part of a leader. Appearance has long played a role in choosing those who will lead. Even Samuel joined the enthusiastic choice of the crowd. "There is not another like him in Israel!" The people respond, "Long live the king!"

**How often do you think we allow appearance to influence our decisions of leadership? Are there ways we can at least recognize a person's heart? What are they?**

The people will return home feeling hopeful and enthusiastic about the future. God has chosen them a king above kings through the lots. This is the second major decision made by Israel based upon the secular. They wanted a king because other nations had a king. They believed they had certainly chosen the right king because of his appearance. This type of decision-making calls to mind again, "The Lord does not see as we see, the Lord sees the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). There was one important factor the people could not know or see in their new king: his heart.

If we cast our eyes briefly into the future, we quickly understand the mistaken assumptions and decisions of the Israelites resulted in pain and chaos. Saul would suffer severe bi-polar illness. A young shepherd named David would play music to calm Saul's tormented spirit. In the end, Saul falls on his own sword and dies.

What is God's response after the Israelites have brought division, suffering, and death among themselves? God responds as always: with grace and redemption. A new king will be chosen. The new king will be known as one of the greatest in all of Israelite history. God will call David to shepherd God's people.

**Though the future reign of Saul ends in death and chaos, why do you think God did not call for an end to the rule of kings? Instead of eradicating the choice of kings for the future, what did God do? Why do you think God chose another king? What does God's redemptive actions say to all of us when we make mistakes? When we sin? When we act without prayer? Most every disciple Jesus chose to follow him - and to one day lead his Church - were flawed. What do you believe Jesus was saying to all of us in choosing people with feet of clay? Jesus laid his head in Judas' breast at the last supper, a place of trust. Why do you think Jesus chose this last action of love and trust for Judas when Judas had already made plans to betray him? What do you think of the statement: "Even the greatest sin we commit, and the greatest mistakes we make, can always be used for good and redemption in the hands of God"? How does the crucifixion of Jesus relate to this statement?**

**Prayer**

*Almighty God, forgive us for our rash behavior. Forgive us for acting without praying. Forgive us when we judge by sight alone. Grant us the ability to remember your great and mighty works in our individual lives and the life of our Church. May our past with you lead to a deeper trust in you. In Jesus name, Amen.*

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