SESSION 5

King Demanded

ISRAEL INSISTED ON HAVING AN EARTHLY KING LIKE THE OTHER NATIONS.

1 Samuel 8:1-9,19-22

1 When Samuel **grew old,** A he appointed his sons
as judges over Israel. 2 His firstborn son's name was
Joel and his second was Abijah. They were judges in
Beer-sheba. 3 However, his sons **did not walk in
his ways** B —they turned toward dishonest profit,
took bribes, and **perverted justice.** C 4 So all **the
elders** D of Israel gathered together and went to
Samuel at Ramah. 5 They said to him, "Look, you
are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways.
Therefore, **appoint a king** E to judge us the same as
all **the other nations have.**" F 6 When they said,
"Give us a king to judge us," Samuel **considered
their demand wrong,** G so he prayed to the LORD.
7 But the LORD told him, "Listen to the people and
everything they say to you. They have not rejected
you; **they have rejected me** H as their king. 8 They
are doing the same thing to you that they have
done to me, since the day I brought them out of
Egypt until this day, abandoning me and worshiping
other gods. 9 Listen to them, but **solemnly warn
them** I and tell them about the **customary
rights** J of the king who will reign over them."
[. . .] 19 The people **refused to listen** K to Samuel.
"No!" they said. "We must have a king over us.
20 Then we'll be like all the other nations: our king
will judge us, go out before us, and fight our battles."
21 Samuel listened to all the people's words and then
repeated them to the LORD. 22 "Listen to them," the
LORD told Samuel. **"Appoint a king for them."** L
Then Samuel told the men of Israel, "Each of you, go
back to your city."

Exploring Key Words

A The text does not give Samuel's exact age, but succession had become a question.

B Under the law, Samuel's sons may have seemed like natural choices to succeed him—except they did not follow the Lord.

C The Hebrew wording suggests twisting or spreading. Samuel's sons were bending justice and mistreating God's people.

D Leaders from Israel's tribes who may have represented some kind of ruling body.

E Decades earlier, God had replaced Eli and his sons with Samuel. Now, the leaders' solution was to install a human king. God had said this would happen (Deut. 17:14-20).

F In the law, God expected Israel to be different from other nations. Being a theocracy instead of a monarchy was one such distinction.

G "The thing displeased Samuel" (KJV; ESV). The Hebrew wording emphasizes the wickedness of the request. Samuel knew it was a sin.

H Israel's actions were not political as much as they were spiritual. The nation's history was littered with instances of turning from God.

I God understood the landmines of a human monarchy. So, He told Samuel to explain the consequences of this transition.

J In verses 10-18, Samuel told the people how much freedom and what possessions they could expect to sacrifice under a king. He would claim what he wanted as his own.

K Refusing to listen to Samuel was the same as refusing to listen to God.

L Ultimately, God still had the final word. He gave Samuel permission to honor the people's request for a king.

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NOTES

The Demand (1 Sam. 8:1-5)

- Having led the people of God well all of his life, Samuel appointed his sons as judges in Israel. However, they did not follow in Samuel's spiritual footsteps. Instead, his sons, Joel and Abijah, ruled dishonestly and did not lead with justice.
- In response to the failures of Samuel's sons, the elders of Israel demanded a king so Israel could be like other nations.

The Rejection (1 Sam. 8:6-9)

- Samuel believed the people's demand for a king was wrong and initially resisted the idea. However, after spending time in prayer, Samuel honored God's direction to move forward with the plan for a king.
- The Lord noted that the people had rejected Him, not Samuel—a common trait since the nation had been delivered from Egypt.
- He also told Samuel to warn the people what having a human king would require. Samuel did this in 1 Samuel 8:10-18.

The Result (1 Sam. 8:19-22)

- Despite God's warning through Samuel, the people of Israel insisted on having a king to lead them. They wanted to be like the other nations.
- Again, God told Samuel to listen to their request and to appoint a king for them. With the matter settled, Samuel dismissed the elders to their homes.

Summary Statements

Israel insisted on having an earthly king like the other nations.

- Parents can remain diligent in directing their children to follow God.
- Believers should resist the temptation to replace God's plan with their own ideas.
- Believers must be careful about allowing others to fill the roles reserved for God in their lives.

Memory Verse

1 Samuel 8:7

Key Doctrine

The Family

Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. (See Joshua 24:15; Ephesians 6:4.)

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at **goExploreTheBible.com.**

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ENGAGE

Why is it sometimes more comfortable to be like everyone else? Why does standing out from the crowd make us feel uncomfortable and vulnerable? (***PSG, p. 46***)

- The 1960s saw the rise of the hippie movement. Young people wanted to free themselves from long-held traditions. They wore bell-bottom jeans, psychedelic tie-dyes, and vests with leather fringe.
- Hippies listened to music that emphasized peace, love, unity, and freedom. They made their voices heard, protesting war and opposing "the man."
- Ironically, in expressing their individuality, they eventually started acting and looking a lot alike.

Bonus: In what ways do you stick out from the crowd? In what ways are you like everyone else?

EXPLORE

THE DEMAND (1 SAM. 8:1-5)

Bonus: How resistant are you to change? Why?

- Several years had passed between chapters 7 and 8. Biblical scholars have speculated that Samuel may have been between 60-75 years old. Regardless, he had reached an age at which a successor was a concern.
- The word "however" stands like a massive roadblock. All was not well in Samuel's life because his sons, Joel and Abijah, did not follow their father's example of godly leadership. They were dishonest men who treated God's people and God's offerings with contempt.
- While Israel's elders still held Samuel in high regard, they did not sugarcoat the failures of his sons. Their solution involved Samuel appointing a king to rule the nation. After centuries of claiming God as their King, they longed for a human leader like the nations around them.

Given the difference between judges and kings, what advantages did the people think having a king would offer? (***PSG, p. 49***)

THE REJECTION (1 SAM. 8:6-9)

Bonus: When has someone responded to a situation differently than you expected? How did that make you feel?

- Samuel believed the people's demand was wrong, so he immediately took the matter to God in prayer. The Lord responded directly to Samuel by telling him to listen to the people's request.
- God recognized that the Israelites were not rejecting Samuel as their leader. They were rejecting Him as their King. This was the latest in a long line of situations where Israel turned its back on the Lord.
- God had said this day would come (Deut. 17:14-20), so He established some guidelines for finding an effective leader in the law of Moses. Now that it was happening, the Lord commanded Samuel to explain what life with a king would be like—and how much sacrifice would be required.

What makes it so easy for us to pursue our own agenda instead of trusting in God? (***PSG, p. 51***)

THE RESULT (1 SAM. 8:19-22)

Bonus: When have you refused to listen to a wise person's advice? How did that turn out?

- Samuel told the leaders about the customary rights of kings (1 Sam. 8:10-18). But they refused to listen to him, which means they also refused to listen to God. Their hearts were set on having a king like the nations that surrounded them.
- They wanted a king to judge them, guide them, and fight their battles. All of these were things God had done in the past. Now, they were determined to follow a human leader instead of the God who loved them and who had led them out of slavery into the promised land.
- God repeated His message to Samuel about appointing a king as they demanded. He would be the last judge and would anoint the nation's first two kings.

Why do we often think that we are going to be the exception to the rule, as in: "That consequence will never happen to me"? (***PSG, p. 53***)

CHALLENGE

As a group, discuss some difficult transitions people face and how God can help them navigate those changes.

In what ways might God be leading you in a different direction? (***PSG, p. 54***)

Challenge adults to examine their lives for areas where they might be trying to be like others in a way that does not honor God's plan for their lives.

Are there areas in which you have put your trust in man rather than God? What changes might you need to make to align yourself more fully with what God wants? (***PSG, p. 54***)

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week's study.

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BONUS IDEAS

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, P. 53)

Compare/contrast the lives of two biblical characters.

> Compare Samuel's description of the customary ways of the king in 1 Samuel 8:11-18 with the narration concerning Solomon's kingdom in 1 Kings 4:21-28. ***Was Samuel's assessment of the ways of a king accurate in describing what took place under Solomon? What are some words or phrases you might use to describe the kingdom of Solomon?*** Compare the words of Samuel in 1 Samuel 8:18 with the concerns raised by the people of Israel about the reign of Solomon in 1 Kings 12:4. ***What lesson can we learn from this study regarding the way we treat others?***

Group adults into teams of three or four. Direct them to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 53). After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share their findings. List the similarities and differences on the board and discuss the questions in the activity.

OBJECT LESSON: DAILY PLANNER

Encourage adults to list different ways people keep their lives organized. Write their responses on the board. Show the group a daily planner. Lead the group to discuss how a daily planner helps individuals identify priorities in their lives.

Review the Israelites' demand for a king in 1 Samuel 8. Ask: ***What did Israel's request for a king reveal about their priorities? How do your priorities compare to God's plan for your life?***

Remind the group that maintaining godly priorities doesn't happen by accident. Emphasize that it takes time and intentional action. Challenge them to consider how they may be letting poor priorities slip into their lives. Encourage them to spend time in prayer during the week, asking God to reveal any problems and to give them the courage to address them as He desires.

DIG DEEPER

A KING-SIZED PROBLEM

How strong is the influence of popular culture? Often, our choices on cars, technology, clothes, and so much more are based on brand names and a desire to be like everyone else. Israel's example of requesting a king proves this drive has been around for a long time.

Israel had the best possible scenario. They were the only people who served a real God. All the other nations had multiple "gods" who were powerless. But Israel's Lord had proven His wisdom and might time after time. Not only was He their God, but He also was their King! He ruled the nation, presiding with perfect justice and offering assurance, peace, and prosperity. Yet, they wanted something else. They wanted to be like everyone else.

All the surrounding nations had a human king. They could see their king face to face. Their kings looked like them, talked like them, and walked like them. Though a monarchy was so inferior to being led by God, they could not help but feel an overwhelming desire to be like all the other nations.

So, in 1 Samuel 8, Israel's elders disregarded the warnings and wisdom of God and demanded a human king to rule over them. God told them that this would lead to destructive decisions. Their sons would be drafted into military service and their daughters would take care of his home. Some of the people would be forced to work as servants, caring for the king and his property. He would tax their property and harvests. Despite all that, the people refused to heed these warnings and insisted on a human king. And, in the process, they insisted on rejecting God.

The Israelites' decision reminds us of the dangers that come from seeking to be like those around us. This text offers Christians a valuable opportunity to reflect on the nature of our relationship with God and the world. It should push us to ask, "Am I wholeheartedly trusting and following God, or am I longing for the things the world has to offer?"

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