

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

1 SAM. 8:1 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 Beer-sheba.

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 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.

Israel Demands a King

Lesson Text: I Samuel 8:1-11, 18-20 Related Scriptures: I Samuel 8:1-22;
Deuteronomy 17:14-20; Judges 8:22-23; Hosea 13:4-11

TIME: 1043 B.C.

PLACE: Ramah

GOLDEN TEXT—“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” (I Samuel 8:7).

Lesson Exposition

REPREHENSIBLE JUDGES—I Sam. 8:1-3

Samuel’s sons (I Sam. 8:1-2). You may recall that Samuel’s mentor, Eli, failed to restrain his sons, and they suffered God’s judgment because of their sins (2:12-17, 22-25; 3:11-14). In this regard, Samuel did not have a very good role model as he was being raised by Eli in the tabernacle. At this point in the narrative, Samuel was old, although we are not sure how old. Perhaps feeling that he did not have a lot of time left, he decided to appoint his sons as judges. Whether he was not thinking clearly because of his advanced age or simply could not see what his own sons were like is conjecture. Either way, he made a mistake by giving them positions of judicial power. Just because a person has great ability or has lived a godly life does not mean his own children will follow in his footsteps. Since Beer-sheba was the southernmost city in Israel, it has even been suggested that Samuel placed them in this faraway place because he knew of their evil proclivity

and this location kept them far from most of the Israelites. We know, however, that simply sending someone to another city does not change who the person is.

Sinful service (I Sam. 8:3). We have all heard the statement, “Money talks.” Sadly, this is true in many situations, even in the legal system. To this day there are people in power who can be bought. In some parts of the world, this is very common.

The sons of Samuel “turned aside after lucre,” meaning they took money to make judgments in favor of the highest bidder. They knew what was right but “perverted judgment [justice]” for their own benefit. In this regard they were unlike Samuel, who was a good and godly man. That they “walked not in his ways” indicates that Samuel had set the right example for them, but they chose a different path. They were in clear violation of the Mosaic law (Deut. 16:18-20).

REQUEST FOR A KING—I Sam. 8:4-6

Elders deliberate (I Sam. 8:4-5).

The actions of Samuel's sons led to widespread discontent. Unbeknownst to Samuel, the elders (tribal leaders) of Israel got together and decided they had had enough and wanted something done about the situation. "All the elders of Israel" were in unanimous agreement, and their goal was clear.

Ramah was Samuel's base of operation, although he traveled on a circuit, judging Israel throughout his life (7:15-17). He was also recognized as a prophet (3:19-21). Being both a political and spiritual leader, he was the de facto leader of Israel—except in regard to his own sons.

The elders pointed out two irrefutable facts to Samuel: he was old, and his sons were evil. Although none of us like to admit it, age not only robs us of our physical prowess, but it may also affect our ability to make good decisions. To what degree Samuel's age affected his judicial ability is unknown. Perhaps the elders just figured the time had arrived for Samuel to retire.

The larger issue was Samuel's sons. Since Samuel had a great deal of influence in Israel, the elders foresaw disastrous consequences if Samuel's sons were given complete, unchecked national power. The leaders concluded that the easiest way to solve the problem was to institute a monarchy. After all, this was typical of virtually all nations, particularly those with which the Israelites were familiar.

Samuel displeased (I Sam. 8:6).

Rather than acquiescing to the desires of Israel's leaders, Samuel was "displeased"; literally, their request was "evil in his eyes."

RESPONSE FROM THE LORD—I

Sam. 8:7-11 To his credit, Samuel took all this to the Lord, which is precisely what we should do when we find ourselves in a similar situation.

Rejection of God (I Sam. 8:7). If Samuel was hoping the Lord was going to intervene and possibly change the minds of Israel's leaders, he was greatly disappointed. The Lord, in fact, told Samuel to "hearken," that is, listen, to the people and grant their request.

God understood what was going on. Apparently Samuel assumed that Israel's request was a personal rejection of him and his leadership. Rather, it was a rejection of God as their King. It was a repudiation of His laws given to govern this nation.

Review of history (I Sam. 8:8). As the Lord spoke to Samuel, He reminded him that things had not changed in hundreds of years. After being delivered from Egyptian bondage, Israel should have been so grateful that their devotion and dedication to the Lord would have been evident, but it was not. Instead, they forsook the Lord and worshipped other gods. This was their besetting sin (cf. Acts 7:51-53).

Since this was the way things were, Samuel was to listen to the people and grant their request for an earthly king.

Realistic forecast (I Sam. 8:9-11).

Although the Lord was going to permit Israel to have a king, He wanted them to know what they were getting into. The Lord told Samuel to "protest solemnly unto them." This meant he was to warn them of the consequences of their decision. The people were like children who want a puppy and can see only the fun they will have and not the unpleasant tasks of pet ownership.

Samuel dutifully shared all that the Lord told him concerning their request for a king and what it would mean for them. As with many decisions and choices, there is usually the good, the bad, and the ugly. Before making important decisions, it behooves us to weigh the pros and cons.

The people probably thought anything would be better than Samuel's sons inheriting his national leadership role. However, subsequent Hebrew history reveals that things got worse.

At this point, Samuel began detailing some of the changes a monarchy would bring about. A king would conscript some of the young men as servants and others as soldiers (I Sam. 8:11). In the following verses, Samuel explained that some would be put to work in the king's fields and others would spend their time making weapons of war (vs. 12). Nor would the young women be spared, as some would end up working in the royal kitchen to maintain the king's household (vs. 13). The king would also seize land as he saw fit (vs. 14) and demand taxes (vs. 15). He would even take some of the people's servants and animals and use them for his own purposes (vss. 16-17).

While the people could see only the benefits of having a king to rule over them, Samuel painted a bleak picture.

REFUSAL OF THE PEOPLE—I Sam. 8:18-20

Diminished prayers (I Sam. 8:18).

Because of the aforementioned realities of a monarchy, Samuel warned the people that a day was coming when they would realize the mistake of asking for a king. At that time, they would appeal to the Lord, but it would be futile to do so. As Samuel said, "The Lord will not hear you in that day."

Determined choice (I Sam. 8:19-20). In spite of the warnings, "the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel." They were dead set on having a king, no matter what the future held. They wanted to be "like all the nations."

Copying the nations around them was just going to lead them deeper into sin. For both individual Christians and churches, a desire to be like the surrounding culture is disastrous.

The elders of Israel assumed that the yet-to-be-chosen king would "judge" (I Sam. 8:20) them, apparently concluding that he would be a just ruler, something Samuel's sons were not.

The people also assumed that a king would be able to wage effective warfare against their enemies. Previously, Israel thought they could be victorious by taking the ark of the covenant into battle with them, but that was a fiasco. Now they thought a king was the answer to their problems.

Samuel went back to the Lord, who again told him to do as the people had requested (I Sam. 8:21-22). It would not be long before Israel's first king was selected.

—John Alva Owston.

QUESTIONS

1. What did Samuel do that caused concern in Israel?
2. What was so bad about Samuel's sons?
3. What did the elders of Israel decide to do about Samuel's sons?
4. What two reasons did the elders give for making their request of Samuel?
5. What did the elders want Samuel to do?
6. How did Samuel feel about the elders' request?
7. Who had the people of Israel really rejected?
8. What consequences did Samuel outline for the nation if they were given a king?
9. Why would the people one day cry out to God, and what would happen when they prayed?
10. What were some of the reasons the people wanted a king?

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Leaders must teach their children to obey God's Word (I Sam. 8:1-2).
2. Parents must discipline children who choose a lifestyle of ungodliness (vs. 3).
3. The ungodly will walk away from God's leadership in exchange for the world's system of government (vss. 4-5).
4. Believers need to pray and seek God's perfect will for their lives (vss. 6-9).
5. The price of going your own way in defiance of God is ruinously high (vss. 10-11).
6. If it serves His purposes, God will grant our request even when we disobey Him (vss. 18-20).

—Wardell Miller.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How do you think God felt when Israel refused to stay under His leadership (vss. 6-8)?
2. Why is it impossible for believers to have intimate fellowship with unbelievers (cf. II Cor. 6:14)?
3. Why was Israel's desire to be under a king's rule disrespectful to God (I Sam. 8:7-8)?
4. Why did God allow Israel to have an imperfect form of government under a king? What happens when believers turn a deaf ear to God's Word (I Sam. 8:19)?
5. How has God been merciful to you when you disobeyed Him (cf. I John 1:9)?

Golden Text Illuminated

“The Lord said unto Samuel, Harken 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” (I Samuel 8:7).

“Be careful what you wish for” is an old adage that poignantly pertains to our golden text for this week.

The judge at this time was Samuel. He had ruled Israel for many years and was also a priest and a prophet. But now Samuel had become very old, and his two sons, Joel and Abiah, were corrupt and evil men who used the office of judge as a means to plunder the possessions of those they were sworn to

serve. So the people had come to Samuel to complain and demand a solution.

Their solution was to demand a king so they could be like the nations all around them! What a simplistic, wrongheaded idea! They were demanding a mere mortal king who would be subject to fear, weakness, and all sorts of corruption.

Samuel was very much offended by the people’s demands on him. He took the sting of their rejection personally.

But God spoke to Samuel and redirected his thoughts. Yahweh reassured him that the people had by no means rejected him; their rejection was directed wholly at Him, the Lord God. It was His rulership that they had rejected, and God was going to give them exactly what they wanted along with a large helping of the misery Samuel had warned them about. God was about to teach His people a painful lesson.