



WHO WANTS A KING?

1 Samuel 8:1-22

1. The Outcry for a King

- 1 Samuel 8:1-5; Judges 8:22-23

2. The Problem was not a King

*- Deuteronomy 17:14-15; Genesis 35:11, 36:31, 49:10;
Numbers 24:7-9; Deuteronomy 28:36; 1 Samuel 8:7-8*

3. The Problem was a King

- 1 Samuel 8:9, 10-17; Leviticus 27:30

4. The Outcome of a King

- 1 Samuel 15:11, 17, 19, 23, 35

5. The Solution to a King

- Joshua 24:14-15; 2 Chronicles 7:14

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Kings and Presidents Who Wants a King? 1 Samuel 8:1-22

Recently released audio recordings of Donald Trump behaving like, well, Donald Trump, put the Republican nominee on the defensive. Then wikileaks released another load of emails showing, among countless other things, that Hillary Clinton and many parts of the network media are working together to change the outcome of the election. Then, a group of independent journalists went undercover and found that major leadership in the Democratic National Committee is fixing the election outcomes. Of course, you won't hear about that from many parts of the network media; they are continuing to focus on Donald Trump's ten-year old comments. All of this happened in just the last week and a half. I keep expecting it to be announced any day that all of this is really just an elaborately fixed reality show. How in the world do you vote in the midst of all that? What if a faithful approach to politics isn't about whose candidate will win? What if God is asking us to be citizens of the Kingdom that has real implications for our neighborhoods and real hope for our country, but is not determined by popular votes?

We are in part two of a four part sermon series called "Kings and Presidents," a series on being Kingdom people in our world of politics. We will finish this series on the Sunday before Election Day, and it's our prayer that you will approach the polls with a Kingdom perspective.

You also need to know that I do not feel it is my responsibility to tell you who to vote for; only to tell you *whom to live for*. And I trust that Jesus, the One you live for, will inform you how you should vote. In "Kings and Presidents," we want to gain perspective and direction by looking at examples from the history of God's people, Israel.

Last week, we saw Joshua's encounter with his own Commander in Chief – God, right before the Israelites crossed the Jordan River and moved into the Promised Land. God was reasserting his design that Israel would be a different people, and that their actions and their loyalties would be to God alone. God had worked through Moses to deliver his people out of Egypt, and after 40 years of wilderness wandering due to the people's sin and fear, God was then working through Joshua to lead them into the Land of Canaan. The call of the people was to remain faithful to their covenant with God by obeying the commands of the Torah, or the Law.

This style of leadership continued for the next 160 or so years as God's people slowly acquired more of their Promised Land. That took them to the time of the Judges, which was roughly around 1100 BC and lasted around 270 years. The time of the Judges really shows Israel's total failure. Before Israel had kings, they had judges. We think of Judges as people who sit in court and decide law, but in the Old Testament, these judges were more like regional, political, military leaders – like tribal chieftains. God attempted to use these leaders/chieftains/prophets to keep Israel faithful to their covenant. The problem was that, not only were the people unfaithful, very few of these judges were good either. The Bible talks about fifteen of these judges, ending with Samuel. Samuel was one of the good ones. The line of judges almost continued to

Samuel's sons, but we learn that his sons were corrupt and not at all like Samuel. Now, the people know that Samuel is getting up in years, and that he has appointed his two sons to succeed him. But they know the sons are not going to do a good job. So the elders assemble a meeting with Samuel to discuss it. That is where we first see...

1. The *Outcry* for a King

We are about to enter the time of the kings in Israel's history. We'll pick up the story in 1 Samuel 8:1:

“When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, ‘You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.’” (1 Samuel 8:1-5, niv)

So now we enter the time of the kings, which will carry Israel into the next 450 years or so, until the time of the Exile. Theologically speaking, this represents the end of their *theocracy*, or the reign of God through his appointed judges or leaders. In Israel's story of the kings, there are some very important similarities, warnings, and instructions for us today as we consider who will be our king – I mean, our president.

We'll start by looking at the people's outcry for a president. I mean, a king.

Their desire for a king seems, at least initially, to be motivated by a desire for a strong succession. Samuel has been a good judge, but he is getting old. Samuel has appointed his two sons to succeed him, but there's a problem with that. For one thing, the position of judge was not an inherited position. We learned this when Gideon was a judge. Gideon had delivered the people from their enemies, so the people wanted him and his son and grandson following him to be their judges, but Gideon made it clear:

“The Israelites said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us—you, your son and your grandson—because you have saved us from the hand of Midian.’ But Gideon told them, ‘I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you.’” (Judges 8:22-23, niv)

But the people also knew that Samuel's boys were not godly or just. They were not like Samuel at all. Their names represented Samuel's love for God; “Joel” means “The Lord is God,” and Abiah means “The Lord is Father.” Unfortunately, even for someone as godly as Samuel, his sons did not live up to the hope expressed in their names. The reputation of these boys was well known, and the people knew they would not be good judges. So they met to talk with Samuel about it, and they already had a solution – they wanted a king.

It is interesting to me to think about our history as a nation. After the Declaration of Independence and Constitution were done being written, we set about to elect our first president – George Washington. The role of president was something of “on the job training” and Washington was reluctant to accept it, feeling the full honor and gravity of it. A correspondent arrived at his home in Mount Vernon to inform him of his unanimous election, and also read to

Washington a letter from Senator John Langdon of New Hampshire. It said, in part: “Suffer me, sir, to indulge the hope that so auspicious a mark of public confidence will meet your approbation and be considered as a sure pledge of the affection and support you are to expect from a free and enlightened people.”¹ Washington reluctantly agreed. That began a series of parades and greetings and occasions in different cities that rivaled the entrance of a king. It “confirmed what his former aide James McHenry had already told him before he left Mount Vernon: ‘You are now a king under a different name.’”² In fact, at the end of his presidency, his popularity after winning the Revolutionary War was surging and the populous wanted him to be king. Washington had been thought to be in a position to take over the government and declare himself king, if he chose. Instead, at some cost to himself he ... reviewed the army, wrapped up affairs, journeyed to Annapolis to resign, and returned to his farm and holdings at Mount Vernon, Virginia.

Washington could have turned into a tyrant king but instead stepped down. It is reported that King George III of England, upon hearing the news of Washington’s resignation, refused to believe it. If the report were true, King George is reported to have said, Washington was the greatest man who ever lived.³ On *two* occasions he was asked to become king by the people, and after getting advice from people like Jefferson and Hamilton, he always declined. It is said that this act saved the republic and kept the US from becoming another version of government tyranny.

Washington knew that power corrupts, and in order for our form of government to work, no one person should have all the power; the power instead should ultimately rest on the people. I wonder if we have once again turned our president into a king? I wonder if power hungry people have become president in order to act like kings? Or perhaps, those who hold the bank accounts for presidents have become the hidden kings?

Well, back to Samuel. Some of you know the story, but let me first remind you...

2. The ***Problem*** was not a King

We have probably all heard the quote from Lord John Dalberg-Acton that says, “Absolute power corrupts absolutely.” That was certainly a danger for Israel in having a king. And if you are familiar with this part of the Old Testament, you know that Samuel and the Lord were not happy about the people’s outcry for a king. But before we look at that, I just want to point out that the real problem was *not* a king.

In fact, you will notice that long before this time in Israel’s history, when they were on their way out of Egypt, God had already predicted that the Israelites would one day ask for a king. In Deuteronomy, for example, God said:

“When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, ‘Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,’ be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses.” (Deuteronomy 17:14-15, niv)

¹ <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/george-washington-the-reluctant-president-49492/?no-ist>

² <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/george-washington-the-reluctant-president-49492/?no-ist>

³ <https://timpanogos.wordpress.com/2010/12/16/george-washington-study-history-refuse-to-be-king-make-the-republic-last/>

Other passages also predicted that the Israelites would one day ask for a king; for example, God promised Jacob:

“A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants” (Genesis 35:11, niv).

Similar references to future kings can be found in other Scriptures that I’ve listed in your notes. (*Genesis 36:31; 49:10; Numbers 24:7–9; and Deuteronomy 28:36*)

So if God *knew* they were going to ask for a king, then clearly the problem here was *not* a king. So what was the real problem here, if it wasn’t a king?

The problem was in what the people were actually wanting, and what it meant.

You see, God intended that he himself was to be the ruler of Israel; the people were to follow him directly. God led the people through Moses and Aaron, and then through priests and judges who were raised up to govern the people. But in Samuel’s time, the people wanted a king. So here was one problem: their request for a king was a rejection of God’s way of leadership over them. The passage tells us this is what the Lord had to say about it to Samuel:

“And the Lord told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.’” (1 Samuel 8:7-8, niv)

And before we are too quick to judge them for that, I have to wonder: in all of our clamoring for the presidential choice of our particular side, have we forsaken God as our ruler, or relegated him to the sidelines? Perhaps we think that God governs the spiritual stuff and has reserved heaven for us, but we need a king to take care of the physical, social world that we live in? Have we, like the Israelites, sidelined God to the past in stories from the Bible’s history and in the future to heaven someday, but removed his rule from our present, everyday lives? I think the current state of politics ought to make the church collectively, and Christians individually ask ourselves that question.

Another reason it was wrong for the Israelites to ask for a king is that they did so in order to be like “all the other nations.” God had created Israel as a unique people. He was their leader. When the Israelites wanted a king like other nations had, they were rejecting their unique, set-apart position as God’s people. The nation whose God was to be the Lord alone was envious of the nations who followed false gods! The Israelites wanted to live like other nations.

We talk a lot about America being a Christian nation, and for the record, I don’t believe it ever really was. It was founded on a certain set of philosophical and ethical principles that happen to work best when there is a moral belief system. Some of the founding fathers were not Christians but were deists. But most everyone at that time adhered to the moral values that could be described as Judeo-Christian. Unfortunately, we as a nation have abandoned those values and have replaced them with our hedonistic, self-first value.

But I wonder if we as Christians are also looking around at our own culture and saying like the Israelites, “We want to live like they do. We want to have the things that they have. We want to put ourselves first. We have a right to get our due, to get what we want. We’ll let government programs and other organizations take care of our neighbors, like kings should do. We want to look out for ourselves.” I wonder if we’ve looked out for only ourselves, like everyone around

us does. And I wonder if in the process we've lost our special relationship with God. I wonder if we've lost our witness to a world that we are to be people who live differently because of our unique relationship with God.

And I wonder if our attitudes about this election don't reveal that we are clamoring for a king, like the people around us. A king in place of God.

So the problem for Israel, and for us, wasn't a king. But the truth was also that...

3. The ***Problem*** was a King

We can see by Samuel's response to their outcry for a king that this was not a good idea for a few reasons.

Initially, it feels like Samuel is taking their request for a king as a personal rejection of him and his sons. So yes, Samuel is personally upset. But he knows, too, that a king is going to have a hard time keeping himself under God's authority. After Samuel prayed, God spoke to him and said:

“Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights.” (1 Samuel 8: 9, niv)

The king will claim his rights over the people. God tried to warn them that the king would do what kings do. So Samuel told the people the warning from God of all the problems a king was going to cause them:

“Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, ‘This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves.’” (1 Samuel 8:10-17, niv)

The problem was that the people would get what they wanted – and then the problem really would be the king. He would put harsh constraints and restraints on the people; he would conscript the people and their possessions. But there is a very telling part of what I just read to you that I want you to see. It's in that very last sentence:

“(The king) will take a tenth of your flocks...” (1 Samuel 8: 17a, niv)

You might think that's not a big deal – it's just taxes, right? But there's more to it than that. The word “tenth” is actually the word for “tithe.” And God was very clear about what we are to do with that tithe or tenth:

“One tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain from the fields or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD and must be set apart to him as holy.” (Leviticus 27:30, nlt)

The tenth – the tithes – belongs to God, but the king will demand the tenth. God is warning them that the king will put himself in the position of God in their lives. The king will think he is God.

Folks, kings and presidents will do what kings and presidents will do.

Some people feel that our current president has over-reached his power through executive orders and has set himself up as king. So some will say we want a different president, or a different platform, or a different ideology in place.

There are certain presidential candidates that we don't like because they make decisions that put themselves in the place of God. For instance, we have a candidate who has taken a clear stand for abortion at every stage of development. We have a strong belief that God has determined the sanctity of life during the *entire* term of the baby and especially in the ninth month and everything but the baby's head has been delivered and then it is murdered. So some will say that we don't want to vote for Hillary.

We also have a strong belief in having respect for all people regardless of their appearance, ethnicity, or gender. And yet we have a candidate who has made a career of belittling women for their appearance, and fosters a wall-building hatred for people in genuine need of help. So some will say we don't want to vote for Donald.

So we think maybe an independent will be the answer, and we vote for a third party or a fifth party or a four-hundredth party, which some will say is really only a vote *against* Donald and a vote for Hillary. But even if an independent gets elected, he or she will also make decisions that we don't like, decisions that will inconvenience us or even put us in harm's way.

Folks, in *every* case, kings and presidents are going to do what kings and presidents do. God has warned us. That doesn't mean we don't have a choice and a vote in the matter; we have an incredible gift of a voice and a vote and we ought to treat it as such! We need to put God first, ask God for insight on how we should vote. But we shouldn't be surprised when *any* candidate begins to act in those ways. Any time we submit ourselves to anyone or anything but the kingdom rule of Yahweh, we shouldn't be surprised by what happens.

The Israelites should not have been surprised, either, at...

4. The *Outcome* of a King

Scripture tells us that Israel got what they asked for with their first king, Saul. In chapter nine of 1 Samuel, King Saul is introduced “with a sense of foreboding, with hints of his ineptness and spiritual ignorance. The nation of Israel gets exactly what it asked for.”⁴

We don't have time to go into all the chapters that talk about King Saul, but I will say he does have some moments that he shines, especially early in his reign. But as time goes on he becomes more self-absorbed, more unhinged, and makes worse and worse decisions. In chapter 15 we are told, that God said:

“I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.” (1 Samuel 15:11, niv)

⁴ John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), 1 Sa 9:1–27.

Saul deliberately began to disobey the Lord and thought that he had better ideas than God did about how things should happen. He blundered big time during one of his battles, and was confronted by Samuel:

“Samuel said, ‘Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel...For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king...’ Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.”
(1 Samuel 15:17, 19, 23, 35, niv)

The downfall of Saul was only the beginning. David became king, and although he led them to victory and prosperity, he also sinned horribly and made poor choices that led to his own household being divided. His sons and grandsons did even worse, leading to Israel eventually becoming a divided kingdom between north and south. It wasn't just the kings; the people themselves continually relied on their kings and themselves instead of the Lord, which eventually led to the Israelites being defeated and led into exile under Babylonian captivity. There are three main events in the history of Israel as a nation: the Exodus, the conquest of the Promised Land, and then the Exile. In fact, in the Hebrew Bible the books are not listed in the same order as in our Bible. For all Jewish people, their Bibles end with the fall of Jerusalem, and Israel living in exile in Babylon. That is the final word of their Bible for them. There are some implications for that, which we will go into next week.

So the outcome of a king is disastrous for God's people. Of course it wasn't all the Kings' faults – the people continued to disobey God, to follow their kings' disobedience, and to live in sinful ways.

Was there any hope? Would there be a way out? See finally...

5. The Solution to a King

You might wonder why God would allow Israel to have a king if he was opposed to it in the first place, and since he knew it would lead to problems for them. That would be a very good question.

It appears as if God would bless a bad decision – a decision that he is opposed to. But God allowing Israel to have a king demonstrates a couple of things: one is that it shows God's benevolence and love. Even though God did not want them to have a king because he knew how bad it would be for them, if that is what they wanted, God would work to give them the best king possible. He still sought the best for them. Even though the Israelites opposed God, God did not oppose them. He was still working to make the best of their wrong choices.

And that's the other thing: God gave the Israelites – and he gives us – the freedom to choose. God has given us incredible power in our ability to choose; we can choose to live under God's rule and reign in our lives, or not. Either choice has significant consequences on our lives and the lives of those we love. God always gives us freedom to choose, right up until the very end of our lives.

The freedom to choose is really what this election season is all about. We can choose to put our hope and faith in our candidate, or we can put our hope and faith in God. We can choose to live by the dictates of an election process and the governments of kings and presidents, or we can choose to live first and only by God's kingdom of love. A significant part of the solution is found in the incredible power of our choice.

If we go back to the days that Israel was under Joshua's leadership, before they had any kings, we see a key statement made by Joshua. In fact, it is some of Joshua's last words to the people of Israel before he died, and it emphasizes the importance of *our* choice:

“Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:14-15, esv)

Israel needed to make that choice, and so do you and I. Our nation may not make that choice, collectively. Honestly, I wonder if the entire system is so corrupted by those in power that it won't matter what we vote; the choice may have already been made for us. I'm not saying we should not exercise our vote – you and I are accountable for that – regardless of whether our vote is thrown out or twisted. We have an enormous responsibility to vote. But I am saying that there is a far more important choice than a vote that you and your house need to make, regardless of the choice of our nation.

The solution to our national state of affairs starts with you: choose this day whom you will serve. Choose this day how you will live out your choice in your neighborhood, with your neighbors. The solution is always a choice away. What will you choose? You can choose the kingdom of God rather than the kings and presidents. You can choose the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ, our king. You must make your choice. *That* is the vote that counts.

But then, you might ask what do we do about our nation? God gives us a solution for that as well. God gave Israel the solution to kings. When King Solomon was dedicating the Temple, before the kingdom became divided; before the Babylonians destroyed the Temple and the Israelites were taken off into captivity, God gave the solution to kings. He said that when we find ourselves in a horrible situation because of our sinful choices, even though we've rejected God, there is a solution:

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14, niv)

We need to decide who we are going to serve, and then we need to pray for our nation. We need to repent of our choices and ask God to help us. Don't expect that a good king or president will change things. Don't wait for evil kings or presidents to change themselves. Notice that verse does not say, “If *unbelievers* will humble themselves...” – it says “if *my people*...” The solution for our nation is God's people. The solution is not Donald Trump, or Hillary Clinton, or a host of independent candidates. The solution is God's people humbling themselves, praying, and turning to God.

Pray