

Dr. Robert Chisholm, 1 & 2 Samuel, Session 6, 1 Samuel 8

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This is Dr. Robert Chisholm in his teaching on 1 and 2 Samuel. This is session 6, 1 Samuel 8, Israel Demands a King.

In our next lesson, we're going to be looking at 1 Samuel chapter eight, which I've entitled Israel Demands a King.

The theme that we see here is the Lord may allow his people to reject his authority because that's what Israel is essentially going to do in this chapter, sadly enough. And the Lord, who's in a give-and-take relationship with his people, he grants freedom and he will allow them to reject his authority. But at the same time, he warns them of the negative consequences of their decision and their rebellion in this particular case.

So, we're going to be in 1 Samuel 8. 1 Samuel 7, you'll recall, is a high point as Israel repents and comes back to the Lord and experiences a great victory. But here we are in chapter eight and they're not going to look so good.

By the way, this is a pattern that we see throughout the Old Testament. I even did a series in my adult class at church one summer called Infamous Letdowns in the Old Testament. And there's a pattern.

Right after they cross the Red Sea on dry land and the Lord gives them a great victory over the Egyptians, just right after that, they're complaining and moaning and moaning. David, as we'll see in the books of Samuel, after his great victory over Goliath, it's not too long after that when he is running from Saul in great fear and comes to the priest at Nobe and says, do you have a sword? And the only one I got is the one you took from Goliath. He says, oh, there's nothing like it.

At that point, he seems to be trusting in a human weapon and ironically one that was used by his greatest enemy whom he defeated. So, this pattern runs throughout the Old Testament and we see it here, that people sometimes have a difficult time sustaining their commitment to the Lord. So, 1 Samuel chapter 8, and we're going to first of all read about Samuel's sons.

They hadn't been mentioned before, but apparently, he had appointed his sons as judges to follow in his footsteps. And so, we read in 1 Samuel 8, 1, when Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah or Aviyah in Hebrew, and they served at Beersheba down south.

But his sons, unfortunately, did not walk in his way. This is interesting because this was the problem with Eli, wasn't it? They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. Of course, the Old Testament law is wrong in any cultural context.

They were different from their father. Remember in the case of Eli, from the Lord's perspective, he was benefiting from his son's wrongdoing and he was not reprimanding them the way he should have. Samuel is not, in the Lord's view, cast in with his sons.

So, all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. Remember, Ramah is his hometown mentioned in the previous chapter. And they said to him, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways.

Now appoint a king to lead us such as all the other nations have. So, they seem to be concerned about justice and in this case, injustice. And they're saying, your sons are not like you.

We don't want them to be the ones that are leading us when you're gone after all you're old, Samuel. We want a king and we want a king like all the nations have. So how is Samuel going to respond? How is the Lord going to respond? Actually, back in Deuteronomy 17, the Lord had anticipated a day when Israel would ask for a king like all the nations.

More on that in a little bit. And when they said, give us a king to lead us, this displeased Samuel. He's not happy about this.

So, he prayed to the Lord. 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.

Some people feel that what that means when he says, listen to all that the people are saying to you, is that he means all of the words. Samuel just mentioned, give us a king to lead us. He didn't say anything about the nations.

But I don't think that's what's going on here. I think that's an idiom. Listen to all means and give them what they want.

Because in some other passages that follow, like in chapter 12, verse 1, Samuel says, I have listened to all that you have said, and I have given you a king. So, I think listen to all simply means doing what they want. Give them what they want, which is surprising.

It's a surprising response from the Lord. It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as king. As they have done from the day, I brought them out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.

Now listen to them, but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do. Give them that king, but warn them what he will be like. Notice in verse 8, that the Lord seems to be saying that they are rejecting you.

But in verse 7, he said, they really have rejected me, not you. What's going on here? Is that a contradiction? Sometimes in the Hebrew Bible, they will use not X, but Y, when they mean Y more than X, or X not Y, when they mean X more than Y. And I think that's the case here. The Lord is basically, saying, they rejected me, not you.

What he really means is, they rejected me more than you. And in verse 8, he does recognize that Samuel, as his representative, has been rejected. But it's as the Lord's representative, see.

So, it's really the Lord, ultimately, who is the one they are rejecting. And the Lord seems to be ready to give them over to this. Give them what they want, Samuel.

Listen to everything they're saying, give them the king that they want. But warn them. Warn them what's going to happen.

And so, Samuel told all of 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 do. And as we read through this, look at how many times the word take is used.

Now I think it shows up in the English translation a little more than in the Hebrew, but there are at least four times in Hebrew where take is used. And also notice how often your is used, the pronoun your. He's going to take what belongs to you.

You own it, but it's going to be taken from you. And so, this is the way the kings of the nations operate. They create these big royal bureaucracies, complete with a military machine.

And all of these soldiers and generals and all these people have got to be fed and they've got to be taken care of and they need to live well. And so, he's going to create this big royal bureaucracy and to fuel it, he's going to need your money and he's going to need your kids and he's going to need the things that belong to you. So, in the end, you're going to curse this king that you think you need.

So here it is. This is what the king who will reign over you will do. And the Lord is warning them here, and this is gracious.

The Lord's letting them know what they're getting into. He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses and they will run in front of his chariots. So, he's going to have chariots and horses.

And of course, we know from the law, that Israel isn't supposed to do this. So right away, I'm thinking this king is not going to be abiding by the law. He's going to do what kings typically do in this culture.

He's going to have a chariot force because you got to have one. If you're going to have a modern army, you have to have some chariots. Egyptians had chariots, Hittites had chariots, and Canaanites under Sisera had chariots.

I got to have some chariots. So right away, this signals this king is not in line with the law of God. And he's going to take your sons to serve him.

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. So, he's going to have all these fields.

He's going to need people to work them and bring in the crop. And then he's going to have to feed a lot of people. So, he's going to have to have cooks and bakers and perfumers, I guess, to make perfume for the ladies in the royal court.

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. Almost makes me think that he's in the place of God.

God is the one who gets the best of the crops. He gets the first fruits and gets the tithe. This king is going to be setting himself up in that way.

Your menservants and maidservants 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. And when that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen and the Lord will not answer you in that day.

So, the Lord seems to be saying to Samuel, give them what they're asking for. Give them a king like all the nations. Just warn them what that king is going to be like.

And in the end, you are going to rue the day you asked for a king. And you're going to cry out for relief and I'm going to say, too late. You didn't listen to me.

You got what you asked for. But the people refused to listen to Samuel. So, Samuel wasn't just informing them.

The ultimate purpose in this warning is to get them to change their minds right here, right now, and say, no, we don't want that. And by the way, scholars have studied kingship in the surrounding nations and they have discovered that yes, this is the way these kingships operated. Kings did exactly what Samuel describes here.

And so, the people should have known this from living in this culture. And so they should have said to themselves, what are we asking for? No, we don't want to be under the authority of that kind of person. But what we're going to discover here is the real reason why they're asking for a king.

It's not just this concern about justice. No, they said, we want a king over us. And notice what they say next.

Then we will be like all the other nations with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles. So what they really are concerned about here is security, national security, and military strength. We discover as the story unfolds that there is a particular threat that's over in Transjordan at this time.

He's the king of the Ammonites. His name is Nahash, which sounds like it means snake. I don't think his mother would have named him that.

That may be a name he got from his enemies, or it may be a homonym. At any rate, they're worried about him. And Saul is actually going to go, once he's chosen as king, he's going to go out and fight this guy in chapter 11.

More on that when we get there. But they're concerned about national security. So are they really trusting in the Lord? I mean, chapter 7. We just studied chapter 7 in our prior lesson.

And what happened? The Philistines were threatening the Israelites as they were repenting, and the Lord came and thundered against the enemy. Chariots, horses, infantry, none of that counts when the Lord thunders from heaven against the enemy. The Lord has demonstrated time and time again in their history, and even recently, that he is fully capable of giving them the victory.

Hannah talked about this. But no, they've fallen away from their position of faith in the Lord. They've forgotten what he has done.

This is an infamous letdown. And they are afraid. And they think it would be nice to have a king with a standing army.

We're getting sick of this citizen-soldier stuff, where every time there's a threat, Israel, Samuel calls everybody together to fight. And we have to take our agricultural implements and make them into weapons. We want to just be able to do our thing.

We want a king who already has an army. He's got professional soldiers, he's got horses and chariots, and he can protect us. We don't want to be citizen-soldiers anymore.

We want a king like all the nations, who's going to defeat other nations, and then he's going to take their sons and daughters and make them his soldiers. That's what we want. We want to feel safe.

So, we don't have to worry about this. And we want to trust in something that we can see. We want to walk by sight, not by faith, is essentially what they're saying here.

And so, when Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. And the Lord answered, listen to them and give them a king. The Lord seems to be ready to give his people over to what they want.

And then Samuel, who has always been portrayed as one who is obedient. Samuel, Samuel, here I am. And when the Lord says it, he does it.

I mean, even here, earlier in the story, the Lord said, tell them this, and Samuel does it. And now the Lord says, listen to them and give them a king. I would expect to read at this point, that Samuel gathered Israel together and set up some kind of process whereby we're going to choose a king, which is what happens a little bit later.

But what Samuel said to the men of Israel is not expected. Everyone go back to his town. Now they may have been thinking, well, he needs a little time to figure out the process, how we're going to get this king.

I'm wondering if this is kind of a way of protesting, a silent protest on the part of Samuel because he seems to be disobedient here. It's as if he says, everybody to their corners, you guys go home. Let me talk to God.

And we see this with Moses. We've suggested that Samuel is a new Moses. Samuel is remembered in Jeremiah as a great intercessor along with Moses.

And the Lord says in Jeremiah, even if Moses and Samuel were here, I wouldn't listen. So, Samuel has this reputation. He's like Moses in this regard.

And maybe this is a form of intercession here. He sends the people away. He does not immediately go out and choose a king.

He wants to give the Lord some time. Remember when the Lord came to Moses, he said, oddly enough, leave me alone. It's almost like he's expecting Moses to try something.

Leave me alone. I want to destroy these people. And I'm going to start over with you.

I've had it with them. I'm ready to just jettison them and I'll start over with you. I can fulfill my promises to Abraham through you.

Moses doesn't buy that. And he objects. And he says, no, Lord, what will the Egyptians think? You don't want to lead your people.

And you made these promises to Abraham. And they're beginning to be realized. The people have grown into a great nation.

And you're ready to fulfill this by giving us the land that you promised Abraham. You don't want to start over. I'm paraphrasing now.

But when you read this in Exodus chapter 32, what happens? The Lord relents. He listens to Moses. Some people say, well, he was just testing Moses to see if Moses would accept his offer.

There's nothing in the passage to suggest that at all. In fact, a later, poetic reflection upon that event that we see in the Psalms, talks about Moses standing in the gap, keeping the Lord from rushing in to destroy his people. Moses interceded.

Now, I don't know how all this works out with divine foreknowledge and sovereignty and all of this. But what I do see is the Lord enters into a relationship with his people and with his prophet. And what the prophet says can impact God.

People sometimes say God can't be impacted by anything outside himself. The Bible seems to indicate that he is able to be impacted and that he chooses to be in this kind of relationship. The Psalms, the Lament Psalms in particular, are attempts to influence God.

And so that's what is involved in intercession. But I see this as kind of a silent intercession on the part of Samuel. And it's interesting, in the next chapter when the Lord comes back to this issue, he's kind of chosen Saul to be the king that they asked for.

They asked for a king, Shaul, and they got Shaul, the one asked for. And I think God chooses a king according to their standards. You might think, boy, Saul was a failure.

God didn't know what he was doing, did he? No, he knew what he was doing. He gave them a king, the kind of guy who looked good on the surface, a tall guy, who looks good, looks king-like, but who really didn't have what he needed on the inside. He gives them a king in accordance with their superficial standard that they want, the kind of guy who would be a king out there among the nations, to teach him a lesson.

And then he chooses, he rejects Saul, and then he chooses David because he looks at David's heart. That's what really matters to God. So, God is trying to teach them a lesson.

He's not making a mistake here. But in chapter 9, he comes along and he basically says, we're going to give him a king, but he's going to be a nagid. He uses a different Hebrew word, not melek, king.

He uses nagid. And I see a nagid as more of a vice-regent. And the Lord makes it very clear by the time we get through this section that this king is still under my authority.

I'm giving you a king. And he was ready initially to just give them a king like all the nations. Samuel told the people, back to your corner.

And then God kind of relents and decides, I'm going to maintain my relationship with my people. I'm going to give them a nagid. They're going to get a king.

They want a king. I'm going to give them a king, but he's not going to be a king like all the nations have. And so that does bring up the issue, what about kingship? Is it viewed positively or negatively in this section of the Old Testament? And even in Samuel, some scholars in 1 Samuel 8-12, see different sources that have been merged together.

One side is a pro-kingship source, and the other side is anti-kingship. And so they're kind of competing views here. Both of the views have been brought together into one story, but some of the material is pro-kingship, and some is anti-kingship.

I don't think that's what's going on here. But it does raise the question, how do we view kingship? If we go back to Deuteronomy chapter 17, we see that the Lord anticipated this particular day. And it's Deuteronomy chapter 17, verse 14, where we'll begin.

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. It's as if the Lord is anticipating naturally they would want a king just like the nations around them. Be sure to appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses.

So, when that day comes and you want a king like all the nations, you need to pick someone that the Lord chooses. He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite.

So, the king, first of all, has to be part of the covenant community. Can't be a foreigner, it's got to be an Israelite. The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself, or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them.

For the Lord has told you, you are not to go back that way again. Why would they want to go down to Egypt and acquire horses? Well, horses pull chariots. They would want, a king like all the nations, would want a chariot force.

The Lord says, no, you're not supposed to accumulate horses in that way. Solomon breaks this, by the way. He breaks this policy.

David did not. David was faithful to this. Solomon broke this.

And so already we're seeing, as this begins to unfold, this doesn't sound like a king like all the nations. They asked for one, and the Lord said, appoint over you someone that I choose. But by the way, the king isn't supposed to have a chariot force.

He's not supposed to have a lot of horses. So he's not going to be like a king like the nation. I'm going to give you a king, but not like that.

Next, in verse 17, he must not take many wives. Oh, the king's like all the nations. I mean, how many is many? I mean, you get into this with David.

Later, when David starts to accumulate wives, some people will say, well, he didn't violate the law because it says many wives. Well, how many is many? What we do see with David is an escalating pattern. He is accumulating them.

And I think, even though they were local girls and they didn't draw his heart away from God, he was establishing a king like the nations precedent that Solomon, his son, then took to the extreme. And Solomon did violate this, for sure. He must not take many wives or his heart will be led astray.

And the way this happens is we want to form an alliance. And so, the king will take the daughter of the other king with whom he's forming the alliance and marry her because it's kind of hard to fight against your brother-in-law. See, it facilitates a treaty situation.

But these ladies come with their own religious system. They have their own gods. You see this with Ahab and Jezebel later.

She brings all of her Baal prophets with her. Solomon later, his heart is led astray by his foreign wives. And he must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.

This is what the kings like the nations out there among the nations would do. It's good to have silver and gold around for a lot of reasons. It makes you look wealthy, powerful, and prominent.

And you can use that silver and gold in forming treaties and alliances and that sort of thing. You can buy off more powerful kings if you've got some silver and gold that you can pay as tribute. If it comes to that.

So, the Lord seems to be saying in Deuteronomy, when the day comes that you want a king like the nations have, that's fine. You can have a king as long as your king is chosen by me and he's an Israelite. But I'm not going to let him be a king like all the nations.

Now in 1st Samuel 8, Samuel says this is what is going to happen. I think the Lord realizes it will evolve into that because kings being kings are going to take it in that direction. But initially, the Lord is saying I'm not really giving you a king like all the nations have.

And this is interesting. Verse 18, when he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law taken from that of the priests who are Levites. It is to be with him and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left.

That was a long sentence. But basically, he's saying he needs to be a student of the Torah. He needs to study the law of God so that he can lead God's people in the proper way.

And he must be humble and not lord it over them. That is not the way kings would typically operate. Then he and his descendants will reign for a long time over his kingdom in Israel.

So that's the kind of king that the Lord anticipated Israel having. In 1 Samuel 8, he's upset when they ask for a king like all the nations and he doesn't mildly say, remember what I said in Deuteronomy, here's how it's going to operate. No, he's ready because of their attitude, because of the context in which this occurs.

They're afraid of a foreign king and they want a standing army and they want national security and they're not trusting in the Lord who thunders from the heavens against their enemies. They're not trusting. I think that's why he's upset and he says, okay, they've rejected me so they can have that king.

Give it to him, Samuel. Samuel decides no. I think he just decides we're going to delay on that one.

And when the Lord comes back in chapter 9, he has decided to operate according to Deuteronomy. I'm going to give them a king. They'll call him a king, but for me, he's a nagid.

He's under my authority and he's not going to go the way that these kings go. Now eventually that will probably happen, given the nature of kings and the nature of my people, but that's not what we're going to authorize right up front. So, let's keep all of that in mind and then go back to the book of Judges where this issue of kingship comes up before we get to Samuel.

I mean, this wasn't the first time that kingship has been mentioned. Remember after Gideon's victory, the people come to him and they say, we want you to be our king. And Gideon says, you already have a king.

You have the Lord as your king. I am not going to serve as your king. Now we've already said that Gideon, sounded good, but Gideon compromised a little bit.

But I tell you what, he says, I'll take some of your gold and silver that you have. And he accumulated wives. He named one of his sons by a concubine.

My father is king. So, I think Gideon wanted the perks of kingship. He wanted since the people are thinking of him in that light, why not take the perks? But he didn't want the full responsibility.

He realized that that would be wrong. And so I think what we're seeing there, why Gideon really made the proper decision in saying, no, I'm not going to become your king, is because the people's attitude was more like it is in 1 Samuel 8. It was really a rejection of God. And I think Gideon saw that.

And so he said no. But then later in Judges, in the epilogue, the epilogue begins and ends with the statement, that everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes because there was no king in Israel. Well, which way is it? You get the impression from the Gideon story that to ask for a king is to reject God.

So now we're talking about kingship in a positive light. If they only had a king, they would have done what was right. Well, I think in the epilogue of Judges, we have a

different type of king in view than what the people had in mind when they confronted Gideon or what they had in mind here in 1 Samuel 8. There's no contradiction.

It may look that way. I think what the author of Judges is saying is, you know, Israel at this period of time really needed, these judges just became weaker and weaker and weaker, spiritually speaking. Samson was not weak physically, but he was weak spiritually.

And so, they really needed a king, but not just any king, the kind of king that is described in Deuteronomy chapter 17. That's the kind of king they needed. Not a king like all the nations, but a king who writes out the law.

And you know, when you write things out, it sticks in the mind. Back when I was in school, we used to take notes. And there was something about taking notes when the professor was lecturing that really kind of helped the material sink into your mind.

And then you could go back and read it. But they need the kind of king who is going to read the law all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord as God and follow carefully all the words of the law and these decrees. He's going to live it out.

He's not going to consider himself better than anyone else. He's not going to turn from that law. He basically is going to be a model of obedience and the people will follow his example.

And so, when Judges says they needed a king, this is what Judges has in mind. And I think as this story unfolds in 1 Samuel, we're going to see the same thing. The people want a king like all the nations.

The Lord's upset because he realizes they're not trusting in me. They want somebody, a king they can see. He's ready to give them that.

There's a little delay there, orchestrated by Samuel. And the Lord comes back and he says, okay, I'll give them a leader. And he'll be different than these Judges that we've had.

And they'll call him a Melech. I'm going to call him a Nagid. And he's going to be a vice-regent under me.

And as we read through it, we understand that the king that the Lord is going to give them is going to be subject to the rules and regulations of Deuteronomy. And in fact, when we get into 1 Samuel 10, we will see this as Samuel is talking to them about

kingship. He is going to explain to the people in verse 25 of chapter 10, the regulations of kingship.

Some people see that as a reference to what Samuel had described in chapter eight. I don't think so. I think it's a reference to Deuteronomy 17.

He is explaining to people how kingship is going to work. And then in chapter 12, the Lord is basically going to say, your king will do just fine and you will do just fine as long as your king and you obey me. So, it's quite clear by the end of this section that the Lord has kind of backed off his initial response.

And you may think, would God do that? Yes. He did it with Moses in Exodus 32 and he does it here. By the end of this little section, he is going to give them a king under his authority who is responsible for following the principles in Deuteronomy 17 and leading the people in obedience to the Lord.

Unfortunately, Saul is going to fail in that regard. So that's the way I resolve the apparent contradiction that we see between passages. Some passages seem to be pro-king, and some others seem to be anti-king.

But I think we can resolve it in this way. There is an ideal of kingship under the Lord's authority that Judges says Israel needed. And the Lord decides that's the kind of king we'll give them.

But unfortunately, the people view the king differently. So, in chapter 9, in our next lesson, we will be looking at God's choice of a king, Saul. The people asked for a king, and in Hebrew, sha'al is the word for asked, and they get sha'ul, which is his name in Hebrew.

He's the asked for one. He gives them what they asked for. Yes, the king will be under his authority, but he's not going to pick Saul by looking at the heart.

He's just going to look at outward appearances, and he's going to show them how outward appearances, walking by sight, can be misleading. And then when Saul fails, he's going to turn to David, and David is going to be chosen on the basis of what's inside his heart for God. But even then, David failed at times.

But we'll be discussing all of that in future lessons.

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