

Dr. Don Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds,

Session 16, Theology of Kingship,

6-min. Video Overview

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Welcome back to The Explainer. Today, we're going to rethink one of the Old Testament's most pivotal and maybe misunderstood moments, when Israel asked for a king. Alright, so let's just jump right in.

You've probably heard this before, right? The story goes that when the Israelites came to the prophet Samuel and asked for a king, it was this huge sin, like a total rejection of God as their real ruler. Yeah, the usual take is that God kind of sighed and, you know, reluctantly gave them what they wanted. Making the whole monarchy thing a plan B. But what if that's not the whole story? What if we've been missing something? What if a king was actually part of God's plan A from the very, very beginning? Okay, to really get this, we've got to go back.

I mean, way back. Back to the foundational promises God made to Abraham, the guy who started it all. Seriously, these promises are the blueprint for everything that comes later.

So check this out. God makes four huge promises to Abraham. Now, most of us remember the first three, right? Countless descendants, a promised land, and that they'd be a blessing to the world.

But look at that fourth one. Kings from your line. Get this: right from the jump, God is telling Abraham that kings are part of the deal.

This isn't some afterthought or a compromise down the road. It was baked into the blueprint for Israel from day one. Okay, so that raises a pretty big question, doesn't it? If a king was always in the cards, why was it such a big deal when they finally asked for one in 1 Samuel? Well, to understand that, you have to get a picture of the absolute mess they were in.

Things were not good. So this era right before the monarchy, the time of the judges, it was a total disaster. Anarchy, really.

There was no central leader, no king, and the Bible sums it up with this chilling line. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Basically, it was a free-for-all.

They'd think, okay, maybe the priests can keep things from falling apart. Nope. They were actually a huge part of the problem.

I mean, get this. At the holy tabernacle, the center of their worship, the high priest's own sons were involved in pagan fertility rituals. It's just a complete desecration of everything they were supposed to stand for.

And if that wasn't bad enough, here comes the final straw. Samuel, the one good leader they had, this respected prophet, he's getting old. And his own sons, the guys he appointed to take over, they're just as bad.

Taking bribes, twisting justice. So the people look around. Their religious leaders are corrupt.

Their civil leaders are corrupt. They see no hope for the future. You can feel the desperation, can't you? And all of this, all this chaos and corruption, brings us right to that fateful moment in 1 Samuel.

Out of this desperation, they ask for a solution. But the problem is they asked for the wrong kind of solution. And this right here, this is the smoking gun.

They say, "Appoint a king for us, like all the nations." Those last few words are everything. The sin wasn't that they asked for a king.

The sin was in the kind of king they asked for. One just like the pagan, oppressive kings of all the other nations. See, God had a totally different model in mind for an Israelite king.

He wanted a king who would be his servant, someone who would uphold his law. But that's not what the people wanted. Nope.

They asked for the standard-issue ancient world dictator. You know, the kind of king who builds up his own power by stepping on his own people. And Samuel doesn't pull any punches.

He spells it out for them, plain as day. He says, "You want that kind of king? Okay, here's what's going to happen. He's going to draft your sons into his army.

He's going to take your best fields and vineyards for his buddies. He's going to tax your grain and your flocks. And he's going to force you to work on his big government projects.

And here's the kicker. Samuel wasn't just making this stuff up. This wasn't a hypothetical what-if.

He was literally just describing how every other king in the region operated. So in their fear, the people of Israel were begging to be put back under the exact kind of oppressive system that God had rescued them from in Egypt. Think about that.

Which brings us to the big question, right? If their request was so wrong, so messed up, why on earth did God say yes? Well, because kingship itself, the right kind of kingship, was still the ultimate plan. God basically decided, okay, I can work with this. He was going to take their flawed, fear-driven request and use it to push his own, much bigger plan forward.

A plan to finally fulfill that promise about a king that he'd made to Abraham all those centuries ago. And you can actually watch this plan unfold through the major covenants in the Old Testament. It's like a story in chapters.

The Abrahamic Covenant kicks it off with the initial promise. Then the Sinaitic Covenant gives the nation its laws and identity. And then, boom, the Davidic Covenant comes along and makes kingship official, promising a royal dynasty that would last.

So every single one of those imperfect kings of Israel, they were all part of this long, winding story. And that story was always pointing forward, always leading somewhere. They were paving the way for a totally different kind of king.

The ultimate king, who would finally and perfectly be the kind of ruler God had in mind from the start. So how does this change things? Well, when you see that kingship was part of the original blueprint, it totally reframes the whole story, doesn't it? It stops being a sad story about Israel's big mistake and God's reluctant plan B. Instead, it becomes this epic story of a divine promise. A promise that unfolds through all the mess and chaos of human history.

Working everything out to finally bring about the one true king he had planned all along.