

1 Samuel 8:10-18

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Samuel tells Israel the word of God. With a king, the people of Israel will lose their sons to fight his wars, to farm his fields, to make his weapons. Their daughters will become perfumers, cooks, and bakers for the king. The king will tax the people for the best of their produce and will take their servants and livestock for his own gain. Ultimately all Israelites will be as slaves to the king, and God will not hear their pleas to undo this.

In this section, Samuel warns the people what will become of their desire to have a human king, rather than having God as their king by living under His covenant in a self-governing manner. As God had directed, *Samuel spoke all the words of the Lord to the people who had asked of him a king*, including the dire warning that this request will result in tyranny and oppression. Samuel now lists the actions the king will take, that the people will not like. *He said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you."* The word translated *procedure* can also be translated "manner" or "judgement." Samuel now lists the basic behavior they can expect from a human king by listing a number of actions the human king will take. In each case these are actions the people will not like.

1. *he (the king) will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots.*
 - Israel had an agricultural economy run by family businesses. By taking the *sons* from the families to do the king's work, each family's business will be diminished. This will be a severe tax that will negatively affect the livelihoods and security of families in Israel.
 - These jobs have a military flavor, to drive *chariots* and serve as *horsemen* and those who *run before the chariots*. The people want the king to fight their battles for them, but it will be their own sons who will do the fighting. And it may no longer be for the defense of the nation. Now it may be for the ego of the king.
2. *He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties,*
 - Samuel warns the people that their sons will be taken by the king to create a standing army. Rather than only fight when necessary, now the nation must bear the expense of a standing military.
 - Some of the sons will become *commanders* who are in charge of the army. Others will become sub-commanders, ruling *thousands and fifties*.
3. *and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.*
 - The taking of sons from the family businesses of Israel will not stop with soldiers. The king will also have to feed and clothe his army and administration. So he will conscript sons to do his *plowing and reap his harvest and make his weapons* in the metal-working and blacksmith shops, as well as manufacture *equipment for his chariots*
4. *He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers.*

- It won't stop with the sons. The king will also want household servants. He will take their daughters *for perfumers and cooks and bakers*.
 - This will be a particularly severe economic blow. The custom in this age was for daughters to collect a dowry for the family when the daughter married. The dowry will now apparently be appropriated by the king
5. *He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give them to his servants.*
- It won't stop with just the family members who should be growing the family business and increasing the family prosperity. It will extend also to appropriation of the family's properties.
 - God granted the property to the tribes and families of Israel (Joshua 13:1-7). Now the king will begin to reassign these sacred family lands to himself.
 - Private property is one of the three pillars of self-governance. Once the people give up self-governance, they might have less responsibility. But they are also going to lose their property and economic vitality.
 - The king will not just take the leftovers; he will *take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves*. The king will want *the best* for himself. And since he has the military power, he will take it.
 - However, the king will not necessarily take it for himself. The king will use the confiscated property to *give them to his servants*. Cronyism will now be the order of the day. If you want great property, get in the king's favor. This will suck vitality from the economy. Rewards will be granted based on political favors rather than productivity.
6. *He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants.*
- It wasn't enough that the king took their family members (who would also be employees of the family business) as well as their property. The king will also want a cut of what he hasn't appropriated already.
 - The king will execute a tax on revenue. He will take *a tenth* of the production of their properties and *give them to his officers and to his servants*. "You do the work, I take the benefit."
 - There is no mention here of the king paying ten percent of the expenses. The people will bear the expenses. They will do all the labor. The king will take his cut off the top.
7. *He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use them for his work.*
- The king has taken the people's family members. He has taken the best of our property. But he has not finished. He will now conscript our *male servants and female servants*.
 - As with the land, the king won't take the leftovers. He will take the *best young men and donkeys* and *use them for his work*. It does not appear that he will pay for their use. He will just conscript their use.
 - At this point, we might start to wonder if there will be anything left for us! But that isn't all:
8. *He will take a tenth of your flocks*
- The king will take *a tenth of the flocks*. Presumably this is ten percent each year.

- Ten percent per year means that the flock owners have to do all the work, raise the livestock, replace the losses to wolves and disease, then the king will take ten percent without bearing any costs or doing any work.
 - Eventually there won't be much left. At that point:
9. *and you yourselves will become his servants.*
- Eventually the taxes and regulations will become so onerous it will be more economically beneficial to just work for the king than try to make ends meet in the business, in light of the crushing taxation and regulations.
 - At that point, the people are no longer free; they are now the king's *servants*.

And so, the people will have come full circle. They began in Egypt as slaves to Pharaoh. They cried out, and God answered their cry. God led them into the land, gave them the law, and instituted a covenant in which they were given a self-governing nation. So long as they cared for one another as they desired to be cared for, they were free to prosper. Now, because they have asked for a human king, instead of living under God as king by serving one another in a self-governing manner, they have returned to being slaves.

At that point, the people will *cry out* for deliverance from oppression, just as they cried out in Egypt. Samuel warns: *Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day.* Samuel makes clear that if they choose this path, the natural consequences of tyranny will be their judgement. And when they come to their senses, and realize the terrible mistake they made, and *cry out* to God for deliverance, it will not come.

The people have been warned. The consequences are clear. But still, God lets them decide.

Although God often protects us from ourselves, at some level He lets each of us decide our own path as well. As Paul states in Galatians 5, each believer in Jesus has been set free to choose their own path. Each person can choose to walk in the Spirit, and gain the fruit of the Spirit, which results in a loving community, and fulfilling the law. Or each person can choose to walk in the flesh, and reap chaos and discord: "But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another" (Galatians 5:15). Each of us will reap as we sow, meaning we will experience the consequences of our decisions (Galatians 6:7). Israel remained God's elect people, but they will suffer the consequences of their choices. So it is with God's people in the New Testament. We are always His people; every sin is nailed to the cross, and will no longer come between us and God (Colossians 2:14). But even though we will always be in His family, we are still accountable, and will reap the consequences of the choices we sow.

Biblical Text

¹⁰ So Samuel spoke all the words of the Lord to the people who had asked of him a king. ¹¹ He said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place *them* for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. ¹² He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and *some* to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. ¹³ He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks

and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give *them* to his servants. ¹⁵ He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. ¹⁶ He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use *them* for his work. ¹⁷ He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. ¹⁸ Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day.”