

1 Samuel 8:19-22

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Despite God's warnings to the Israelites that a king will oppress them, they refuse to listen, and finalize their request for a human monarch. They wish to be like the other nations who all have kings. They want to give up their system of self-governance in hopes that a king will take all such responsibility from them. The Lord answers that a king will be appointed.

In spite of the dire warning that if the people chose a king, they would end up under an unbearable tyranny, losing their freedom, *the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but there shall be a king over us."* Samuel made the consequences clear. But the people had their own rationale. They now list out their own reasoning for wanting a human king, instead of living in self-governance under their covenant with God:

1. The first rationale why the people wanted a king, in spite of God's warning against it was *that we also may be like all the nations.*
 - Israel had been an exception. They were the only nation without a human king. Each person bore responsibility for one another. The communities were self-governing. They were tired of being an exception. They wanted to be like everyone else.
 - In stating this, the people were rejecting the assignment God had given them to serve a priestly function to the nations around them (Exodus 19:6). They were supposed to demonstrate to the surrounding nations the immense benefits of each family living as its own sovereign, owning its property, and caring for others as they want to be cared for. Instead of a culture based on the strong exploiting the weak, Israel was to demonstrate the superiority of a culture based on everyone loving their neighbor. The people were rejecting this assignment.
 - They were also rejecting the first pillar of self-governance, which is rule of law, based on God's authority. They are now placing themselves under a human authority.
2. *that our king may judge us*
 - The people were assigned to appoint judges themselves (Deuteronomy 16:18).
 - This means the ultimate responsibility for the nation living under the law fell to each person. Self-governance means shouldering responsibility. Responsibility for self as well as others.
 - Perhaps they were tired of being responsible. They were just ready to let an "expert" make the decisions. They were ready to delegate all their civic responsibility to someone else.
 - In doing this they are rejecting the second pillar of self-governance, which is consent of the governed. God had granted them the authority to choose righteous judges. They are, in a fashion, exercising this responsibility in coming to Samuel. But under a king they are stuck. They will no longer have the authority to choose their own leaders.

3. *and go out before us and fight our battles.*

- In self-governance, the people had the responsibility to do the fighting, when it was necessary to defend the nation.
- The ideal for this is stated succinctly in Judges 5, after Deborah and Barack had defeated Sisera: “That the leaders led in Israel, That the people volunteered, Bless the LORD!” The leaders risked their necks for the people, but got no additional power over the people when they succeeded, even though they doubtless would die if they lost. And the people did not fight under coercion, they volunteered. When people act willingly to serve one another for a common mission, the LORD is blessed.
- No more. The people don’t want the responsibility any longer. They are ready to give it over to a king.

Sadly, the people did not listen to God. The Bible is clear that listening to God is the way to gain the greatest of riches, the kind of riches that never fade away (James 1:19-21; Revelation 3:18-22). But these people were not ready to listen to God. They had already made up their minds. So, *Now after Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the Lord’s hearing.* Samuel again went to the LORD for direction. Certainly, God already knew what the people said, and even what was in their hearts. But Samuel repeats what he heard in order to get the LORD’s guidance.

The LORD answered as He had before: *The Lord said to Samuel, “Listen to their voice and appoint them a king.”* God had warned them that if they got a king, they would end up experiencing tyranny. They would lose their freedom, and become slaves of the king. But the people did not listen. Therefore God granted them their request. God had made clear that if they chose this path, their choice would be their judgement. And when they cried out for deliverance, God would not grant it. But they chose the path anyway.

So Samuel said to the men of Israel, “Go every man to his city.” In saying this, Samuel is acknowledging that they will get their wish in due time.

This chapter has a significant parallel to the choice each believer can make each day. One choice is to walk in the Spirit, which leads to self-governance as a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). When we walk in self-governance, we fulfill the law (Galatians 5:13-14; Romans 8:4). When God gave the law at Mount Sinai, He entered a covenant with Israel. God promised that if they would keep His law, they would gain immense blessings (Deuteronomy 30:11-20). Much of that is practical, in that any community that loves and cares for one another as much as they love and care for themselves will be a wonderful place to live.

New Testament believers are grafted into the olive tree that is Israel (Romans 11:17). They are placed into the family of Abraham through faith (Romans 9:7-8). They have a new covenant written on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:27). When New Testament believers choose to walk in the Spirit, they fulfill the law, and show the glory of God to those who observe them (John 15:7-8). This is like living in self-governance in obedience to the covenant of God. Just as in the Old Testament, the New Testament promises great blessings, great rewards for such obedience (Deuteronomy 30:11-20; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 3:21).

The other choice we can make is to choose to walk in the flesh. If we do so, we walk in tyranny. Our flesh is a tyrant, who will lead us into slavery to sin (Romans 6:12-23). It will lead us into wrath, as we experience the severe adverse consequences of sin (Romans 1:18-28). Amazingly, God has granted humans this choice. But God has also granted us these stories, to provide us with the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of others (1 Corinthians 10:1-11).

Biblical Text

⁹ Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, “No, but there shall be a king over us, ²⁰ that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.” ²¹ Now after Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the Lord’s hearing. ²² The Lord said to Samuel, “Listen to their voice and appoint