

1 Samuel 8:6-9

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/1sam/1sam-8/1-samuel-86-9/>

Samuel is unhappy that Israel wants a king, so he prays to God for guidance. God assures Samuel that Israel is rejecting Him, not Samuel. He explains that this is how the Israelites have always behaved. God will grant Israel a human king, but first they must be warned of the consequences that will bring.

Samuel listened to their request, and *the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel*. To Samuel's credit, he did not react negatively to the criticism of his sons. Samuel apparently did not discipline his sons properly. But he does not defend them here, or seek to keep them in place. The thing that displeased Samuel is that the people *said "Give us a king to judge us."* Samuel did not answer the people immediately. Instead he took the matter to God prior to passing judgement. This was probably his pattern, and why he was an excellent judge.

Samuel prayed to the Lord and asked for wisdom regarding the people's request. You see in action here the principle of consent of the governed, as God had intended. The people were submitting to Samuel as judge, but properly taking responsibility for appointing righteous judges by stating that there were corrupt judges among them that should be removed. However, in the midst of a proper exercise of self-governance, the people are requesting God to set aside a great blessing, the ability to choose their own leaders.

God answered Samuel's prayer very specifically. Apparently God spoke to Samuel just as He had when Samuel was a boy (1 Samuel 3:1-10). God now spoke, and *The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them."* God entered a covenant with the people on Mount Sinai to be their Suzerain ruler, or king. God's Sinai covenant established a self-governing society. There were three pillars in this self-governing relationship: rule of law, consent of the governed, and private property. In this covenant, God was the giver of the law; there was no authority to give laws other than He. This was the essence of the first five commands of the Ten Commandments. The second five commands of the Ten Commandments established the principle of private property; God forbade the people to harm others, take their possessions, or defraud them. In fact, God forbade envy (Exodus 20).

The third and final pillar was consent of the governed. The people were assigned to administer the law among themselves, in their communities. They were also assigned the task of choosing judges from among themselves (Deuteronomy 16:18). God states here that by rejecting this system of self-governance, and asking instead for a human king, the people are not rejecting Samuel. They could have *rejected* Samuel by asking for a different judge. Instead, they were rejecting God as *king over them*. This demonstrates an amazing principle: when humans take responsibility to serve and care for others, and to live consistent with God's law (which Jesus summed up by saying "Love your neighbor as yourself") they are serving God as king.

God executes judgement on the people by giving them what they asked for. God tells Samuel to *listen to the voice of the people*. One of the primary ways God judges His people is by granting a sinful desire. This is consistent with Romans 1:18-32, which states that the wrath of God is revealed against unrighteousness when God gives people over to their own desires:

- “Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity” (Romans 1:24a)
- “For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions” (Romans 1:26a)
- “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind” (Romans 1:28b)

In each case, God’s wrath is poured out on sin by granting that people get their wish, then allowing the natural consequences of their chosen actions to take effect. God is now going to pass judgement on Israel in this manner, by granting their desire.

This is nothing new. Israel has sought their own way all along. God tells Samuel that their rejection is *Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day—in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also*. God delivered the people from Egypt, but instead of listening to His ways, they have sought their own way. This is no different. In doing so they are rejecting God as king over them. Interestingly, God equates this to having *served other gods*.

God says just as Israel *served other gods*, they are now *doing this to Samuel also*. This is because serving other gods was a part of seeking their own way. God makes the point in Isaiah 44 that no reasonable person can chop down a tree, make half of it into firewood, carve an idol with the other half, and actually believe that idol has power (Isaiah 44:15-17). What they are really doing is using the idol as moral justification for doing whatever they want to do, including sexual immorality and exploitive behavior toward others.

Therefore, God decides to judge them by granting them their request. However, God is merciful and directs Samuel to issue them a solemn warning. God told Samuel: *Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them.*” God will now describe the nature of human rulers to gravitate toward tyranny, high taxation, and abuse. The nation is choosing to set aside self-governance, taking personal responsibility for others, and loving and serving their neighbors. They are replacing it by ceding all their responsibility (and therefore power) to a human king, in exchange for a promise that the king will bear all the responsibility for them. God grants them their wish, but issues them a severe warning that the king will inevitably become a tyrant, and they will be oppressed once again, as they were in Egypt. And when they cry for deliverance, it will not be granted.

Biblical Text

⁶ But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” And Samuel prayed to the Lord. ⁷ The Lord said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. ⁸ Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day—in that they have

forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also. ⁹ Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them.”