

# Israel's Desire for a King

## 1 Samuel 8 & 9

### Key Bible Texts

1 Samuel 8 & 9

### Key Bible Verse(s)

“And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.” (1 Samuel 8:7)

## Background to the Study

The time between chapters 7 and 8 may have been twenty or twenty-five years. This chapter marks a transition between the era of the judges and the beginning of the monarchy. Samuel had judged Israel well, saved them from the Philistines, and led them back to God. However, by this time he was an old man, and the Children of Israel did not want another judge. Instead, they demanded to be given a king to judge them and lead them in battle (v. 20), so they could be like the nations around them. God knew that Israel would someday want a king, and so Moses gave directions regarding that time (Deuteronomy. 17:14-20). Even before that, God had told Abraham and Jacob that their descendants would include kings (Genesis 17:6; 35:11). In his final days, Jacob had said, “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah” (Genesis 49:10). God wanted these changes to come at His timing and instigation, but Israel was determined to have a king and refused to wait on God’s timing. At God’s instruction, Samuel warned them, carefully explaining the negative consequences of such a choice. He said the king would:

- Take their children to serve in the palace and army
- Take the best of their grains, grapes, olives, and animals
- Demand slave labour
- Tax them

These predictions were fulfilled, especially in the time of Solomon’s reign. Despite the warnings, Israel insisted on a king. Their rejection was not of Samuel, but rather of God, that He would not reign over them. God granted their request, and for the next 450 years, they had forty-one kings, most of whom did not follow God but led the people far from Him.

Chapter 9 marks the shift of focus from Samuel to Saul. The first two verses of the chapter show that Saul’s family had prestige and that, from a man’s perspective, Saul appeared to be an excellent choice for a king. It is important to remember that God directed Samuel to anoint Saul, but it was only God’s permissive will because the Children of Israel insisted on having a king. Saul’s father had sent him on a

mission to find their lost donkeys. In Biblical times, donkeys were considered necessities and were used for many purposes, including farming, hauling, and transportation. Even the poorest families owned at least one. Owning a number of donkeys indicated wealth, and losing them was a disaster. Kish, Saul's father, was wealthy, as evidenced by his many donkeys. In verse 6, Saul and his servant prepared to travel to the city where Samuel the prophet lived – believed to be Ramah. The phrase, "All that he saith cometh surely to pass" confirms Samuel as a true prophet according to Deuteronomy 18:22. Before Saul arrived, God had revealed to Samuel that he was to anoint Saul to be captain over Israel. He also told him about the missing donkeys. Although Samuel's heart was heavy because of Israel's insistence upon having a king, he obeyed God and prepared for Saul's anointing. Because the maidens were preparing to draw water, we know that Saul and his servant arrived at the city in the evening. The "high place" these young women referred to (v. 12) was a place for sacrifice and prayer. It also had a banquet hall ("parlour" in v. 22), and thirty people were invited to the special meal that Samuel had arranged. Saul did not understand at this time the full implications of all Samuel said to him. However, he did humbly protest that his family was "the least in the smallest" tribe in Israel. Samuel disregarded that comment; he knew that was not important to God. The right shoulder of the animal was the portion of the offering that went to the priest, yet Samuel had reserved it for Saul. After the feast, Samuel had Saul spend the night with him so they could talk. By the time Saul left Samuel, he knew what was happening.

## A TESTIMONY FROM OUR DAY

*Our pastor tells of a time when he was applying for a different employment position, one that he really wanted. He had been interviewed, and it seemed that he was going to be awarded this job. As he was driving to what he expected would be the final interview, he prayed, "Lord, You know that I really want this job. I want it so much that I am not sure if I can truly see Your will. Please help me! If this position is not Your will for me, please close the opportunity." He did not get the job, and he was disappointed at the time. However, within a year that company was no longer in business. He had proved, once again, that following God is the best plan. Though most of us know that principle in our heads, sometimes when we want something badly, we may be tempted to press God to give us our way. The Lord has a particular plan for each of our lives, but He can only direct us on an individual basis if we are willing to do what He says. If we are determined to have our own way, He may allow that – granting His permissive will – but it will not be to our advantage. God's plans for us are the best, and we cannot improve them by pushing for our own ways. In our text today, the Children of Israel determined to have a king. They pressed until God said yes. Their wilful rejection of God's kingly rule and His plans for them was wrong. However, God granted their desire, although their self-centred request had tragic results. The Omniscient Lord could see their future unhappiness, and He had Samuel warn them of the disadvantages of having a king. Still, they determined to have their own way. What we consider right by our natural thinking is not always spiritually best for us. Doing what God wants us to do may not always be according to our will. If we will yield to Him and follow His instructions, we will be blessed every time. Obeying God always results in good, although we may not see that good until eternity.*

## A Closer Look

**Question 1**

What were the reasons given by the elders of Israel for wanting a king (1 Samuel 8:4-5)? Were these claims legitimate? Why or why not?

**Question 2**

What was God's reaction to the people's request? Discuss with your class the difference between God's permissive and perfect will.  
1 Samuel 8:7-9

**Question 3**

Samuel expressed to Saul that "all the desire of Israel" was on him, speaking about his upcoming responsibility. What was Saul's response, why do you think he reacted the way he did to Samuel's words 1 Samuel 9:19-27

**Question 4**

What safeguards can we place in our lives to help us do God's will even when it seems difficult and name some things we should do when we need direction from God?

## Take Home

Sometimes we may be tempted to want to go our way rather than to obey God. We need to be careful to submit to and obey Him because His ways are always best in the long term. When God gives you direction, listen and obey!