

## 1 Samuel 8:1-22

### The People Complain About Samuel's Unjust Sons

**1 Samuel 8:1** - "And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beersheba. And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment."

Samuel was probably about 60 at this time. A man is called an old man at sixty, and a grey headed man at seventy (Pirke Abot, c. 5. sect. 21).

Samuel's wife is never mentioned. I could find no rabbinical source that even mentions this strange fact. Perhaps she died in childbirth. This might have contributed to the flawed character of the children, left with no mother to help raise them.

Like the sons of Eli (**1 Samuel 2:12-36**), Samuel's sons perverted justice, took bribes and considered their position as judges to be an opportunity to squeeze the people for money. At root they were hypocrites. The rich became their friends. Their rulings always went against the poor who could not afford to pay a bribe. The rabbis said they would adjourn courtroom proceedings when they saw a caravan approach in order to do business with the merchants.

The rabbis interpret the instructions in **Exodus 18:21** that rulers and judges be "men of truth, hating covetousness" to mean hating "gain" of any kind, even legal profit. - i.e. they should be content with their lot, never seeking more.

Rebellious, self-seeking and disobedient children appear all through the stories of the patriarchs - Cain, Ham, Esau, the sons of Aaron, the sons of Eli, etc.

Maybe Samuel's sons could not live up to everyone's expectations. Maybe their perspective on life was bent by being in the public eye. Perhaps they resented their father's humble and frugal lifestyle and thought they deserved better. Samuel might have used up all his strength and wisdom in service to Israel, with none left over for his home life and raising his children. Was he too hard on them, or too lenient? We don't know, and the scripture leaves us in the dark.

What we do know is that their injustices turned the people away from God - similar to what happened because of Eli's sons. The people saw that once Samuel died, they would be left under the unjust government of his two sons, and that was unacceptable. With the Tabernacle and Ark separated, and the judges operating in different parts of the country, there was no unified national focal point.

Why weren't Samuel's sons punished like Eli's sons were? The rabbis surmise that their misdeeds were done more privately, while Eli's sons oppressed the people openly. Also, they explain that in **1 Samuel 12:2** when Samuel tells the people "behold, my sons are with you," that means they had been dismissed from serving as judges when their

covetousness came to light.

### **The People Ask for a King**

**1 Samuel 8:4-6** - "Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, 'Give us a king to judge us.' And Samuel prayed unto the LORD."

The sins of Samuel's sons combined with the unbelief and rebellion of the people resulted in God agreeing to give the people a king - but only as chastisement for their disloyalty and ingratitude.

Israel's desire for a king is similar to the people's complaining that they wanted meat rather than the manna that God provided in the wilderness.

- Numbers 11:19-20 - "Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the LORD which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?"

The attitude of the scriptures here toward a king is contradictory, and that puzzled the rabbis. Was it a good thing or a bad thing?

"make for us" a king - The rabbis propose that the word "make" or "appoint" is similar to the word for a drug. A drug can be a medicinal healing agent, or it can be a poison. If the people are faithful, a king could benefit them and lead them closer to God. If they are rebellious, a king could oppress them and lead them further into idolatry.

Having a king was not necessary. But if the people asked for one, God would first chastise them with a bad king (Saul), and then bring them a good one (David) who would be a type of Christ - the King of Kings, ruler of a heavenly kingdom, an eternal one not of this world but existing within us.

### **'First the Natural, Then the Spiritual'**

This is in line with the scriptural principle of "first the natural, then the spiritual" and seen in Esau and Jacob, Cain and Abel and other biblical characters.

- **Romans 9:12** - "It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." (see also **Malachi 1:2-3**)

Comparing the first Adam with Christ as the last Adam, Paul explains:

- **1 Corinthians 15:46** - "However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual."

**1 Samuel 8:7** - "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."

Looking back on this event, God speaks through the prophet Hosea, saying, "I gave thee a king in mine anger.." (**Hosea 13:11**).

The people did not seem to reject Samuel as a judge. In fact he continued to judge Israel all the days of his life. But instead of seeking God's will and waiting on Him, they pushed their own agenda, which sprang from their own minds.

But because they were rejecting God, they also in effect were rejecting Samuel:

**1 Samuel 8:8** - "According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee."

Jesus makes a similar point:

- **John 15:20** - "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."

Israel time after time had fallen away into unbelief and idol worship. Now they would suffer for a while under an increasingly oppressive and mentally unstable King Saul. But even this turn of events would be transformed to fit into God's plan leading to David's rule, "a man after God's own heart," who would typify the future Messiah.

**1 Samuel 8:9-10** - "Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king."

### **A Warning Against Submitting to a King (1 Samuel 8:11-18)**

**1 Samuel 8:11** - "And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots."

Then follows a list of the many possible abuses they would suffer.

The Torah had already prophetically foreseen this possibility in Deuteronomy 17.

The king must be someone chosen by God, and not a foreigner:

- **Deuteronomy 17:14-15** - "When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king

over me, like as all the nations that are about me; Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.

Kings are Forbidden to 'Return to Egypt' and Multiply Horses or Wives:

- **Deuteronomy 17:16-17** - "But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold."

This prohibits making alliances with Egypt or other powerful states through marriage, and building up a powerful armed force including horses and chariots, because Israel's trust should be only in the Lord, not in its own strength. An alliance with Egypt would make Israel beholden to it, a situation similar to the slavery from which God rescued them. (Also - as later seen with Solomon - marriages to foreign princesses led to the introduction of idol worship, which they brought with them).

The king must be governed by God's Law:

- **Deuteronomy 17:18-20** - "And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel."

The king that God describes here would never be an absolute monarch with unrestricted power. He would be submitted to the law of God. Also, the king was not to think of himself as "lifted up above his brethren" and certainly not semi-divine, as most other ancient kings were perceived. In fact, his ascending to the throne would have to be agreed on and approved by the people (as with Saul - **1 Samuel 11:15** - and David who was first anointed by Samuel - **1 Samuel 16:1-13** - and then by his own tribe of Judah - **2 Samuel 2:4** - and then the other tribes in **5:3**)

This in fact was unique in the ancient world - the first constitutional monarchy, in which the ruler was approved by the people and restricted under law. It preceded Greek democracy by about 500 years.

But the temptation to absolute power is always present, and God's warning concerned how a king might abuse his position to accumulate riches or build up an army for reckless foreign campaigns. A rogue king would cost the people much more than Samuel's sons would.

## The Warning Rejected

**1 Samuel 8:19-20** - "Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles."

Their impatience was growing because they knew that Nahash, king of the children of Ammon, was preparing to attack them, and they wanted a king to lead them in battle (see **1 Samuel 12:11-12**).

### 'Love Not the World' vs 'God so Loved the World'

To desire to "be like all the nations" is presented to New Testament believers as the sin of "loving the world."

- **1 John 2:15-17** - "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

The pious in Israel would have to "see through" the figure and attributes of the king and recognize the future Messiah there. In the same way, instead of seeing things of this world as something to "love," acquire or own, we "see through" them to recognize and love the God who created the world.

When we "see through" in that way, we can enter into the meaning of Jesus' seemingly contradictory saying in **John 3:16** - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The key to doing this is to go to the cross. We can only "see through" if we are out of the way. If I haven't gone to the cross, I will always respond as Eve did in the garden - with the lust of the eyes and the pride of life and self-seeking.

**1 Samuel 8:22** - "And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city."

According to a rabbinical saying, the Lord leaves a person in the care of whatever power he chooses to rely on - be it his own strength, his intelligence, his financial resources, Nature, the king or the Lord Himself.

By telling Samuel to make or crown a king "for" them, God was indicating again that the king would be subject to their approval.

The next two chapters describe the anointing of Saul as king.

## Christ is the Model for Kingship

In **1 Samuel 8** we see a transition about to happen - from Israel being governed directly by God through the High Priest and then his Judges, into a monarchy ruled by a king.

The change comes at a time when Israel is falling away from obedience to God, so God frowns on their choice. But this idea of a kingdom has been hinted at early in the scriptures, and that partly explains the seemingly contradictory attitude toward a king.

Besides the passage from **Deuteronomy 17**, look at **Genesis 49** - Jacob's prophetic blessing of his children.

- **Genesis 49:10** - "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

Later, the hireling prophet Balaam is shown a similar vision:

- **Numbers 24:17** - "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth."

The rabbis said these verses point to the Messiah, who will rule as Israel's king. The Hebrew word *shebet* is translated as scepter, a symbol of authority. It is also translated simply as "rod" or branch.

The rod was an implement primarily usually used by a shepherd. A rod is used for protecting the sheep from predators, but also for guiding them. The crooked shepherd's staff could reach out to rescue lambs from a thicket or to pull them away from danger or wandering from the flock.

Ancient kings like the Pharaoh and kings of Babylon often compared themselves to shepherds of the people, portraying themselves as kind guides while at the same time protecting the nation and insuring justice. But usually this was all just public relations, and the kings were actually the self-seeking oppressors that Samuel warns Israel about in this chapter.

The point is that the king as the "good shepherd" is an ancient picture dimly reflected in human memory from God's original vision of Messiah.

Even the evil Gentile kings were pointing to the ultimate kingship of Christ - the only "Good Shepherd."

- **John 10:11** - "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

Ultimately, God's rod will break the authority of all other rulers and kings, as he did to

historical Babylon:

- **Isaiah 14:3-7** - "And it shall come to pass in the day that the LORD shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, That thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! The LORD hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth. The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing."

Predatory enemies, like wolves coming after the sheep, could be driven away or killed with the rod.

Speaking of the Messiah, David says:

- **Psalms 2:8-9** - "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

The rod "of iron" just means it is the strongest authority there is.

The whole idea of authority and rulership is a reflection of God's sovereignty over His creation:

- **Psalms 45:6** - "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre."

Before he was chosen as king, David actually was a shepherd. A shepherd becoming king was unheard of. But David fused the definition of the shepherd's rod with the king's scepter in one person.

The focus in Christ's spiritual, eternal kingdom of the authority of the rod for believers is conveyed not through force, but through words of exhortation.

Isaiah's vision of Messiah is also a description of a righteous king:

- **Isaiah 11:1-4** - "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked."

A similar picture is reflected in the Book of Revelation:

- **Revelation 19:11-15** - "Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron."

The purpose of the rod for believers is to guide us toward and keep us within His covenant:

- **Leviticus 27:32** - "And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD."

The people would bring out their flock and the sheep would pass under the rod of the priest, from which he would select the tithe. It was a demonstration of the people's submission to God's Law.

Ezekiel uses this picture as a type of Israel purging rebellion from Israel. When confronted directly with the symbol of authority - the rod - the faithful submit to His authority, while rebels balk and resist.

- **Ezekiel 20:37** - "And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the LORD."

Jesus expands on this in His picture of separating the sheep from the goats in **Matthew 25:31-46**.

This is what Paul means:

- **1 Corinthians 4:20-21** - "What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?"

Paul wasn't going to hit them with a rod, but rather exhort and discipline them with words based on his authority as an apostle. The predators here were not wolves, but false doctrines and legalists.

Finally, the whole of **Psalms 23** is about this symbol of a shepherd's care for his sheep, and thus a picture of the best kind of king or ruler:

- **Psalms 23:1** - "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want....Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

**But the Kingdom of God is a peculiar kind of realm.**

In Jesus' model prayer He asks:

- **Matthew 6:10** - "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Although Jesus' kingdom had broken into world history, it was a spiritual kingdom, and He told Pilate it was "not of this world" (**John 18:36**). The kingdom of God is within you, He tells us.

The Book of Revelation foresees the end of time when all dissonance and rebellion will cease and His rule will be apparent to all.

Now it can only be accomplished in our earthen vessels, within our hearts.

- **Hebrews 2:8-9** - "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man."

As the hymn says, "Although the wrong it seems so strong, He is the ruler yet - This is my Father's world!"