

# CHAPTER 8

Things went so very well with Israel, in the chapter before, under Samuel's administration, that, methinks, it is a pity to find him so quickly, as we do in this chapter, old, and going off, and things working towards a revolution. But so it is; Israel's good days seldom continue long. We have here,

**I.** Samuel decaying (v. 1).

**II.** His sons degenerating (v. 2, 3).

**III.** Israel discontented with the present government and anxious to see a change. For

1. They petition Samuel to set a king over them (v. 4, 5).
2. Samuel brings the matter to God (v. 6).
3. God directs him what answer to give them, by way of reproof (v. 7, 8), and by way of remonstrance, setting forth the consequences of a change of the government, and how uneasy they would soon be under it (v. 9-18).
4. They insist upon their petition (v. 19, 20).
5. Samuel promises them, from God, that they shall shortly be gratified (v. 21, 22). Thus hard is it for people to know when they are well off.

## 1 SAMUEL 8:1-3

### THE WICKEDNESS OF SAMUEL'S SONS

Two sad things we find here, but not strange things: —

**1.** A good and useful man growing old and unfit for service (v. 1): *Samuel was old*, and could not judge Israel, as he had done. He is not reckoned to be past sixty years of age now, perhaps not so much; but he was a man betimes, was full of thoughts and cared when he was a child, which perhaps hastened the infirmities of age upon him. The fruits that are the first ripe keep the worst. He had spent his strength and spirits in the fatigue of public business, and now, if he think to shake himself as at other times, he finds he is mistaken: old age has cut his hair. Those that are in the prime

of their time ought to be busy in doing the work of life: for, as they go into years, they will find themselves less disposed to it and less able for it.

**2.** The children of a good man turning aside, and not treading in his steps. Samuel had given his sons so good an education, and they had given him such good hopes of their doing well, and gained such a reputation in Israel, that he made them judges, assistants to him awhile, and afterwards deputies under him at Beersheeba, which lay remote from Ramah, v. 2. Probably the southern countries petitioned for their residence there, that they might not be necessitated to travel far with their causes. We have reason to think that Samuel gave them their commissions, not because they were his sons (he had no ambition to entail the government upon his family, any more than Gideon had), but because, for aught that yet appeared, they were men very fit for the trust; and none so proper to ease the aged judge, and take some of the burden off him, as (*coeteris paribus* — *other things being equal*) his own sons, who no doubt were respected for their good father's sake, and, having such an advantage at setting out, might soon have been great if they had but been good. But, alas! *his sons walked not in his ways* (v. 3), and, when their character was the reverse of his, their relation to so good a man, which otherwise would have been their honour, was really their disgrace. *Degeneranti genus opprobrium* — *A good extraction is a reproach to him that degenerates from it.* Note, Those that have the most grace themselves cannot give grace to their children. It has often been the grief of good men to see their posterity, instead of treading in their steps, trampling upon them, and, as Job speaks, *marring their path*. Nay, many that have begun well, promised fair, and set out in the right path, so that their parents and friends have had great hopes of them, yet afterwards have turned aside to by-paths, and been the grief of those of whom they should have been the joy. When Samuel's sons were made judges, and settled at a distance from him, then they discovered themselves. Thus,

**(1.)** Many that have been well educated, and have conducted themselves well while they were under their parents' eye, when they have gone abroad into the world and set up for themselves have proved bad. Let none therefore be secure either of themselves or theirs, but depend on divine grace.

**(2.)** Many that have done well in a state of meanness and subjection have been spoiled by preferment and power. Honours change men's minds, and too often for the worse. It does not appear that Samuel's sons were so

profane and vicious as Eli's sons; but, whatever they were in other respects, they were corrupt judges, they *turned aside after lucre*, after *the mammon of unrighteousness*, so the Chaldee reads it. Note, *The love of money is the root of all evil*. It is pernicious in any, but especially in judges. Samuel had taken no bribes (~~(v. 12)~~ 1 Samuel 12:3), but his sons had, though, no doubt, he warned them against it when he made them judges; and then they perverted judgment. In determining controversies, they had an eye to the bribe, not to the law, and enquired who bid highest, not who had right on his side. It is sad with a people when the public justice that should do them right, being perverted, does them the greatest wrong.

## ~~(v. 12)~~ 1 SAMUEL 8:4-22

### THE PEOPLE DESIRE A KING

We have here the starting of a matter perfectly new and surprising, which was the setting up of kingly government in Israel. Perhaps the thing had been often talked of among them by those that were given to change and affected that which looked great. But we do not find that it was ever till now publicly proposed and debated. Abimelech was little better than a titular king, though he is said to reign over Israel (~~(v. 22)~~ Judges 9:22), and perhaps his fall had for a great while rendered the title of king odious in Israel, as that of Tarquinius did among the Romans; but, if it had, by this time the odium was worn off, and some bold steps are here taken towards so great a revolution as that amounted to. Here is,

**I.** The address of the elders to Samuel in this matter (v. 4, 5): They *gathered themselves together*, by common consent; and not in a riotous tumultuous manner, but with the respect due to his character, they came to him to his house as Ramah with their address, which contained,

**1.** A remonstrance of their grievances: in short, *Thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways*. Many a fairer occasion that people had had to ask a king, when they were oppressed by their neighbours or embroiled at home for want of *a king in Israel*, but a small thing will serve factious spirits for a colour to desire a change.

**(1.)** It was true that Samuel was old; but if that made him less able to ride the circuit, and sit long on the bench, yet it made him the more wise and

experienced, and, upon that account, the fitter to rule. If he was old, had he not grown old in their service? And it was very unkind, ungrateful, nay, and unjust, to cast him off when he was old, who had spent his days in doing them good. God had saved his youth from being despicable (~~1~~ Samuel 3:20), yet they make his old age so, which should have been counted worthy of double honour. If old people be upbraided with their infirmities, and laid aside for them, let them not think it strange; Samuel himself was so.

(2.) It was true that his sons did not walk in his ways; the more was his grief, but they could not say it was his fault: he had not, like Eli, indulged them in their badness, but was ready to receive complaints against them. And, if that had been the thing desired, we may well suppose, upon the making out of the charge of bribery against them he would have superseded their commissions and punished them. But this would not content the elders of Israel; they had another project in their head.

2. A petition for the redress of these grievances, by setting a king over them: *Make us a king to judge us like all the nations*. Thus far it was well, that they did not rise up in rebellion against Samuel and set up a king for themselves, *vi et armis* — *by force*; but they applied to Samuel, God's prophet, and humbly begged of him to do it. But it appears by what follows that it was an evil proposal and ill made, and was displeasing to God. God designed them a king, a man after his own heart, when Samuel was dead; but they would anticipate God's counsel, and would have one now that Samuel was old. They had a prophet to judge them, that had immediate correspondence with heaven, and therein they were great and happy above any nation, none having God *so nigh unto them* as they had, ~~Deuteronomy~~ Deuteronomy 4:7. But this would not serve; they must have a king to judge them with external pomp and power, like *all the nations*. A poor prophet in a mantle, though conversant in the visions of the Almighty, looked mean in the eyes of those who judged by outward appearance; but a king in a purple robe, with his guards and officers of state, would look great: and such a one they must have. They knew it was in vain to court Samuel to take upon him the title and dignity of a king, but he must appoint them one. They do not say, "Give us a king that is wise and good, and will judge better than thy sons do," but, "Give us a king," any body that will but make a figure. Thus foolishly did they forsake their own mercies, and, under pretence of advancing the dignity of their nation to that

of their neighbours, did really thrust themselves down from their own excellency, and profane their crown by *casting it to the ground*.

**II.** Samuel's resentment of this address, v. 6. Let us see how he took it.

**1.** It cut him to the heart. Probably it was a surprise to him, and he had not any intimation before of their design, which made it the more grievous. The thing displeased Samuel; not when they upbraided him with his own infirmities and his children's irregularities (he could patiently bear what reflected on himself and his own family), but it *displeased him when they said, Give us a king to judge us*, because that reflected upon God and his honour.

**2.** It drove him to his knees; he gave them no answer for the present, but took time to consider of what they proposed, and prayed unto the Lord for direction what to do, spreading the case before him and leaving it with him, and so making himself easy. Samuel was a man much in prayer, and we are encouraged *in every thing to make our requests known to God*, <sup><1016></sup>Philippians 4:6. When any thing disturbs us, it is our interest, as well as our duty, to show before God our trouble, and he gives us leave to be humbly free with him.

**III.** The instruction God gave him concerning this matter. Those that in straits seek to God shall find him nigh unto them, and ready to direct them. He tells him,

**1.** That which would be an allay to his displeasure. Samuel was much disturbed at the proposal: it troubled him greatly to see his prophetic office thus slighted, and all the good turns he had done to Israel thus ungratefully returned; but God tells him he must not think it either hard or strange.

**(1.)** He must not think it hard that they had put this slight upon him, for they had herein put a slight upon God himself: "*They have not rejected thee only, but they have rejected me. I share with thee in the affront,*" v. 7. Note, If God interest himself in the indignities that are done us, and the contempts that are put upon us, we may well afford to bear them patiently; nor need we think the worse of ourselves if *for his sake we bear reproach* (<sup><1307></sup>Psalm 69:7), but rather rejoice and count it an honour, <sup><1024></sup>Colossians 1:24. Samuel must not complain that they were weary of his government, though just and gentle, for really they were weary of God's government; this was what they disliked: *They have rejected me, that I should not reign*

over them. God reigns over the heathen (<sup>1978</sup>Psalm 47:8), over all the world, but the government of Israel had hitherto been, in a more peculiar manner than ever any government was, a Theocracy, a divine government; their judges had their call and commission immediately from God; the affairs of their nation were under his peculiar direction. As the constitution, so the administration of their government, was by *Thus saith the Lord*; this method they were weary of, though it was their honour and safety, above any thing, so long as they kept in with God. They were indeed so much the more exposed to calamities if they provoked God to anger by sin, and found they could not transgress at so cheap a rate as other nations could, which perhaps was the true reason why they desired to stand upon the same terms with God that other nations did.

(2.) He must not think it strange, nor marvel at the matter, for they do as they always have done: *According to all the works which they have done, since the day that I brought them out of Egypt, so do they unto thee*, v. 8; They had at first been so very respectful and obsequious to Samuel that he began to hope they were cured of their old stubborn disposition; but now he found himself deceived in them, and must not be surprised at it. They had always been rude to their governors, witness Moses and Aaron; nay, *They have forsaken me and served other gods*; the greatness of their crime, in affecting new gods, may make this crime of affecting new governors seem little. Samuel might expect they would deal treacherously, for they were called *transgressors from the womb*, <sup>288</sup>Isaiah 48:8. This had been *their manner from their youth up*, <sup>222</sup>Jeremiah 22:21.

2. He tells him that which would be an answer to their demand. Samuel would not have known what to say if God had not instructed him. Should he oppose the motion, it would bespeak a greater fondness of power and dominion than did become a prophet, and an indulgence of his sons. Should he yield to the motion, it would look like the betraying of his trust, and he would become accessory to all the bad consequences of a change. Aaron sinned in gratifying the people when they said, *Make us gods*; Samuel dares not therefore comply with them when they say, *Make us a king*, but he gives them, with assurance, the answer God sent them.

(1.) He must tell them that *they shall have a king*. *Hearken to the voice of the people*, v. 7, and again, v. 9. Not that God was pleased with their request, but, as sometimes he crosses us in love, so at other times he gratifies us in wrath; he did so here. When they said, *Give us a king and*

princes he gave them a king in his anger (see ~~2310~~ Hosea 13:10, 11), as he gave them quails, ~~3965~~ Psalm 106:15; 78:29. God bade Samuel humour them in this matter,

[1.] That they might be beaten with their own rod, and might feel, to their cost, the difference between his government and the government of a king; see ~~4118~~ 2 Chronicles 12:8. It soon appeared how much worse their condition was, in all respects, under Saul, than it had been under Samuel.

[2.] To prevent something worse. If they were not gratified, they would either rise in rebellion against Samuel or universally revolt from their religion and admit the gods of the nations, that they might have kings like them. Rather than so, let them have a king.

[3.] God knows how to bring glory to himself out of it, and to serve his own wise purposes even by their foolish counsels.

(2.) But he must tell them, withal, that when they have a king they will soon have enough of him, and will, when it is too late, repent of their choice. This he must *protest solemnly to them* (v. 9), that, if they would have a king to rule them, as the eastern kings ruled their subjects, they would find the yoke exceedingly heavy. They looked only at the pomp or magnificence of a king, and thought that would make their nation great and considerable among its neighbours, and would strike a terror upon their enemies; but he must bid them consider how they would like to bear the charges of that pomp, and how they would endure that arbitrary power which the neighbouring kings assumed. Note, Those that set their hearts inordinately upon any thing in this world ought, for the moderating of their desires, to consider the inconveniences as well as the conveniences that will attend it, and to set the one over against the other in their thoughts. Those that submit to the government of the world and the flesh are told plainly what hard masters they are, and what a tyranny the dominion of sin is; and yet they will exchange God's government for it.

**IV.** Samuel's faithful delivery of God's mind to them, v. 10. He *told them all the words of the Lord*, how ill he resented it, that he construed it a rejecting of him, and compared it with their serving other gods, — that he would grant their request if they insisted on it, but withal had ordered him to represent to them the certain consequences of their choice, that they would be such that if they had any reason left them, and would allow themselves to consult their own interest, they would withdraw their

petition, and beg to continue as they were. Accordingly he lays before them, very particularly, what would be, not the right of a king in general, but *the manner of the king that should reign over them*, according to the pattern of the nations, v. 11. Samuel does not speak (as bishop Patrick expounds it) of a just and honest right of a king to do these things, for his right is quite otherwise described in that part of Moses's law which concerns the king's duty, but such a right as the kings of the nations had then acquired. *This shall be the manner of the king*, that is, “thus he must support his dignity at the expense of that which is dearest to you, and thus he will abuse his power, as those that have power are apt to do; and, having the militia in his hand, you will be under a necessity of submitting to him.”

1. If they will have such a king as the nations have, let them consider,

(1.) That king must have a great retinue, abundance of servants to wait on him, grooms to look after his chariots and horses, gentlemen to ride about with him, and footmen to run before his chariots. This is the chief grandeur of princes, and the imaginary glory of great men, to have a multitude of attendants. And whence must he have these? “Why, he will take your sons, who are free-born, have a liberal education, and whom you now have at your own disposal, and will *appoint them for himself*,” v. 11. They must wait upon him, and be at his beck; those that used to work for their parents and themselves must work for him, *ear his ground, and reap his harvest* (v. 12), and count it their preferment too, v. 16. This would be a great change.

(2.) He must keep a great table; he will not be content to dine with his neighbours upon a sacrifice, as Samuel used to do (~~1~~ 1 Samuel 9:13); but he must have a variety of dainty dishes, forced meats, and sweet-meats, and delicate sauces; and who must prepare him these? “Why, he will take your daughters, the most ingenious and handy of them, whom you hoped to prefer to houses and tables of their own; and, whether you be willing or no, they must be his confectioners, and cooks, and bakers, and the like.”

(3.) “He must needs have a standing army, for guards and garrisons; and your sons, instead of being elders of your cities, and living in quiet and honour at home, must be captains over thousands and captains over fifties, and must be disposed of at the pleasure of the sovereign.”



(4.) “You may expect that he will have great favourites, whom, having dignified and ennobled, he must enrich, and give them estates suitable to their honour; and which way can he do that, but out of your inheritances? v. 14. *He will take your fields and vineyards*, which descended to you from your ancestors, and which you hoped to leave to your posterity after you, *even the best of them*; and will not only take them to himself (you could bear that better), but he will *give them to his servants*, who will be your masters, and bear rule over that for which you have laboured, How will you like that?”

(5.) “He must have great revenues to maintain his grandeur and power with; and whence must he have them but from you? He will take the tenth of the fruits of your ground (v. 15), and your cattle, v. 17. You think the tenths, the double tenths, which the law of God has appointed for the support of the church, grievous enough, and grudge the payment of them; but, if you have a king, there must issue another tenth out of your estates, which will be levied with more rigour, for the support of the royal dignity. Consider the expense with the magnificence, and whether it will quit cost.”

2. These would be their grievances, and,

(1.) They would have none but God to complain to. Once they complained to the prince himself, and were answered, according to the manner of the king, *Your yoke is heavy, and I will add to it*, <sup><1121></sup>1 Kings 12:11.

(2.) When they complained to God he *would not hear them*, v. 18. Nor could they expect that he should, both because they had been deaf to his calls and admonitions, and this trouble, in particular, they had brought upon themselves by rejecting him, and would not believe when he told them what would come of it. Note, When we bring ourselves into distress by our own irregular desires and projects we justly forfeit the comfort of prayer and the benefit of divine aids, and, if God be not better to us than we deserve, must have our relief in our own hands, and then it is bad with us.

V. The people's obstinacy in their demand, v. 19, 20. One would think such a representation of the consequences as this was, coming from God himself, who can neither deceive by his word nor be deceived in his knowledge, should have prevailed with them to waive their request: but their hearts were upon it, right or wrong, good or evil: “*We will have a king over us*, whatever God or Samuel say to the contrary; we will have a

king, whatever it cost us, and whatever inconvenience we bring upon ourselves or our posterity by it." See their folly.

**1.** They were quite deaf to reason and blind to their own interest. They could not answer Samuel's arguments against it, nor deny the force of them, and yet they grow more violent in their request, and more insolent. Before it was, "Pray, *make us a king;*" now it is, "*Nay, but we will have a king;* yea, that we will, because we will; nor will we bear to have any thing said against it." See the absurdity of inordinate desires, and how they rob men of their reason.

**2.** They could not stay God's time. God had intimated to them in the law that, in due time, Israel should have a king (<sup>4574</sup>Deuteronomy 17:14, 15), and perhaps they had some intimation that the time was at hand; but they are all in haste: "We, in our day, will have this king over us." Could they but have waited ten or twelve years longer they would have had David, a king of God's giving in mercy, and all the calamities that attended the setting up of Saul would have been prevented. Sudden resolves and hasty desires make work for a long and leisurely repentance.

**3.** That which they aimed at in desiring a king was not only, as before, that they might be like the nations, and levelled with the one above whom God had so far advanced them, but that they might have one to judge them, and to go out before them when they took the field, and to fight their battles. Foolish people and unwise! Could they ever desire a battle better fought for them than the last was, by Samuel's prayer and God's thunder? <sup>4070</sup>1 Samuel 7:10. Was victory hereby too sure to them? And were they fond of trying the chance of war at the same uncertainty that others did? So sick, it seems, were they of their privileges: and what was the issue? Their first king was slain in a battle, which none of their judges ever were; so was Josiah, one of the last and best.

**VI.** The dismissing of them with an intimation that very shortly they should have what they asked.

**1.** *Samuel rehearsed all their words in the ears of the Lord*, v. 21. Not but that God perfectly knew it, without Samuel's report; but thus he dealt faithfully between God and Israel, as a prophet, returning the answer to him that sent him; and thus he waited on God for further direction. God is fully acquainted with the state of the case we are in care and doubt about, but he will know it from us. His rehearsing it *in the ears of the Lord*

intimates that it was done in private; for the people were not disposed to join with him in prayer to God for direction in this matter; also it bespeaks a holy familiarity, to which God graciously admits his people: they speak in the ears of the Lord, as one friend whispers with another; their communion with God is *meat they have to eat which the world knows not of*, ~~4:32~~ John 4:32.

**2.** God gave direction that they should have a king, since they were so inordinately set upon it (v. 22): “*Make them a king*, and let them make their best of him, and thank themselves if that very pomp and power which they are so eager to see their sovereign in be their plague and burden.” *So he gave them up to their own hearts' lusts*. Samuel told them this, but sent them home for the present, *every man to his city*; for the designation of the person must be left to God; they had now no more to do. When God saw fit to notify the choice to Samuel they should hear further from him; in the mean time let them keep the peace and expect the issue.