

“LIKE THE NATIONS”

I. Introduction

- A. This chapter marks an important turning point in Israel’s history.
1. Here we see the beginnings of the shift from the era of the judges to the era of the monarchy.
 2. From the time of the conquest of Canaan up to this point, Israel had existed as a loose tribal confederation.
 3. But when Samuel anoints a king over Israel, they will become a unified nation with a centralized government.
- B. As we consider this chapter tonight, we will note some of the ways in which it compares and contrasts with the previous chapters of 1 Samuel.
1. One thing that I want to point out as we begin is how the actions of God’s people here in chapter 8 stand in such sharp contrast to their actions in chapter 7.
 2. In chapter 7, they turned to the Lord for help when they faced a military threat at the hands of the Philistines, and the Lord delivered them.
 3. Here in chapter 8, as they anticipate future military conflicts, they demand that Samuel give them a king who will lead them into battle.
 4. In doing this, they showed that they had already forgotten about what happened in the previous chapter.
 5. Instead of remembering how the Lord had helped them in the past and trusting the Lord to help them on into the future, they came up with their own idea about where they would find help.

II. Rejecting God (1-9)

- A. The passage begins by telling us what happened when Samuel grew old.
 - 1. As he found it more and more difficult to fulfill his duties in his old age, Samuel decided to make his sons judges over Israel in order to assist him.
 - 2. While this might seem like a reasonable solution to a legitimate need, it ended up creating more problems because Samuel's sons were not godly men.
 - 3. They were corrupt.
 - 4. They took bribes and perverted justice.
 - 5. They were certainly not the kind of men you would want serving as judges.
- B. This brings to mind what happened earlier in 1 Samuel with Eli and his sons.
 - 1. Once again, the people of Israel are suffering under the leadership of men who are using their position only to serve their own interests.
 - 2. We should note that the text gives no indication that Samuel was responsible for his sons' wickedness.
 - 3. It is possible that Samuel was not even aware of his sons' wickedness, since Beersheba is in the southernmost portion of Israel, over 50 miles away from Samuel's home in Ramah.
 - 4. Where Samuel erred was in appointing his sons as judges after him.
 - 5. Unlike the office of priest in Israel, the office of judge was not hereditary.

6. This is made clear in Judges 8, where the people wanted to appoint Gideon and his offspring as hereditary rulers but Gideon responded by saying, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you." (Judges 8:23)
 7. In appointing his sons as judges, Samuel was trusting in his own wisdom instead of looking to the Lord and seeking his will in this situation.
- C. The behavior of Samuel's sons caused Israel's elders to go to Samuel and say, "appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations."
1. There was nothing wrong with the first part of their request, the request for a king.
 2. A number of Old Testament passages make it clear that God intended for his people to have a king.
 3. When Jacob blessed his sons at the end of Genesis, he said this of Judah: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." (Genesis 49:10)
 4. In Exodus 19, the Lord told his people "you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex. 19:6)
 5. Deuteronomy 17 contains instructions pertaining to the office king in Israel.
 6. And there is the repeated refrain in the book of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25)
 7. The problem with the elders' demand was not the fact that they wanted a king but their motive in asking for a king.
 8. They wanted a king because they wanted to be like the nations.

- D. It was God's will for his people to have a God-fearing king, but in asking for a king like the nations the people were rejecting God's rule as their true King.
1. They were putting their hope in a military leader.
 2. They wanted a king to lead them in their battles because they were unwilling to trust the Lord to continue to be their help, as he had been in chapter 7.
 3. In demanding a king like the nations, they were forgetting that God had called them to be a holy nation, a people who were set apart from the peoples of the world.
 4. This is something that we too are quick to forget.
 5. Keeping in step with the culture is a lot more attractive than standing out from the culture.
 6. We get tired of being different.
 7. We think about all of the benefits of fitting in
 8. We can even slip into the error of thinking that the church needs to be like the world if its ministry is going to be successful.
- E. Another way to look at what Israel was doing in making this demand of Samuel is to see it as an example of how we tend to set our wisdom above God's wisdom.
1. Instead of crying out to God for help as they faced this leadership crisis, Israel's elders told Samuel how to help them.
 2. When faced with difficult situations, it is easy for us to think that the answer is to come up with a technique that will help us solve our problems and accomplish our goals.
 3. As one commentator puts it, "We are not content with seeking a saving God but desire to direct how and when he will

save.” [Davis, 86]

III. Receiving a Warning (10-18)

- A. After hearing the elders’ demand for a king, Samuel turned the matter over to the Lord in prayer.
1. And God responded by explaining that the people were not rejecting Samuel’s ministry as judge but were rejecting the Lord as their king.
 2. Take note of how God’s words here highlight the grief that Israel had brought upon him ever since he brought them out of Egypt.
 3. God said, “According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you.”
 4. We need to remember that it grieves the Lord when we forsake him and look elsewhere for security and help.
- B. God told Samuel to obey the voice of the elders, but he also told Samuel to first warn them what it will be like to have a king “like the nations.”
1. As Samuel issues this warning, the phrase that he repeats again and again is “He will take.”
 2. This is what Israel can expect from the kind of king they are seeking.
 3. His reign will not be characterized by giving but by taking.
 4. He will take and take and take.
 5. Sadly, this is exactly what we see when we look at the history of the monarchy in Israel.

6. One incident that especially comes to mind is King Ahab's seizure of Naboth's vineyard, which is recorded in 1 Kings 21.
 7. We might also think of the response of Solomon's son Rehoboam when the people asked him to lighten the heavy yoke that his father had placed upon them.
 8. Instead of following the wise advice of his father's counselors to ease up on the people, Rehoboam took the advice of his own peers and told the people: "My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs. And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions." (1 Kgs. 12:10-11)
 9. Those fateful words resulted in the splintering of Israel into two separate kingdoms.
 10. Not even King David's reign was free from the taking that Samuel warned would characterize the monarchy.
 11. David took the wife of another man.
- C. As we think about Samuel's description of the kind of king that Israel was seeking, we should take note of how it stands in such contrast to the kingship of Jesus Christ.
1. Jesus is a real King over a real kingdom, but his kingdom is not of this world.
 2. Jesus did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
 3. Jesus' kingdom is not advanced through political influence or warfare or the things that are impressive and powerful in the eyes of the world.
 4. Instead, when Pilate asked Jesus, "'So you are a king?', Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world — to bear witness

to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.'" (Jn. 18:37)

5. Jesus' kingdom is advanced through the proclamation of his Word of truth.
6. He subdues his people to his dominion by giving us ears to hear his voice as he speaks the words of eternal life.

IV. Receiving What They Want (19-22)

- A. Our passage ends by telling us that after the people heard Samuel's warning about what to expect from a king like the nations, they persisted in their demand for such a king.
 1. They knew what they wanted.
 2. There was no changing their minds.
 3. As they assessed their situation, they were convinced that their solution was the only one that would work.
 4. They would not listen to Samuel's words of warning.
 5. When we are bent on getting what we want, we will not listen to anything that goes against our desires.
 6. As the Proverb says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." (Prov. 12:15)
- B. Israel's motive in seeking a king like the nations was wrong, but God gave them what they wanted anyway.
 1. This shows us that it is not always good for us to get what we ask of God.
 2. As you look back on your life, it is not hard to think of instances when it would not have been in your best interests for God to give

you what you wanted at the time.

3. This should help us keep things in perspective when we wonder why God isn't granting what we ask of him.
- C. God gave Israel the king that they wanted in order to teach them a lesson.
1. Israel's kings brought a great deal of misery upon the covenant people.
 2. The kings' unfaithfulness resulted not only in the division of the kingdom but also in the eventual fall of both the northern and the southern kingdoms.
 3. Nevertheless, God worked through all of this in order to accomplish his purposes.
 4. Even though having a king like the nations proved to be a disaster for Israel, the Lord used this to prepare the way for the coming of a better King.
 5. The prophet Zechariah foretold the coming of that King when he wrote these words: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth." (Zech. 9:9-10)
 6. That is a description of your King, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 7. You too should rejoice greatly.
 8. For this King has graciously brought you under his kindly rule by giving you ears to listen to his voice.