THE DEMAND OF ISRAEL FOR A KING: CHOOSING THE WAYS OF THE WORLD AND REJECTING GOD
1 Samuel 08:01–09

Introduction

The world has much to offer any person who diligently pursues and seeks after the things of the world. The world can offer possessions, riches, recognition, honour, position, authority, power, pleasure, recreation and a host of other benefits and enjoyments. There is nothing wrong with what the world offers unless the things of the world become the focus of our lives. Or unless we twist the benefits of this world and make them evil. However, our primary focus — our motivating drive in life — must be God, to know Him and to fellowship with Him.

Focusing upon the ways of this world was the tragic mistake of the Israelites. The driving motivation of their hearts became the ways of the world, not God and His righteousness. For thirty-plus years, the Israelites had followed the leadership of Samuel. But now Samuel had aged and would soon be passing from this world. As a result, the Israelites craved to establish a monarchy, the rule of a king just "like all the nations." Ever since the days of Moses, they had lived under a theocracy, the rule and reign of God Himself. In fact, under Moses' leadership, the Israelites had made a covenant, an agreement with the Lord. The terms of the agreement stipulated that the Lord was to be the Saviour and Deliverer, the Protector and Provider of Israel. And all the Israelites had to do was obey the Lord, keep His commandments. Ever since the days of Moses, this covenant had been agreed upon by both the Lord and the Israelites. But now, after centuries of looking around at other nations and observing them, the Israelites began to covet the form of government adopted by them. They desired a king just "like all the nations." They wanted to break their covenant with the Lord and make an agreement with some charismatic man. They wanted this man to be just like the kings of most other nations: an attractive man, a charismatic leader, a man who would agree to rule over them and become their saviour and deliverer, protector and provider.

The people's desire for a king became a craving lust, a lust that made them stubborn, stiff-necked and hard-hearted. They insisted upon, even demanded, a king just "like all the nations." This is the subject of this pivotal Scripture: *The Demand of Israel for a King: Choosing the Ways of the World and Rejecting God*, 1 Samuel 8:1-22.

I. The reasons for demanding a king: corruption and worldliness (vv. 1-5).

II. The tragedy of demanding a king: a picture of forsaking God (vv. 6-9).

III. The warning — the consequences of being ruled by a king (a monarchy): a picture of reaping what one sows (vv. 10-18).

IV. The insistent demands for a king: a picture of being stubborn, hard-hearted (vv. 19-22).

I. *1 Samuel 08:01–05 The Reasons for Demanding a King: Corruption and Worldliness*

The reasons for Israel's demanding a king were threefold. The three reasons are clearly stated in the Scripture and outline:

1. An aged leader was clearly a reason for demanding new leadership (v. 1). Samuel had grown old, and apparently his age was beginning to affect his ability to lead the nation. It appeared he would not live much longer and the people feared that the nation might slip back into the lawless days of the judges. To prevent this from happening, new leadership was demanded.

2. A corrupt leadership and judicial system was a reason for demanding a new system of government (vv. 2-3). Because of his age, Samuel had appointed his two sons to succeed him: Joel, which means "the LORD is God," and Abijah, which means "my father is the LORD." With Samuel as their father, they had received a godly upbringing. But they lived hypocritical lives: they did not follow in the steps of their father. They turned away from God and became greedy for money. They accepted bribes and perverted justice. In determining controversial cases, they accepted bribes and ruled in favour of the oppressor or guilty party. This wickedness reminded the people of Eli's two sons, and they feared returning to the lawless, corrupt days of the judges (see notes, 1 Sam 2:12-36). Thus, a desire arose within the people for new leadership, the leadership of a king.

3. A desire to be like the surrounding nations was a reason the Israelites requested a king (vv. 4-5). Note that the tribal leaders of Israel gathered together and travelled to Ramah. In conference with Samuel, they laid out their three reasons for desiring a king: Samuel was old, and his sons did not walk in his godly ways; therefore, they desired to have a king just "like all the nations." Note what they emphasized and what they did not emphasize:

=> they demanded a king just "like all the nations."

=> they did not demand a king "after God's own heart."

The people should have desired a king who had the *heart of God*, a man who was totally, wholeheartedly committed to God. This should have been their emphasis, their focus; but instead, they emphasized a king just "like all the nations." Their eyes and hearts were set upon the world and its ways instead of upon God and His way of righteousness. They were interested in the world's way of securing peace, security, prosperity, position, authority, power, honour, ceremony and pleasure. They would never deny that they had an interest in the man's being a godly ruler, but their emphasis was not upon the spiritual or righteous commitment of the man. Having a king with a heart "just like God's" was not their focus. They wanted a king just "like all the nations."

Thought 1. There are two strong lessons for us in this point:

(1) We must not be controlled by greed: coveting money, position, fame or power. And we must not pervert justice: accepting bribes, kickbacks or payoffs, a practice common in politics, construction projects, and far too often in legal cases. God forbids these sins time and again:

Mark 14:11 *They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.*

Acts 8:18 *When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money.*

1 Tim 6:10 *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

Exo 23:6, 8 *Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent."*

Deut l6:18-19 *Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly. Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the innocent.*

Deut 24:17 *"Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge."*

Deut 27:19 *"Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"*

1 Sam 8:3 *But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.*

1 Kng 15:19 *"Let there be a treaty between me and you," he said, "as there was between my father and your father. See, I am sending you a gift of silver and gold. Now break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will withdraw from me."*

Psa 15:5 *Who lends money to the poor without interest; who does not accept a bribe against the innocent. Whoever does these things will never be shaken.*

Prov 15:27 *A greedy man brings trouble to his family, but he who hates bribes will live.*

Prov 21:26 *All day long he craves for more, but the righteous give without sparing.*

Micah 3:11 *Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us."*

(2) We must not focus upon this world, seeking after the ways of this world. We must not develop carnal, fleshly minds, desiring the things of this world more than we

desire the things of God. The Christian believer lives in this world, but he must not become a part of this world. This is the strong declaration of Scripture.

Luke 21:34 *"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap."*

Rom 12:2 *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

1 Cor 7:31 *Those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.*

Eph 4:17 *So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.*

Col 3:12 *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

2 Tim 2:4 *No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer.*

Titus 2:12-13 *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

Heb 11:24-25 *By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.*

1 John 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

Psa 94:11 *The LORD knows the thoughts of man; he knows that they are futile.*

II. *1 Samuel 08:06–09 The Tragedy of Demanding a King: A Picture of Forsaking God*

The demand of Israel for a king was most tragic. By demanding a king they were forsaking God and rejecting His kingship, His authority and rule over their lives. Note that this is exactly what Scripture says:

1. The request of the elders for a king displeased Samuel and clearly caught him off guard — a complete surprise (v. 8). Apparently, he had had no idea what the elders were going to be requesting. Requesting a king meant that there were grumblings against his leadership among the citizens of the nation and that some had already rejected his leadership. The elders would never have come on their own unless there

were serious grumblings and complaints from the people. Utterly shocked, Samuel requested time to seek the LORD in prayer. But the shocking request of the elders was not to be the only surprise Samuel received. God's response also amazed him.

2. God instructed Samuel to grant the elders' request for a king (vv. 7-9). To relieve Samuel's uneasiness, God assured him that the people were not rejecting Samuel, but God Himself. Just as the Israelites had done since their deliverance from Egypt, so they were now doing once again: they were rejecting their Saviour and Deliverer, their Protector and Provider. Remember, the Israelites had a covenant relationship with the LORD, an agreement that the LORD would be their Saviour, their Provider and Protector — if they would just obey Him, accepting His rule of righteousness. But here they were, ready to break their covenant with the LORD in order to make an agreement with a king just "like all the nations." Forgetting how often the LORD had saved and delivered them in the past and forgetting how He had constantly provided for them throughout their lives, the Israelites requested the right to establish a monarchy, to live under the authority of a king.

   Note this fact: their desire for a king was not wrong, not in and of itself. God Himself had even made provisions in His law for the appointment and rule of a king over His people (Deut 17:14-20; see also Gen 49:10; Num 24:7, 17). What, therefore, was wrong with Israel's request for a king? It was their motive, their purpose. They wanted a king just "like all the nations," not a king "after God's own heart" (13:14). Consequently, in requesting a king just "like all the nations," they were rejecting God. They were breaking their covenant, their agreement with Him.

   Thought 1. There is a strong lesson for us in this point: we must never forsake God, rejecting and turning away from Him. Our desires may not be the desire expressed by Israel, the craving for a king to rule over us, a king just "like all the nations." But if we have other desires that focus upon the worldly or carnal ways of this earth, then we too reject God. If we turn to any sinful or wicked way of this world, we reject God. For God cannot look upon evil. God will have nothing to do with the sinful, wicked ways of this world. Scripture warns us against rejecting the LORD.

   1Th 4:7-8 *For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.*

   2 Pet 2:14-17 *With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed — an accursed brood! They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey — an animal without speech — who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them.*

Deut 28:20 *The Lord will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him.*

Jud 10:13 *But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you.*

Psa 81:11-12 *"But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices. "If my people would only listen to me, if Israel would only follow my ways."*

Prov 1:24-31 *But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand. Since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke. I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you. When calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord. Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways, and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.*

Jer 1:16 *I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshipping what their hands have made.*

Jer 2:13 *"My People have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."*

Jer. 17:13 *Lord, you are the hope of Israel; all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water.* ■