

Be Careful What You Ask For (1 Samuel 8:1-9)

1. Perplexing and Prolonging Problems

- Samuel was a prophet and judged Israel all the days of his life (2:26; 3:19-22; 7:15). Samuel is old (v.1) and has appointed his sons as judges over Israel. His two sons, Joel (The LORD is God) and Abijah (The LORD is my Divine Father), were placed in Beersheba (southernmost point in the nation of Israel).
- They were wicked men: They took bribes (Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:19), perverted justice (Ex. 23:2), and did not walk in the ways of Samuel. Judges are to hate dishonest gain (Ex. 18:21).

Perplexing Question:

- Why did Samuel appoint his sons? He was old, which either indicates that he needed help in judging parts of the kingdom, and unknowingly discovered that his sons were wicked, or he was senile in his old age, and did not have the mental faculties to perceive their wickedness (Beersheba was 50 miles away).

Prolonging Problems:

- While priestly roles were hereditary and dependent upon being a member from the tribe of Levi, the roles of judges and prophets were not (Deut. 18:1-8; 1 Sam.2:30). Eli, as the High Priest was wicked, and so were his sons. God appointed judges in times of need (Judg. 2:16) and prophets were called by God directly (Ex. 3:1-22). Here, we have judges functioning as though it was hereditary. Samuel's actions are actually closer to that of a king.

Similarities between Eli's Dynasty and Samuel's:

- Both sons act opposite of what is expected of the leaders of Israel.
- The ways of the sons are not the ways of the father (motif in 1 Samuel).
- Both sons perverted justice (2:23; 8:3).
- The evils of the sons were brought to light in their fathers' old age (2:22; 8:1-3)

Differences between Eli's Dynasty and Samuel's:

- Eli's sons were under his direct supervision; Samuel's were 50 miles away.
- Samuel may not have been aware of his sons' conduct; Eli was (2:22,29).
- Samuel was far away from his sons, which is literal and symbolic of the guilt of his sons compared with his own lifestyle (v.3).
- Priesthood was hereditary (Deut. 18:1-8; 1 Sam.2:30); judgeship was not.

The failures and history of the priests and judges over Israel was the perfect catalyst to the request for a king. The corruption of the sons of Eli merited prophetic indictments and resulted in the permanent loss of the ark. In the same way, the wickedness of Samuel's sons will be a catalyst to the elders requesting a king.

2. Petition and Proposition (v.4-6)

Petition: in the eyes of the elders (representatives of Israel), the nation is in trouble; Samuel is old, and his children are wicked. Instead of asking Samuel to appoint new judges, they request a king.

Proposition: "give us a king so we can be like the other nations." Kingship is the rule of one man over a large group where his authority derives simply because of his position rather than another source. In this hereditary system, power is transmitted from the father to the son. A king offers a strong, stable, and predictable center of political authority that is measurable and foreseeable. Their history has been "ups and downs" and they think they can achieve stability if they have the same governmental system and representation as other nations do.

3. Providence and Permission (v.7-9)

- The nation wants kingship, which is hereditary; control and authority is passed from the father to the son. This is a similar system that they have experienced under Eli and Samuel's dynasties.
- They do not want the LORD as their king. They are currently a theocracy and want to move towards a monarchy; they want another man representing them in addition to the prophets and priests.
- This request is not unexpected or fortuitous; prior to this, only God had been called "king" (Ex. 15:18; Numb. 23:21; Deut. 33:5). Since the days of Moses, being like other nations has been a repeated theme (Ex. 32; Numb. 24; 25; Judg. 2:11-12). They have already asked for a king with Gideon and his sons (Judg. 8:23). Hannah has already prophesied future kingship (1 Sam. 2:10).
- The request for a king, in itself, was not sinful; their motives behind the request was. God has been moving His people slowly and progressively towards kingship. God had already decreed that there would be a king (Deut. 17:14-20). Israel is going to "want to be like the nations" yet God is going to bring about His own king.
- The nation is idolatrous again, yet, in God's redemptive story, He permits their request, even though their motives are wrong. Their request will bring about future chastening, yet God will use this to accomplish His own ends.
- They no longer want to be separate, as God's treasured possession (Ex. 19:5). Samuel grants their request, which will serve as a powerful witness against them.
- Their failure was that they depreciated the surpassing blessings of being God's covenantal people and exaggerated the value of the gifts that were withheld (centralized kingship and all the apparent "benefits" that would follow).
- The LORD has three responses to Samuel, who is upset at their request (v.7-8)
 - He assures Samuel that they have not rejected him but the LORD
 - The LORD agrees to their request
 - In mercy, the LORD, through Samuel, will give future details regarding kingship that will prove to be burdensome (v.10-22)