

# “MAKE US A KING”

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In 1 Samuel 8:4-5, all the elders of Israel came to the prophet Samuel in Ramah and said, “Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” Some 400 years before Israel made this demand, God said, “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” (Deut 17:14-15). God knew this was coming. He said *when*, not *if*, and even foretold their desire to be like the nations around them. Much can be learned from studying Israel’s demand for a king.

## Rejection of God

“But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Harken 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. 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” (1 Sam 8:6-8). Samuel was now getting a small taste of what God had endured from the Israelites for close to 400 years. But Israel was not actually rejecting Samuel. When Israel demanded to have a king instead of judges, they were rejecting God’s reign over them. For one thing, throughout those nearly 400 years up to that time, God had delivered Israel from the hand of all their enemies (1 Sam 12:7-11). But, fearing the Ammonites under Nahash, Israel had no faith in God whatsoever and wanted a king to lead them, trusting in man instead of God (1 Sam 12:12). They also wanted to be *like the nations*. How many times as a child did we not beg to be allowed to do something because “everybody else” was doing it? That was usually followed by words from our parents along the lines of, “If everybody starts jumping off a cliff. . .” It remains a strong temptation for individual Christians to be conformed to this world, and even for entire congregations to be like the *denominations* instead of being the true church of the New Testament. God teaches us to be different from this world, and to be holy to Him (Rom 12:1-2; 2 Cor 6:14-18; 1 Pet 1:13-16; 2:9-12).

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(continued)

## God’s way is always best

God had chosen the ideal system of government for the nation of Israel and that was the judges. Through the judges, God reigned over Israel. It is true that God rules in the kingdoms of men regardless of their system of government (2 Chr 20:6; Dan 4; Rom 13:1-8). God also chose Israel’s kings (1 Sam 9:15-17; 1 Sam 16:1-14; 1 Kgs 1:11-40). Nevertheless, a monarchy is an entirely different system of government than the judges. For one thing, kings rule very differently than judges. God warned Israel about the absolute and arbitrary manner in which kings rule their subjects (1 Sam 8:9-18). The judges did not rule in this way. It was a blessing to the people of Israel to be under the rule of judges rather than kings. Further, the nature of a monarchy is that the kingdom is inherited by a descendant when the king dies (see Judg 8:22-23; Dan 2:44). Such was not the case with the judges. With the judges, God chose from among the entire nation of Israel the very best and most righteous and capable leader for His people, from Moses to Samuel. *None* of the judges are described as being wicked, although they had to overcome their mistakes as all men do. Many of them are included in Hebrews chapter 11 as part of our “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1). They were righteous men of faith whom God selected from among all the people to deliver and judge them. Therefore, with God’s system, Israel was guaranteed to always have righteous leaders. But that would not be the case with kings. Kings and their descendants were not always righteous. In fact, of 3 kings of united Israel, 19 kings of divided Israel, and 19 kings of Judah, only 9 of 41 led their kingdom in righteousness (David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Amaziah, Azariah, Jotham, Hezekiah and Josiah). That was the result of rejecting God’s system to follow the world’s system. Saul’s reign began a 464-year downward spiral that resulted in the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria in 722 B.C. and the Southern Kingdom by Babylon in 586 B.C. It would have been a blessing if there had been others in Samuel’s time like faithful Gideon of old when the people of Israel tried to make him a king. They said, “Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian” (Judg 8:22), Gideon replied, “I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: *the Lord shall rule over you*” (Judg 8:23).