

ISRAEL DEMANDS A KING (PART 1)

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In 1 Samuel chapter 8, the children of Israel demanded to have a king. Verses 1-5 say, “And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beersheba. And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment. Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” This demand was a rejection of God and led to a spiritual decline in Israel that lasted for almost 500 years.

Israel’s rejection of God

How did Israel’s last judge feel about the people demanding to have a king instead of another judge? “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, Hearken 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).

Kings versus Judges: The manner of rule

God had chosen the system of government for the nation of Israel from its beginning 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 (Josh 3:13; 2 Chr 20:6; Ezra 5:11; Psa 2:6-12; 22:28; 47; 83:18; 103:19; 110:1-7; Dan 4:17,25-26,32,35; Matt 28:18; Acts 10:36; Rom 13:1-8; Rev 2:26-27; 12:5; 19:15). And, consequently, God is the one who chose Saul (1 Sam 9:15-17), David (1 Sam 13:13-14; 16:1-14), Solomon (2 Sam 7:12-16; 1 Kgs 1:11-40; 1 Chr 22:5-10; 29:1), and the other kings of Israel and Judah (see 1 Kgs 11:11-13,26-38; 12:15-25; 14:5-16; 15:25-30; 2 Kgs 9:1-10:11; 10:30; 15:8-12; Jer 22:10-30). But a monarchy is an entirely

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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.

Kings versus Judges: How rulers were chosen

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. First, God chose Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt and lead them to the promised land of Canaan (Exod 3; Num 12:1-9; 16:1-35,41-50; Acts 7:20-36). In Moses, God chose a man who was “very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Num 12:3). Next, God chose Joshua as the successor to Moses, to lead the Israelite conquest of Canaan (Num 27:15-23; Deut 34:7-9). Joshua (along with Caleb) “wholly followed the Lord” unlike any other of his generation (Num 32:11-12). This was the pattern that God followed throughout the time of the judges. Whenever Israel departed from God and suffered punishment from Him for their sins, “*the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them*” (Judg 2:16). God raised up righteous men as judges and these judges taught Israel to follow God’s commandments (Judg 2:17). “*And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge*” (Judg 2:18). After Joshua, the Lord raised up Othniel, the nephew and son-in-law of Caleb (Judg 3:9). God also raised up Ehud (Judg 3:15) and the other judges of Israel. God chose Gideon (Judg 6:14), Samson (Judg 13:5), and Samuel (1 Sam 1-3). *None* of the judges are described as being wicked. Many of them (including Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, Samson and Samuel, Heb 11:23-34) 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. That is why we see judges selected by God from so many different tribes: Moses of Levi (Num 26:59; 1 Chr 23:14), Joshua of Ephraim (Num 13:8), Othniel of Judah (Num 13:6 + Judg 3:9), Ehud of Benjamin (Judg 3:15), Gideon of Manasseh (Judg 6:15), Jephthah of Gilead (i.e. Manasseh, Num 26:29; 32:39-42; Judg 11:1-11), Samson of Dan (Judg 13:2-5,24-25), and Samuel of Levi (1 Sam 1:1; 1 Chr 6:16-27). Therefore, with God’s system, Israel was guaranteed to always have righteous leaders. But that would not be the case with kings.