

ISRAEL DEMANDS A KING (PART 2)

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God made a covenant with the nation of Israel, and he knew His people well. As He said in Hosea 5:3, *“Israel is not hid from me.”* Thus, over 400 years beforehand, the Lord foresaw that Israel would one day demand to have a king to be like all their neighbors: *“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”* (Deut 17:14). And so it came to pass that when Samuel the prophet and Judge of Israel became old, the people of Israel demanded, *“Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations”* (1 Sam 8:5). God also understood exactly what the consequences would be for Israel to follow the ways of the world instead of His ways, and we have the opportunity to learn much from this sad example.

The consequence of rejecting God’s rule

When God foretold Israel’s rejection of His rule over them, He also instructed those kings-to-be to follow Him. *“And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel”* (Deut 17:18-20). God never had to command one of the Judges of Israel to have a copy of His law before him to read all the days of his life, and to learn to fear the Lord, and keep all his commandments. The Judges were already doing that, which is why God chose them in the first place! But kings and their descendants were not guaranteed to be righteous. In fact, of 3 kings of united Israel, 19 kings of divided Israel, and 19 kings of Judah, only 6 of these 41 men led their kingdom in righteousness to the end of their reign (David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah). That is the result of rejecting God’s system to follow the world’s system. Faithful Gideon refused to go this evil way. After *“the men of Israel said unto Gideon, 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). When Israel rejected God’s rule over them in the days of Samuel, they embarked upon 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. Thus ended God’s toleration of this spiritually destructive system of government for the nation of Israel.

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The lesson for us

This entire slippery slope was predicted by God. In Deuteronomy 31:16-18, the Lord told Moses, “Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? *And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought*, in that they are turned unto other gods.” God knew Israel would forsake Him (led in large part by their kings), and when it came time for them to reap what they had sown, He would not listen to them. He repeated that promise when they first demanded their king: “And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; *and the Lord will not hear you in that day*” (1 Sam 8:18). He would then bring this tragic chapter in Israel’s history to a permanent conclusion. Summarizing Israel’s spiritual decline under the kings, and foretelling the end of this period through Isaiah the prophet (about 150 years before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), God said, “How is the faithful city become a harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loves gifts, and follows after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come unto them. Therefore saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies” (Isa 1:21-24). God then promised to restore the system of righteous leadership that Israel had under the judges: “*And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city*” (Isa 1:25-26). God fulfilled this when Israel returned from captivity. God then chose righteous leaders like Zerubbabel and Nehemiah to rule the people, much like in the days of the judges. This serves as a lesson of what happens when men forsake God’s way to follow some other way. Today, we must follow remember to God’s plan for the home (Eph 5:22-6:4; Col 3:18-21), for the church (1 Tim 2:11-3:15; Titus 1:5-9, etc.), and for everything else (Col 3:17). Proverbs 3:5-6 reminds us, “*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*”