

# The Wrong Road

## 1 Samuel 8:1-22

It was not as if the boys did not know better. From the cradle, Samuel raised his two sons to honor and obey God. Their names tell us that.

Now the name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba. Verse 2

Old Eli gave his sons Egyptian names. But not Samuel. Joel means, Jehovah is king. And Abijah means, God is my father.

Samuel taught them the Scriptures. And when they were still skinny little boys, he took them along as he traveled from town to town. They stood back in the shadows and watched as their father sat as Israel's judge, sentencing criminals and settling disputes.

But by the time the two boys were grown, Samuel was getting old. He was tired. And his knees ached from long hikes up hilly lanes to far flung farm villages. So the old man enlisted his sons as helpers.

And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. Verse 1

Samuel started the two boys out in Israel's southernmost province. With a fierce and unforgiving sun, Beersheba sat on the edge of the Sinai desert. The sky was like burnished brass. And the heat was stifling.

It was the bottom rung for a judge. But for the boys it was an open door. Their father had no estate. He lived on a family legacy and whatever people chose to offer him.

Money was so tight at home, the boys grew up dreaming of being rich. The dream did not die when they grew up, either. More than anything, they wanted to money. And they did not care how they got it. ...his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice. Verse 3 (ESV)

Sure, the boys knew it was wrong. But there was money to be made. Big money! People were willing to drop gold coins in the boys' hands to make sure disputes were settled to their advantage.

Samuel's sons understood it was a sin. But who would know? It was a private matter, they thought. But they were wrong. No sin is purely personal; the one who sins is never the only one who suffers.

The greed that goaded these two good boys gone bad was the seed for a string of sins. When it was all over, their whole nation would suffer. People would be reduced to slavery. And swarms of black flies would buzz about bodies, rotting on battlefields.

## Rebellion

When the elders saw Samuel's sons strutting down the streets of Beersheba, they shook their heads. The old prophet's sons wore glittering gold rings, purchased with bribe money. Nothing seemed to change. First, it was Eli's sons. Now Samuel's.

The old men resented two crooked judges. But on the inside, they smiled. It was the very excuse the elders were waiting for.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to

him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations." Verses 4-5

The old prophet was ambushed by the elders' request. His sons had carefully hidden their graft from their father.

Of course, Samuel knew the Law said the day would come when God's people would demand to be ruled by a king. But He never imagined that day would come in his lifetime.

When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, "I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me," Deuteronomy 17:14

Moses' words were a prediction, not permission to appoint a king. The greed and graft Samuel's sons dabbled in at Beersheba was not really the reason Israel demanded a king. All that was merely a mask.

The real reason was rebellion. It had nothing to do with what the elders wanted, but what they did not want.

Since their forefathers left their slave shacks behind in Egypt, Jacob's descendants had but one King. God Himself ruled over His people. And that, God insisted, was what they rejected.

...they have rejected Me from being king over them. Verse 7

The elders were specific in their request. They wanted a king just like all the pagan nations around them.

...there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." Verses 19-20

It was not as if Israel's eternal King did not fight for them. At Mizpah, His voice thundered from the heavens. And the Philistines ran away with terror in their eyes.

But God refused to wage war for His people when they had sin in their hearts. And the elders wanted someone who would.

The old men tried to make their request sound reasonable. But it was not. It was sin, plain and simple. Later, Samuel made that clear.

...your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the Lord by asking for yourselves a king. 1 Samuel 12:17

Wanting a king was wicked because it was borne of rebellion. But that is not the only reason why it was a sin.

Israel made the decision without seeking or even wanting God's will. It was not based upon faith in the Lord who loved them at all.

If the elders had trusted God and waited for His perfect will, they would have gotten the king they wanted. They were wrong about Samuel's sons. They would not rule as judges when the old judge died.

At Bethlehem, a little shepherd boy was growing up to be a man after God's own heart. And the Lord already planned to raise David to the throne of Israel.

But the elders were not willing to wait. They wanted a king. And they wanted him right now.

It is always a mistake to make demands of God. It is dangerous, too. Our Lord always does what is best for His people. However, if we demand hurtful things, God just might give us what we want. But it will not be a blessing; it will be a curse. That was what happened

with Israel.

I gave you a king in My anger... Hosea 13:11

God commanded Samuel to do as the elders asked. And the elders went home with smiles on their faces. But the smiles soon turned to tears.

Mark it down. If we insist on our own will and our own way, our joy will also become despair. And we will finally know the truth.

God's will is always best for His people.

## Reproach

The elders' demand for a king not only stunned Samuel. It also stabbed an icicle of sorrow into his heart.

...the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." Verse 6

The old judge took it personally. And it is hard to see why he would not. After all, his sons' graft was isolated and incidental. He himself had judged Israel selflessly and righteously. And all Israel knew it.

Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? 1 Samuel 12:3

Samuel knew but one way to deal with the disappointment and despair in his heart. He dealt with sorrow as we should. He took the matter to God.

Samuel prayed to the Lord. The Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day—in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also. Verse 6-8

It always matters to God when His people struggle with sorrow, disappointment and discouragement. But it especially touches His heart when His faithful servants suffer rejection simply because of their service for Him.

So the loving Lord who called Samuel to a life of service, counseled His prophet. The old judge must not take it personally, God said. The people were not really rejecting him; they were rejecting the Lord Himself.

But that should not surprise Samuel, the Lord continued. After all, since He freed them from the slime pits of Egypt, the people of Israel have done little else.

In the desert, He gave them perfect food to eat. Yet they hated it and hated Him for giving it to them. And when they were thirsty, they threatened to murder Moses.

It was no different in Canaan. After Joshua died, the people abandoned their God and worshiped hideous pagan idols.

Samuel knew that much. What he had not expected was that the people would treat him in the very same way they treated their God.

But we who serve Christ should never be ambushed when we are treated shabbily by people who are claim to know the Lord we love. Jesus warned us that people will treat us just as they treated Him.

Remember the word that I said to you, “A slave is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. John 15:20\_21

It is hard and humbling to read the gospel accounts of our Lord’s life. At every turn, people who claimed to know and love God opposed Him. They spread lies about Him. They even cast ugly aspersions on His mother, suggesting He was conceived out of adultery or fornication.

In the end, proud and pious men who spent their lives worshiping God and reading the Scriptures stooped to bribery and outright lies. They not only opposed God’s Son. They hated Him so much, they maneuvered and manipulated to have Him murdered.

And Christ commanded those who love Him to remember that people will treat us just as they treated Him. Yes, if we come to Jesus and trust Him with all our hearts, we will share in His grace and glory. But that is not all we will share.

We will also share in His reproach. But that is not a penalty; it is both a privilege and an honor. So we must never despair when people treat us badly. We must remember Jesus and fasten our eyes upon Him.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:2\_3 (NIV)

God did not want Samuel to be so overcome by rejection and reproach that he became discouraged and gave up. And when we suffer because we belong to His Son, He does not want us to lose heart, either.

## Results

God was definite. He vehemently disagreed with the elders’ demand for a king who was just like all the pagan rulers. It enraged Him. And out of that wrath, He commanded His prophet to give the old men precisely what they asked for.

Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them.” Verse 9

Yes, if we are so selfish and sinful that we demand to have our own way, God will give it to us. But He will not blind side us.

Choosing to go our own way instead of God’s way always leads to suffering. And our Lord wants us to know it.

So He gave Samuel a detailed description of what the king the elders craved would do. Then He commanded the old judge to relay His words to the elders.

It is a stunning, startling list. There is not a single word about what the king the elders asked for would do for them. All he would do is use and misuse them.

Their sons and daughters would not be able to work on their father’s farm or in the family business. The king would carry the best and brightest of them away to serve in his royal court.

Sons would be runners before the royal chariot, heralding the coming of the king. And

daughters would sweat their lives away in the king's kitchen.

The elders wanted a king to fight their battles. But their own sons would really do all the fighting and all the dying.

And if that was not enough, the king would also take their fields and farms to give to his princes, his cronies, and his lackeys. He would tax their crops and confiscate their best fields, groves and vineyards. And their farmhands and draft animals would plow the king's crops.

There is an important lesson in the Lord's list of demands a king would make upon the people. After all, everyone is the servant of someone. We willingly and lovingly serve the great God of Heaven. Or we serve the dark prince of this world.

God is the greatest of all masters. He always gives; He never takes. Yes, He does allow people to serve Him, but only as free and eager volunteers. He allows us to give our time, our talents and our treasures to Him, too. But only if we give them freely, willingly and joyfully.

If we refuse to serve the Savior who died for us, we have no choice. Even if we vehemently deny it and scorn the very idea, we are slaves to the devil, just as the elders of Israel would one day become slaves of the king they craved.

...you yourselves will become his servants. Verse 17

And Satan makes every pagan king look like a philanthropist. He never gives; he only takes. He destroys the life of everyone who serves him. And he doesn't stop there. He also ruins the lives of their children.

He takes what we treasure. And he drains the joy out of life. He offers sensation but not a moment of satisfaction.

But if we will not have God rule over us. We have no other option. We cannot avoid being ruled by Satan.

There was a further penalty in God's stern warning to the elders. One day they would bitterly regret their decision to serve a self-serving king.

Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day. Verse 18

It was not long before the Lord's words were fulfilled. And the people wept because of the king they had demanded. So in their anguish and agony, they cried out to God. But He was silent and stony in Heaven.

The people of Israel had made their choice. Now they had to live with the results. They had chosen the world. And they could not walk their own way, yet still bask in the blessings of their God.

It is surprising, but the elders brushed aside all of the warnings Samuel offered them.

Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but there shall be a king over us," Verse 19

In the end, God gave His people precisely what they wanted. Then and now, our Lord refuses to stand in the way of His people's right to choose. And that is an ominous truth.

Like the people of Israel, we can decide to walk away from God's loving lordship over our lives. But if we do, we must also forfeit all of His blessings.

However, there is one wonderful difference between ancient Israel and the gospel God's Son purchased for us with His blood. For the Israelites, there was no road back.

They demanded a king. So God gave them what they wanted. But when they tired of him, they could not come back to the kind and compassionate rule of God as their only

King.

But because Jesus lived a perfect life, died for our sins, and rose victorious over death, we can. Even when we have foolishly chosen to reject Christ as our Captain and King, we are not locked into serving the dark and deadly prince of this world.

Our Savior has shattered every chain and opened every lock. His blood is not only able to free Satan's slaves. Christ can also restore us when we wander away after self and sin.

The elders of Israel made a terrible decision. They chose the wrong master. Now they had to live with him and all his demands.

But we do not. We can come to Christ and be cleansed all over again. We can claim Jesus Christ as our Captain and King once again.

We can be free and happy. All we have to do is choose Jesus.