

1st Samuel 8:19-22

19 But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, "No! but we are determined to have a king over us, 20 so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles." 21 When Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. 22 The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice and set a king over them." Samuel then said to the people of Israel, "Each of you return home."

In ancient times there were many nations, cultures, and civilizations that would make their king out to be some form of a divine being. They would worship their king much in the same way as North Korea does today. However, during antiquity Israel was unique from all of the other nations in regards to both its governing ideology and its religion. They lived by the covenant model. They were ruled by their covenant relationship with God and recognized God's sovereignty. Instead of trying to make their king into some form of god, the one true God was their king. Verification that their God is the one true God is proven by providence. God sustains them and guides them throughout their history. They have a long history of victories; Moses vs. Pharaoh, Elijah vs. Baal, the conquest of the Promised Land, the numerous victories of the various judges. The providence of God is seen in each period of history; during their slavery in Egypt when God frees them, the 40 years in the wilderness when God sustains them, the conquest of the Promised Land whereupon God is always victorious – the 24 kings that were conquered by Joshua (Joshua 12). The God of Israel always wins. Our God is the creator of the heavens and the earth, and rules supreme. Shortly after they settled in the Promised Land, God ruled them through prophets and judges. Samuel was a prophet and a judge, when he was elderly he made his sons judges over Israel. However, they were bad judges. They took bribes and perverted justice. This brings us to today's Scripture.

The elders speak as representatives of the people and demand a king rather than a new line of judges. This turns out to be a huge problem. Their desire is to be like the other nations. To emulate their neighbors means giving up on their covenant relationship. In essence they are saying that they don't want to be different, they want to be like everyone else. They were either not happy with the covenant, or they simply lacked the patience that the covenant required. Regardless, they failed to trust in God. So, they wanted to do it on their own and ended up responding emotionally instead of logically. What they wanted at the time superseded their memory of covenant success and benefits. What they really wanted was a king to go out before them and fight their battles for them. This is military justification for kingship and it is a big insult to God because they are turning away from trusting in God and rejecting the covenant. Samuel warns the people that a human king is going to be a bad thing; he will take your sons and daughters, your harvest and your livestock, and the monarchy will end up being supported by a military draft. But the people refused to listen to Samuel. Here lies a very simple lesson. If you don't listen to God's prophet, you will have problems. Then the warning comes from God. It is God that they have rejected. They have rejected God from being king over them. Ever since God brought them out of Egypt to this day they have forsook God in order to serve other gods (1st Samuel 8:7-8). This has been the problem all along – breaking the covenant. It is the same fundamental problem from day one to today. Israel's tendency to engage in idolatry goes all the way back to the beginning of Israel as a nation when they were freed from slavery. The lessons

repeat multiple times. The Bible shows how rejecting God does not favor well with humans. You must let God rule over your life. But the people never learn and as a consequence they have a history of chronic struggles.

Now let's jump forward to the New Testament for our lesson today. First of all I want to point out the people in the New Testament never learned the vital lesson taught in the Old Testament - let God rule over your life. In the New Testament we see during the triumphant entry into Jerusalem the people do the same thing as the people did in Old Testament. They demand a king! They demand a king instead of following God. They wanted the same thing; they wanted their way instead of God's way. Responding emotionally, they reject Jesus just like the people rejected Samuel. They toss aside the covenant for military justification of kingship instead of allowing God to rule over them. They turn against Jesus because they want a warrior when God sent to them a redeemer. So, instead of trusting God, or allowing God to rule, they crucified the Son of God.

The contemporary lesson for us is to learn from the struggles and mistakes of the biblical people and let God rule over your life. The Old Testament people were eager to cast off their unique role as God's special people. They sacrificed the authority of God for human power. You as an individual and we as a church are called to be in the world, not of the world. It is a matter of being in relationship with God, in a continuity of the covenant with the qualities of love, peace, justice, compassion, and active worship. The pressure of conformity is great within our society. Our consumer driven culture elevates qualities that are quite different from the covenant model; self interest, self fulfillment, power, acquisition, materialism, and wealth. The Scripture provides a warning for us. Eagerness to reach the world creates temptation to compromise. The church must guard against sacrificing our calling and identity. To what extent do we defend God, the covenant, and our faith? Stand against injustice. Trust God over human authority. We owe a higher loyalty to God. Human power is subordinate to divine power.