

The Weight of the Crown

Give Us a King

1 Samuel 8-9

Mark Vroegop

When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice. Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him. He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day." But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, "No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey their voice and make them a king." Samuel then said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city" (1 Sam. 8:1-22, ESV).

We started our journey through 1 & 2 Samuel on January 21, 2024. Do you know why that day was special? Because it was the only blue-sky, clear day in the entire month. I'm sure you sensed it because January was the fifth cloudiest month on record with 71 percent of the month completely cloud covered. We only had one clear day: January 21.

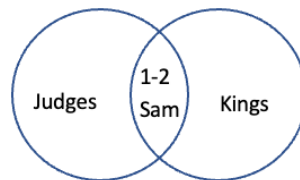
When we started our series, I talked about gray zones, and it was probably more fitting than I even realized as it felt incredibly gray for most of the month. But cultural gray zones kind of feel the same—life isn't as clear, people are stressed, emotions are just under the surface, and uncertainty is all around us.

I quoted from a great book by Mark Sayers called *A Non-Anxious Presence*:

“Gray zones exist in the overlap of two eras. They contain the influence of both the passing and the forming era; this makes gray zones confusing and contradictory.”¹

“...gray zones are seeded with the potential for renewal. Unformed moments and chaotic spaces force us to leave behind the ideas and idols of the passing era. With God, every moment is seeded with the possibility of rebirth...We must see it not as a disaster but as an opportunity for rebirth, renewal, and revival.”²

1 & 2 Samuel are the books that mark this bumpy transition as they move from the era of the judges to the era of the kings.



Our text today could be considered “ground-zero” of that gray zone, especially for Samuel. But it’s also true for the nation and for the first king, Saul. 1 Samuel 8-9 detail the nation’s demand for a king, God’s response, and the providence of God at work. The ground-zero narrative shows us that **God works in a broken world**.

Allow me to give you our application questions at the front of the sermon:

1. What am I **afraid** of? Fear often creates broken solutions out of desperation or arrogance.
2. Is God trying to get my **attention**? God uses a broken world to wake us up.
3. What **assumptions** do I make about God’s plan? We need to trust that God is working in ways that we cannot see.

Fear. Attention. Assumptions. Keep those three words in mind as we look at this passage.

¹ Mark Sayers, *A Non-Anxious Presence: How a Changing and Complex World Will Create a Remnant of Renewed Christian Leaders*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers: 2022), 23.

² Mark Sayers, *A Non-Anxious Presence: How a Changing and Complex World Will Create a Remnant of Renewed Christian Leaders*, 15.

Demand (8:1-9)

Chapter 7 ended on a high note. Samuel led the people into a season of spiritual renewal. We're not sure how long this season of spiritual vitality remained, but at some point, the people became dissatisfied with Samuel's spiritual leadership. This is one of the messages that we find in 1 & 2 Samuel. Namely, that every leader—every human—is not able to deliver everything that God's people need.

We learn in verses 1-3 that Samuel's sons were also corrupt. It appears that he tried to spread out the burden of oversight by appointing his sons as judges. The text tells us that they were posted in Beersheba which is the southern-most city in Israel. This may have been an attempt to load-balance the demand. But his sons "did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain . . . they took bribes and perverted justice" (v 3).

This leads to a crisis moment. According to verse 4, all the elders from the various tribes gathered at Ramah to confront Samuel. Their statement was clear: "You are old and your sons do not walk in your ways" (v. 4). Now, this isn't an inaccurate concern. Both issues were true. It was a real problem.

But their solution is telling. They could have asked Samuel for another judge, someone besides either of his two sons. Bear in mind that at this moment in Israel's history, the tribes of Israel are not entirely unified. They are governed independently by the local elders with Samuel traveling between them for spiritual encouragement and counsel. Worship, sacrifice, and spiritual leadership were the unifying force. However, the people do not feel like that's working.

They said, "Give us a king to judge us like all the nations" (v. 6). It seems that they no longer want a prophet to judge them; they want a king. What's more, they are taking their cues from the nations around them.

We'll come back to this. But notice that Samuel was not pleased with their request. We're not told why. But it appears that he received it as personal rejection. God's response to Samuel seemed to indicate both this and that it was a statement about the spiritual condition of the people.

And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them" (1 Sam. 8:7-9).

Now, if we look a little further down in the text (v. 20), we find these important words added to their motivation: ". . . and go out before us and fight our battles." It would appear that their fear of what happens after Samuel combined with the necessity of leadership for national security were major motivators here. John Woodhouse says:

A king therefore offered a strong, stable, and predictable center of political authority for a nation that otherwise had to depend on an unseen God to unite them. Furthermore, kingship held out the promise of efficient central organization to a nation that, lacking such structures, tended to lurch from one crisis to the next. After many years of such instability, it is not difficult to see how reasonable the proposal must have seemed to the elders.³

Fear is a powerful emotion, and it can cause God's people to say and do rash things. Trusting God is a vulnerable activity. Fear makes you grab for control. It can cause you to act in a way that you'll regret later. What are you afraid of right now? What occupies space in your heart that causes you to reach for the panic or the anger button? You might find it helpful to check yourself to see what actions are motivated by fear when there are opportunities to trust the Lord.

Warning (8:10-22)

Samuel proceeded to give the people a stern warning about what would happen if they decided to go this direction with a king. It seems that Samuel was trying to cause them to reconsider. His predictions were pretty grim:

- A king will take your sons for military service (v. 11)
- A king will take away their freedom to work as they please (v. 12-13)
- A king will take their land (v. 14)
- A king will take a portion of their produce and possessions (v. 15-17)

The word "take" is used six times in this short paragraph. The people wanted earthly security, and that would come at a price. They would lose a significant amount of their freedom. The end of verse 17 says, "... you shall be his slaves." Their fear of other nations and their desire to be like every other kingdom would lead to sacrifices that would be painful and hard.

Samuel offered another warning. They would regret their choice with no ability to return. "And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day" (v. 18). These are pretty strong words of warning.

But the people wouldn't hear it. Despite Samuel's warning, the people demanded a king:

But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, "No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam. 8:19-20).

The wording choice seems intentionally ironic in light of the promise in Deuteronomy 20:4.

... and shall say to them, "Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, for the LORD your

³ John Woodhouse, [1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 145.

God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory”
(Deut. 20:3-4).

Samuel was trying to get the attention of the people as it related to where all of this was headed. But the people refused to listen. It would seem that their fear and desire for security blinded them to the spiritual costs of their decisions. Dale Ralph Davis says,

Israel then hears God’s wisdom but does not submit to it; God gives her instruction, but she is not teachable. Which should lead God’s current people to cry out for a soft heart, for a teachable spirit, for preservation from the arrogance of our own stupidity.⁴

Where might God be inviting you to trust him when you are inclined to not heed the warnings that he offers? Too often God’s people (including us) push away trust in God for what we think is going to give us the control we desire.

But in doing so, we forget promises like Isaiah 40:31.

... but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint (Isa. 40:31).

The warning ends with verse 22: “And the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Obey their voice and make them a king.’ Samuel then said to the men of Israel, ‘Go every man to his city” (1 Sam. 8:22).

Providence (9:1-27)

After the challenging back and forth between Samuel and God’s people, we read about how the first king of Israel was identified. It’s an intriguing story because of what’s not here. There’s no dramatic entrance or revealing moment. In fact, the king of Israel was identified when a herd of donkeys went missing.

Saul is introduced in 9:1-2. We learn that he’s from the tribe of Benjamin. He came from money. He’s tall and handsome. It’s almost as if he came right out of central casting. We then learn that there were missing donkeys, and Saul was tasked by his father to find them (v. 3). Saul and a servant conducted a wide search, but they were not successful in locating the donkeys. When they came to Zuph, Saul was ready to give up the search and return home (v. 5). However, in verses 6-9, the servant suggested that they consult “a man of God in {the} city.” In verses 11-14, Saul and the servant inquired about the man of God, and they learned that he’d just arrived in the city.

Verse 15-16 tell us about Samuel. The previous day, the Lord had told Samuel about Saul’s arrival and his choice for him to be anointed as king.

⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, [*1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 90.

Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have seen my people, because their cry has come to me (1 Sam. 9:16).

When Samuel sees Saul, the Lord spoke to him: “Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He it is who shall restrain my people” (1 Sam. 9:17).

In verses 19-21, Samuel informed Saul that his donkeys had been found, and Saul responded with humble gratitude. Saul and the servant were invited to a feast where Saul was given the place of honor.

Saul still didn’t know what was happening. He spent the night at Samuel’s home (v. 25). In the morning, Samuel walked with Saul to the edge of the city, and he sent the servant ahead, inviting Saul to stop and talk (v. 27).

Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him and said, “Has not the Lord anointed you to be prince over his people Israel? And you shall reign over the people of the Lord and you will save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies. And this shall be the sign to you that the Lord has anointed you to be prince over his heritage” (1 Sam. 10:1).

And with that act, a new era in Israel’s history began. Lost donkeys were how Saul and Samuel were brought together. It’s good to be reminded that God is at work in circumstances that we might dismiss as insignificant or mundane. The Lord reigns over it all!

It reminds us of Hannah’s song:

He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s, and on them he has set the world (1 Sam. 2:8).

Fear. Attention. Assumptions. This text invites us to prayerfully consider:

1. What am I **afraid** of? Fear often creates broken solutions out of desperation or arrogance.
2. Is God trying to get my **attention**? God uses a broken world to wake us up.
3. What **assumptions** do I make about God’s plan? We need to trust that God is working in ways that we cannot see.

The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength (1 Sam. 2:4).

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