

The Cost of Rejecting God's Invitation
Samuel as Judge and the People's Demand for a King
Invitation to Leadership Series - Part 4

1 Samuel 7:3-8:22
5/10/25-5/11/25

Introduction

- What happens if we make all our children's choices for them? They don't learn to stand and decide for themselves, right? Why is that bad? Because it means they don't get to gain the lessons learned along the way. They don't get to develop the muscles that deciding and learning gain them. They don't get to understand what failure means and why it matters. In other words, it's not very loving. It seems loving because we help them avoid consequence in the moment, but it's not. Right?

Sometimes, God's greatest act of LOVE is letting us
learn from our own CHOICES.

- Recap and Context
 - Last Week – Philistines attack and get the ark. Eli and sons die. God is cleaning house. Did His glory leave or is He cleaning up to come back in stronger?

Lesson

- Fresh Wind; Fresh Fire
 - Samuel steps up to lead Israel in Reform
 - 1 Samuel 7:3–6 – *“And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, “If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”*⁴ *So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroath [regional gods and goddesses¹], and they served the LORD only.*⁵ *Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.”*⁶ *So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the LORD and fasted on that day and said there, “We have sinned against the LORD.” And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.*”
 - And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, - Samuel is now operating as kind of a priest and prophet for the whole nation although he is primarily focused on the South with the tribe of Benjamin region.

¹ “The phrase gods and goddesses (‘et-habb^o‘ālim w’et-hā’āštārōt; lit., “the Baals and the Astartes”; also 12:10) is interpreted variously: for example, “the Baals and the Astartes” (NRSV); “the Baals and the Ashtaroath” (NASB); “their Baals and Ashtoreths” (NIV). Baal is the Canaanite storm god, sometimes called Hadad; Baal worship had been a constant temptation from the very beginning of Israel’s settlement process as seen from the Baal-Peor incident (Num. 23:28). Astarte corresponds to the Ugaritic fertility goddess ‘ttrt (UT §19.1941). See also on 31:10 for the Philistines’ “temple of Astartes.” Male-female pairs of divinities are known in the Ugaritic mythology, such as “El and Asherah” and “Baal and Anat.” But here in Samuel, Baal is paired with Astarte. At Emar’s western temples, also, the storm god called Baal is paired with the goddess AŠtar. The plural nouns “Baals” and “Astartes” sometime refer to various manifestations of Baal or Astarte in local cults, but here, as in Judg. 10:6 and 12:10 and most places in the OT, the plural forms seem to stand for gods and goddesses in general. So, from the present context, the idiomatic expression “the Baals and the Astartes” is the equivalent of the foreign gods and goddesses in v. 3.” NICOT

- “If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, - Samuel is not forcing anything but saying that IF they want to do it, there’s a way to do it legitimately and a way to do it illegitimately. If they really want to reconnect with God it’s going to cost them, and they need to know what to do.
- Half vs. whole hearted – what’s the key difference here? Interestingly the Bible uses the phrase ‘whole heart’ and ‘not with a whole heart’ to describe dedication, loyalty and adherence. What makes the difference? The amount of selfishness and lack of obedience. **What would God say of your life up to this point?**
 - Psalm 119:2-3 – *“Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart,³ who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!”*
 - *“Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ Mk 12:29–30 (cf. Dt 6:5)*
 - King Hezekiah *‘loved God with all his heart’* – 2 Kings 20:3
 - David told Solomon to love God with all his heart – 1 Chron 28:9
 - King Jehoshaphat told the priest and Levites to do their job with their whole heart for God – 2 Chron 19:9
 - BUT – King Amaziah – *“And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, yet not with a whole heart.”* – 2 Chron 25:2
 - AND - God busted Judah the nation – *“Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, declares the LORD.”* Je 3:10
- then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you – to say you want to change means that you need to change and for these people their primary issue was allegiance. They were serving themselves and inadvertently (although intentionally) serving demonic false gods. If they were serious they were going to need to get rid of them.
 - Shift of allegiance means shift of personal culture – you cannot change gods without change in how you live. Our gods dictate our personal culture.
- and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, - We cannot operate in a void. If we removed one thing, another will be pulled into it (like a blackhole). Therefore we must intentionally REPLACE it with something else. It’s not enough to just stop serving other gods and pretend like we can be neutral or on our own. That’s not an option. We need to replace the god/God we serve.
- and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” – There is a specific situation that is causing the people to want to repent: fear of an enemy. They need the Lord’s help and Samuel is letting them know what it’s going to take. God will actively defend His people, but ONLY if they are His people.
- So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD only. – they were motivated to change. They got rid of the local gods that they had been serving for years.

- Who or what is a Baal? – The region that Israel conquered was called Canaan. All the people groups collectively were called ‘Canaanites’. But that group was comprised of a ton of smaller groups like the Philistines, the Girgashites, Amorites, etc. Within this region a local and regional false deity/god named Baal was dominant. Although through the years different parts of this character were highlighted, the general concept is that Baal was the big god of the area. He was the god of fertility, human sexuality, agriculture, and animal husbandry. He was so popular that many locations were named after him. Unfortunately Israel (the Jews) integrated with the local culture and adopted worship of many gods in conjunction with Yahweh (a big no-no). During the Northern territory (Israel), King Ahab (famous for being married to Jezebel – from Phoenicia) incorporated Baal worship in a significant way. It’s what Elijah was dealing with in the Mt. Carmel situation. Later the South bought into it with the daughter of Ahab/Jezebel married the king of the South Jehoram of Judah. One of the key ways that Baal was worshipped was through sexual rites (orgies) in ‘high places’ (on hills). The goal was to bring in the fertile rainy season. God was very clear in his condemnation of this false god. Baal also means both ‘husband’ and ‘master’ and ‘lord.’ Although El was the chief god of the Canaanite pantheon (group of gods), he was relatively unknown and said to be far away. Locally Baal was his prime minister who ruled Canaan for him. Eventually the god Hadad, the Semitic storm god took on the term Baal and they became synonymous, so it’s tough to tell which Baal figure is in play at any given bible story. The Hadad version was called, ‘lord of all, exalted lord of earth, eternal, one who prevails. He was the son of Dagon, the god of justice and defender of the region. He had a consort...
- Who or what is an Ashtoreth/Ashtaroth? – a Canaanite goddess known as El’s daughter. She is known as Anath. She is also known sometimes as El’s sister Athirat/Elat/Asherah (goddess of the sea), so it’s a bit confusing. The main focus of these goddess was sex and war. They were sacred prostitutes. It seems that the worship item that was common to her shrines was a phallic wooden totem put in ‘high places’, along with incense and other stone pillars. At other times she is associated with a sister goddess Astarte which is linked to Ishtar the Assyrian goddess of love and fertility.
- Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel at Mizpah², - Samuel wants them to have a meeting where they can honor the Lord and go through the ritual of repentance formally together. They are to gather at one of the three primary spiritual locations (likely had makeshift temples).

² “Mizpah is probably modern Tel en-Naṣbeh [MR170–143], 7.5 miles northwest of Jerusalem; not Nebi Samwil (5 miles northwest of Jerusalem).” NICOT

- and I will pray to the LORD for you.” – Samuel would function as the national priest and seek the Lord on their behalf.
- So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the LORD³ – They did it and went through the ritual. There is nothing known about this ritual of pouring water out.
- and fasted on that day – we do know what fasting means and are familiar with the restriction of food for religious purposes. They did so to demonstrate their seriousness of this petition to God as well as to deny themselves to focus on Him.
- and said there, “We have sinned against the LORD.” – they confessed and admitted that they were wrong. Too often we want to add another way to the one we are currently doing. We want to keep doing what we want and add the way someone else wants us to do it. But part of repentance is admitting that the way that you have been doing it is not sufficient. That’s why you are making the change.
 - What might it look like to engage more deeply in the practice of repentance in our own lives? Repentance should be serious work. It should not be legalistic work or mere ritual. The point is a changed heart, not simply a changed appearance. Too often, in the Age of Grace (gifted by Jesus after the cross to His children), we are sloppy and abuse the grace by not taking repentance seriously. But what would happen if we did? What would that look like? How could we demonstrate to God better that we are all-in with realignment? What could we do to alter our inner habits and patterns to align with God better, instead of just hoping we change?
- And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah⁴ – from priest to judge. But don’t forget prophet. Samuel functioned in all three roles. The only major role he didn’t operated in is king.
- **Core Point: Necessary Change⁵ – it is not enough to simply say that Jesus is our king. Our lives, behaviors, actions, and loyalties need to affirm that.** It begins with an intention to do so (motivation and heart), but it then shifts to actual action and decisions to do differently. Baptism is a good example of an outward act demonstrating and inward decision and change. Another good example is Communion. It’s inner thanks and reception of God’s gifts

³ “For drew water and poured it, see also 9:11. In light of the command-obedience pattern, this water ritual must have something to do with the preparation for Samuel’s intercessory prayer for the people (“I shall pray for you”) before the Lord. McCarter mentions the Egyptian water ritual at Hierapolis, where “twice a year water was drawn from ‘the sea’ and poured out in the temple.” He notes the “evidence for a connection between the water libations and the hope for sufficient rainfall.” De Moor also connects the ritual in this verse with a well-known rain-charm.²³ However, as McCarter himself admits, the relationship of the rain charm ritual and our incident is not clear. In the present context, “pouring,” instead of drinking, the water and “fasting” are connected, and both acts were done before the Lord. R. P. Gordon takes this water pouring as the act of “the self-denial of the occasion as the participants solemnly proclaimed their abstinence from even this necessity of life” and accepts here “a fertility significance, in that the God of Israel, and not Baal or Ashtart (cf. v. 4), is acknowledged as the true source of life and fertility.” Though in 2 Sam. 23:16 David poured out water to the Lord in response to the loyalty of his three brave warriors, the pouring out of water in our passage is for a penitential purpose. For their part, the people fasted and confessed their sin (on this term see 2:25) on that day “there” (at Mizpah).” NICOT

⁴ “Thus, Samuel’s judgeship officially begins at Mizpah.” NICOT

⁵ “To return” (*šwb) here is the act of “repentance,” that is, a change of direction back to the Lord. Three things are commanded: (1) to turn aside from idolatry; (2) to fix the heart on the Lord; and (3) to serve him alone.” NICOT

demonstrated by an outward action of taking and receiving with a grateful heart.

- The Great Defender
 - God defeats the Philistines and eliminates the threat
 - *1 Samuel 7:7–14 – “Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. ⁸And the people of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines.” ⁹So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. And Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him. ¹⁰As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. ¹¹And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car. ¹²Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, “Till now the LORD has helped us.” ¹³So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. ¹⁴The cities that the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites.”*
 - Now when the Philistines – the Philistines are a significant group and character in the Old Testament. They had many interactions with the Israelites and it was only going to get worse. We met them recently in the last sermon where they fought Israel and won and took the ark of the covenant. So who are they? They are a sea-faring people group that starting more North on the Turkish coast but migrated down into Canaan’s coast around the 12th or 13th centuries BC (history shows they intended to keep going south but were stopped by Egypt). The name Philistia is derived from Palestine so they adopted the local land as their own. As a primary war people, they had no intention of kicking out the groups they invaded. They simply ruled them and adopted a lot of the local culture. They had iron weapons before Israel did and they utilized chariots, which made them a threat. They didn’t practice circumcision like the majority of Canaanites, the Israelites and the Egyptians, so that made them ‘different’. By the time of Samuel, they were Israel’s chief threat.
 - heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, - the Philistines were always waiting for their change to move against Israel and take more territory. They hated the Israelite presence and considered them both irritating and domineering. This was their shot. They were going to have a whole group of the big dogs in one place and it was time for war.

- the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. – the leadership of the Philistines were called ‘lords’ which meant powerful leaders. They were bringing their armies together to launch a war.
- And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. – the people realized that the Philistines were gathering together to make war and it freaked them out. They knew that the Philistines were more organized in battle than they were during that era and they weren’t likely to win in a fair fight.
- And the people of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines.” – The people were so scared that they called to Samuel and begged him to intercede for them with God. They knew it was going to be a God-win or nothing. They told him to pray and pray and pray more. They couldn’t afford to not have the covering of God.
 - Lesson Learned: Different Tactic – this time when they are attacked, they didn’t try to use the magic-gold-box (ark of the covenant) concept that they relied on last time and lost. They learned that it was actually their relationship with God that protected them, not an amulet of power.
 - When Christianity becomes magical – A dangerous temptation is to shift our focus from a relationship to God to His stuff and certain formulas to try to either force God’s hand on our behalf, or to manipulate a force. This is commonly done through misuse of faith. We pull our faith IN and WITH God and start putting it in methods, like praying a certain way. Anytime we do this, it’s shifting into the magical instead of the relational. Prayer isn’t a force manipulation tool, but a connection with God.
- So Samuel took a nursing lamb⁶ and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. – Samuel went into priest mode and started offering to the Lord in ritual petition. Lambs can be offered at their 9th day of life and beyond. Why did it have to be so young in this case? No clue.
 - It’s difficult to not see Jesus – anytime there is a lamb sacrificed to God, we ultimately think of the great ‘Lamb of God’ who is sacrificed for our sins on the cross. Was this a foreshadowing intentionally or simply another sacrifice of a lamb story that later laid the foundation for what Jesus did?
- And Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him. – Samuel did what was required. He prayed and interceded, and God answered him. The answer was not so much in verbal but in action.,
- As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. – During the connection with God things were getting worse. The Philistine army was advancing and that meant certain death to

⁶ “For suckling lamb (תִּיֵּהָ חֵלֶב, lit., “lamb of milk”), see 6:7 (“cows for suckling”). Note that an animal can be sacrificed after it is eight days old (see Exod. 22:30; Lev. 22:27).” NICOT

the Israelite army that was ready to engage in battle. The big question in the story is: will God respond and do so in time?

- But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound⁷ that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion,⁸ - We don't have to wait long to find out that God did respond with power and defense. What it means that the LORD/Yahweh thundered is unknown. It could mean that He empowered the Israelite army to thunder against them in war to win, or that He literally scared them by thundering from heaven, or that He used thunder and lightning to affect them. Regardless it made the Philistine army panic and they lost their advantage. This is a common way that God fights for Israel: confusing the enemy so they are unable to organize and fight properly. Sometimes they fight each other. God gets in their heads.
- God picks the style – it's so tempting for us to try to command HOW God answers our prayer requests. It's one thing to ask, it's another thing to demand how it's answered. We pray with a bias in mind and don't give God glory unless He answers the way that we expect. If we pray to be healed of cancer, God has multiple options at hand. He can heal it instantly and miraculously (what we expect), or He can give us new ideas on how to treat it (depending on the style of cancer), or He can use modern medicine. If the result is that you don't have cancer anymore then it's God's gift and provision, regardless of the method.
- and they were defeated before Israel. – Israel won the battle. It was just as they hoped. But they had to do their part. It wasn't ALL DONE for them. They still had to fight.
- And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car⁹ – Notice the army pursuit and the attacking and fighting. It wasn't a cake walk, but at the end of the day God gave them the victory.
- Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the LORD has helped us." – Samuel knew that it's easy for people to forget the goodness and miracles of God so he used a tangible reminder. He grabbed a large stone and put it in a public place so that everyone in the future would be able to see it as a memorial and remember about God's protection.

⁷ "For the expression the Lord thundered, see also 2:10 and 12:17. Is this a metaphor, that is, did the Lord respond to Samuel with a thunder-like loud sound? Or, did the Lord use actual "timely" providential thunder against the Philistines? In either case it describes the Lord's special intervention into a specific fact in human history as the lord and judge. Some scholars immediately take expressions like this to mean that the event is unhistorical. However, Assyrian records also mention divine intervention in battles, and no one claims that those are unhistorical. In the ancient Near East, battle is often described in terms of a storm, while, on the other hand, storms are described using war language. In the Bible also, the language and imagery of the storm theophany are used for the divine activities in the texts, such as Exod. 19:16; Psalms 18 (= 2 Samuel 22), 29; Habakkuk 3; see on 2:10. The use of storm language in the Old Testament is, therefore, not necessarily an allusion to Baal myths or the like, as is often advocated by scholars." NICOT

⁸ "The term confused occurs first in Exod. 14:24, where the Lord threw the Egyptian army into confusion (also in Exod. 23:27; Josh. 10:10; Judg. 4:15). See especially 2 Sam. 22:15 (= Ps. 18:15) and Ps. 144:6, "where the term is used to describe the effect upon the enemy of Yahweh's lightning ('arrows') in a storm theophany context." NICOT

⁹ "The place-name Beth-car appears only here. Its location is unknown, and it cannot be Bethel, a few miles north of Mizpah, since it is difficult to see in Bêt-kâr a corruption of Bêt-'êl; it is probably to the west of Mizpah in the general direction of Philistia." NICOT

- Don't we need stones of remembrance for our lives? – one of the main flaws of humanity, especially today, is the ease in which we forget stuff. God will do a miracle, and we are all fired up but about 6 months later we forget about it. The next time we need His help we have to generate faith all over again because we forgot what He did in the past. It's critical that we have some mechanism by which we can intentionally remember what God has done so that He doesn't lose glory and we don't have to restart our faith.
- So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. – The great threat nearby, the Philistines were shut down and that was a HUGE deal to Israel. There was peace and safety and the damage was so significant that they lacked the forces and resources to attack again soon.
- And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. – How did they win? God. And God entered into that defense mode all the days that Samuel led the nation. Why? Because Samuel led the people well and the people were dedicated, relatively, to God. God fulfilled His promises.
- The cities that the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines¹⁰ – The win was so significant that Israel even got back from territory that they had lost in prior battles. Ekron and Gath are important Philistine cities so it's a big win.
- There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites¹¹ - The Amorites are both a specific group and a general group. The specific group was the original desert people who entered into the fertile crescent in the 21-21st centuries BC. They took over Babylon for a time (putting Hammurabi in power) but lost it to the Hittites in 1595BC. For our story, the smaller group later known as Amorites were the hill people (Num 13:29; Dt 1:7). The general way the term Amorite is used is kind of like the term 'Canaanites' meaning it's a bunch of people groups in the same region. So, the point here is that they had peace with all the people groups around them that usually caused trouble.
- **Core Point: Christians Fight on Their Knees – too often we are resulting in fighting like the world since our prayers lives are so anemic. Do we want what man can do or what the Lord can do. What's really angering you? What's really 'against you'? What is your enemy? What should you do about it?**

¹⁰ "The phrase both Ekron and Gath (lit., "from Ekron to Gath") could mean (1) up to the border between Ekron and Gath; (2) the area between Ekron and Gath — from Mizpah, Ekron comes first, then Gath — geographical situation suggests "from Ekron as far as Gath" (ištu ... adi... "from ... to ..."); or (3) both Ekron and Gath; see on 6:18. The third interpretation probably fits the context best; the sense is that the places returned both from Ekron and from Gath; namely, "their vicinities" were recovered to Israel. To put it differently, it describes the part of the border area that was freed from Philistine control. "The writer's point is that all such cities were controlled by Israel during Samuel's lifetime, and that the Philistines were confined to a minimal home base." NICOT

¹¹ "The Amorites were the pre-Israelite population of ancient Canaan (see also 2 Sam. 21:2); the term is used here in the widest sense, referring to the totality of indigenous inhabitants. The Israelites subdued the Philistines while having a peaceful relationship with the Amorites. In other words, Israel was safe both internally and externally." NICOT

- Too Far From the Tree
 - Samuel judges Israel but his sons fail
 - 1 Samuel 7:15–8:3 – *“Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶ And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places. ¹⁷ Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel. And he built there an altar to the LORD. ⁸ When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. ² The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. ³ Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice.”*
 - Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. – this is a short description of the role that Samuel fulfilled. He was the national leader.
 - The power of faithfulness – there are some kings that led Israel in this history that started good and ended bad. Unfortunately their good stuff is overshadowed by the bad and the legacy they leave is bad. When someone is faithful for the long haul there is far greater fruit and fruit that lasts since it’s tended to for a long time and grows deep. The longer we truly walk with God, the more we know Him and the more we know Him the more control He has in our lives and our lives take on a new reality. So, how do we stay faithful? **Three simple ways: 1.) daily focus** – maybe you’ve heard the phrase, ‘mind the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves’. In the same way, mind the days and the years will take care of themselves. It’s the drift of being gone from the lord for a series of days, months and years that reshape us. But if we keep a short list with God, we are bound to be faithful in the long run. **2.) Maintain passion** – learn how you are built and how God intends you to interact with Him the best. Lean into those things that are lifegiving. Keep your fire whatever it takes. Be in environments that fuel you. Have friends that spur you on. Keep your walk exciting and engaging by serving and being on the front lines. Don’t even let yourself become insulated from new Christians or watching the gospel take root. **3.) have some form of accountability that keeps you on track during the times when you don’t want to walk with God.** There needs to be either relationships or situations that keep you grounded and tied in to the Lord when your human nature wants to drift.
 - And he went on a circuit year by year¹² – this is a description of a route that went through the Benjaminite clans (primarily that tribe borders)
 - to Bethel¹³ - A key holy place.

¹² “From his hometown Ramah, he visited three cities, Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah, all in or around the district of the Benjaminite clans.” NICOT

¹³ “Bethel appears for the first time in Samuel; other occurrences are 10:3; 13:2; 30:27; it does not appear in 2 Samuel. According to Judg. 20:17, at that time, “the ark of the covenant of God” was there. The modern site is Beitin, about 10 miles north of Jerusalem, located at the intersection of major highways — the mountain ridge road and the main road leading from Jericho to the Coastal Plain. It was one of the most important sacred sites, being associated with the tradition of the patriarchs (see Gen. 35:15). It was “traditionally Benjaminite (Josh. 18:22) but in fact Ephraimite throughout most of its (Israelite) history, serving as one of the two principal sanctuaries of the northern kingdom (1 K. 12:29).” NICOT

- Gilgal¹⁴ - another key holy place.
- and Mizpah. – the third key holy place.
- And he judged Israel in all these places. – He did his job and did it well.
- Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel. – Ramah was the fourth key holy place in the South. It's his homebase.
- And he built there an altar to the LORD. – An altar to the Lord means a permanent location of worship for the people. It was a place that people could go to tangibly and concretely to be ministered to and connect with God. Usually it was a pile of rocks that created a flat spot on top for burnt offerings.
- When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel¹⁵ – this is a LONG time later. He was faithful in his role. UNTIL, he put his sons as judges over Israel. That is not how it was supposed to be done. Priesthood is generational, judgeship is selected by God. But Samuel was assuming that since he was in charge of his boys that they would do best. They didn't.
- The name of his firstborn son was Joel¹⁶ - Notice the names. Joel means 'yahweh is God'.
- and the name of his second, Abijah¹⁷ - Abijah means 'my father is God/Yahweh.' Clearly Samuel was into God.
- they were judges in Beersheba¹⁸ – there is no indicator why they were serving so far away in the South. Yes, dad served the other areas but they were quite a ways away for some reason.
- Yet his sons did not walk in his ways – and here's where things fall apart. Just like Eli, Samuel's sons were terrible priest/judge leaders. They fell too far from the tree. They didn't have the hearts that Samuel did. Eli failed and Samuel followed in those father footsteps.

¹⁴ "Gilgal also appears for the first time in Samuel. The site is not yet identified. It was the place "on the east border of Jericho" where Joshua and the Israelites camped after crossing the Jordan River (Josh. 4:19; etc.). Later, "the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bokim" and warned the Israelites about their apostasy (Judg. 2:1f.). This ancient city was a cult center, an important shrine, and place of sacrifice in the Benjaminite district. To there Samuel ordered Saul to go down and wait on God after his private anointing (see 10:8), and the people "made Saul king there before the Lord" (11:15). But it was also there that Saul's perpetual kingship was rejected (13:8–15) and finally abandoned (15:23). It was the place where David went after crossing the Jordan River on his return to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 19:16, 41). Later, in the eighth century, Amos (4:4; 5:5) and Hosea (4:15; 9:15; 12:12) denounced it as an active cult center." NICOT

¹⁵ "It was unusual for a judge to appoint his own sons as judges, for judgeship was not hereditary. In fact, Gideon refused the suggestion that he establish a dynasty; see Judg. 8:22–23. Though Eli "judged" (1 Sam. 4:18) Israel for forty years, his sons are never said to have judged. (Their priesthood was of course hereditary.) It may be that the narrator calls the audience's attention to this new development, that is, "a hereditary succession," in the political history of ancient Israel. R. P. Gordon sees here Samuel's "little dynastic experiment."¹⁶ This "experiment" of Samuel's was certainly a breach of the old practice of waiting for the divine appointment of a new judge and was possibly a cause of his family problems. It certainly foreshadows the problems of hereditary kingship in obviating divine choice." NICOT

¹⁶ "Samuel's sons did not deserve their good names, Joel and Abijah. Both contain short forms (yô and yāh) of the divine name Yahweh. The name Joel means "Yahu is God." Abijah means "My father is Yah." NICOT

¹⁷ "Samuel's sons did not deserve their good names, Joel and Abijah. Both contain short forms (yô and yāh) of the divine name Yahweh. The name Joel means "Yahu is God." Abijah means "My father is Yah." NICOT

¹⁸ "Why did they operate out of Beersheba, the traditional southern extreme of Israelite territory (see 3:20)? Beersheba, the ancient holy place associated with the patriarchs, may have been one of the cultic centers in this day, though Samuel's activities were in or around the traditional territory of the tribe of Benjamin. Later, in the eighth century B.C., Amos denounced this place, together with Bethel and Gilgal, as one of the cultic centers to which the people should not go and worship (Amos 5:5)." NICOT

- but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice. – What was their sin? Money. They were too into gain and selfishness. They would change their leadership based on support they could get and money they could acquire.
 - Wisely choose leaders – nepotism is tempting but it’s dangerous and in my opinion more often than not, wrong. It’s our job to wisely choose leaders, not rely on our buddies, or our kids if they are not fit for the role. I get it, we want to support and benefit those around us, but what’s the ultimate job? Obey God and do what is right. We need to bring in leaders that have been tested. We watch those who serve well in the small things to make them in charge of the larger things.
- **Core Point: Kids Don’t Always Follow in Our Footsteps – it is every parent’s struggle to hope for their kids to do well. For Christian parents, it’s most important that their children follow the Lord as they do, or better. Unfortunately they are individual people that have to walk their own journey. We have influence but not control. However, we cannot be blind to the concerns within our own home and turn a blind eye to what’s happening there. Also, Samuel didn’t learn from Eli’s failings with his own boys. We have a responsibility with our kids to raise them right, not demand they be right. Big Difference.**
- It’s Not You, It’s Me
 - Israel demands a king
 - 1 Samuel 8:4-9¹⁹ – *“Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah⁵ 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.”⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” And Samuel prayed to the LORD.⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹ Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”*
 - Then all the elders of Israel gathered together²⁰ – Again we see that the nation is coming collectively to Samuel as their collective head and lead. Elders of Israel are leaders of the tribes.
 - and came to Samuel at Ramah – they came to Samuel’s homebase to talk with him.
 - and said to him, “Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. – they are saying, ‘you’ve been good but you are going to die

¹⁹ “This chapter is among the most significant in the historical books of the Old Testament, marking the transition from judgeship to kingship in ancient Israel.” NICOT

²⁰ “Now all the elders of Israel came to Samuel. Samuel was thus “the first judge in the Bible who was accorded truly national status” NICOT

soon. Your kids are terrible and we don't want them leading when you aren't around to keep them in check.'

- Now appoint for us a king²¹ to judge us like all the nations." ²² - this is a crucial change in the nation of the Jews. They were always a THEOCRACY which means ruled by God. They had judges and priests who would help locally lead them for God and with God, but God was always supposed to be the head of the nation and the supreme leader. But now they want a king. They want what other nations have. They don't like being different.
- The difference between kings and judges – both judge in a sense. So what is the difference? Seat of power. A judge is helping people get along with people and determining what is best from a big picture perspective. A king is implementing his vision and will for the nation and people.
- But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king²³ to judge us." – Samuel knew what this meant. It meant not only that he was being rejected in his leadership (with his boys), but that they were rejecting God's leadership of their nation. Practically speaking he knew that it was going to lead to ups and downs and mostly ruin, which the books of 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles reveals.
- And Samuel prayed to the LORD. – When Samuel was upset he prayed. Shouldn't we all do that a LOT more? I should. Sometimes we don't pray as the first reaction. Too often we get upset, worry, stress, lash out, then

²¹ "It may be that Samuel himself had contributed to the lack of trust in God by appointing his own sons as judges (see below, on v. 1), instead of waiting on God to raise up a judge acceptable in his eyes. In fact, the office of a judge was never hereditary like the priestly one. When Gideon was requested by the people to rule over them, he turned down that request, saying "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you" (Judg. 8:23). It may be that the people had grown used to seeing the person of Samuel without seeing the God who, though unseen, was king behind him controlling history. When Samuel became old and unable to control the behavior of his own sons, the situation seemed to them to be totally desperate. They too did not want to wait for God to act to raise up someone to judge or lead in battle as the need arose; they wanted someone on hand (see 1 Sam. 8:19–20). So, they requested a king "like all the (other) nations" (v. 5). The same mistake is repeated by the people of God in the modern age as they lose sight of Him who rules as the real king of universe; see "Introduction" (Section IX, A). Thus, this was not simply a request for a socio-political transformation; it was a serious religious offense against Israel's sovereign God. Since Yahweh the creator had been the king from the beginning, the request for a human king was the rejection of God who had been "ruling over them as a king" (v. 7), namely, the rejection of theocracy. This was an extremely crucial decision made by the people of God, and it would be dangerous for them to become like other nations where a completely different religious system dominated the monarchy." NICOT

²² "For like all the (other) nations (k^okol-haggôyim), see also v. 20; Deut. 17:14; Ezek. 25:8. The people wanted to become like all the other nations, but God had called them uniquely to be his people, under his especial care. But they are exchanging their true glory for status in the eyes of the world. Just as the Israelites were the people of a God who is unique and incomparable with any other god (see on 1 Sam. 2:2); so they were supposedly incomparable with any other nations: that is, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6), "set apart for service to their divine monarch." So, what they hoped to do was exactly to throw away their special status as the chosen people of God in order to identify themselves with the nations of this world." NICOT

²³ "The same phrase, like all the nations, appears in a similar context in Deut. 17:14–15: "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,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman." While the text in Deuteronomy is similar to our passage and some claim that it was "inspired by the tradition about Saul's coronation," it should be noted that there are differences in the key statements. For example, Deuteronomy insists that the king be an Israelite, a non-issue in the Samuel account. In the Samuel passage, conscription of sons and daughters is forecast, while the Deuteronomy passage forbids multiplication of horses. But though the Samuel passage could be the realization of the situation envisioned in Deuteronomy (in 10:20 only Israelites are involved in the lots), it is hard to think that the traditions recorded in Samuel were the source of the Deuteronomy passage. Kingship in Canaan was known to Israel from the beginning of the settlement; there were kings of city-states such as Adoni-bezek of Jerusalem (Judg. 1:5). There were also many examples outside of Israel, including the Egyptian kingship as well as the nearby kingdoms of Aram, Moab, and Ammon. It was not surprising, then, that the writer of Deuteronomy would consider the possibility that someday a monarchy might be created in Israel." NICOT

pray, if at all. Samuel wanted to know what God had to say because on Samuel's watch, God was in charge.

- 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. – God said, let them have what they want. They'll learn. And it's clear they are not rejecting you, buddy, you've done a good job. They are rejecting me even though I've done a good job too.
- 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. – Then God goes on to explain that He's always struggled to have their respect and allegiance. He tells a short history lesson of how even from the beginning of their exodus and shaping as a nation they have struggled with loyalty to God. It's just another step of disobedient hearts.
- Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king²⁴ who shall reign over them. – God said, let them have a king but make sure they know what they are walking into so they can't use it later as an excuse that they didn't know.
- **Core Point: When We Want What the World Has – Too often we are counter culture in the wrong ways and not the right ways. What God wants is alignment and allegiance from His people. We want to do what other people do so we can have what they have. But, when we cut God out, we lose the most core elements. Many times we leave the church and blame the church for the failures we see there, but in doing so we leave God behind as well and face the consequences. The failure of the people in church won't get you more grace when you are held accountable for your own life and decisions.**
- It's Not What You Think It Is
 - Samuel warns Israel of the ramifications of a king
 - 1 Samuel 8:10-22 – *"So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. ¹⁵ He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves.*

²⁴ "It simply lists the king's rights according to the rule, or regulations, in a monarchic society." NICOT

18 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."

- So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him. – Samuel was honest before them and laid out the situation for the people to make an informed choice, just as God told him to. Samuel is tremendously faithful.
- He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: - this is what's it's going to practically mean for you to have a king.
 - he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots²⁵ – He will start a standing army and it's going to take your boys away from you (unlike God defending the nation and leaving your boys at home until necessary).
 - And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, - He will design a massive army based on assumptions and guesses about attacks (unlike God who knows who is a real threat and when).
 - and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, - He will want the best of the land and will want his home and palace great. This means he's going to start a labor force to 'make things great'. That's going to be taken from you.
 - and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. – His war machine will demand from you a LOT.
 - He will take your daughters to be perfumers – He will want the fine things in life and that's going to take a lot of your daughters away from you to work for him.
 - and cooks and bakers. – your girls will be brought on staff and you will lose them.
 - He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. – He will demand to take the best of the nation since he's in charge. It's just going to happen that way. He will take the best land and food.
 - He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants²⁶ – He will absolutely start a tax system in the nation to fund all of this stuff and his lifestyle, on top of God's tax on you.
 - He will take your male servants and female servants – He will take your servants that you either paid for or got somehow and he will use them for himself. He'll take your stuff.

²⁵ "On they will run before his chariot, see 2 Sam. 15:1 ("Absalom provided for himself a chariot and horses, together with fifty men to run before him") and 1 K. 1:5 (Adonijah's chariot runners). It was the custom for the royal chariot to be escorted by a team of runners. In 1 Sam. 22:17 (also 1 K. 14:27f.; 2 K. 10:25) "runners" refers to bodyguards in the king's court." NICOT

²⁶ "The term *sārīs* here refers either to officers or to "eunuchs" (NEB; REB) and appears with the other term officials or "trusted servants." It is a loanword from Akkadian (Assyrian) *ša rēši*, "one at the head, officer." As the Assyrian merismatic pair, "eunuchs (= beardless officers)" (*ša rēši*) and "bearded officers" (*ša ziqni*) would refer to the court officials in general; the present expression, *l'sārīsāw w'la'ābādāw*, could also refer to the king's officials in general, though the term *sārīs* by itself can mean etymologically "eunuch." NICOT

- and the best of your young men and your donkeys and put them to his work. – He will take more and more and more and never be satisfied.
 - He will take the tenth of your flocks, - He will even take your flocks and herds in taxes.
 - and you shall be his slaves. – Bottom line: You will be his slaves. Just know what you are walking into. Power like that is always going to get abused.
 - And in that day you will cry out because of your king, - And you will hate it eventually and you will complain and whine.
 - whom you have chosen for yourselves, - But realize now, that it was YOU who wanted this. I don't want to hear about it. This was YOUR choice.
 - but the LORD will not answer you in that day. – And God's going to let you take the consequences of that decision. He's. not going to come in and rescue you immediately from this terrible decision. You all need to learn.
 - **Core Point: The High Cost of Compromise – When we compromise the ways of the Lord there are clear and subtle consequences. When we, as the nation of America chose to collectively and formally distance ourselves from God and Christianity there were implications and ramifications of that which are playing out more and more. God and man's priorities are different. Mankind always asks what it's in it for themselves which means that the greater they get in power the more they want to take. God gives. He has all things and has no craving for more. He can lead unselfishly and does.**
- Blah, Blah, Blah
 - Israel will not relent in their desire for a king
 - 1 Samuel 8:19-22 – *“But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, “No! But there shall be a king over us, ²⁰ 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.” ²¹ And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. 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.””*
 - But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. – Even after all of that warning the people were stubbornly committed to the choice for a king. They probably thought it would be different in their case.
 - And they said, “No! But there shall be a king over us, - they demand it anyway. Why? What is their prime motivators?
 - that we also may be like all the nations, - that they can be like everyone else. This is a grass is greener scenario. They think it will be BETTER.
 - and that our king may judge us – They didn't want Samuel's kids, but they still needed a leader.

- and go out before us and fight our battles. – And they didn't want to be afraid of the unknown anymore. They wanted a leader ready to defend practically in a way they could see and rely on better. God was too mysterious.
- And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. – Samuel shared the info with God (not like He wasn't listening) to talk about it. Remember, it was ultimately a rejection of God.
- And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey their voice and make them a king." – God said, 'let's do this. They'll learn.'
- Samuel then said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city." – we are done here. I've heard you. I've consulted the Lord. I'll get back to you on next steps.
- **When God Gives us What We Want²⁷ – How many things do we desire that are bad for us? How many prayer requests do we pray for that aren't good for us? What if the Lord stopped holding us back and actually let us free to go pursue what we want to pursue? What about the temptations and the sin that we think is what we want? What happens if God opens the gate and lets us out?**

Conclusion

- Huge shift in Israel's History (drama) - The rest of Israel's existence in the ancient world was drama from this choice. It not only didn't accomplish what they wanted it to accomplish but it lead to bloodshed and pain and turmoil.
- The results in the books of Kings and Chronicles: **Israel experienced 43 different kings = 7 were good. 3 started good but ended evil. 2 were too-mixed to know and 31 were declared evil.**
 - 4 Kings of the whole united nation: Saul (evil); Ishbosheth (unk); David (good); Solomon (good young, evil old)
 - 20 Kings of Judah (South)
 - 6 Good ones: Asa; Jehoshaphat; Uzziah/Azariah; Jotham; Hezekiah; Josiah
 - 12 Bad ones: Rehoboam, Abijam/Abijah, Jehoram/Joram, Ahaziah/Azariah/Jehoahaz, Athaliah, Ahaz, Manasseh, Amon, Jehoahaz/Shallum, Jehoiakim/Eliakim, Jehoiachin/Coniah/Jeconiah, Zedekiah.
 - 2 Mixed or Unknown: Joash/Jehoash (good young, bad old); Amaziah (good young, bad old)
 - Captivity to Babylon
 - 19 Kings of Israel (North)
 - 0 Good ones
 - 18 Bad ones: Jeroboam, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram/Joram, Jehoahaz, Joash/Jehoash, Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea.
 - 1 Mixed or Unknown: Jehu
 - Assyrian Captivity
 -

²⁷ This may be an opportunity to unpack "Free Will" and the "The Problem of Pain"--C.S Lewis offers great commentary on both subjects – insight from Pastor Judah Sanders