9-15 June 2024

! Samuel 8: 4-11, 16-20

**Bible notes**

**4**So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. **5**They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Samuel+8%3A4-20&version=NIV#fen-NIV-7375a)] us, such as all the other nations have.”

**6**But when they said, “Give us a king to lead us,” this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. **7**And the Lord told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. **8**As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. **9**Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights.”

**10**Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. **11**He said, “This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. … **17**He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. **18**When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day.”

**19**But the people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” they said. “We want a king over us. **20**Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”

**Bible notes**

Who was to be Israel’s king? During the period of the judges, the answer was God. The judges emerged as charismatic leaders, often in times of crisis, but their authority depended on God’s validation. God had called Israel to be a unique nation directly under his care, a community bound by covenant, a ‘priestly kingdom and a holy nation’ (Exodus 19:6). But now Israel was asking to move away from this model and be ruled by a king, ‘like other nations’ (v.5). They were rejecting the special status offered by God and wanted to adopt the pattern followed by their neighbours. It’s possible to identify social and political reasons for this choice. They were under pressure from the military threat presented by the Philistines, who had kings. Samuel was ageing and his sons were not suitable to take up his role. The elders of Israel recognised the possibility of a power vacuum and took steps to avoid it.

Samuel was clearly opposed to this move. God’s words to him reassured him that they were not rejecting his prophetic authority but God, setting this in the long history of ambivalent relationships between the Israelites and God. Samuel shared God’s words of warning: a king would build a new kind of economy where the land and its produce was held centrally, and the people would be forced into forms of employment that created luxury and glory for the king and his courtiers, but left the sons and daughters of Israel demeaned and unprotected in servile roles. Yet God opted to allow the Israelites to make the choice for kingship. However, God set up a way of king-making that ensured the king was God’s choice, not the people’s. It was Samuel who would have responsibility for identifying Israel’s king, and he would anoint him in line with God’s direction. Elsewhere too it’s clear that God kept control of the process – Deuteronomy 17:14-19 restricts the wealth and wives of the king, who is to be chosen by God. 1 Samuel 12:14 is explicit: the king must follow the Lord.

Though kingship is not God’s preferred option for governing Israel, this passage describes a compromise in which God responds to the people’s wishes in ways that ensure ultimate control remains where it belongs – with the Lord, with whom they are in covenant relationship.

### ****Reflection****

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

There is a difference between God making change and God enabling change. If God makes a change, it would be done and dusted, there would be no responsibility or relationship with us. If God enables change, it falls to us to put the change into being, to make it happen, perhaps to decide its direction and more and, in so doing, to form a relationship with the one who calls, who disturbs, who enables and supports us.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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* Can you think of an action you have taken that has caused big ripples?
* Where was God in the decision you took?

## Are you aware of situations in the news where big decisions must be made? How might you pray for the decision-makers?

## Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

**A prayer of thanksgiving**

Lord God, we thank you that you have placed us in community.   
Our lives are made up of clusters of different people; some we   
have no choice about. But we thank you, Lord, that in you we   
can always choose how we react. Today we choose your way of   
showing love to all. We thank you, God of the people, that you are   
our king. You can make us a community that is transformed by your   
love and our actions.   
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

May God give us eyes of faith to see God’s way   
in the face of the many choices we face.   
May God be in our choices and our plans.   
May God bless us and all those we seek to serve.    
**Amen.**