

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST SAMUEL 8

This chapter relates, how that Samuel being old, and his sons behaving ill, the people desired to have a king set over them, (~~ORR~~ 1 Samuel 8:1-5), which case Samuel laid before the Lord, and he was directed by him to yield to the people's desire, but at the same time to set before them all the disadvantages and ill consequences that would arise from thence, which he did, (~~ORR~~ 1 Samuel 8:6-18), but they insisting upon it, nevertheless, he gave them reason to expect that their request would be granted, (~~ORR~~ 1 Samuel 8:19-22).

Ver. 1. *And it came to pass, when Samuel was old*, etc.] The common notion of the Jews is, that he lived but fifty two years ^{f148}; when a man is not usually called an old man, unless the infirmities of old age came upon him sooner than they commonly do, through his indefatigable labours from his childhood, and the cares and burdens of government he had long bore; though some think he was about sixty years of age; and Abarbinel is of opinion that he was more than seventy. It is a rule with the Jews ^{f149}, that a man is called an old man at sixty, and a grey headed man at seventy:

that he made his sons judges over Israel; under himself, not being able through old age to go the circuits he used; he sent them, and appointed them to hear and try causes in his stead, or settled them in some particular places in the land, and, as it seems by what follows, at Beersheba; though whether that was under his direction, or was their own choice, is not certain.

Ver. 2. *Now the name of his firstborn was Joel*, etc.] In (~~ORR~~ 1 Chronicles 6:28) he is called Vashni; (see Gill on “~~ORR~~ 1 Chronicles 6:28”). This was not Joel the prophet, as some have thought, neither his parentage, nor his office, nor his times, will agree with this:

and the name of his second Abiah: which two sons seem to be all he had:

they were judges in Beersheba; in the utmost border of the land, to the south, as Ramah, where Samuel dwelt and judged, was more to the north;

where they were placed by their father, for the greater convenience of the people of Israel that lived southward, to bring their causes to them, as those lived more northward might bring them to him: according to Josephus ^{f150}, they were placed by their father, the one in Bethel, one of the places Samuel used to go to in his circuit and judge, and the other at Beersheba. But some, as Junius and others, think it should be rendered, “unto Beersheba”; and so takes in its opposite, Dan, which lay at the utmost border of the land northward; hence the phrase, “from Dan to Beersheba”; and that the one was settled at Dan for the sake of the northern part of the land, and the other at Beersheba, for the sake of the southern: or rather these sons of Samuel placed themselves at Beersheba; which was an ill judged thing, to be both in one place, and which must give the people of Israel a great deal of trouble, and put them to a large expense to come from all quarters thither, to have their causes tried; but that is not the worst.

Ver. 3. *And his sons walked not in his ways*, etc.] The meaning of which is not that they did not go the circuit he did, which is too low a sense of the words some Jewish writers give; but they did not walk in the fear of God, in the paths of religion and righteousness, truth and holiness; they neither served God, nor did justice to men, as Samuel had done:

but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment; indulged to covetousness, sought to get riches at any rate, took bribes, which blind the eyes of judges; and so passed wrong judgment, and gave the cause to those that gave the largest gifts, right or wrong.

Ver. 4. *Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together*, etc.] At some place of rendezvous appointed; these were the heads of the tribes, and fathers of the houses and families of Israel, the principal persons of age and authority:

and came to Samuel unto Ramah; the place of his nativity and abode, and where he now dwelt, and judged Israel; they went in a very respectable body with an address to him.

Ver. 5. *And said unto him, behold, thou art old*, etc.] (see ^{<000>}1 Samuel 8:1), his age was no reproach to him, nor was it becoming them to upbraid him with it; nor was it a reason why he should be removed from his office, for it did not disqualify him for it; but rather, having gained by age

experience, was more fit for it, though he might not be able to ride his circuits as formerly:

and thy sons walk not in thy ways; whom he had made judges; this is a better reason than the former for what is after requested; and had they only besought them to remove him from their places, and rested content with that, it would have been well enough; but what they were solicitous for, and always had an inclination to, and now thought a proper opportunity offered of obtaining it, was what follows:

now make us a king to judge us like all the nations; to rule over them as sole monarch; to go before them in battle as their general, as well as to administer justice to them, by hearing and trying causes as their judge; which only they mention to cover their views, and make their motion more acceptable to Samuel; what they were desirous of was to have a king appearing in pomp and splendour, wearing a crown of gold, clothed in royal apparel, with a sceptre in his hand, dwelling in a stately palace, keeping a splendid court, and attended with a grand retinue, as the rest of the nations about them had had for a long time. The first kings we read of were in the times of Abraham, but after it became common for nations to have kings over them, and particularly the neighbours of Israel, as Edom, Moab, Ammon, etc. and Cicero says^{f151}, all the ancient nations had their kings, to whom they were obedient: Israel had God for their King in a peculiar manner other nations had not, and stood in no need of any other; and happy it would have been for them if they had been content therewith, and not sought after another: however, they were so modest, and paid such deference to Samuel, as to desire him to make or appoint one for them.

Ver. 6. *But the thing displeased Samuel*, etc.] Not that they called him an old man, and suggested that he was incapacitated for his office, nor for observing the unbecoming walk of his sons, but for what follows:

when they said, give us a king to judge us; what displeased him was, that they were for changing their form of government, not only to remove it from him, and his sons, but from the Lord himself, who was king over them; the ill consequences of which, many of them at least, he easily foresaw, and which gave him great uneasiness, both on account of the glory of God, and their own good; insomuch, as Josephus^{f152} says, he could neither eat nor sleep, but watched all night, and spent it in prayer, as follows:

and Samuel prayed unto the Lord; to know his mind and will, and what answer he should return unto them.

Ver. 7. *And the Lord said unto Samuel*, etc.] He appeared to him in a vision or dream, and by an articulate voice delivered to him what follows:

hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; not as approving of what they said, but permitting and allowing what they asked, as a punishment of them for their disloyalty and ingratitude, and as resenting their ill behaviour to him; for it was in anger he assented to their request, (^{<2811>}Hosea 13:11)

for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me that I should not reign over them; most interpreters supply the word “only”, as if the sense was, that they had not only rejected Samuel from judging them, but the Lord also from reigning over them; and which is spoken to comfort Samuel, and to alleviate the pressure on his mind for the ill treatment he had met with; for since they had served the Lord after this manner, it was no wonder he should be ill used, and might bear it with great patience: but I see no reason why the word may not be taken absolutely, that they had not rejected Samuel from all share in the government, at least from judging the people; for so he continued all the days of his life, even after they had a king over them; but they entirely rejected the sole and peculiar government of God over them.

Ver. 8. *According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them out of Egypt*, etc.] This was no new thing; all that they had done since they were wonderfully favoured of God, as to be brought out of Egyptian bondage, was all of a piece with this; one continued series of ingratitude, of rebellion against God, and against his servants, that he employed under him, as Moses, Aaron, etc.

even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods; this is what this people were always addicted to, to east off the worship and service of God, and go into idolatry:

so do they also unto thee; acted the like ungrateful part to him for all the service he had done them, from his childhood to that time; wherefore, as the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord, if such things as before observed were done to Jehovah himself, Samuel could not expect to meet with better treatment, other than he had, (see ^{<4024>}Matthew 10:24,25).

Ver. 9. *Now therefore hearken unto their voice*, etc.] And appoint them a king as they desire:

howbeit, yet protest solemnly unto them; not against the thing itself, which was permitted, but against the evil of their request, as to the unseasonable time, ill manner, and unjustifiable reason, in and for which it was made; the Lord would have Samuel lay before them their evil in requesting it, and the evils that would follow upon it to them, and faithfully represent them to them, that they might be left without excuse, and have none to blame but themselves when they, should come upon them:

and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them: or the right or judgment^{f153}; not a legal right or form of government, but an assumed, arbitrary, and despotic power, such as the kings of the east exercised over their subjects, a king like whom the Israelites desired to have; namely, what unbounded liberties he would take with them, what slaves he would make of them, and what of their property he would take to himself at pleasure, as is after related. The word signifies, not a divine law, according to which the king should govern, but a custom, or a custom he would introduce, as the word is rendered, (^{<0023>}1 Samuel 2:13) and is different from that in (^{<0025>}1 Samuel 10:25).

Ver. 10. *And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto them*, etc.] How he considered this request of theirs as a rejection of him as their king, and that it was acting the same ungrateful part they had always done; and since they were so importunate to have it granted, it should be done; but that he was ordered to lay before them all the inconveniences that would attend it, and the evils that would follow upon it unto them:

that asked of him a king; which is observed, not to distinguish a part of them from the rest; for this was an united request of the people.

Ver. 11. *And he said, this will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you*, etc.] Not in which he ought to proceed, but what he will do: and this not the manner of one king, or of the first only, but of all of them, more or less; of kings in general, who are commonly inclined to arbitrary power. So Aristotle^{f154} in opposition to theocracy, describes a full and absolute kingdom, as he calls it, when a king does all things according to his will: and observes, that he that would have the mind or reason preside, would have God and the laws rule; but he that would have a man to reign, adds also a lust, or one led by his own lust: so it follows,

he will take your sons, and appoint them for himself; for his own use and service, to wait upon him, to be his pages, or grooms, or guards:

for his chariots; to take care of them, and drive them, though not without paying them for it; yet this being but a mean and servile employment, and what they should be obliged to, whether they would or no, is observed to show the tyranny and bondage to which they would be subject, when their sons otherwise might be free men, and possessed of estates and carriages of their own:

and to be his horsemen; or rather “for his horses”, to take care of them, and go out along with him, and attend his person, whether when going to war, or on pleasure:

and some shall run before his chariots; be his running footmen, being swift of foot, and trained up for that service; some are naturally swift, as Asahel was (^{<1028>}2 Samuel 2:18). Pliny ^{f155} speaks of some swifter than horses; and of the swiftness of some he elsewhere gives ^{f156} many surprising instances. It seems as if it was usual to have fifty such men to run before them, (see ^{<1031>}2 Samuel 15:1 ^{<1005>}1 Kings 1:5).

Ver. 12. *And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties*, etc.] Which though posts of honour, yet when they are not matter of choice, and especially being precarious, and depending on the arbitrary will of a prince, are not eligible, and less so to persons that choose another sort of life:

and [will set] them to ear his ground; to plough it; not the same persons made captains of thousands and fifties, but others, whom he will employ in tilling and manuring his fields, and oblige them to it:

and to reap his harvest; when it is ripe, and gather it in, and bring it home into his barns and garners:

and to make his instruments of war: as swords, spears, bows and arrows, most commonly used in those times:

and instruments of chariots; which seem to design chariots of war, and the iron spikes and scythes which were joined to them, to cut down the foot soldiers, when driven among them in battle, which are commonly called chariots of iron; (see ^{<676>}Joshua 17:16 ^{<0043>}Judges 4:3).

Ver. 13. *And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries*, etc.] Such as deal in spices, and mix them, and make them up in various forms very agreeable to the taste. Men are commonly in our countries and times employed in such arts, but it seems this was the business of women in those times and places. Some versions ^{f157} render it “*unguentariae*”, makers or sellers of ointments, and such there were in some nations ^{f158}, such was Lydia in Juvenal ^{f159};

and to be cooks; to dress all sorts of food, especially what were boiled, as the word signifies: and to be bakers; to make and bake bread, which though with us is the work of men, yet in the eastern countries was usually done by women; (see Gill on “⁻⁰³²⁶Leviticus 26:26”).

Ver. 14. *And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards*, etc.] Which includes the whole increase of their land, their corn, and wine, and oil; and it is these, the fruits of their fields, vineyards, and oliveyards, which are here meant; for otherwise kings might not, and did not by their absolute authority, take away those from their subjects; otherwise Ahab would have taken away Naboth’s vineyard at once, nor would Jezebel have needed to have taken such a method she did, to put Ahab into the possession of it:

even the best of them, and give them to his servants; for their service; and which some restrain to times of war, when necessity obliged to use such methods.

Ver. 15. *And he will take the tenth of your seed*, etc.] When grown up and ripe, as their wheat and barley:

and of your vineyards; the tenth of the grapes they should produce:

and give to his officers, and to his servants; for the support and maintenance of them; and to pay this, besides the tithes of the priests and Levites, would make it very burdensome to them; and this was no other than what kings of other nations usually had, the like to whom they were desirous of having, and therefore must expect that they would insist upon the privileges and revenues that others had. In Babylon, as Aristotle ^{f160} relates, there was an ancient law which required the tenth of whatever was imported for the public revenue, which was revived in the times of Alexander by Antimenes the Rhodian. In Arabia Felix was an island abounding with frankincense and myrrh, and various spices, the tenth of

the fruits of which the king always had, as Diodorus Siculus^{f161} reports, as in the Apocrypha:

“And as for other things that belong unto us, of the tithes and customs pertaining unto us, as also the salt-pits, and the crown taxes, which are due unto us, we discharge them of them all for their relief.” (1 Maccabees 11:35)

Ver. 16. *And he will take your manservants, and your maidservants,* etc.] Into his own family, for his own use and service, if he wants them, or likes them better than what he has:

and your goodliest young men: that are tall and lusty, comely and beautiful, of a proper stature and good aspect; and such in all countries used to be chosen for officers in courts, or attendants there; and so the Turks to this day pitch upon young men to attend on great personages, who are of a comely form, have admirable features, and are well shaped, (see Gill on “~~2004~~ Daniel 1:4”),

and your asses, and put them to his work; employ them in ploughing his fields, drawing his carriages, or bearing his burdens; and so any other cattle that would serve the same purposes, as oxen, camels, etc.

Ver. 17. *He will take the tenth of your sheep,* etc.] As well as of their seed and vineyards; and not the tithe of their flocks only, but of their herds also, which are here included, as Kimchi observes:

and ye shall be his servants: made slaves of by him, even as the Canaanitish servants were, according to Abarbinel; though others interpret it more mildly of their being obliged to pay tribute and taxes, for the support of his government.

Ver. 18. *And ye shall cry out in that day, because of your king,* etc.] His power and pride, his oppression and tyranny, his heavy exactions, and intolerable yoke, and yet not be able to free themselves from them; all that they could do would be only to cry out under them as grievously distressed, and not knowing how to help themselves; and which would be the more aggravated, because they brought all this upon themselves, as it follows:

which ye shall have chosen you; for though the choice of a king for them, at a proper time, God had reserved to himself, yet in later times, as is here

suggested, they would choose for themselves, and did, (see ^{<2804>}Hosea 8:4) besides, to have a king in general was at first their own choice, though the particular person was by the designation of the Lord:

and the Lord will not hear you in that day; will not regard them, have no compassion on them, suffer them to remain under their oppressions, and not deliver them out of them; because they rejected him from being their King, and put themselves out of his protection, into the hands of another, and therefore it was just to leave them to their own choice.

Ver. 19. *Nevertheless, the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel*, etc.] The advice he gave not to think of a king, but be content with the government under which they were; but to this they would not hearken, notwithstanding all the inconveniences that would attend such a change:

and they said, nay, but we will have a king over us; they would not believe what Samuel said concerning a king, even though they were the words of the Lord he delivered to them; and though they knew Samuel was a prophet, and spoke by a spirit of prophecy, and none of his words had ever fallen to the ground: but such was their stubbornness and obstinacy, and so set upon having a king, that one they would have, let them suffer what hardships, or be at what expenses they might; at all events, and against all remonstrances, they were determined to have one.

Ver. 20. *That we also may be like all the nations*, etc.] Even though they were slaves, like them; a king they would have, as they had, such was their stupidity. It was their greatest honour and glory, as well as happiness, not to be like other nations; as in their religion, laws, and liberties, so in their form of government; God being their King in such a peculiar sense as he was not of others, but with this they could not be content:

and that our king may judge us; hear their causes, administer justice and judgment to them, protect their persons and properties, and rule them according to the civil laws that were given them:

and go out before us, and fight our battles; which Samuel their present judge did not, and to which perhaps they may have some respect; but then he gained more for them by his prayers, than a king or general would by his military skill or prowess, (see ^{<0070>}1 Samuel 7:10), and it is very remarkable, and what is observed by some, that their first king died in a battle. What made them so pressing and importunate to have a king at, this time, and not defer it to another, it is very probable was, that they understood that

Nahash, king of the children of Ammon, was preparing to attack them, and therefore they were desirous to have a king also to go out before them, and meet him, and give him battle, (~~12~~1 Samuel 12:12).

Ver. 21. *And Samuel heard all the words of the people*, etc.] Patiently, and without interruption; attentively heard them, took notice of them, laid them up in his memory; but gave no answer to them, but reported them to the Lord, as in the next clause:

and he rehearsed them in the ears of the Lord; privately, in a free and familiar manner, with great exactness, as they were expressed; this he did, not before the people publicly, but in secret prayer, seeking for direction what he should further do, or what answer he should return to them.

Ver. 22. *And the Lord said to Samuel*, etc.] an audible voice, or by an impulse upon his mind:

hearken unto their voice, and make them a king; since they will have a king, let them have one, and let them know that they shall have one:

and Samuel said unto the men of Israel: the elders of the people that addressed him on this occasion, (~~12~~1 Samuel 8:4)

go ye every man unto his city; signifying they might return in peace, and be assured their request would be granted, and a king would be appointed in a short time, and which they might report to their fellow citizens; and they might expect to hear from him quickly, as soon as he had instructions from the Lord who should be their king, which right he had reserved to himself; and therefore in the mean while they might rest contented that they would have one in a little time.