

After twenty years of oppression by the Philistines after the ark was returned, Israel finally began to turn back to the LORD and He responded by helping them. Some years later, Samuel has made his sons judges but they do not have the integrity of their father. The elders of Israel come to Samuel with the request that he follow the example of other nations and give them a king to rule over them.

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1 And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD.

**“And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the LORD”** – The LORD had tormented the Philistines with mice and tumors for seven months, causing them to realize that they could no longer keep the ark of the covenant as a trophy of their victory over Israel. They set it on a cart pulled by two milk cows and let the cows go where they wanted. The cows pulled the ark back to Israel, stopping at Beth-Shemesh. The inhabitants of Beth-Shemesh celebrated the return of the ark but the LORD killed many of them because they had violated the LORD’s command (Num. 4:20) by looking inside the ark. In fear, the men of Beth-Shemesh sent messengers to Kirjath-jearim and asked them to take the ark. Why did they not return it to Shiloh? It’s possible that Shiloh had been destroyed by the Philistines, as some scripture passages allude to (Psalms 78:60; Jer. 7:12, 7:14; 26:6, 26:9).

**“and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD”** – We know nothing about Abinadab or his son Eleazar, but apparently the LORD was satisfied with the arrangement. It appears that Abinadab made the effort to take proper care of the ark by sanctifying his son.

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2 And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

**“And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years”** – The ark’s time at Kirjath-jearim was not brief. It remained there for twenty years until the events of the next verse happen. Commentators estimate that the ark was under the care of Abinadab’s sons for around 70 years, leaving only when King David brings it to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6; 1 Chr. 13).

**“and all the house of Israel lamented [to mourn] after the LORD”** – Apparently these twenty years had not been kind to Israel. The Philistines had been oppressing them and Samuel likely had been calling Israel to repent and return to the LORD. At the end of those twenty years Israel began to mourn over their sin of forsaking the LORD to worship other gods (v. 3).

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3 And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, *then* put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. 4 Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only.

When Israel began showing signs of repentance, Samuel responds by telling them what they needed to do and how the LORD would bless them when they did. In order to return to the LORD they would need to do it with all their hearts by leaving behind all the other gods that they had been worshiping. Ashtaroth was the chief goddess of the Sidonians and the Philistines and many in Israel had included images of her in their worship. Samuel advised Israel to “prepare” (*establish; make firm*) their hearts on the LORD and serve Him as their only God. If they did these things then the LORD would rescue them from the oppression of the Philistines. Apparently the hearts of the people of Israel were ready because they obeyed Samuel’s words.

**Verses 5-17:** Samuel calls Israel to a prayer meeting at Mizpeh where they confessed their sins in repentance before the LORD. However, the Philistines became suspicious when they heard that Israel had gathered there and sent their army to attack. Samuel made a burnt offering to the LORD and cried out in prayer on behalf of Israel and the LORD answered by confusing the Philistines with a thunder storm. Israel was then able to mount a counter-offensive and defeat the Philistines. The LORD gave Israel the advantage over the Philistines while Samuel was alive, allowing them to regain the cities that the Philistines had previously taken from them.

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1 And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel.

Over the years Samuel had judged Israel on an annual circuit between Beth-el, Gilgal, and Mizpeh (1 Sam. 7:16). Now that he was getting old, he likely could not maintain such a busy schedule so he enlisted his sons to help him judge Israel. They were apparently in line to replace Samuel when he died.

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2 Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: *they were* judges in Beer-sheba. 3 And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.

**“Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: *they were* judges in Beer-sheba”** – We are given the names of the two sons that Samuel had set in place as judges. Their base of operations was in Beer-sheba.

**“And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre [unjust gain], and took bribes, and perverted judgment”** – Unfortunately, Samuel’s sons did not have the integrity of their father, but used their position as judges to pad their own pockets with illicit gain. They willingly accepted bribes in return for a favorable judgment, which was contrary to the law: **Deut. 16:19** “*Thou shalt not wrest [bend; twist] judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous.*” It is ironic that Samuel also had a problem with his sons after seeing Eli’s troubles with his sons, although it’s unclear whether or not Samuel was aware of his sons’ dishonest practices.

4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, 5 And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.

**“Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah”** – Ramah was where Samuel’s home was (1 Sam. 7:17). These elders represented each of the tribes of Israel.

**“And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways”** – They point out Samuel’s age and the fact that it would not be too many years before he would die and the responsibility for judging Israel would fall to his sons, who did not have the integrity of their father. Apparently the dishonesty of Samuel’s sons was well known to the people, if not to Samuel.

**“now make us a king to judge us like all the nations”** – These elders believe the solution is for Samuel to establish a king to judge the people since Samuel’s sons were not suitable for taking Samuel’s place when he died.

6 But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. 7 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

**“But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD”** – Up until this point the LORD had governed Israel through men who served as judges. Now the elders were asking Samuel to replace himself with a king to be their judge, which Samuel apparently interpreted as a rejection of him and his ability to judge (v. 7b), as well as a rejection of the LORD as being sovereign over Israel.

**“And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee”** – The LORD gives Samuel permission to do as the elders have asked. The LORD had anticipated that Israel would eventually have a king and had already given commandments governing the behavior of their kings (Deut. 17:14-20).

**“for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them”** – Samuel should not take the people’s desire for a king as a rejection of himself, because in reality they were rejecting the LORD as the One Who would reign over Israel. The LORD’s intention was that the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, would be Israel’s One true King.

8 According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.

Israel was being consistent with their track record of rebellion against the LORD. Their desire for a human king was just the latest example of the rejection of the LORD’s leadership that Israel had been exhibiting ever since their emancipation from Egypt.

9 Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.

The LORD permits Samuel to do as the people have asked, but not before warning them of the consequences of what they were asking. He is to explain to them what it will mean to have a king rule over them and how that they will have to serve according to this king’s desires.

**Verses 10-18:** Samuel explains that a king will do such things as drafting the people’s sons into his military as well as to serve as personal servants to work his land. The king will tax the people 10% of their seed, livestock, land and property in order to finance his administration. He then warns them that the LORD will not listen when they cry out to the LORD because of the hardship that their king has put them under. They will be reaping the consequences of what they asked for.

19 Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have 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.

**“Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us”** – The people have made up their mind and stubbornly refuse to reconsider their request despite what Samuel has told them. They then give three reasons why they want a king.

**“That we also may be like all the nations”** – Apparently they believed that if all the other nations had a king, then it must be because that system of government worked and was best. However, God’s people always make a mistake when they want to be like the world instead of what God intends us to be. They wanted a man to rule over them like the other nations did instead of having the LORD ruling over them and delegating his authority through a judge.

**“and that our king may judge us”** – They wanted a man to be the final authority in administering justice. Before, a judge provided this under the authority and guidance of the LORD.

**“and go out before us, and fight our battles”** – They wanted to hand over the responsibility of fighting battles to a king who would be responsible for maintaining an army. Previously the LORD would raise up a leader who would assemble an army when needed and then go into battle dependent on the LORD to fight for them. Now they wanted to depend on a king to fight their battles.

21 And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD. 22 And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city.

Samuel takes the words of the people back to the LORD, Who gives him permission to give the people a king. So Samuel sends the people away so that he can consult with the LORD on how to go about doing as they have asked.