

Misplaced Faith

WHY DO WE PUT FAITH IN PEOPLE INSTEAD OF GOD?

Focal Verses • 1 SAMUEL 8:1–9, 19–22

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will DESCRIBE the events that led up to the Israelites' demand for a king, DESIRE to live in obedience to God's way, and GIVE difficult areas of our lives to God.

In Focus

"We need a strong leader with a new vision!"

That was the cry and sentiment of the congregation as they grew tired of their interim pastor. The interim pastor, Pastor Bob, was an empathetic and collaborative leader who wanted to make sure the church had a strong foundation before they called their next pastor. Some church board members felt that Pastor Bob wasn't a good enough preacher. Others felt like Pastor Bob was asking too much for the members to be involved. Others didn't like the prayer meetings he was calling. The congregation wanted change after their last pastor had moved, but they didn't want to have to work for things to be different. When the pastoral search committee got together, they decided they wanted a strong-willed, charismatic preacher who would understand that the pastor should be doing all the work of the church. The members were there to be led, not be leaders.

A year later, Pastor Bob got a call from the chair of the search committee. "Would you be interested in interviewing to come back to our church? The pastor we called is leaving again; he is suing us after he had ethical and abuse issues, and the church is in bad shape."

"I am so sorry to hear that, but I have taken another ministry assignment," Pastor Bob replied.

Sometimes people misplace their faith in people because it requires less work than trusting in God. How can we avoid settling for what is harmful because it is easy or attractive?



Keep in Mind

"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"
(1 Samuel 8:22, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV 1 Samuel 8:1 And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel.

2 Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beersheba.

3 And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

The People, Places, and Times

Samuel. Samuel was born into an Ephraimite family in Ramah. His mother, Hannah, had been barren before she prayed and the Lord answered her prayer for a child. When Samuel was born, she dedicated him to the Lord. His father, Elkanah, and his mother took Samuel as a boy to the Shiloh temple to be raised by the priest, Eli. Samuel was called by the Lord and established as a prophet of the Lord. Later, he became one of Israel's greatest judges.

Ramah. Ramah, the birthplace of Samuel, shares its root with the Hebrew verb *rum* (on), meaning 'to be high' or 'exalted.' The town is also called Ramathaim-Zophim in 1 Samuel 1: 1, possibly meaning "the double heights of

the Zophites." This is also the place where the elders came to demand a king and where Saul first met Samuel. It is still uncertain where this town was located.

Background

As judge of Israel, Samuel led the people to victory over the Philistines and motivated them to return to the Lord with all their hearts. In 1 Samuel 7:1–14, Samuel challenged the Israelites to rid themselves of all foreign gods and follow the Lord with all their hearts. The people obeyed Samuel, and he assembled them together to pray and fast while he interceded for them before the Lord. The Philistines heard about the Israelites assembling and decided to attack

them, fearing that the Israelites were planning to wage war on them. But the Lord, through a great thunder, caused the Philistines to panic, and the Israelites were able to conquer them. In memory of this great victory, Samuel set up an altar at Mizpah called “Ebenezer,” which means “Stone of Help.” This began a time of rest for the Israelites because they did not have to fight the Philistines or other enemies. During this time, Israel came to Samuel to request a king.

At-A-Glance

1. Israel’s Last Judge (1 Samuel 8:1–3)
2. Israel’s Request for a King (1 Samuel 8:4–9)
3. Israel’s Request Granted (1 Samuel 8:19–22)

In Depth

1. Israel’s Last Judge (1 Samuel 8:1–3)

Israel’s judges, chosen by God, had a significant part in their history and growth. They were deliverers from oppression, leaders in war, and the judges in judicial matters. Samuel, Israel’s last judge, performed all these duties and more. His time of duty extended all the days of his life (1 Samuel 7:15).

Samuel’s character and relationship with God made him one of Israel’s greatest judges. He had an excellent knowledge of and respect for God’s law and an intimate communion with God. Samuel led the people of Israel by the Word of God and prayer instead of by the sword. He relied on God to restrain the aggression of surrounding nations and protect against their attacks.

Each year, Samuel traveled approximately 50 miles, from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel (v. 16). He was more than a judge to the Israelites. Samuel also served as a counselor,

pastor, and prophet of the people. As pastor and prophet, he abolished idolatry among the people and built an altar in Ramah to the Lord (v. 17). Samuel testified through the building of this altar that his authority and wisdom to judge came from the Lord.

As Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons to help with his duties as judge (8:1). His sons, Joel and Abijah, served at Beersheba, which was in the extreme south of the tribe of Judah. Joel and Abijah did not follow Samuel’s example. Joel and Abijah were dishonest judges, accepting bribes and perverting the people instead of upholding justice among them (8:3). They used their office for selfish gain and not for the benefit of the people or God’s glory.

2. Israel’s Request for a King (vv. 4–9)

The behavior of Samuel’s sons brought great concern among the Israelites. As a result, the elders of Israel came to Samuel at Ramah (v. 4); the elders, as the heads of the tribes, represented the people. They laid out their concerns before Samuel. The Israelites were concerned about what would happen when Samuel died. They realized Samuel was old and his sons would not lead them as he did.

The Israelites had a sincere concern. Therefore, the Israelites wanted Samuel to appoint a king to lead them before he died. Their offense was that they wanted “a king to judge them like all the nations” (v. 5). The Israelites had forgotten that they were a people chosen by God. God had been their King. He had ruled them through His representatives. God called the Israelites to live by a different set of standards. They were not to be like other nations. They rejected God’s way of doing things by asking for a king.

Samuel was displeased with their request (v. 6) and prayed to the Lord concerning the people’s petition. The Lord understood Samuel’s

sadness and comforted him by stating that “they are rejecting me, not you” (v. 7, NLT). God reminded Samuel of the Israelite’s constant rejection of His leadership. He used the example of how they chose to serve other gods after He led them out of Egypt (v. 8).

Although Samuel was displeased with the people, God knew their hearts. He told Samuel to warn them of the consequences of going their own way and having a king (v. 9).

3. Israel’s Request Granted (vv. 19–22)

Samuel warned the people what it would be like to have a king. Still, they demanded a king. They refused to listen to Samuel’s warning and, with determination, stated, “We want a king over us” (v. 19). The people insisted that they needed a king to lead them and go out before them and fight their battles like other nations. Yet, their closest neighbor, the Philistines, had no king but an oligarchy of five princes (Joshua 13:3, Judges 3:3, 16:5). Perhaps the people wanted not to develop themselves or their nation but to escape the rigor of the Mosaic law.

The people believed they would be better off with a human king who would manage their judicial problems and care for the country’s defense against their neighbors.

Although Samuel was distressed over the people’s decision, he took the request before the Lord (v. 21). Samuel became the people’s mediator and brought the nation’s petition to Yahweh in prayer. Yahweh heard their request and granted it. He told Samuel to “listen to them and give them a king” (v. 22).

God agreed to let Israel have a king like all the other nations. God allowed them to have their way and to learn by experience what it means to do it their way versus His way. God desires us to do things His way, but He will allow our will if we insist on doing things our way.

Search the Scriptures

1. How do we know that Samuel’s sons Joel and Abijah did not follow Samuel’s example as judge? (1 Samuel 8:3, 5).
2. What was Samuel’s response to the people’s request for a king? (1 Samuel 8:6).
3. What reason did the Israelites give for wanting a king? (1 Samuel 8:19–20).

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why do we sometimes expect human leaders or groups to solve problems only God can solve?
2. How does Religious Nationalism highlight the desire for our works to save our nation when only God can save us?

Liberating Lesson

Our global society faces a battle of choices between different government, political, and leadership styles. There are authoritarian governments and democracies. There are religious states and secular states. There are political liberals and conservatives. There are top-down corporations and grassroots organizations. As people shift from one form of leadership to another, it can be difficult to discern how to follow God’s leading in response. Often, the thing we think we want is not what God wants for us. How can we respond faithfully to leaders without expecting them to be saviors? What does faithful leadership look like in your organization, community, and nation?

Application for Activation

Our relationships, finances, healthy lifestyle, and career choices are only a few challenging areas to give to God. Proverbs 16:3–4 states, “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. The Lord works out everything for his own end. . .” Is there an area of your life that you prefer to handle your way instead of committing it to God’s way? Write this area down on a paper, and then write Proverb

16:3–4 on the same paper. Pray and ask God to help you commit to doing things His way.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

New Bible Dictionary, Edited by I. Howard Marshall, A.R. Millard, J.I. Packer, and D.J. Wiseman. IntVarsity Press, 3rd Edition, 1996.

Say It Correctly

Solemnly, sol-emn-ly

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 57

Deuteronomy 5–7

Psalm 27:1–3

DAY 58

Deuteronomy 8–10

Psalm 27:4–6

DAY 59

Deuteronomy 11–13

Psalm 27:7–12

DAY 60

Deuteronomy 14–16

Psalm 27:13–14

DAY 61

Deuteronomy 17–20

Psalm 28

DAY 62

Deuteronomy 21–23

Psalm 29

DAY 63

Deuteronomy 24–27

Psalm 30