

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel

Lesson 4: Samuel Judges Israel; “Give Us a King” -- 1 Samuel 7:1–8:22

Picture Israel twenty years after the ark came home. The Philistines still press on the borders. The shrine at Shiloh is a memory. And the people, like sheep without a shepherd, drift back toward the old idols that always seem to be waiting at the edge of the camp. Then one voice rises above the confusion, the voice of Samuel, and it says something so simple it is almost startling: if you will return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away your gods and prepare your hearts unto Him alone. The whole story turns on that one word, return.

We know that pull. We know what it is to set up little altars to the comfortable idols of our time, money, approval, control, the endless screens that promise us we will not be bored or afraid. Israel did not need a lecture; they needed to come home. And when they gathered at Mizpah, drew water and poured it out before the Lord, and confessed, “We have sinned against the Lord,” something happened that we long to see happen in us. Heaven moved. The same God who had been waiting all those years was not slow to forgive.

Then comes a stone. Samuel takes it, sets it up, and names it Ebenezer, “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” It is a marker, a memory you can touch. Every life that walks with God needs a few of those stones, places where you can stand and say, this far the Lord has brought me. We are forgetful people, and grace, once received, fades fast unless we build something to remember it by.

But the lesson does not end on the mountaintop. Samuel grows old, his sons prove unworthy, and the elders of Israel come with a request that sounds reasonable and is, underneath, a quiet rejection of God Himself: “Make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” Like all the nations. There is the ache that lives in every human heart, the desire to be like the world rather than to trust the rule of an unseen King. Watch closely in this lesson, because the very thing they begged for would one day cost them dearly, and the God who warned them gave it anyway, in patience and in sorrow.

Group Discussion: When Israel asked for a king “like all the nations,” what were they really rejecting, and where do you see the church today tempted to want to look and operate like the world around it rather than trust God's rule?

Personal Reflection: What is one idol, a comfort, a fear, a habit, that you have allowed back into your life, and what would it look like for you this week to “put it away” and prepare your heart unto the Lord only?

Read 1 Samuel 7:1–8:22

Study Questions

1. According to 1 Samuel 7:3, what did Samuel say Israel must do to be delivered from the Philistines, and what does this teach us about the way God brings genuine restoration to His people?
2. Israel “put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only” (7:4). What idols compete for your loyalty, and what does putting them away actually require of you, not in feeling only but in action?
3. At Mizpah the people drew water, poured it out before the Lord, fasted, and said, “We have sinned against the Lord” (7:5–6). What marks this as true repentance rather than mere regret, and how does the New Testament describe genuine repentance?
4. Samuel set up a stone and called it Ebenezer, “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us” (7:12). What are the “Ebenezer stones” in your own walk, and how could remembering them strengthen you in present trials?
5. When Israel cried to the Lord and He thundered against the Philistines (7:9–11), what does the contrast between earlier defeat and this victory reveal about where Israel's true strength lay?
6. Samuel “judged Israel all the days of his life” and went year by year on a circuit (7:15–17). What does his steady, unglamorous faithfulness over a lifetime stir in you about your own quiet, daily service?

7. In 8:5 the elders ask for a king “like all the nations.” Why does God call this a rejection of Himself (8:7) rather than a rejection of Samuel, and what does this reveal about the nature of all our sin?
8. Samuel warned the people, in detail, what a human king would take from them (8:11–18). When have you wanted something so badly that you ignored a clear warning, and what did it cost you?
9. God told Samuel, “Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king” (8:22), even though the request was sinful. What does it reveal about God's sovereignty and His justice that He sometimes grants what we wrongly demand and lets us live with the result?
10. Name one specific way Jesus, the true and rightful King, is forming your heart through this passage to trust His rule rather than to crave being “like all the nations.”

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Deuteronomy 17:14–20, God's earlier instruction about a king who would point them back to His law rather than away from it; Judges 8:22–23, Gideon's refusal to rule because the Lord shall rule over you; Acts 2:30–36, the risen Christ enthroned now as the true King whom Israel longed for; Colossians 1:13, our deliverance into the kingdom of God's dear Son; Romans 12:1–2, the call not to be conformed to this world but transformed.

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