

## 4. Israel Demands a King and the LORD Answers

(1 Samuel 8:1-10:16)

### 2 Samuel and Saul (1 Samuel 8:1–16:13)

“ This second major section of 1, 2 Samuel details **the outworking of one of the Torah’s most important predictions, the transfer of supreme social influence in Israelite culture from judges and Levites to kings.** These chapters function as a historical commentary on Deut 16:18–17:20 and provide insights into both the proximate and underlying causes for Israel’s immutable decision to be ruled by an earthly king.  
[Robert D. Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel, 110–112]

#### 2.1 Israel Demands a King (1 Samuel 8:1–9:17)

##### 2.1.1 Samuel appoints his sons as judges (8:1-3)

- **Samuel is the only judge who ruled over ALL Israel** (see 1 Sam 3:20; 4:1; 7:3, 5; 8:4; 10:20, 25; 11:14–15; 25:1; 28:3) - all others were local or regional. Like others before (Gideon, Eli), Samuel’s sons prove to be faithless, transgressing the Torah (see Exod 23:8; Lev 19:15; Deut 16:19)
- According to **Deuteronomy 17:8–13**, the Levitical priests were to have a role in judging/leading Israel as well. Although Samuel is faithful in this role, his sons are not.
- Both the failure of Samuel’s sons and the coming demand for a King rejects the teaching of The Torah which implies the LORD desired local leadership:

**Deuteronomy 16:18–20** “You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. 16:19 You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. 16:20 Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

### 2.1.2 **The Elders of Israel demand a King, rejecting the LORD (8:4-9)**

- The desire to have a King “like all the other nations” also stands against the LORD’s desires and plans for Israel to be distinct from other nations: Leviticus 20:26; Numbers 23:9
- Passages like Deuteronomy 33:5 and Numbers 23:21 clearly state that early on, Israel accepted YHWH as King. Now they are rejecting Him.
- 8:8 - the LORD clearly indicates that Israel had been unfaithful to Him ever since Egypt!

### 2.1.3 **Samuel warns the people about the “price” of a King (8:10-18)**

- “Unlike the Lord ... human kingship would not result in deliverance for Israel but rather oppression reminiscent of what the people had experienced under Egypt (cf. Exod 2:23), Aram Naharaim (cf. Judg 3:9), Moab (cf. Judg 3:15), and the Midianites (cf. Judg 6:6–7).” (Robert D. Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel, 117)
- **Here, kings in general are described as “takers” who diminish the welfare of others to further their own interests!**
- 8:18 - Having a King would not mean just uniting under one leader; this type of government would create a **burdensome bureaucracy** supported at the expense of the people. *The people would regret their request and call out to the LORD, but He would not listen!*

### 2.1.4 **Israel still demands a King and the LORD responds (8:19-22)**

- 8:20 - Not only does Israel reject YHWH as king, but also as their military leader - the one who has and would fight for them.

### 2.1.5 **Saul is introduced (9:1-14)**

- 9:1- Saul’s family is presented as a wealthy/influential family.
- 9:2 - Saul is the only Israelite in the Bible specifically described as **tall**. In other texts, it is the **enemies** of Israel who are tall: See Numbers 13:33; Deuteronomy 1:28; 2:10; 9:2; 1 Samuel 17:4
- Saul is portrayed as **an incompetent shepherd**, foreshadowing the fact that he will not be a good leader.

“A second significant literary motif traceable throughout the Torah is that of **the shepherd as a noble leader**: righteous men and great patriarchs in the Torah were consistently portrayed as shepherds (Abel [Gen 4:2], Abraham [Gen 12:6], Isaac [Gen 26:14], Jacob [Gen 30:29–31], Judah [Gen 38:13], Moses [Exod 3:1]). Thus in 1 Samuel when the opening image of Saul is that of an incompetent shepherd who cannot even find large animals who stray from the family home—ones that later return home without Saul’s assistance—the audience is prepared to evaluate Saul as an unrighteous and tragic character in the history of Israel. On the other hand, the expectation that David will be a righteous and great man is produced through the initial depiction of David as a shepherd who faithfully abides with the sheep when all others have abandoned him.” [Robert D. Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel, 52]

- 9:5-10 - Saul is presented as being somewhat spiritually blind: 1) he has no idea who Samuel is even though he only lived 5 miles away, 2) he did not consider consulting the LORD with his problem, 3) he assumed that spiritual/prophetic help had to be bought.
- 9:9 - the explanation of the seer/prophet gives us a clue to Samuel’s later editing from earlier sources.
- 9:12 - “**a sacrifice on the high place...**” Samuel had built an altar here in Ramah (in Zuph) in 7:17. He had done this most likely due to the destruction of Shiloh in the earlier battle.

## 2.2 Samuel Anoints Saul (1 Samuel 9:15–10:16)

### 2.2.1 Saul is revealed to Samuel (9:15-27)

- 9:16-17 - notice the 4 times the LORD refers to “**MY people.**”
- 9:17 - “He shall govern/restrain/hold back/hinder my people...” in the majority of uses of this verb, the connotation is *negative*.
- Throughout this whole episode, Saul fails to comprehend the true nature of Samuel as he will do later with Jonathan, David, and Ahimelech. His misjudgments show his **relational/spiritual blindness** and cause tragedy for himself and others.
- 9:21 - Saul is probably indicating that his tribe is the most un-spiritual of the treacherous tribe of Benjamin that had recently almost been destroyed because of their sin (Judges 20:35, 48). Also Saul’s town of

Gibeah had committed one of the most contemptible crimes (parallel to the sins of Sodom) in Israel's history (see Judges 19:22–26)

### 2.2.2 Samuel anoints Saul in private and sends him home with “signs” to look for (10:1-8)

- 10:1 - Until now in Scripture, only **sacred objects** (Leviticus 8:10–11, 30; Numbers 7:1) and **Aaronic priests** (Leviticus 8:30) had been *anointed*.
- 10:1 - Samuel call's Saul a *leader/prince* here, not king, although kingship is clearly implied later.

“In Egyptian culture it was the custom to anoint vassal kings, i.e., minor kings who owed allegiance to the great king of Egypt; in this light we may see the king of Israel not as a king in his own right but as the vassal of Yahweh, who is envisaged as the true king of Israel.”  
[D. F. Payne, I and II Samuel, 50]

- 10:1 - Israel is described as the LORD's *inheritance/heritage*
- 10:2-8 - The Signs that Samuel gives Saul 1) confirms Samuel's prophetic word (finding the donkeys), 2) the gift of the bread for worship was originally intended for the *anointed* Aaronic priests, now it is given to Saul confirming his anointing, and 3) the presence of the LORD is confirmed with the encounter with prophets and the Spirit of the LORD coming upon Saul.
- **10:8 - establishes the relationship of the Prophet and the King - the King was to be under the authority of the LORD through the instruction of the prophet.**

### 2.2.3 Saul prophesies with the prophets (10:9-16)

- 10:9 - “**God gave him another heart ...**”  
“The manifestation of the Spirit is most needed (and given by God) at those points in salvation history, when radical turning points occur, and where people must be convinced that this radical change is willed by God. Such was the transition from the leadership of Israel by judges ... to leadership by kings.... [Harry A. Hoffner Jr., 1 & 2 Samuel, 385]
- 10:12- “*Is Saul also among the prophets?*” is probably meant as a cynical jab.