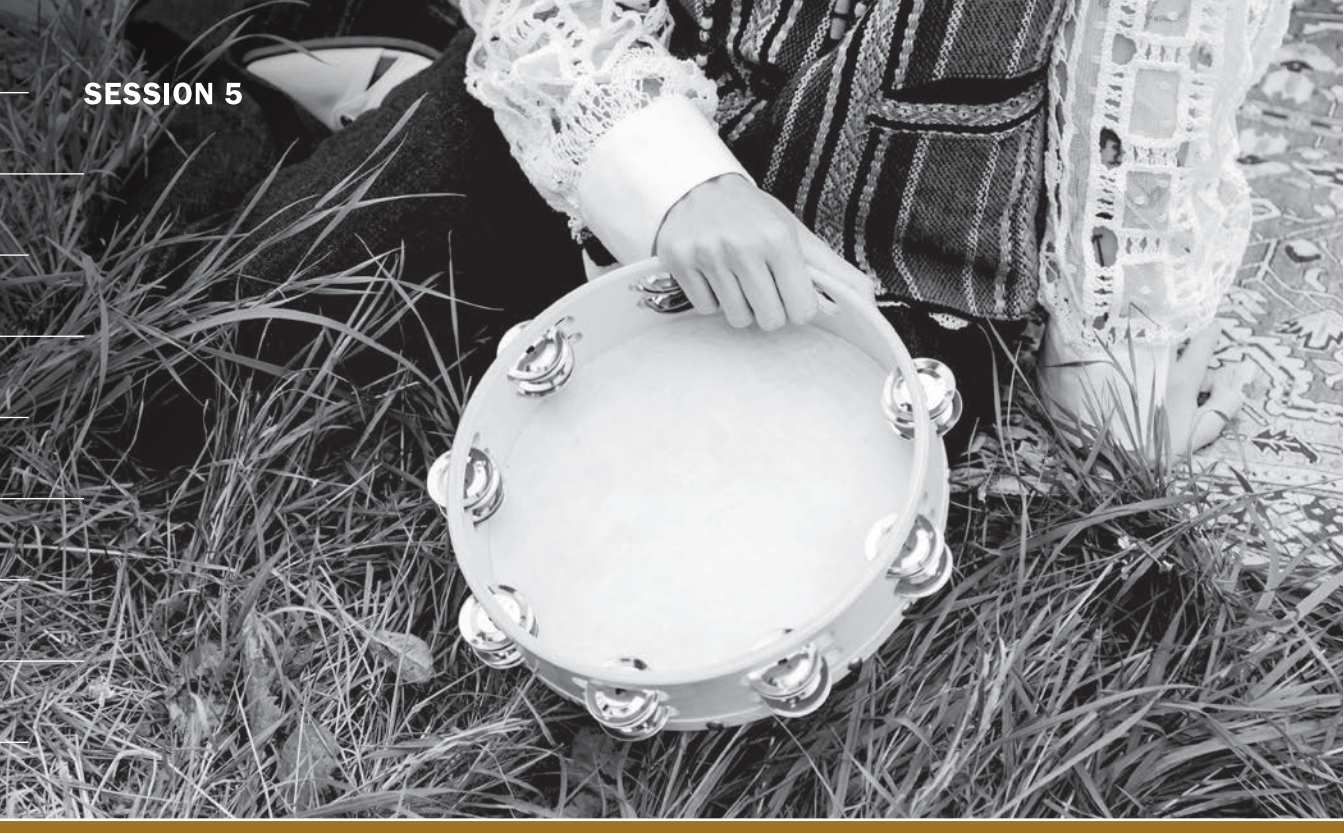


King Demanded

ISRAEL INSISTED ON HAVING AN EARTHLY KING LIKE THE OTHER NATIONS.

1 SAMUEL 8:1-9,19-22

The 1960s saw the rise of the hippie movement. Young people wanted to free themselves from long-held traditions. They wore bell-bottom jeans, psychedelic tie-dyes, and vests with leather fringe. Hippies listened to music that emphasized peace, love, unity, and freedom. They made their voices heard, protesting war and opposing "the man." Ironically, wanting to express their individuality, they eventually acted and looked a lot alike.

Why is it sometimes more comfortable to be like everyone else? Why does standing out from the crowd make us feel uncomfortable and vulnerable?

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

1 SAMUEL 8:1–11:15

The book of Judges provides the backdrop for what was occurring in Israel for this week's study. In preparation for leading God's people into Canaan, the Lord instructed them to drive out the inhabitants of every city and village and to destroy the altars and high places where the people worshiped their pagan gods. Rather than obey fully, they allowed some peoples to stay in the land. Concerning those who remained, an angel told the Israelites, "They will be thorns in your sides, and their gods will be a trap for you" (Judg. 2:3).

After Joshua and those who served alongside him died, "another generation rose up who did not know the LORD or the works he had done for Israel" (2:10). The Israelites abandoned God; they began to worship Baal and other Canaanite gods. God sent judgment in the form of marauders who would attack and oppress God's people. The Israelites would call to God in repentance. In response, the Lord raised up judges—twelve in all—who would fight their enemies. While these twelve judges were protecting God's people, the Israelites would be obedient to the Lord. After the judge died, though, the people would return to their ungodly ways.

Even before His people crossed into Canaan, God had told them to appoint judges when they settled into Israel. He instructed, "Appoint judges and officials for your tribes in all your towns the LORD your God is giving you. They are to judge the people with righteous judgment" (Deut. 16:18). Initially, this was how the Israelites functioned politically and culturally.

We see this structure in an early scene in Israel's history. In trying to identify who had disobeyed his command not to remove anything from the conquered city of Jericho, Joshua called the people forward and told them to organize by tribes. The selected tribe was to organize by clans, and then the clans by families. From the chosen family, God identified the culprit, Achan (Josh. 7). This presents a snapshot of how the nation was first organized in Canaan. What we see in today's study is the end of this political and cultural structure.

Read 1 Samuel 8:1-9,19-22. What motivations for wanting a king are clearly stated in the passage?

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

THE DEMAND (1 SAM. 8:1-5)

[1] When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges over Israel. [2] His firstborn son's name was Joel and his second was Abijah. They were judges in Beer-sheba. [3] However, his sons did not walk in his ways—they turned toward dishonest profit, took bribes, and perverted justice. [4] So all the elders of Israel gathered together and went to Samuel at Ramah. [5] They said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Therefore, appoint a king to judge us the same as all the other nations have."

VERSES 1-3

Chapter 7 ended by saying Samuel served as a judge "throughout his life" (1 Sam. 7:15) Much time passed between chapters 7 and 8. Biblical scholars have conjectured about Samuel's age; the range has been from his sixties to as old as seventy-five. Evidently, though, he had reached an age at which he was concerned about having a successor. So, he ***appointed*** his sons to serve.

Up to this point, Scripture portrayed Samuel in a positive light. In appointing his sons, though, he erred. This was not his decision to make. The office was not an inherited position that passed from one generation to the next. God selected Israel's judges.

In much of the ancient world, parents chose names that reflected their hopes for the children's future and destiny. People believed names reflected one's essence. Hence, names were both personal and meaningful, as we see with Samuel's two sons. In Hebrew, the name •***Joel*** meant "Yahweh is God." This was a statement of faith. The name •***Abijah*** was also a statement of faith. It translates as "Yahweh is my Father." The two names reflected the high and holy hopes Samuel had for his sons when they were born.

The word ***however*** stands like a massive roadblock. All was not well in Samuel's life. The difficulty came because of Joel and Abijah. This seems to have been a case of history repeating itself. Eli had been Samuel's mentor. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, like their father, served as priests. But rather than demonstrate humility and godliness, they were "wicked men" (2:12). They treated people's offerings with contempt and demanded the best parts of the meat for themselves (vv. 13-17). Additionally, they were sleeping with the

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

women who served at the tabernacle's entrance (v. 22). As a result, God brought judgment on the Israelites and, specifically, on Eli's two sons (4:1-22). Samuel's sons, likewise, lived sinfully and abused their power. They took ***dishonest profit*** (Ex. 18:21), accepted bribes (23:8), and ***perverted justice*** (23:2).

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Family*

Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. (See Joshua 24:15; Ephesians 6:4.)

VERSES 4-5

These verses serve as a pivot point not only in the story but also in ancient Israel's cultural, political, and religious life. The situation that had been in place for hundreds of years was about to come to an end, signaled by the elders of Israel going en masse to see Samuel in •***Ramah***.

The elders' coming to Samuel shows that the Israelites still had great respect for the aged prophet and judge. Beginning their message with ***look*** may sound like an argument. For instance, we might say, "Now look!" This, though, was not an argument or confrontation. The word's first biblical usage occurred when God showed Adam plants and trees in the garden (Gen. 1:29).

The elders pointed out Samuel's age and his sons' failures, and they concluded that Israel needed a king. This came despite the fact that Israel's system of judges had worked for hundreds of years.

How were kings and judges different? God raised up a judge, typically for a season, in order to address a crisis or threat. Afterward, the judge went back to his normal life. And judges were not over a government or political structure. Kings served until the end of their lives; their descendants typically then took the throne. Kings maintained a governmental organization, including an army.

Given the difference between judges and kings, what advantages did the people think having a king would offer?

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

THE REJECTION (1 SAM. 8:6-9)

[6] When they said, "Give us a king to judge us," Samuel considered their demand wrong, so he prayed to the LORD. [7] But the LORD told him, "Listen to the people and everything they say to you. They have not rejected you; they have rejected me as their king. [8] They are doing the same thing to you that they have done to me, since the day I brought them out of Egypt until this day, abandoning me and worshiping other gods. [9] Listen to them, but solemnly warn them and tell them about the customary rights of the king who will reign over them."

VERSES 6-9

The book of Judges concluded with, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him" (Judg. 21:25). The verse sets up the scene in which Eli's and Samuel's sons walked in disobedience. They did what they thought they could get by with. The elders, and certainly Israel as a whole, had had enough. Hence, they wanted a king who would ***judge*** or govern them properly.

Samuel believed the people's demand was wrong. That ***he prayed to the LORD*** should come as no surprise. His mother, Hannah, was a woman of prayer and had set the example for her son. Samuel's birth came about after Hannah prayed. Samuel followed her example, regularly praying.

That the ***LORD told him***—that is, spoke directly to Samuel—emphasizes that God still saw him as His chosen prophet. Through him, God would speak to Israel. In that communication, Samuel heard the unexpected. God instructed Samuel to ***listen,*** meaning to hear with understanding.

The people were rejecting the infinite and eternal God and King of heaven (Ps. 5:2; Isa. 44:6). They were looking instead for a temporal and earthly king who, at best, would have finite power and a limited reign (Hos. 13:10-11). This act of rejecting God began early in Israel's history—long before this conversation between Samuel and Israel's elders. Between the Red Sea and Mount Sinai the people began to grumble, complaining that they were starving to death. Moses, knowing that God would provide food, rightly told the Israelites, "Your complaints are not against us [meaning him and Aaron] but against the LORD" (Ex. 16:8). The pattern of complaining and doubting God's faithfulness continued through much of the exodus sojourn. The dates and faces were different.

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

The attitude and actions, though, were the same. God's people repeatedly abandoned Him and went after other gods.

God continued, repeating His imperative to Samuel—***listen***. The context clearly shows He was instructing Samuel to do as the elders asked. With the imperative came a grave admonishment: ***solemnly warn them***.

God's willingness to allow them to go through with their plan shows how seriously He valued man's free will. As He had done in the garden, God allowed people to make the hurtful choice—but with that choice came unavoidable consequences. Indeed, we reap what we sow.

When speaking to Moses in the wilderness, the Lord had set up parameters about how a king was to behave (Deut. 17:14-20). God knew, though, that kings would not live up to this ideal. Thus, He next explained to Samuel how Israel's kings would abuse their customary rights and how His people would suffer (1 Sam. 8:10-18).

What makes it so easy for us to pursue our own agenda instead of trusting in God?

THE RESULT (1 SAM. 8:19-22)

19 The people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We must have a king over us. 20 Then we'll be like all the other nations: our king will judge us, go out before us, and fight our battles." 21 Samuel listened to all the people's words and then repeated them to the LORD. 22 "Listen to them," the LORD told Samuel. "Appoint a king for them." Then Samuel told the men of Israel, "Each of you, go back to your city."

VERSES 19-21

God had instructed Samuel to listen to the people, yet they refused to listen to him. The word translated ***No!*** can also mean, "Never!"

Although they may have known that Israel's future ruler had the option of enacting the "customary rights of the king," (1 Sam. 8:9), the elders were confident that their monarchs would be different. Those rights included taking people's sons and daughters, servants, cattle, and donkeys for his own use. Kings could also take the best from the people's fields and harvests—and take the owners as

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

well (vv. 10-17). The elders believed these things would not and could not ever happen to them. This misguided conviction was behind their declaration, ***We must have a king.*** They thought that having a king and being ***like all the other nations*** would be good.

Being *like all the other nations* meant Yahweh would no longer be His people's Ruler, King, and Lawgiver. They would no longer reflect His glory. Sadly, the house of Judah eventually did become like other nations (Ezek. 25:8).

The people wanted a king who would go out as a warrior and fight their battles. Why make this request now? Some biblical scholars believe that the Israelites' losing the ark of the covenant to the Philistines and afterward seeing them as a long-standing threat had weakened their confidence. Add to that, the Ammonites were becoming increasingly powerful (see 1 Sam. 11; 12:12). The perceived threats were taking an emotional toll on Israel.

What the people's request failed to acknowledge was that God had been fighting their battles since their ancestors had been captives in Egypt. Further, He promised He would continue to do that if they would remain faithful to Him.

Saying Samuel ***listened*** may imply that he both heard what the elders (and by extension, all of Israel) were saying and that he recognized the gravity of their request. In Hebrew, the phrase ***repeated them to the LORD*** literally means he "spoke them in the ears of the LORD." The terminology highlights the intimacy of the conversation.

VERSE 22

This was the third time God told Samuel to ***listen*** (also vv. 7,9). Maybe the repetition highlighted Samuel's reluctance to give the Israelites what they requested.

This verse contains a second imperative: Samuel was to ***appoint a king*** for the people. This was the exact opposite of what Samuel originally thought would have and should have happened. God's words were not a suggestion or a request.

Samuel instructed the elders to return to their individual cities. Their work here was done. Time had come for Samuel to act.

Scripture connects the corruption of Eli's sons to Israel's losing the ark of the covenant to the Philistines. This week's text connects the corruption of Samuel's sons to the loss of the office of judge. Samuel was Israel's last judge; he would identify and anoint Israel's first king.

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

Why do we often think that we are going to be the exception to the rule, as in: "That consequence will never happen to me"? How does that reality help you better understand the elders' insistence that Israel should have a king, despite dire warnings?

Although the people were rejecting God as their King, He would still be the One who would choose the man Samuel was to anoint. What does that say about God's sovereign rule over His people?

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare and contrast the lives of two biblical characters.*

Compare Samuel's description of the customary ways of the king in 1 Samuel 8:11-18 with the narration concerning Solomon's kingdom in 1 Kings 4:21-28. Was Samuel's assessment of the ways of a king accurate in describing what took place under Solomon? What are some words or phrases you might use to describe the kingdom of Solomon? Compare the words of Samuel in 1 Samuel 8:18 with the concerns raised by the people of Israel about the reign of Solomon in 1 Kings 12:4. What lesson can we learn from this study regarding the way we treat others?

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources

APPLY THE TEXT

+ Parents can remain diligent in directing their children to follow God.
+ Believers should resist the temptation to replace God's plan with their own ideas.
+ Believers must be careful about allowing others to fill the roles reserved for God in their lives.

In what ways might God be leading you in a different direction? Set aside some time today or this week and pray for God to give you the courage and opportunity to follow His leading. If appropriate, be ready to share your experience with your Bible study group.

Examine your own life. In what ways are you trying to "fit in" and be like everybody else? Looking for areas of spiritual compromise, what changes do you need to make in your life? Are there areas in which you have put your trust in man rather than God? What changes might you need to make to align yourself more fully with what God wants?

Memorize 1 Samuel 8:7.

Prayer Needs

© 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources