



## Daily Verse and Comment

### 1 Samuel 8:5

(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.

*King James Version*

In ancient Israel's saga of rebellion against her Creator, one incident stands out due to its brazenness. When an aged Samuel appoints his greedy and unrighteous sons as judges in his place ([1 Samuel 8:1-3](#)), the elders of Israel demand that he instead install a king "to rule over [Israel] *like all the other nations*" ([1 Samuel 8:5](#), *Amplified Bible*; emphasis ours throughout). Grieved by this request, Samuel takes the matter to [God](#), who tells him that the real issue is that the people had rejected God from being King over them (verse 7). In reality, they were demonstrating their lack of trust in God. Though not saying it in so many words, this nation whom God had perfectly redeemed from Egypt found their Sovereign to be untrustworthy.

Samuel gives the assembled people a prophetic glimpse of life under a human king (verses 10-18). Yet, even after this inspired warning, the people maintain that they want "a king over us, 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" (verses 19-20). Even though it is not the ideal, and it is not what God would have chosen for them, He gives them what they ask—a government like the nations around them had. Sometimes God's most effective judgment is to give His people what they want and let them suffer for it.

God knew that Israel would someday be influenced by surrounding nations and desire a similar form of government. Knowing His people's hardness of heart, He gives instructions regarding that scenario, such as that *He* would choose the king, that the king would not be foreign-born, etc. However, His true intention was for Israel to be "a kingdom of priests and a *holy* [set apart] nation" ([Exodus 19:6](#)). Earlier, they had been "a people dwelling alone, not

reckoning itself among the nations" ([Numbers 23:9](#)). God reminds them: "I am the LORD your God, who has *separated you from the peoples*" ([Leviticus 20:24](#)). The Israelites' great distinction was that they were *not* like the other nations—and God desired that they remain that way.

The problem was not the king *per se*, for long before, God had promised that kings would come from Abraham ([Genesis 17:6](#)) and that Judah would be the royal tribe from which the [King of Kings](#) would come ([Genesis 49:8-10](#)). The problem was Israel's desire *to be like the nations*, as it showed that they did not trust the system God had established or did not trust God to change it if it needed to be changed. *God* was supposed to be their King ([Exodus 15:18](#) ; [Judges 8:23](#); [I Samuel 12:12](#)).

But during the tumultuous time of the Judges, Israel deteriorated spiritually first, then politically. They did not recognize their spiritual King, and not having a physical one, everyone did what was right in his own eyes ([Judges 17:6](#); [21:25](#)). During this time, Israel was in constant danger of invasion. God frequently chastened them by allowing a foreigner to rule over them, letting the people experience the contrast between His [goodness](#) and the oppression of the profane. Israel's response to this was to seek a physical king to lead them against their enemies. This they did rather than seek the spiritual King who could give them victory but also required their submission. The elders rightly discerned the wretched spiritual condition of Samuel's sons but missed the fact that the leaders God appointed were simply representative of the unrighteous people they governed. Their solution was to borrow a page from [the world](#) around them and have a king, while God's solution was for His people to turn back to Him.

Man gravitates toward a system of human checks and balances that allows him to retain a measure of control. He replaces God's instructions with a constitution, which becomes the law of the land. He sets time limits on how long a person can hold authority and develops intricate procedures for choosing a leader. In contrast, those who trust in God rely on His governance without feeling the need to serve in an advisory capacity. They have confidence in His sovereign ability to elevate those chosen at the right time or to remove them at the right time, if necessary. They also have [faith](#) that,

even when He promotes an unrighteous leader as a means of judging His people, the outcome will still be positive if it causes them to turn back to Him.

For as long as there has been a "world" to eschew, there has also been the great temptation of God's people to imitate it. Yet each time they have given in, it has borne bitter fruit. On the wilderness journey, the Israelites continually compared their circumstances to the world they knew in Egypt. After settling in the land, they compared their situation to the pagan world around them. What they did *not* do was compare themselves against God's desire for them.

When God's people imitate the priorities, values, and methods of the world, they begin to lose their distinctiveness and [holiness](#). They lose that divine setting-apart that is part of God's grace. They may gain some acceptance from the world, but the terrible cost is an uneasy or damaged relationship with the Creator that results from rejecting His rule over them.

— David C. Grabbe

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