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That Old Time Religion

I Samuel 8

Intro: We've now arrived at the 2nd section of the Book of I Samuel. The 1st section deals w/ Samuel & the influence he had on Israel. This next section focuses on the establishment of the monarchy; specifically, the influence of Saul.

Ch7 marked an amazing period in Israel's history; where, in the face of consistently oppressive domination by the Philistines, the nation as a whole repented b/4 the Lord at the direction of Samuel. They honestly sought **YHWH's** forgiveness & divine provision of deliverance from their enemies. Israel finally began 2 honor & respond 2 their covenant God as they were supposed from the very beginning & b/c of this, **YHWH** responds positively 2 their pleas. Their arch rivals are divinely confused & thoroughly overcome. Israel regains her courage & beats the Philistines from her territory, taking back all the real estate that had been forcibly taken from them in the past. This event was memorialized by Samuel by erecting a stone monument he named **Ebenezer: thus far has the Lord helped us.**

Ch8 begins some years later & well, *the times, they were a changing* & the elders wanted the nation 2 change too! 1 thing we know about the Bible is that it is a revelation of God – it shows us what God is like. Another, less enjoyable aspect of the Bible is that it is also a revelation of God's people. That's the function of **ch8: YHWH's analysis of His people**. But let's not make the mistake of assuming we're just going 2/b looking thru a magnifying glass. No, in reality, we're going 2/b looking into a mirror. Not only does the Bible reveal God, it also reveals us!

1-3- old- sets the stage: Samuel's long in the tooth (30+ yrs later). He knows he won't live forever so he appoints his 2 sons as judges (family business). Problem was, like Eli, Samuel's sons were scoundrels. Now, Samuel was 1 of the most godly men in the entire Bible. He's never specifically said 2 sin but this would have 2/b his greatest error: appointing 2 sons as judges. Why? B/c they weren't like him at all. Their greatest failure: they didn't follow **his ways**. Samuel was **pure, honest & upstanding** – he didn't live or minister in hypocrisy – his ways were right b/4 the Lord. But, neither of his sons were a chip off the old block & their failure becomes the catalyst 4 an even bigger problem.

4-5- you're old- elders recognize that Samuel's about 2 pass off the scene & they also know they have no future in his 2 sons, so they come 2 Ramah w/ an important request: "**make us a king...like all the nations.**" **We want military leadership, protection, safety. We were content w/ U but your sons aren't like you & we don't want 2/b stuck w/ them.**

Over the yrs, these elders have gotten a bad rap from preachers & commentators 4 making this request but we must understand that this demand 4 a king was not wrong in & of itself b/c from the very start, a monarchy was expected. Jacob had prophesied on his death bed that the scepter (= **royalty**) would not depart from Judah (**Gen 49:10**). Balaam, in his blessing of Israel, prophesied that they would have a king who would lead them 2 victory over their enemies (**Num 24:17-19**). But most of all, **Deut 17:14-20** teaches us that a monarchy in Israel was 2/b expected. Moses finds no fault in Israel's desire 4 a king (**vs14**) but ironically, the rest of the chapter makes it clear that Israel will **not** have a king "**like all the nations**" b/c he must be a man of **YHWH's** choosing (**15a**); an Israelite (**15b**); w/o all the customary royal benefits – military machine, multiple wives & massive wealth (**16-17**). Most importantly, the king must see himself as subjected & subservient 2 the rule of **YHWH's** law. This was the nature of the king that **YHWH** had planned 4 Israel all along but that's not the elder's concern here. But, what is **YHWH's** analysis of this request?

6-7- displeased- Samuel's not happy about their request but he doesn't vent his displeasure on the elders, instead, he prays about it. Now, there's a novel idea! Would 2 God that we could be so dependent on the Lord as 2 bring our frustrations 2 Him 1st instead of declaring them far & wide 2 any & all who will listen (on facebook or otherwise). He takes it 2 the Lord & is given a **proper perspective** on what's actually transpiring. **YHWH** tells him, "**Don't take it personally Samuel. It's not you they've rejected but they have rejected Me from being king over them.**" There's a lesson 4 believers here: If you want 2 speak the word of the Lord 2 the people around you; if you want 2 share the truths that you've learned from this Book; if you want 2 set an example b/4 the world – you're going 2 experience some rejection & you have 2/b able 2 handle it b/c ultimately, the world is not rejecting you, they're rejecting God. In fact, Israel had a longstanding tradition of rejecting **YHWH's** rule over them from the very beginning...

8- forsaken- tell me the old, old story! This was the old story. They've been doing this 2 **YHWH** 4 centuries, since He brought them out of Egypt! Samuel's only been around 60-70 yrs & hasn't experienced it much, but **YHWH's** seen it many times b/4. Key word in His evaluation is: **forsaken**. The king is not just a substitute 4 Samuel, he's supposed 2/b a substitute 4 **YHWH**! What we have here is just the same old idolatry w/ a new twist. Contrast these events w/ those of the previous chapter. Here, in Israel's current emergency, there's no crying out 2 **YHWH** 4 deliverance, just a demand 4 a king. Their help was no longer in the strong name of **YHWH** but in a new form of government (**Ps 118:8-9**). It's not the **request** 4 a monarchy that's the problem but their **trust** in a monarchy as the solution 2 their problems that's the real villain here. It's not the **fact** of the request but the **motive** behind the request that's tainted it.

The realities of **ch7** are the perfect contrast 2 put **ch8** in proper perspective. At a time of desperate emergency & complete helplessness, Israel leaned in repentance, prayer & hope on her covenant God & found deliverance. There was no powerful king on site, just a faithful intercessor (**Samuel**). No, here in **ch8**, Israel's doing virtually the same

thing she did in **ch4: relying on some mechanical provision 4 her security**. There, it's **superstition (ark is among us)**, attempting 2 **manipulate** God. Here, it's **political (a king over us)** trying 2 **substitute** God. It's the same old **idolatry**.

But, how does Israel's current situation relate 2 us? How does it reflect us & how God deals w/ us today?

1) We, like Israel, tend 2 assess our problems **mechanically**, not **spiritually**. When something bad happens, our 1st impulse is 2 assume something's wrong in our technique (**not holding mouth right**). We look 2 adjustment, not repentance; as if there's something wrong in our "system" that needs tweaking. In life, in ministry, in our own Christian walk – it's very easy 4 us 2 look 4 a **new gimmick (fad, book, program)** rather than 2 cry out 4 a **new heart**.

2) Instead of just looking 2 God 4 help, we're more interested in telling Him how 2 help. Our focus is not on God's deliverance in our trials but in specifying the way He must bring that deliverance. Thus, we **trust** the **method** more than the **Master!** We're not content w/ seeking a saving God but insist on directing how & when He can save. So...

3) In response, sometimes God will grant our requests – 2 our own hurt! These "answers 2 prayer" may be **less** a sign of **His favor & more** a sign of **our stubbornness!** Oftentimes, God's greatest kindness 2 us is in **not** answering our prayers exactly as we petition Him 2 (**Ps 106:13-15**). Praise God, His mercies are new every morning!

4) In light of Israel's difficult situation, their request 4 a king was perfectly rational; yet God saw it as a rejection of His rule over them. This should serve 2 warn us that even tho our proposals & solutions may be completely **reasonable**, clearly **logical** & obviously **plausible** – they can also still be totally **godless**. Some of our idolatry is so sophisticated & appears so reasonable, it extremely hard 2 detect; but God can see it & He'll reveal it 2 us if we will only ask Him 2.

9-18- warn- Listen 2 them & forewarn them what it will mean (**look like**) 2 have their desire fulfilled. If history's taught us anything it is this: man is incapable of governing himself – power corrupts & absolute power corrupts absolutely. That old bromide is proven every day in our world. But **YHWH's** graciously showing Israel what's in store 4 them.

will take- Samuel's not referring 2 the extraordinary abuses of royalty, just the usual practices of it. This is the way of a king: **he will take** – your sons, daughters, fields, tenth of harvest, servants (human & animal), livestock... The point is: Israel needs 2 know what the monarchy will cost her. But come on, it takes a lot of man power & a massive bureaucratic structure 2 attempt 2 do what God does easily. A human king **will take & you will cry out!** That's exactly what will happen at the end of Solomon's reign. But, **God is low maintenance** – if you let Him rule over you, He doesn't need your food, money, sons & daughters. He won't tax you or confiscate your property. If God reigns in your life – He's low maintenance. In fact, you really don't have anything that God wants – except your heart! You can keep your stuff. But if you want a man 2 rule over you, this is how its going 2/b. He's going 2 take everything he needs or thinks he needs b/c **gov't costs** a lot of money & the king you get isn't going 2/b independently wealthy.

Faced w/ such a bleak outlook of confiscatory taxation, you'd think the elders would have reconsidered. Sadly, no...

19-22- refused- **YHWH** gives them all the info they need 2 know but Israel refuses 2 allow wisdom 2 pull them away from the foolishness they so eagerly want 2 commit. Samuel has 2 listen 2 their voice while they refuse 2 listen 2 his. Israel's stubbornness teaches us that knowledge, information or truth does **not** in itself change or empower us. If that's news 2 you, you're not alone. Our society has it in mind that the solution 2 every moral / social problem is education. If we just teach people about the harmful effects of the problem *de jour*, they'll stay away from it. The fallacy of this thinking is that it fails 2 consider latent human stupidity. Education may clarify but it cannot transform! There's a big difference between having the truth & loving the truth. Only loving the truth leads 2 obeying the truth.

like...nations- this is not just an expression, 4 Israel – it's a **passion!** In their request lies the desire 2 fit in, 2 belong, 2 get up 2 speed. After all, it is the Iron Age & they need the proper structures 2 meet the demands of a new era. Israel wanted 2/b like all the nations; problem is: they **weren't like any** other nation! Israel, by definition, was unique. What other nation had heard God speak directly & lived 2 tell about it? What other nation had been delivered from oppressive bondage a God who beat their hard-headed oppressors into submission w/ raw power & sheer terror? Israel couldn't escape being different but they'd **do everything possible 2 try**. Are modern Christians much better?

4 the most part it seems that Christians today have an **aversion 2 holiness**: they **don't care 2/b different 4 God's sake** but would rather **blend in**, not be 2 distinct. Are we not under the same command as Israel, "**You shall be different, 4 I the Lord your God, am different.**" (**Lev 19:2 "holy"**). Yet, many just try 2 stay in step w/ our culture & fit into society. I mean, who wants 2 stand out in the midst of a crooked & perverse nation? You could get killed 4 it! Why should we pursue the biblical definition of success? Or bother 2 have an eternal outlook? Why strive 4 purity in our speech? Or faithfulness in marriage? Or abstinence b/4 it? Why have a passion 4 worship over entertainment? Or prefer 2 enjoy God's presence rather that chase after self-fulfillment? Why? B/c that's what we've been saved 2 do! Like Israel, we can try 2 blend in but we can't escape being a peculiar people. The harder we try – the more miserable we will become. Either way, we'll be a testimony 2 unbelievers: whether we testify of His grace or of His righteous justice.

So, Israel hears God's wisdom but refuses 2 submit 2 it. **YHWH** gives her instruction but she's **not** teachable! Seeing this in Israel should prompt us (**as God's current people**) 2 cry out 4 a soft heart, 4 a teachable spirit, 4 protection from the arrogance of our own latent stupidity (**Prov 12:15 "The way of the fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise."**) We must never presume 2/b walking in God's will, we must diligently seek His direction daily

Ch8 is our mirror, revealing Israel's heart & our. How easily we misplace our trust (method over Master); how haunt we are 2/b different; how resistant we are 2 any word that doesn't agree w/ our opinions. In light of this, we should also recognize that those times when God refused 2 grant our request wasn't His indifference but his kindness! 😊