

Kingship: Right or Wrong?

1 Samuel 12 Samuel said to all Israel, "I have listened to your voice in everything you asked of me, and I have installed a king over you. {2} Now, there is the king walking before you while I am old and gray, and my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my youth until this day. {3} So testify against me before Yahweh and before his anointed one: Whose bull have I taken? Whose ass have I taken? Whom have I oppressed and crushed? From whose hand have I taken a bribe so as to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you." {4} They replied, "You have not oppressed us, nor crushed us, nor taken anything from anyone." {5} He asserted, "Yahweh is a witness against you, and his anointed one is a witness this day, that you have not found any wrong in me." They concurred, "He is a witness."

{6} Samuel continued his speech to the people, "Yahweh is a witness--he who appointed Moses and Aaron, and who brought up your ancestors from the land of Egypt. {7} Now, take your stand, and I will enter into judgment with you before Yahweh on the basis of all the righteousnesses of Yahweh, which he has performed for you and for your ancestors.

{8} When Jacob and his children went to Egypt, the Egyptians afflicted them. Then your ancestors cried to Yahweh, and he sent Moses and Aaron to bring out your ancestors from Egypt and to make them dwell in this place. {9} But they forgot Yahweh their God. Hence he sold them into the hand of Sisera, the commander of the army of Jabin king of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab. These enemies fought against them. {10} When they cried to Yahweh, they said, 'We have sinned in that we have abandoned Yahweh and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. Now save us from the hand of our enemies round about, and we will serve you.' {11} Then Yahweh sent Jerubbaal, Barak, Jephthah, and Samuel to deliver you from the hand of your enemies round about, so that you could live securely. {12} But when you saw that Nahash

The Argument of 1 Samuel 12

I. Legal Process between Samuel and people, vv. 1-5.

People assert Samuel's innocence, with Yahweh and the anointed king standing by as witnesses.

II. The innocent Samuel conducts a Legal Process against the people, vv. 6-15.

At issue: Adequacy of the people's response to Yahweh's saving actions.

v. 7 standard of comparison = Yahweh's **righteousness**.

[a = sin; b = oppression; c = cry to Yahweh; d = deliverance.]

v. 8 = b-c-d (the oppression in Egypt was not the **result** of sin).

vv. 9-11 a-b-c-d (period of the judges. Demonstrates **sin** of people and **righteousness** of Yahweh).

king of the Ammonites coming against you, you said to me, ‘No, but a king shall reign over us.’ Yet Yahweh your God was your king.

{13} “Now there is the king whom you chose and asked for; Yahweh has in fact given you a king. {14} If you fear Yahweh, serve him, obey his voice, and do not rebel against the command of Yahweh, both you and the king who rules over you will truly be followers of Yahweh your God. {15} But if you do not obey the voice of Yahweh and rebel against the command of Yahweh, the hand of Yahweh will be against you and your king to destroy you.

{16} “Now take your stand and see this great action which Yahweh is doing in your presence. {17} Is it not wheat harvest today? I will pray to Yahweh to send thunder and rain so that you will know and see that your evil which you have done is great in the eyes of Yahweh by asking a king for yourselves.” {18} When Samuel prayed to Yahweh, he sent thunder and rain on the same day, leading all the people to fear Yahweh and Samuel very much. {19} All the people said to Samuel, “Pray to Yahweh your God on behalf of your servants lest we die, since we added to all our sins an evil by asking for a king for ourselves.”

{20} Samuel replied to the people, “You--do not be afraid even though you have done this great evil. Yes, do not turn from Yahweh, but serve Yahweh with all your heart. {21} Do not turn after vain things which do not profit or save since they really are vain. {22} For Yahweh will not cast off his people because of his great name. {23} He has resolved to make you a people for himself. As for me, let death be my lot if I sin against Yahweh by ceasing to pray on your behalf. I will instruct you in the good and upright way. {24} But fear Yahweh, serve him in fidelity, with all your heart. See how he has acted greatly for you. {25}

vv. 12-13 b (Ammonite crisis)-a’ (sinful request for king follows oppression and replaces the standard cry)-d (God gives a king anyway=another demonstration of Yahweh’s *righteousness*).

Hence, despite sinful origin of kingship, Yahweh’s righteousness could adapt itself to this new institution.

v.14 Blessings for you and king if you fear, serve, listen to, and do not rebel.

v.15 Curses for you and king if you do not listen or if you rebel.

III. Samuel (whose *innocence* was shown in vv. 1-5) prays to Yahweh (whose *righteousness* was shown in vv. 6-15) to send rain during harvest. This display of God’s power leads people to confess the desire for kingship as their climactic sin (vv. 16-19).

IV. Conditions under which kingship would be possible, vv. 20-25:

- +worship of Yahweh alone
- +Yahweh promises not to forsake people because of his great name
- +promise of Samuel (and other prophets) to pray for them
- +promise of Samuel to teach about the good and upright way.

If, however, you persist in acting wickedly, both you and your king you shall be swept away.”

But, v. 25, **threat of exile for king and people in case of unfaithfulness**. This threat had become reality in 721 and 587, but it did not thereby destroy the righteousness of Yahweh.

The Mixed Message of 1 Samuel 7-12

The Ambivalent Message of chapter 12 follows a dialogical argument between critical and positive passages:

Criticism of kingship in **deuteronomistic pericopes**:

7:2-17 (victory over Philistines achieved without a king);
8:1-22 (though kingship would lead to social inequities and was a rejection of Yahweh [cf. 10:18b-19], it was also a gift of Yahweh)

Positive attitude toward kingship **in old pericopes** that have been included in Dtr, all of which **in their present form** associate Saul's elevation to kingship with Samuel:

9:1-10:16 (Saul seeks asses and finds kingship);
10:17-27a (Saul chosen by lot); 11:1-15 (Saul defeats Ammonites at Jabesh-Gilead).

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