

Week 12 :: The Demand for a King

Daily Reading for Week

1 Samuel 18-20, Psalm 83
1 Samuel 21-24, Psalm 84
1 Samuel 25-27, Psalm 85
1 Samuel 28-31, Psalm 86
2 Samuel 1-3, Psalm 87
2 Samuel 4-8, Psalm 88
2 Samuel 9-12, Psalm 89

Resources for Week

Read Scripture Video: [Ruth](#) and [1 Samuel](#)
Read: Deuteronomy 17:14-20 & 1 Samuel 8

INTRO TO DISCUSSION

This week, we transition from the Judges period of Israel's history to the beginning of the kings. The king-centric narratives begin with the simple and beautiful story of Ruth, where we see God's kindness to a faithful Moabite (i.e. foreigner) woman through Boaz. The book of Ruth previews the coming story by providing us a genealogy that tells us that she is the great-grandmother of Israel's greatest king, David.

The king narratives begin in earnest in 1 Samuel, where we find Israel under the leadership of the priest/prophet/judge Samuel. Samuel is surprisingly faithful to God, considering the other judges we've seen. As Samuel grows old, he appoints his sons to fulfill the role of judges, but they are unfaithful and "pervert justice." Israel, threatened by the many enemies surrounding them and also sick of leaders who continually act unjustly and lead them into sin and destruction, ask Samuel to appoint a king over them.

Now there is a lot implied in this request. On the one hand, it is understandable for the people to desire an end to the mostly calamitous line of judges. They perceive the nations around them as having strong, mighty kings as leaders, and they desire to be led similarly. The request for a king is not wrong in and of itself; indeed, it was anticipated in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. There we find Moses describing the type of king Israel is to appoint once it entered and dwelt in the promised land. Moses describes a king that is to be decidedly opposite from the king Israel had been enslaved by and just escaped from in Egypt (Pharaoh). But Israel's request for a king in 1 Samuel 8 is at its core a rejection of their God-given identity. Israel was the people which God chose as His own in order to bless the whole earth. They were to be holy, meaning to live differently than all the nations around them according to the law God gave them, so that the nations would be drawn into relationship with YHWH, the one true God. Part of this differentiation was the fact that the nation was to be led by YHWH. In the ancient world where a king was often the biggest, strongest, richest and most powerful man around, Israel was to rely on God as their true king. Even the type of king described by Moses in Deuteronomy is to be something of a priest/theologian bringing the people back to their true king, YHWH, rather than a great warrior who rules with an iron fist.

Israel's demand for a king is motivated not out of a desire to be set apart, but to be like the nations around them. Before granting Israel's desire for a king, Samuel issues a

warning, a dire preview of what life under a king will be like: he will lord over you, take your children and send them into battle, take your money and land, force you and your children into labor, and make you his slaves. Samuel is warning, in no uncertain terms, that Israel will be as they were under Pharaoh in Egypt: crushed and enslaved. Israel ignores these warnings and demands a king anyway, rejecting YHWH and essentially choosing to live under a Pharaoh instead.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Questions for Basic Understanding:

These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.

1. One of the hermeneutic guidelines for reading Biblical narrative is to pay attention to the pace of the story, especially noticing when it slows down dramatically to zoom in on a particular time or event. Typically, this indicates a particularly important chapter of the story. Why do you think the narrative slows down so much in Ruth & 1 Samuel after racing through hundreds of years of history in Judges?
2. Why is this a specifically important chapter in the theological story of Israel's history?

Questions for Listening to Scripture:

These questions are to help us be affected by Scripture in the way it was intended to affect us.

1. Read Deuteronomy 17:14-20 again. What kind of king is Israel supposed to have?
 - a. Do you think Samuel embodies well the type of king Deuteronomy 17 describes?
2. Now read 1 Samuel 8. What kind of king does Israel desire?

Questions for Interacting with Scripture:

These questions are to help us slow down to taste and notice Scripture, savor its richness, and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

1. What does it say about Israel and its leaders at this point in the story that they desire the Pharaoh-like king Samuel warns them against versus the priest/prophet king described in Deuteronomy 17 and embodied by Samuel?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Questions for Self-Examination:

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in light of our interaction with Scripture, and consider any appropriate action.

1. Do you feel any sympathy for Israel in this story? If you were in their shoes, what kind of king would you want ruling over you?
2. God calls us, like Israel, to live differently (or as holy) from the world and the culture around us. With this in mind, in what ways can you identify with Israel's rebellious desire to instead follow the ways of the world?