

2. God listens to His people's request

Have you ever stopped to think about how Canada has a queen? We are a constitutional monarchy, and the Queen of Canada exercises absolute authority. No law is passed without her consent, and all the laws are enforced under her authority. It's true that she never contradicts our legislative branch, and the Prime Minister of the legislative is our de facto leader, yet we do not elect our supreme executive.

As we will read in our passage, the Israelites would have longed to have had a ruler like we do. They wanted a human representative to lead them. In truth, they didn't have parliaments in those days, and the monarchy held more real power. But the concept is still the same. One person to serve as head of state, one whom the people could look to when the times were rough. And the days were rough in those days, and so the people of Israel asked the Lord through Samuel for a king. And God decided to listen to them. Let's read together about Israel's request for a king in 1 Samuel 8 (*Read verses 4-18*)

One of the common themes in the days of the Judges was that there was no king in Israel. This didn't mean that Israel had no king, for God was their King, but rather, that they did not submit to him, and did not recognize him as their king. They were to obey the Lord by following his laws, not as they saw fit. Gideon had to remind the Israelites of this reality when they tried to make him their king in Judges 8. Gideon reminded them that "the Lord will rule over you," and he refused to be crowned king of Israel.

But Israel wanted independence from the Lord, for they wanted to be like the nations around them. Israel had been called to be holy, just like the Lord is holy. This holiness was demonstrated in being distinct from the nations, practicing laws and lifestyles different from the nations. Israel wasn't to have a king like the nations around them, for they were a theocracy, they were ruled by God.

Inherent in Israel's request was denying the kingship of God. They sought safety with a military leader rather than with the Lord their God. They asked for a king even though the Lord their God was their king, he was their refuge, and he had shown that he could protect them.

The Lord heard their requests, and he gave to Israel what they asked of him. The Israelites didn't fully grasp what they were requesting from the Lord. God sent Samuel to the people who were asking for a king, and he told them what a human king would do. A human king from Israel would perpetuate Israel's disobedience. He would take, take, take. He'd take their money, he'd take their children, he'd take their freedom, he'd take their produce. His hand would be heavy upon them, and they would end up crying for relief from the Lord, who would not give it to them. They would come to know the difference between the yoke of the Lord as king, and the yoke of a human king.

For the Lord would give to his people what they wanted, even though what they wanted wasn't the best for them. God is not one to force people into service to him, even though that is best for everyone! He did not compel Adam and Eve to serve him, but allowed them to freely choose to turn their backs on him and his authority, even though such a decision led to their own suffering and death. Paul tells the Romans that the Lord hands sinners over to their own passions, allowing them to be ruled by them, for that is what they desire. This is the result of sin: rejecting God ends up in slavery to oppression. It can be shown in slavery to sin, or in slavery to our natures, or in slavery to other men.

But while the desire behind the request was sinful rebellion, a rejection of God as king, yet the office of king was still part of God's plan. Jacob and Balaam had prophesied about it long ago. The law of God allowed for a king to rule over them. Indeed, kingship itself is a revelation of God's rule of grace over his people. The kings that would follow would point ahead to the hope of a true ruler, a proper king who ruled with divine authority, one who would be born in Bethlehem as heir to the throne, and his rule would be an eternal one. Despite rebellion, there was great hope that arose from this request, an anticipation of a better future. But the kings who would follow, could not live up to the Lord's expectation of a man to rule over his chosen people. They were weak and sinful men, who could not follow all the laws of the Lord and guide a holy nation. Yet God's plan of salvation did involve a man who would reign perfectly as King forever.

Christ's kingship is in stark contrast with the kingship described in verses 11 through 17. Rather than take, take, take, he gave up everything, not counting equality with God a thing to be grasped, but humbled himself. He did not come to be served, but to serve. This is our God, the servant King. As the Revelation to John opens, Christ is the King who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.

And as our King, he rules a kingdom which is not "like the nations," he is not a king "like the nations" around us, despite Israel's desire. Christ Jesus told Pontius Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world. Unlike the take, take, take king Samuel described, our King breaks the weapons of war and causes them to cease, Psalm 46. He does not take sons and daughters and lands, but he gives them. He does not need our grain, wine, cattle, or flocks as we're reminded in Psalm 50, for the world is his and all that is in it.

And above all else, he does not make us into slaves, but he frees us. For freedom Christ has set you free! Stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Recognize Christ as your King and serve him alone! Do you recognize his authority as your king? Do you expect safety from him? Are there other petty kings in your life to whom you give tribute to? Do not let other kings or idols come between you and your service to Christ as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

After all, not only has Christ freed us from slavery, but he has also made us heirs with him. Together with Christ we will reign as kings and queens over all creation when he returns with the New Jerusalem and makes all things new. Until that day comes, let us live as the sons and daughters of the King, in service to the Lord as citizens of his kingdom.