

Adam Clarke Commentary 1 Samuel 8

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Samuel, grown old, makes his sons judges in Beer-sheba, 1 Samuel 8:1, 1 Samuel 8:2. They pervert judgment; and the people complain, and desire a king, 1 Samuel 8:3-5. Samuel is displeased, and inquires of the Lord, 1 Samuel 8:6. The Lord is also displeased; but directs Samuel to appoint them a king, and to show them solemnly the consequences of their choice, 1 Samuel 8:7-9. Samuel does so; and shows them what they may expect from an absolute monarch, and how afflicted they should be under his administration, 1 Samuel 8:10-18. The people refuse to recede from their demand; and Samuel lays the matter before the Lord, and dismisses them, 1 Samuel 8:19-22.

Verse 1

When Samuel was old - Supposed to be about sixty.

He made his sons judges - He appointed them as his lieutenants to superintend certain affairs in Beer-sheba, which he could not conveniently attend to himself. But they were never judges in the proper sense of the word; Samuel was the last judge in Israel, and he judged it to the day of his death. See 1 Samuel 7:16.

Verse 3

His sons walked not in his ways - Their iniquity is pointed out in three words:

1.They turned aside after lucre; the original (x'xixç (batsa)) signifies to cut, clip, break off; and therefore Mr. Parkhurst thinks that it means nearly the same with our clipping of coin. It however expresses here the idea of avarice, of getting money by hook or by crook. The Targum says, "They looked after xžxžx•xÿ x"x©xšx" (mamon dishkar), the mammon of unrighteousness; of which they did not make unto themselves friends but enemies; see the note on Matthew 6:24.

2.They took bribes; x©x—x" (shochad), gifts or presents, to blind their eyes.

3.They perverted judgment - they turned judgment aside; they put it out of its regular path; they sold it to the highest bidder: thus the wicked rich man had his cause, and the poor man was oppressed and deprived of his right.

This was the custom in our own country before Magna Charta was obtained; he that would speed in the king's court must bribe all the officers, and fee both the king and queen! I have found in our ancient records the most barefaced and shameful examples of this kind; but it was totally abolished, invito rege, by that provision in the above charter which states, Nulli vendemus, nulli negabimvs ant differemus rectum aut iudicium; "To no man will we sell, to no man will we deny or defer, justice and right." It was customary in those inauspicious times, for judgment to be delayed in banco regis, in the king's court, as long as there was any hope that more money would be paid in order to bring it to issue. And there were cases, where the king did not like the party, in which he denied justice and judgment entirely! Magna Charta brought them to book, and brought the subject to his right.

Of those times it might well be said, as Homer did, Iliad xvi., ver. 387.

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"When guilty mortals break the eternal laws,
Or judges, bribed, betray the righteous cause."

"When the laws are perverted by force; when justice is expelled from her seat; when judges are swayed from the right, regardless of the vengeance of Heaven." Or, in other words, these were times in which the streams of justice were poisoned in their source, and judges neither feared God nor regarded man.

Verse 5

Make us a king - Hitherto, from the time in which they were a people, the Israelites were under a theocracy, they had no other king but God. Now they desire to have a king like the other nations around them, who may be their general in battle; for this is the point at which they principally aim.

Verse 6

The thing displeased Samuel - Because he saw that this amounted to a formal renunciation of the Divine government.

Samuel prayed unto the Lord - He begged to know his mind in this important business.

Verse 7

They have rejected me - They wish to put that government in the hands of a mortal, which was always in the hands of their God. But hearken unto their voice - grant them what they request. So we find God grants that in his displeasure which he withholds in his mercy.

Verse 9

Show them the manner of the king - The word *mišpat* (mishpat), which we here render manner, signifies simply what the king would and might require, according to the manner in which kings in general ruled; all of whom, in those times, were absolute and despotic.

The whole of this manner of the king is well illustrated by Puffendorf.

“Hitherto,” says he, “the people of Israel had lived under governors raised up of God, who had exacted no tribute of them, nor put them to any charge; but, little content with this form of government. they desire to have a king like other nations, who should live in magnificence and pomp, keep armies, and be able to resist any invasion. Samuel informs them what it was they desired; that when they understood it, they might consider whether they would persist in their choice. If they would have a king splendidly attended, he tells them that he would take their sons for his chariots, etc.; if they would have him keep up constant forces, then he would appoint them for colonels and captains, and employ those in his wars who were accustomed to follow their family business; and since, after the manner of other kings, he must keep a stately court, they must be content that their daughters should serve in several offices, which the king would think below the dignity of his wives and daughters, 1 Samuel 8:13. Many ministers also, in several departments, both of war and peace, must have salaries to support them, which must be paid out of their fields and vineyards, 1 Samuel 8:14. In one word, that to sustain his dignity their king would exact the tenth of all they possessed, and be maintained in a royal manner out of their estates.”

It is perfectly vain in Grotius, or any one else, to state that this shows what a king, as king, may any where in virtue of his office, claim and exact; and that he can take the property and persons of his subjects, and dispose of them as he may judge necessary for the exigence of the state. This was the manner of Saul, but Saul was not a king of God’s choosing: “He gave him in his wrath, and took him away in his displeasure;” and the manner of such a king should not be arrogated by any potentate who affects to rule *jure divino*, by Divine right. The manner of the king of God’s choice is distinctly detailed, Deuteronomy 17:15-20, to which the reader will do well to refer, that he may have an impartial statement of the subject.

Verse 19

The people refused to obey - They would have the king, his manner and all, notwithstanding the solemn warning which they here receive.

Verse 20

May judge us - This appears to be a rejection of Samuel.

Go out before us - Be in every respect our head and governor.

And fight our battles - Be the general of our armies.

Verse 21

Rehearsed them in the ears of the Lord - He went to the altar, and in his secret devotion laid the whole business before God.

Verse 22

Hearken unto their voice - Let them have what they desire, and let them abide the consequences.

Go ye every man unto his city - It seems the elders of the people had tarried all this time with Samuel, and when he had received his ultimate answer from God, he told them of it and dismissed them.

On this account we may observe:

1. That God did not change the government of Israel; it was the people themselves who changed it.
2. That though God permitted them to have a king, yet he did not approve of him.
3. That, notwithstanding he did not suffer them to choose the man, he ordered his servant Samuel to choose him

by lot, he disposing of that lot.

4. That God never gave up the supreme government; he was still King in Israel, and the king, so called, was only the vicegerent or deputy of the Lord.

5. That no king of Judah attempted to be supreme, therefore they never made new laws, nor altered the old; which was a positive confession that God was the supreme Legislator.

6. That an absolute monarchy is always an evil, and is contrary to all the rights, civil and religious, of mankind; a mode of government that all people should avoid, as pregnant with evils to mankind.

7. That although it was a sin in the Israelites to desire a king, that is, to change a constitution of which God was the author, yet kingly government, properly understood, is a good of the first magnitude to the civil happiness of mankind.

8. That by kingly government, properly understood, I mean such a monarchical government as that of Great Britain, where the king, the nobles, and the people, are duly mixed, each having his proper part in the government, and each preventing the other from running to excess, and all limited by law.

9. That the three grand forms of government which have obtained among mankind, viz., monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, have each certain advantages without which no state can be well preserved; but they have evils by which any state may be injured.

10. That, from a proper mixture of these, the advantages of the whole may be reaped without any of their attendant evils, and that this is the British constitution; which, not merely the wisdom of our ancestors, but the providence of God has given unto us, and of which no other state has had common sense enough to avail themselves, though they see that because of this the British empire is the most powerful and the most happy in the universe, and likely at last to give laws to the whole world.

The manner of our king is constitutional, widely different from that of Saul, and from that of any other potentate in the four quarters of the globe. He is the father of his people, and the people feel and love him as such. He has all the power necessary to do good; they have all the liberty necessary to their political happiness, had they only a diminution of taxes, which at present are too heavy for any nation to bear.