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Looking for a Leader

Studies in Samuel and Kings

Introduction: Who is the ruler of Israel?

The books of Samuel and Kings have a common theme of leadership. We meet leaders of all sorts; we see leadership styles and patterns of various kinds. Leaders come and they go, they have successes and failures; some taste victory, others defeat, and throughout God's word observes them, warts and all.

Someone has subtitled the books of Samuel and Kings, 'Men Behaving Badly' because they include tales of wars, intrigue, rape, murder, love and betrayal. But beneath all this lies the foundational question, 'Who is it that rightly leads and governs God's people?' 'Who is the *real* ruler of Israel?'

Of course, if the answer to that question is not 'you' or 'me', then the way that we respond to that ruler will determine much of our life and destiny. In these studies we will learn what makes a good leader and we will also be challenged in our responses to God's leadership.

Discussion questions:

- What kind of leaders and leadership do you respond to most favourably?
- In what situations do you find yourself taking a leadership role?

Background

Before we arrive at the books of Samuel and Kings, the people of God have already had a number of significant leaders. Here is some background on them.

God

It could be said that God alone is the true ruler of Israel. At least that's how it all began. God promised Abraham a nation, a land, and blessing to all nations through him. When the descendants of Abraham grew to become a nation it was God who rescued them and led them through the exodus out from Egypt to the Promised Land. God ruled his people through his covenant and his Law. His word was brought to the people through human agents such as Moses.

Judges

After the people of Israel finally settled in their Promised Land, the book of Judges records the rule of many 'Judges' over Israel.

- Turn in your Bibles to Judges 2:10-19. What was the role of the Judges for Israel?.
- See how many of the Judges your group can list.

Ultimately, the system of Judges ruling Israel in their Promised Land was problematic. The book concludes with these words:

Judges 21:25 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.

That is to say, everyone did just whatever they wanted—with the implication being that they did not do what God wanted. The system of Judges had the people of God living in the Promised Land but ignoring God's rule over them.

Samuel

Some kind of consistency was found under the leadership of Samuel, the last of the great judges. In 1 Sam 1-7 he acts as warrior-deliverer (1 Sam 7), prophet (1 Sam 3:19-20), as well as judge—applying the law of God to the cases the people brought before him (1 Sam 7:15-17).

The request for a King

Eventually a time came when the people of Israel asked for a king.

Read 1 Samuel 8

1. In 1 Sam 8 the people ask for a king. What is the trigger for this request?
2. What does the bible tell us was their true motive behind this request?
3. What benefits did the people see in having a king? What problems did Samuel see with having a king?

In verses 7-8 God affirms that he alone is the real king of his people. It is a kingship that is absolute; requiring allegiance, obedience and that due honour be given him. It is a rule that operates regardless of the system of government in place—whether judges, prophets, a monarchy, a despot or a democracy. God rules his people.

4. How do people today either show allegiance to God's rule or rejection of it?
5. In what areas of your life do you find it difficult to give God your complete allegiance? How do you deal with the temptation to be your own authority?

For Prayer: the situations in which you lead, for those who lead you, and for your responses to leadership.

For next week, read 1 Sam 8-15.

For further thought:

Read Deuteronomy 17:14-20. In this passage God had already foreseen the request for a king and provided a model of monarchy for his people.

6. How would you describe this kind of monarchy?
7. Assuming both Samuel and the people know Deuteronomy 17:14-20, why do you think Samuel seems so against the request of the people in 1 Sam 8:10-18?

There is an apparent contradiction between God's decree in Deut 17:14-20 and God's opposition to the request for a king in 1 Sam 8. Samuel opposes the request and God promises judgment as a result of it. The *apparent* contradiction is resolved by our understanding of the kind of king Israel demanded (1 Sam 8:19-20). There they demand—not request—a king to rule them so that they would become like the nations around them. Their king would not only 'judge' them, but he would "go our before us and fight our battles." In other words, he would do as the LORD had done previously for Israel (cf Deut 20:4, Judges 4:14). Under this kind of monarchy the people of Israel would indeed be just like the surrounding nations. They would no longer be the kind of nation God intended in Exodus 19:5-6. They wanted a king to replace God.

God's response to the request is therefore even more perplexing. He tells Samuel to agree to their demand. God will give them the kind of king they request. He will give them over to the sinful course of action they had already decided upon—just as God does for mankind generally in Romans 1:24, 26, and 28.

Judgment will follow for the nation of Israel, but God will also be merciful and limit the disaster (1 Sam 12:19-25).