

The King Speech

1 Samuel 8 July 12, 2026

In 1260 AD, Iceland was ready for a king. For 300 years their society operated under a unique political system where chieftains agreed to a common code.¹ But in the 13th century, Iceland was in chaos amid internal disputes. And so, they agreed to come under the rule of Norway's king.

He promised to bring stability and peace to the region. Of course, to accomplish that he'd need to be given total legislative power so he could give them a new set of laws.² He'd have total control of trade in and out of the nation.³ And, naturally, he'd need them to pay a new set of taxes.⁴

The stability Iceland hoped for didn't arrive immediately. It took a century for the new system to be put in place.⁵ Meanwhile, Norway itself was in decline. In 1319, Norway's king died and the throne was left to his 3 year old grandson. In the late 1300s, Norway came under Danish rule,⁶ meaning Iceland was now the dependent of a dependent.⁷

For Icelanders, the 14th century became "the struggle for rights" against the monarchy.⁸ By the 17th century the king's grip on trade led to scarcity of food, equipment, and household goods.⁹

By the 19th century, Iceland wanted no more kings. But they wouldn't be free of the crown until the 1944 vote on independence. It passed with 99.5% approval after a whopping 98.4% turnout.¹⁰

In 1 Samuel 8 we have the record of the nation of Israel coming to Samuel and demanding a king. They're not just asking for a new *leader*, but a new *system*. This is a significant scene, historically speaking. But what we need to understand is that this is not just an interesting development in political history. This is a *pivotal* moment. As God's people *pivot* away from following God and instead repeat *again* the same mistake that Adam and Eve made in the Garden of Eden. And the warning God gives *them* is a warning *we* need to take to heart so that we do not deceive ourselves into the bondage and exploitation that always comes when we kick God off the throne of our lives.

1 Samuel 8:1-3 - ¹ When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges over Israel. ² His firstborn son's name was Joel and his second was Abijah. They were judges in Beer-sheba. ³ However, his sons did not walk in his ways—they turned toward dishonest profit, took bribes, and perverted justice.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Icelandic_Commonwealth

² Erika Ruth Sigurdson *The Church In Fourteenth-Century Iceland*

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danish_trade_monopoly_in_Iceland

⁴ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Covenant_\(Iceland\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Covenant_(Iceland))

⁵ Sigurdson

⁶ <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/independence-norway>

⁷ Sigurdson

⁸ Jón Jóhannesson *Íslendinga Saga*

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danish_trade_monopoly_in_Iceland

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Icelandic_independence_movement

There was a 20 year gap in chapter 7 between verses 1 and 2. Here we have another decades-long gap. Samuel is no longer a young man. And we're sad to see that his sons have become a lot like Eli's sons. They weren't as bad, but they, too, were corrupt personally and professionally.

The difference is Samuel was not complicit in their wickedness the way Eli had been. In chapter 12, Samuel gives the whole nation an opportunity to bring any charges of impropriety against him and they all agree, "No, you've been absolutely upright." And God signs off on it, too.

But was Samuel *wrong* to appoint his sons as judges? Some commentators call this Samuel's "tragic mistake."¹¹ They say it looks like he was trying to set up a dynasty of his own.

We know Samuel was faithful. He upheld God's word and obeyed it. It doesn't seem like he was appointing Joel and Abijah as judges in the Samson/Ehud sense, but in the sense of telling people the Law and helping settle disputes. *That* was something God's leaders were *supposed* to do, according to Deuteronomy 16. But his sons were *not* fulfilling the rest of the command, which was to judge righteously.¹² In fact, they did the *opposite* of what the text specifically says.

1 Samuel 8:4-6 - ⁴ So all the elders of Israel gathered together and went to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵ They said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Therefore, appoint a king to judge us the same as all the other nations have." ⁶ When they said, "Give us a king to judge us," Samuel considered their demand wrong, so he prayed to the LORD.

The people use Samuel's sons as an excuse, but they're not the real *reason*. Twice in this chapter they say, "we want to be *the same as the other nations*." When it was Eli's sons, the faithful of Israel put up with it because they still wanted to come and worship the Lord. They still trusted the Lord. They knew God's faithfulness was bigger than how they were being mistreated in Shiloh.

But now, the nation doesn't only want away from Samuel's sons, they want away from God Himself. They are asking for a fundamental change to their national constitution.¹³ Spiritually, it's even worse. We'll see how God describes it in a moment.

But let's remember that the way we walk influences people. If we honor God and obey God, we can make an impact for the Gospel. But when we *do not* obey God, when we do not walk by faith, when we are not holy and distinct from the culture around us, it gives people a reason to stay in their sin. Now, people are responsible for themselves, but your life makes a difference to either attract people to Jesus or repel them from Him.

They say, "Your sons don't walk in your ways so we're going to just bail on our national relationship with God altogether." Your witness matters. We're not perfect, but let's be Samuel, not Abijah.

¹¹ James Smith *The Books Of History*

¹² Deuteronomy 16:18-20

¹³ Bill Arnold *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel*

1 Samuel 8:7-9 - ⁷ But the LORD told him, “Listen to the people and everything they say to you. They have not rejected you; they have rejected me as their king. ⁸ They are doing the same thing to you that they have done to me, since the day I brought them out of Egypt until this day, abandoning me and worshiping other gods. ⁹ Listen to them, but solemnly warn them and tell them about the customary rights of the king who will reign over them.”

This was way more than a different political party winning an election. God describes it as a rejection - that Israel *despised* Him.¹⁴ They want Him out of office altogether.

Spiritually speaking, they were already seeing other people. They're worshiping other gods. It had been true for a long time. But *now* is the moment they ask for the divorce.

This is what happens when we indulge sin or idolatry in our lives. We can try to downplay it or rationalize it or say it won't take over our hearts, but *this* is the result. And our inner choices to not go God's way not only has an impact on the rest of our relationship with Him, but that sin starts bearing fruit and growing weeds and making wider impact *through* us, even at the societal level.

Why is the world the way it is? Because of *sin*. Because the sin nature within us wants to rebel against God's rule over our lives. The people came saying, "We don't have a king and we want one." But, no, they *had* a King. God *was* their King. But Him they did *not* want.

They tried to blame it on Joel and Abijah, but it wasn't about Samuel's sons, it was about Israel's hearts. As one scholar notes, this was the political manifestation of a spiritual problem.¹⁵

Now God does something amazing here: He *grants* their request. Israel is committing treason. It's terrible infidelity. But God does not *force* us to love Him or obey Him. He allows them to have what they want. *But*, because He loves His people, He tells Samuel to warn them what that will mean. He uses is formal legal language.¹⁶ If *this* is what they want, let them know what it will cost. Just as God warned Adam and Eve about what would happen if they ate from that tree in the Garden.

1 Samuel 8:10-18 - ¹⁰ Samuel told all the LORD's words to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹ He said, “These are the rights of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and put them to his use in his chariots, on his horses, or running in front of his chariots. ¹² He can appoint them for his use as commanders of thousands or commanders of fifties, to plow his ground and reap his harvest, or to make his weapons of war and the equipment for his chariots. ¹³ He can take your daughters to become perfumers, cooks, and bakers. ¹⁴ He can take your best fields, vineyards, and olive orchards and give them to his servants. ¹⁵ He can take a tenth of your grain and your vineyards and give them to his officials and servants. ¹⁶ He can take your male servants, your female servants, your best cattle, and your donkeys and use them for his work. ¹⁷ He can take a tenth of your flocks, and you

¹⁴ *Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament*

¹⁵ Robert Bergen *The New American Commentary, Volume 7: 1, 2 Samuel*

¹⁶ P. Kyle McCarter *1 Samuel: A New Translation With Introduction And Commentary*

yourselves can become his servants. ¹⁸ When that day comes, you will cry out because of the king you've chosen for yourselves, but the LORD won't answer you on that day."

Side effects include dizziness, nausea, depression, and, vomiting. "Give me the pill anyway, doc." This is a case where Samuel was trying to get them *not* to take this medicine. The side effects wouldn't be pleasant. Of course, these things wouldn't happen overnight. But they *would* happen.

When Iceland first came under the rule of Norway's king, the effects weren't felt immediately. But eventually the king realized that he could use Iceland for personal revenue. He started *renting out* the governorship of the island. Wealthy people purchased control, then could collect and keep any taxes they got from the people.¹⁷ Obviously this led to terrible abuses.

Samuel warns the people that the king will have the *right* to tax them, to take what he wants from them, and to tell them to do what *he* wanted. He was the law.

We've heard people use the phrase "Texas justice." This is *Rexes* justice. He does what he wants. He takes what he wants. So, rather than being the King's *children*, which is what they are under God's sovereign rule, they become the king's commodities to be exploited. The nation no longer exists to flourish under God's grace, but to furnish a man's palace and empire - to become the fuel to the machine of his pleasure and his war mongering and his amassed wealth.

Samuel gives a pretty pessimistic outlook. But how many really *great* kings have there been in human history? In truth, there's only been *one* and He is the once and future King, Jesus Christ. But they're rejecting the goodness of God for the perceived greatness of some theoretical king.

Now remember: *They didn't need a king*. What just happened in chapter 7? God delivered them in battle. But they no longer wanted that kind of relationship with the Lord and *that's* why He said at the end there, "On that day, when you call to Me, I'm not going to answer you." It's not because He was being mean or pouting. It's that God will allow us to experience the consequences of the choices we make. When we demand to sin, to rebel against Him, then He will allow us to have what we want. If you want misery, you can have it. But don't expect God to pull you out of your self-inflicted consequences when He has warned you *exactly* what will happen.

With that said, though He was going to allow them to experience the consequences of their choices, He *still* promised not to abandon them. We'll see that in chapter 12. But don't confuse God's grace for His approval.

1 Samuel 8:19-20 - ¹⁹ The people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We must have a king over us. ²⁰ Then we'll be like all the other nations: our king will judge us, go out before us, and fight our battles."

¹⁷ Sigurdson

Our battles? This is the Lord's army and they are *His* battles. Every time God's people go out to do their own battles, the result is failure and loss. But when Samuel warns them, they just say, "NO! We *must* have a king." He's going to look so great executing military maneuvers for us.¹⁸

We'll learn that *part* of their desire for a king was because the Ammonites were starting to be a real threat. So you had Ammonites to the east, Philistines to the west, but God had been *faithful* to deliver them, even just one chapter ago. This was about being like the other nations. They wanted to be a worldly people, led by an impressive king. They wanted freedom from God. But freedom from God is actually defeat, bondage, and death.

The irony is: What guarantee did they have that their king would be a good one? I mean, they claim they *must* have a monarchy because, after all, Joel and Abijah aren't good guys. Ok, well what happens when your *king* isn't a good guy? When it's not just some bribes happening in Beersheba, but when your whole life is at the disposal of a tyrant?

But they're just fooling themselves. This is about a heart that wants to be out from under God's control. This is about a group of people who did not want to submit to the Lord's leading. It was wise in their own eyes. Good in their own eyes. What does God know, anyway?

1 Samuel 8:21-22 - ²¹ Samuel listened to all the people's words and then repeated them to the LORD. ²² "Listen to them," the LORD told Samuel. "Appoint a king for them." Then Samuel told the men of Israel, "Each of you, go back to your city."

Go home to the allotted land given to you by God. Able to live at peace despite the Philistines because of God. Meanwhile, the people say, "Just pick somebody." Did they hear themselves? But this wasn't about getting a *new* king, it was about getting rid of the rightful King.

Are we willing to honor God as King? Are we willing to *obey* what He commands? From the beginning, human hearts want to rebel. We've often willing to believe the lie that *some other* king would be better. But it's never true. Things are always worse when we rebel against the Lord.

And we don't want to be like the world. For one thing, friendship with the world means enmity with God. But on top of that, the world is in terrible shape. There's no hope waiting for us in man's kingdom.

Meanwhile, what kind of King is our God? Good. True. Gracious. Kind. Generous. Loving. Mindful of us. A King Who opens His treasury to save us, to help us, to bless us. The King of love our Shepherd is - His goodness faileth never. Let's not drift toward wanting independence from Him. Instead, let us once again make a declaration of *dependence* in our hearts to the Lord our God, our King forever. Worshiping Him. Waiting on Him. Serving Him. Following Him with our hearts, with our lives, today.

¹⁸ Robert Alter *The David Story*