

Acknowledge the ultimate King (1 Samuel 12)

Though God granted Israel's request for a king, their request was "evil" because it expressed a rejection of the LORD as their true King. Therefore, Samuel calls them to renew their commitment to the kingship of the LORD and to serve Him alone faithfully. Israel's problem was not Samuel or the rule of God through judges, but their own heart. Similarly, trials can reveal our hearts and call us to a renewed commitment to submit to the lordship of Jesus in our lives.

I. Kingdom renewal: the problem — explaining the need (12:1–12)

1. *Israel's problem did not arise through a failure in Samuel or the divine system of judges.*

Samuel had granted Israel their request to have a king, though it displeased him, because God had told him to do as they said (8:7) and to anoint Saul as king (9:16). The reasons they had given for their request (8:4) are here implied: Samuel's age and his sons' failure. But Samuel calls them to witness that it was not a failure in his character that required any change in leadership. God was a witness against them.

→ Remember the importance of being morally impeccable leaders and generally of ending our lives well.

2. *Israel's problem, the reason the kingdom had to be renewed, was their rejection of the LORD as their King.*

God had appointed divine leaders to deliver Israel beginning with Moses and Aaron. God through His appointed leaders had done all which they now wanted from a human king. So Samuel rehearses the "righteous deeds of the LORD" in the past centuries, that is, His faithfulness in keeping His covenant promises, both blessing and cursing. When they forsook the LORD, He sent enemies against them—such as Habor, the Philistines, and Moab. When they repented, He delivered them through the efforts of His chosen judges. Nevertheless, when Nahash came against them, they demanded a king to reign over them, even though it was clear that the LORD their God was their king (v. 12). Their rejection of His kingship was the real problem.

→ Trials, and where you turn for help, reveal your heart. Remember that God intends trials for the good of those whom He loves (Hebrews 12:6; James 1:2–4; Romans 5:3–5; etc.)

II. Kingdom renewal: the responsibility — explaining the meaning (12:13–25)

1. *Acknowledge the rule of Jehovah God (12:13–15).*

Despite human decisions and actions, it was the LORD who set a king over them. They needed to acknowledge that the LORD reigned and both they and their king were to follow Him first and foremost, fearing Him, serving Him, and obeying Him.

→ Similarly, the Christian's profession of faith should reveal its genuineness in obedience.

2. *Confess sin (12:16–19).*

The seriousness of the situation was punctuated by a miraculous, untimely, disastrous rain causing the people to fear and bringing them to confess their sin.

→ Repentance and confession of sin are both part of becoming and being a follower of Jesus and are blessed by God with forgiveness and cleansing (cf. 1 John 1:9; Psalms 51 and 32).

3. *Receive instruction (12:20–23).*

Samuel commits to instructing and praying for the people (v. 23) which he begins immediately to do. He begins by not diminishing what they have done, but also telling them to start again serving the Lord and not to turn aside to empty things. God's faithfulness rests in Him and His righteousness and not in them. (→ Nor does it rest in you being "lovely.")

4. *Continue in faithfulness (12:24–25).*

Israel needed to follow the LORD with "all their heart," being helped by remembering the great things He has done. If they acted wickedly they would be "swept away."

→ Following Jesus Christ is not adding another activity but replacing going your own way with following Him. Help by giving thanks for all the great things God has done and is doing in your life.

Israel and her kings failed to fear the LORD and serve Him faithfully. But in Jesus Christ we have a perfect human and divine King who came first to serve and give His life to save sinners and will come again to rule righteously. By His Spirit believers can faithfully follow Him.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- What evidences are in your life that you are whole-heartedly following Christ as your King and are not turning aside to "empty things" which cannot profit?
- Are you quick to confess sin? Why/why not? What can help believers deal more quickly with sin in their lives?
- What helps you be a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus? What more could help?
- What question would you like to ask of an Israelite who was present that day?