

A Daily Bread

Date: 30 Av 5786 (August 13, 2026)

Torah Portion: Shoftim

Topic: A King and Shmuel, Part 2

Yet this does not mean that everything the elders said was wrong. Their concern regarding Shmuel's sons was legitimate. Scripture itself tells us that **“his sons did not walk in his ways”** (1Sam. 8:3). The elders did not need to invent accusations against them. They presented the situation to Shmuel and requested a change in leadership. Significantly, Shmuel did not immediately attack them or defend himself. **He brought the matter before YHWH.** Although their request displeased him, he did not allow his personal feelings to determine his response.

This is one of the most important lessons in the passage. Shmuel was offended, yet he prayed. He did not immediately act upon his anger. He took the matter to YHWH and allowed YHWH to reveal what was actually taking place. What Shmuel initially experienced as rejection of himself was, at a deeper level, a rejection of YHWH's kingship.

YHWH's words also comforted Shmuel by placing the people's behavior within the larger history of Yisrael: **“According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Mitzrayim, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other mighty ones—so they are doing to you also”** (1Sam. 8:8). Shmuel was experiencing something YHWH Himself had repeatedly experienced from His people. Shortly after being delivered from Mitzrayim, Yisrael made the golden calf and sought a visible object to stand before them. Now, generations later, they again desired something visible and tangible—a human king who would **“go out before us and fight our battles”** (1Sam. 8:20).

The golden calf and the demand for a king therefore share a subtle spiritual danger. In both cases, the people desired something visible that could provide the security that should ultimately have been found in YHWH. The problem was not that a visible leader was inherently evil; Moshe and Shmuel themselves were visible leaders appointed by YHWH. The problem arose when the visible instrument began to replace dependence upon the invisible King.

This distinction remains essential. The Torah does not condemn human leadership. It establishes judges, elders, priests, prophets, and kings. But every legitimate authority in Yisrael remains subordinate to the authority of YHWH. The king may wear a crown, but Torah remains above the crown.

The central lesson, therefore, is not merely about kingship. It concerns the way we make decisions. There will be times when our concerns are legitimate, just as the elders' concerns about Shmuel's sons were legitimate. Yet a legitimate concern does not automatically justify every solution we devise. We may correctly recognize a problem and still choose the wrong remedy because our hearts are influenced by fear, impatience, pride, or the desire to imitate those around us. Shmuel teaches us a better way: **bring the matter before YHWH.** Before taking our own initiative, we should seek His direction. Before deciding what appears best in our own eyes, we should ask what is right according to His Torah. The question is not simply, *“What do the nations around us do?”* nor even, *“What seems most practical to us?”* The deeper question is, **“What does YHWH desire?”**

Yisrael could have a king, but the king had to remain under the King. In the same way, human wisdom, leadership, institutions, and plans may all have their proper place, but none of them should replace our dependence upon YHWH. The lesson of 1Sam. 8 is therefore timeless: **when we face difficult decisions, we should not merely ask YHWH to bless the choice we have already made. We should first seek Him so that our choice may be shaped by His will.**

Shalom.