

BaptistWay Bible Series for April 2: Every choice carries its own consequence

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Every choice carries its own consequence

- 1 Samuel 12

By Joseph Matos

Dallas Baptist University, Dallas

How “narrative” time flies. In the span of only 11 chapters, we have witnessed the promise, birth, call, growth and leadership of Samuel. He has served as priest, prophet and judge. He has anointed and reaffirmed Saul as king. But now, at the beginning of chapter 12, already Samuel is self-described as an old man and gray (v. 2).

Before Samuel fades from the public eye—he will still “advise” Saul and later anoint David in Saul’s stead, but these are done privately—he gives his farewell discourse containing words of correction and exhortation to the people of Israel. Like Moses and Joshua before him, Samuel presents Israel with a choice as they move into the period of the monarchy and outlines the consequences of each choice.

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Samuel vindicated (vv. 1-6)

The chapter opens with Samuel standing before the people as he again presents them the king they have chosen. In the process, Samuel called them to reflect on his own service to them from the time of his youth into his old age, challenging them to find any fault with him as their leader. He offered to make right any wrong he might have committed against them, but they acknowledged he had led them impeccably. At no time did he cheat them, oppress them or take anything from them. Never was his judgment clouded by bribes (vv.3-4). But as the following verses show, their request for a king revealed the nature of their own sin. They had done what prior generations had not.

Israel confronted (vv. 7-13)

Before his own departure, Samuel reminded Israel of the great deeds God performed on their behalf. This recollection, however, was not merely given for information purposes; nor was it given with a view to the people offering praise to God for these great deeds. Rather, Samuel used this brief synopsis to confront Israel with their great sin.

In the past, when threatened by potential destruction by an enemy, their ancestors “cried out to the Lord” for help (vv. 8, 10), resulting in God’s raising up a deliverer. Yet the present generation, with one exception, did

not seek the Lord. In a recent battle with the Philistines, Israel had sought assurance by carrying the Ark of the Covenant, only to have it captured (chapter 4). Soon thereafter, as a result of Samuel's intercession and God's intervention, their renewed allegiance to the Lord led to their deliverance (chapter 7). Then with mounting threats not only from the Philistines (chapter 8) but also from the Ammonites (ch. 11 and 12:12), instead of seeking the Lord, the people cried out for a human king to rule over them (12:12).

Samuel stood before them to declare that they had received what they had wished for. But it was not God's best for them, for the Lord was their king.

The concession and challenge (vv. 13-15)

In a striking shift, however, Samuel assured the people that despite their poor decision (in v. 17 he actually says it was an "evil thing" they did), they still could experience God's blessing and provision if they would offer him first place. Though a human king would rule over them, they must give priority to the Lord.

Notice the conditions and their results given in the passage: "If you fear the Lord and serve and obey him ... and if ... (you) follow the Lord your God—good" (v. 14).

Conversely, the consequences for disobedience and rebellion would be the same as experienced by their ancestors: "his hand will be against you . . ." (v. 15). They had a king now, but that was no excuse to turn their eyes away from the Lord.

Israel's confession (vv. 16-19)

As a sign reaffirming God's displeasure with Israel's request for a king, Samuel warned thunder and rain would come despite it being the time of wheat harvest (v. 17). Such an occurrence was not only rare given the time of year it was (May-June), but also was potentially disastrous—the crops could be destroyed. As warned, when Samuel called on the Lord, the thunder and rain came. The storm served its purpose, for "all the people stood in awe of the Lord and of Samuel" and they asked for Samuel to intercede on their behalf as they confessed that asking for a king was evil (vv. 18-19).

Samuel's consolation (vv. 20-23)

Samuel alleviated the people's fear of the storm and, for the second time, warned them that in order to ensure their standing with the Lord, they must remain true to him and serve him. They should avoid idols, the sin of previous generations, which are of no use in times of trouble anyway (v. 21). Furthermore, Samuel reminded the people that God, for his own sake and for his own pleasure, chose Israel and therefore would not reject them. For his part, Samuel promised he would intercede for them and teach them what is good (v. 23).

Recapitulation (vv. 24-25)

In a final broad stroke, Samuel once more called the people to wholehearted, faithful service to the Lord. Anything short of that would yield dire consequences.

While Israel had committed a sin avoided by previous generations, if they would now remain faithful to God in this new circumstance, they could avoid the consequences experienced by previous generations.

Time would soon tell which choice Israel and their kings made.

Discussion questions

- Was the monarchy God's best for Israel?
- How often have you sought human means of deliverance from trouble?
- Do you need to return to wholehearted, faithful service to the Lord?
- What stands in the way of your wholehearted, faithful service to the Lord?



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