

# FAMILY TRADITIONS



## Introduction

A tradition is a practice, belief, or custom passed down through generations. For example, most families have at least one recipe handed down for preservation. They may be kept on a 3x5 notecard, written in the margins of an old cookbook, or only taught in person so the recipe can't be duplicated by others outside the family. They're often kept

for special family moments like holidays, birthdays, or reunions; and they're loved by virtually everyone.

What makes these recipes special is their ability to link past and future generations. They create a bond between deceased family members we may never have met and ones yet to be born whom we may never meet. They keep our shared identity.

✚ **What's a family recipe you love to make or eat? What makes it special to your family?**

## **Session Context**

By the time of 1 Samuel, the Israelites have occupied the Promised Land for a few centuries. Those who personally witnessed God's mighty hand during the Exodus have died out and their descendants have been able to enjoy the land flowing with milk and honey.

Unfortunately, Joshua's death marked the end of a central leader for Israel up until this point in their story. Instead of one unified authority figure, the Israelites have been led by a three-part governance structure consisting of elders, priests, and judges. Elders and judges operated at the local level to handle disputes. The elders also served as representatives when all of Israel needed to be unified. The priests served more at the tribal or regional level as there were 48 cities scattered throughout the promised land. They focused on teaching, worship and sometimes judicial matters. At certain times God also raised up national judges like Deborah, Gideon, and Samson to serve as deliverers when Israel battled enemies.

Despite having multiple levels of guidance and support, the Israelites struggled to remain faithful to God.

# Scripture Exploration

## 1 Samuel 8:4-22

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<sup>4</sup> Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together and came to Samuel to Ramah. <sup>5</sup> They said to him, "Behold, you are old, and your sons don't walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." <sup>6</sup> But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us."

Samuel prayed to the LORD. <sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they tell you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me as the king over them. <sup>8</sup> According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, in that they have forsaken me and served other gods, so they also do to you. <sup>9</sup> Now therefore, listen to their voice. However, you shall protest solemnly to them, and shall show them the way of the king who will reign over them."

<sup>10</sup> Samuel told all the LORD's words to the people who asked him for a king. <sup>11</sup> He said, "This will be the way of the king who shall reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them as his servants, for his chariots and to be his horsemen; and they will run before his chariots. <sup>12</sup> He will appoint them to him for captains of thousands and captains of fifties; and he will assign some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest; and to make his instruments of war and the instruments of his chariots. <sup>13</sup> He will take your daughters to be perfumers, to be cooks, and to be bakers. <sup>14</sup> He will take your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, even your best, and give them to his servants. <sup>15</sup> He will take one tenth of your seed and of your vineyards, and give it to his officers and to his servants. <sup>16</sup> He will take your male servants, your female servants, your best young men, and your donkeys, and assign them to his

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own work. <sup>17</sup> He will take one tenth of your flocks; and you will be his servants. <sup>18</sup> You will cry out in that day because of your king whom you will have chosen for yourselves; and the LORD will not answer you in that day."

<sup>19</sup> But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No, but we will have a king over us, <sup>20</sup> that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles."

<sup>21</sup> Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD. <sup>22</sup> The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice, and make them a king."

Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Everyone go to your own city."

### **VERSES 4-5**

God had appointed Samuel as Israel's national prophet and judge. For the elders to come together and present a problem to him meant the issue was critical in their eyes. They were concerned about the ability of Samuel's corrupt sons to lead Israel after Samuel's death. So, they requested a king.

### **VERSES 6-9**

Samuel didn't like their request, but he also didn't deny his sons were corrupt. God's response to Samuel's prayer shows God viewed the elders' request for a king as a rejection of him. They could have requested another prophet like Samuel – someone who walked in God's ways but didn't have sovereign authority over them. Instead, they requested Samuel to appoint them a king. In other words, they sought God's intervention but not his counsel.

### **VERSES 10-18**

Samuel shared all that God told him with the people, especially how a king would take more from them than

they thought or desired and require a tenth of their best without listening to their needs.

### **VERSES 19-20**

The elders' response to God's insights into kingship reflected their heart posture. They wanted a king so they could be like all the other nations. They wanted the king to judge them, go before them, and fight for them. God had been doing those things for them up to that point. Now they wanted a human to do them instead.

### **VERSES 21-22**

Samuel went back to God and restated everything the people told him. God's response was to have Samuel do what the people asked: make them a king. Samuel then directed the people to go back to their own cities which signaled the matter was settled. They would get a king. Their tradition of recognizing God alone as their sovereign ruler was coming to an end.

## **Life Application**

### **† Seek God's guidance before making assignments.**

When Samuel made his sons judges, it was a human decision. We don't find in this passage where God directed him to do it and there was no law commanding it be done. The results speak for themselves: the actions of his corrupted sons led to Israel rejecting God by requesting a king.

We cannot assume our family members should or can handle the assignments God has entrusted to us. God knows what people can handle and he will direct us on who should take over our responsibilities. When we try to appoint people outside of God's will, the results can be disastrous for our families and communities.

**+ Ask God for the solution instead of offering one.**

The Israelites were so concerned with not having Samuel's sons take over after his death that they requested something they didn't fully understand. They saw the perceived benefits of a king but not the sacrifice. God warned them by explaining how kings worked but the Israelites wouldn't listen.

Sometimes we are so disheartened by our present circumstances that we request bad solutions. Instead of offering God a solution, we should ask God what we need. He never steers us wrong.

**+ Keep practices that support essential traditions.**

When the Israelites exited Egypt a few centuries earlier, they understood God was their king (see Ex. 15:18). However, they had repeated seasons of unfaithfulness and disobedience to God which were led by people like Samuel's sons. They had lost touch with the essential tradition of God as their king because they were inconsistent with practicing behaviors that kept it alive in their hearts.

God has called us to regularly practice behaviors that keep him in the center of our heart. Activities such as the Lord's Supper, Sabbath rest, tithing, prayer, fasting and communal worship are just a few. Each time we do them, we recenter our hearts to make God #1. And when we fail to consistently do them, we risk losing connection to who God is to us, which is everything.

## Session Reflection

- What traditions has your family kept alive over generations?
- Which ones support your identity in Christ?
- What traditions would you like to see your family start?
- How can you introduce or strengthen family traditions that support your Christian identity?

