

Authority

Chapter 5 False Authority

“Wisdom and truth, the offspring of the sky, are immortal; while cunning and deception, the meteors of the earth, after glittering for a moment, must pass away.”¹

"The jawbone of an ass is just as dangerous a weapon today as in Samson's time."²

If you have followed this far (I am impressed!) you may have noticed that I have studiously avoided answering a blindingly obvious question – if authority is from God, for *the authorities that exist have been established by God*³, where does satan get his authority from?

If it is from God, and three times Jesus describes satan as ‘the prince of this world’, then doesn’t that imply that his authority is also good?

This is critical if we are to coax from hiding the further questions that are peering from behind the skirts of this one. In his letter to the Romans, Paul goes on from the Scripture above to warn us, *Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.*⁴ Are we supposed to submit to the Hitlers and Stalins too? Always? And if not always, at what point does rebellion become ‘godly resistance’? And if so, what does that resistance look like in practice?

Studying false authority in Scripture will give us some clues, and reveal another key principle in understanding how authority works. We will attempt to tackle the others in later chapters, when we look at the application of correct authority in society and government.

The Bible speaks a lot about false authority. First of all of course is satan himself. Then there are false prophets, apostles, Christs and other, self-appointed, ‘authorities’. And finally the Scriptures are full of examples of bad kings, religious and secular rulers, who lead unholy lives and oppose the work of God, or who simply fail to rule. There is plenty of ‘false authority’ out there, as many of us have had occasion to experience!

¹ Robert Hall, Engl Bapt Minister 1764-1831, sourced from *Dictionary of Burning Words of Brilliant Writers* (1895) by Josiah Hotchkiss Gilbert

² Attributed to US President Richard Nixon; http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Talk:Richard_Nixon

³ Romans 13:1

⁴ Romans 13:2

The prince of this world

Reluctant though I am to begin any chapter with satan, here we must, for he is the epitome of false authority. But to understand why, we need to remind ourselves of who he is, and how he got here.

He is *the great dragon [who] was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*⁵ The name 'satan' actually comes from Hebrew words meaning 'the adversary'. He is certainly not of equal power with God, being a created being of limited power, and his arrival on earth was ignominious – he was 'hurled'!

Jesus said, "*I saw satan fall like lightning from heaven*" (Luke 10:18). While it is true that this referred primarily to the immediate story, which was of demons submitting to the disciples, I also believe that Jesus was telling them the reason why the demons submitted – because satan had to submit to the lordship of Christ at the beginning.

He is described as the *angel of the Abyss* in the book of Revelation⁶, but we do not know if he was an archangel. As a created being, not a spirit, he can only be in one place at one time, but can probably travel 'in swift flight', as other angels. However he has demons and other powers under his rule who can do his bidding.

Two passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel are commonly viewed as referring to him. Both are prophecies about secular kings, of Babylon and of Tyre respectively, but neither passage can refer exclusively to the immediate matter in hand. Their scope is too broad. Instead, they are excellent examples of the principle of double reference, where a passage primarily refers to one matter or person, but has a prophetic reference to another. In fact it is hard to interpret either passage without understanding that they refer to the original fall of satan. If so, we learn quite a lot more.

Ezekiel 28:14 calls him a *cherub*, which is a winged angel, and that he was *ordained* to guard the *holy mount*, or throne room of God. It then says that he sinned, became proud on account of his beauty, corrupted his wisdom, and was filled with violence. So he was *expelled in disgrace* from the mount of God.

Isaiah clearly had a similar revelation:

How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!

You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain.

I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit (Isaiah 14:12-15).

If that is so, we understand that he wanted to be like God without being under his authority, because he declares, '*I will make myself like the Most High*'. This is the spirit of rebellion: to want the power without submission, and to want to 'do it my way'. He was guardian of God's throne, but clearly for satan that was not enough. His envious eye shone green over the coveted seat, (and what janitor, alone in the boardroom, has not tried the chairman's chair?) He wanted supreme authority.

⁵ Revelation 12:9

⁶ Revelation 9:11

But his proud heart caused him to be thrown to the earth. Although he is described as being ‘cast down to the earth’, this was not total exclusion from heaven, because in Job chapter 1 he had access to God, along with the angels. No, satan’s fall is meant to be understood in terms of his position of authority in heaven. He lost his job.

Not only did Jesus see him fall like lightning from heaven, he saw to it: *So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones*⁷ – it was Christ himself who did the ‘hurling’! And satan found himself thrown to earth, with no authority, no rights, no job and no kingdom. But he would soon change that!

In the next chapters we will look at the implications of the fall of man upon humanity and creation. For now we need to study its consequences for satan. When satan was hurled to earth, it was already under the jurisdiction of man⁸. For satan, this would not do! He was not only unwilling to serve man, he wanted far more – he wanted a throne.

By deceiving the man and woman he not only brought about their destruction, and initiated history as we know it, he also stole their authority. The process: deception – temptation – submission – sin, is common to every sin we commit, wittingly or otherwise.

Deception: ‘*Did God really say...*’ Temptation: ‘*...you will be like God...*’ Submission: ‘*...she took some...*’ and Sin: ‘*...and ate.*’ The important point for us to note here is that with every sin there is a moment, or a turning-point, of submission. Speaking of the same process, James calls this moment, ‘*desire ...conceived*’.⁹ It is at that point that authority is yielded, and the act of sin follows as night follows day. And that was the moment of satan’s victory!

Wolf packs operate to a strict hierarchy. Every pack will have its alpha male and alpha female. They are top dogs, having gained their position through numerous battles with the rest of the pack. Once there, their position is maintained by acts of submission by the pack members whenever they encounter their leaders. These may include grimacing, lowering the head, or even crawling on their belly with the head deflected sideways, exposing the vulnerable neck. It is a statement of faith, ‘kill me if you wish’, trusting that the senior wolf will not do so!

The alpha male is rarely challenged until a young pretender thinks he is the stronger. A battle royal will ensue, until again one submits. Deaths occur rarely, and the loser will usually willingly accept their new status, or leave the pack. But at that moment of submission, authority is transferred, and the victor is now the pack leader.

And at that moment too, satan became ‘prince of this world’, as Jesus referred to him. He is however, a prince, and not a king. A king has supreme authority. A prince is a pretender to the throne, but does not sit on it. He is always under the authority of the king, and there is only one supreme king over the world, who is Jesus Christ!

But what exactly did Jesus mean? First of all the word translated ‘prince’ (*archon*) simply means ‘ruler’, and can be found throughout the New Testament. We already know that satan is the ‘prince of demons’¹⁰, but what is the extent of his authority over ‘the world’?

Here we run into semantics, because this expression, ‘prince of this world’ is only found in John’s Gospel, and only used by Jesus. The word for ‘world’ is *kosmos* in Greek, and the

⁷ Ezekiel 28:16b

⁸ The Bible doesn’t tell us when the angels were created, but man was clearly created and given authority over the earth on 6th day of the creation. satan’s fall must have followed that, as all was perfect at creation.

⁹ James 1:13-15

¹⁰ Ascribed to the devil by the Pharisees and teachers of the law. See for example, Matthew 12:24.

New Testament writers, and especially John, used the word in four different ways! It can mean either 'the universe', or 'the earth', or 'all mankind', or 'all those alienated from God' that is, unbelievers, with the latter probably being the most frequent.

We can quickly dismiss the first, since it is unlikely that Jesus meant that satan is the ruler of the universe. God is surely the only ruler of his creation, now and forever! And we know that satan is the father of all those who do not *belong to God*, again from Jesus' own lips. Speaking to the Pharisees he told them, '*you belong to your father, the devil...He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God*'¹¹ Therefore satan is already prince over those who belong to him – who refuse to listen to the gospel of Jesus.

Which leaves the other two: 'the earth', or 'all mankind'. Did Jesus mean that satan is prince over 'the earth'? Or is he prince over 'all mankind', but has no authority over the earth itself? An example of the difficulty we face with this question can be found in Jesus' reply to the Pharisees earlier in that same dialogue, when they challenged his claim to be the light of the world. '*You are from below,*' he told them. '*I am from above. You are of this world [kosmos]; I am not of this world.*'¹² In the context, he could have been referring to either the earth, or all mankind, or all unbelievers!

However, I believe we can solve this riddle by re-considering what authority it was that the devil stole, or rather I should say, was handed to him on a plate by Adam and his wife. The full extent of that authority we shall discover in the next chapter, so unfortunately we must wait until then to find the answer! For the moment, it is enough to note that satan is abaddon, the destroyer,¹³ and that the whole earth suffers from his destructive power.

He is also a defeated adversary. *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.*¹⁴ If that is so, his authority will also be removed. When will that happen, and why is satan still allowed to prowl around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour? Jesus tells us very clearly:

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

'An enemy did this,' he replied.

The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn' (Matthew 13:24-30).

When the disciples asked him to explain the parable, Jesus told them that he is the Sower, the field is the world (*kosmos* again, which in this case must mean 'the earth'), the weeds are the

¹¹ See whole passage of John 8:42-47

¹² John 8:23

¹³ Revelation 9:11

¹⁴ 1 John 3:8

‘sons of the evil one’, that is unbelievers and those who resist the gospel, and the enemy is the devil.

With that cast list, the Lord’s purpose is crystal clear. His heart is for the wheat – he is seeking an abundant harvest. He cares so much for the wheat that he even suffers weeds, that is the unrighteous and the unbelieving to hinder the gospel, in the hope that some may come into the kingdom! And he suffers the enemy’s lies, temptations and trials, so that more wheat may be gathered into his barn. He is, after all, the Lord of the harvest!

So the devil is endured until the end of the age, when *they will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*¹⁵

But we must remember that God never gave satan authority over this earth – we did! He could not have gained it if we had not submitted in the first place. Although satan deliberately set Adam up, he could not have ‘stolen’ his authority without Adam’s consent. Nothing has changed today! God does not tempt us, nor does he allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear. *But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*¹⁶ Submission is always an act of the will, a decision. We see very soon what that implies.

Satan, then, is ‘prince of this world’, but has since been defeated by the cross and by the blood of the lamb. His authority is both limited in power, limited in extent, and limited in time. His end in the lake of fire is assured. It has been well said, ‘When satan reminds you of your past, remind him instead of his future!’ At the end of all things the authority he usurped will be returned to those from whom he conned it.

Assumed authority

‘I followed him because he seemed so good. He was so believable. He did remarkable things, and lived such an exemplary life.’ I was listening to the testimony of a middle-aged lady who had once been deceived into following an Indian guru. She had even spent a lot of time in India, giving generous gifts to her mentor, and even her heart. ‘I thought I had found what I had been searching for all my life. I really loved that man.’

Until one day deception was found in him, and in her own words, ‘her world fell apart’. My heart bleeds for her, and the many millions like her equally deceived. Fortunately for my friend, she has since found Jesus Christ, and her world and her heart are being restored.

Arguably the strongest language in the Bible is reserved for those who assume authority that was never given to them. *‘These men are blemishes at your love feasts,’* rails Jude against false teachers, *‘eating with you without the slightest qualm--shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted--twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.’*¹⁷ The spittle positively flies from the page!

¹⁵ Matthew 13:42-43

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:13

¹⁷ Jude 1:12-13

Tellingly, he describes them as those who *reject authority*,¹⁸ while Peter declares that they *despise authority*.¹⁹ Both clearly imply that they are not willing to submit to authority, but instead attempt to establish their own.

We meet the same language in Jeremiah who mourns, *a horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?*²⁰ God explains that, *The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds.*²¹ It is clear that they were never sent, so they never had God's authority.

Assumed authority without commission and without submission is rebellion, and rebellion is akin to witchcraft! They fill God's people with false hope, and introduce destructive heresies. Every cult is born out of people who follow false prophets, who steal salvation from those who are being saved. *If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.*²² No wonder the Lord's anger burns so fiercely against the impostors through the words of his real prophets!

The greatest false prophet will appear at the end of this age, when the beasts and the false prophet mentioned in the book of Revelation will perform miraculous signs and deceive many people. At the same time, the beast from the sea will be given the devil's authority and power to *make war against the saints*²³. This authority does NOT come from God! Like all false prophets whose motives are selfish, his destruction is certain, and along with the devil he will be cast into the lake of fire.

Jesus himself warns against *false Christs and false prophets [who] will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible.*²⁴ Equally Paul condemns the false apostles as *deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ,*²⁵ calling them servants of satan.

We are to be alert for these pretenders for they are both believable and dangerous. If they were neither, we would not need to be warned. But if the Corinthian church had been deceived, having had personal teaching from the Apostle Paul himself for eighteen months, who are we to think that we might not be?

They do not have authority, for they have never been given it. But Jesus reminded us that we can tell a tree by its fruit. Is all authority from God? Yes! But not all those have it, who make the claim.

However there is a further danger here that we have already seen. satan acquired mankind's authority because we submitted to him. When people submit to false authority, they are in effect appointing them into a position of authority. *For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you*

¹⁸ Jude 1:8

¹⁹ 2 Peter 2:10

²⁰ Jeremiah 5:30-31

²¹ Jeremiah 14:14

²² 2 Peter 2:20

²³ Revelation 13:6

²⁴ Matthew 24:24

²⁵ 2 Corinthians 11:13

*received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.*²⁶ These false apostles had come without authority but once the Corinthians submitted to them, they acquired a false authority over the church, not from Paul, but from the Corinthians themselves. If not given to them by God, then satan, demons or other people can only have authority over us to the extent that we have submitted to them.

Abused authority

If the apostles waxed lyrical against the false apostles, prophets and teachers, Jesus reserved his longest diatribe for those who had been given authority, but who had turned it into a platform for personal privilege. *'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees,'* he cried, *'you hypocrites!'* *'Blind guides,'* he called them, *'you are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean... You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?'*²⁷ This extraordinary outburst from the Prince of Peace himself has always seemed to me surreal. But his emotions are left untold, and I cannot believe that he delivered this withering indictment without tears. His real motive is revealed in his final question – he longed for them to repent.

What really got his goat was not merely that they themselves were destined for hell, but that their attitude and actions hindered others from finding salvation also. They were doubly damned.

However Jesus had begun his speech with a telling comment on the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, but which reveals a key principle of authority.

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 'The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach' (Matthew 23:1-3).

When Jesus said that they sat in Moses' seat, he meant that they represented and implemented the Mosaic Law. The seat is a euphemism for authority. The Pharisees and teachers of the law had the same authority that God had delegated to Moses because they were his current representatives to uphold the Law.

Therefore they were to be obeyed, for however badly the Pharisees behaved, the law was from God, and was good. So we understand then this key principle – that the authority does not rest in the person, but in the position! This will have great significance when we investigate its implications for the way godly authority should work in our lives later in this book.

There is one final aspect of false authority that we need to look at before we set out to discover the astonishing authority God gifted to man, how he lost it, and how it is being restored by the grace of God.

The King Makers

Waiting to preach, I was sitting on a padded, high-back chair on a carpeted platform in the simple, concrete and asbestos church. Below me the congregation sat on the ground, clapping in rhythm to the worship songs. Among the steel rafters above us a few ceiling fans wobbled

²⁶ 2 Corinthians 11:4

²⁷ See Matthew chapter 23

at the sultry air and I appreciated the stronger pedestal one directed at the platform. It was very hot.

Before long the senior pastor arrived, dressed in a smart, white suit. His wife and children were equally immaculate in their Sunday best. The congregation rose to their feet while the family took their place on the platform. The pastor directed the service with humour, gentleness and unquestioned authority. When a decision needed to be made, it was referred to him.

After my message several came to the pastor for ministry. He prayed earnestly for them, anointing some with oil. Later we sat in his air-conditioned office drinking sodas, while lunch was brought to us. He spoke to me of his aspirations for the church, and his son's plans for Bible College. He thanked me for my ministry, and called a deacon to arrange a taxi to return me to my hotel.

This might be a pattern repeated almost anywhere in the world on any given Sunday. I set it in a developing country, but change a few details and it would apply equally in the West. Typical church? Perhaps. But it is not God's intended pattern.

I have often puzzled over why we like people to be in authority over us. For studying the above scene, it is clear that the senior pastor is not merely a pastor. He is king. And his greatest aspiration is that the church would grow (for then he would have more subjects, and more subjects means more power, more status, more authority, and more resources). The Maori people of New Zealand have a word, *mana*, that describes this perfectly. It means to have power, authority, integrity, charisma, or prestige. There is also a supernatural edge to the word, suggesting that they are especially 'anointed' or have an indwelling supernatural force or power.²⁸ In Asian cultures, the word more usually used is 'face'. Church growth enhances *mana*.

And his second great aspiration? That his son would carry on the work. And be the next king.

Rarely is this calculated exploitation – it is merely the consequence of circumstances. It is more convenient, more comfortable, and the people like it this way. In fact, the people even seem to promote it! Why? Maybe from the members' perspective, there is reflected glory in the higher *mana* of one's leader.

We love to 'bless' our leaders – I have witnessed a congregation in a developing nation take up a single offering that paid for a luxury, four-wheel-drive vehicle to 'bless' their senior pastor. Such sacrifice is humbling, but is it God's intended pattern? What were the real motives behind such a gift? Was it more than just overflowing generosity and gratitude? Could it possibly be because, deep down, they wanted their king to be better than the king next door? 'We have 500 members in our church, how many in yours?' 'Our pastor is so busy...' or 'Our pastor prays for four hours every morning...'

But surely, you may say, someone has to lead, our leaders must have authority? Doesn't the book of Hebrews tell us, *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority*²⁹? Of course, but is that what it means? To appoint kings? For such a mindset actually has deadly consequences.

Jane Stork was a young Australian mother of two small children, seeking freedom from anger, and to find spiritual reality. She writes:

²⁸ Britannica Concise Encyclopedia online; www.answers.com/topic/mana

²⁹ Hebrews 13:17a

Anger was like a shadowy monster at my shoulder, waiting to pounce. On the recommendation of a friend, I called to make an appointment with a psychologist. Roger, my husband drove me to the psychologist's home. On the way I began to have second thoughts. What on earth was I doing? When we arrived, I was so worked up I didn't even notice that the man who walked towards us was wearing a long orange robe and a string of beads around his neck. We sat down, but not to talk. Instead the man said we would do a dynamic meditation. I don't think I'd ever heard the word 'meditation' before.

I never did talk to the psychologist about my anger, but Roger and I found ourselves driving to join him every weekend for meditation and to listen to tapes he played us of lectures by someone called Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Everything Bhagwan said made sense to me. It was like a breath of fresh air after the narrow parameters of the Catholic doctrine with which I had been raised. It was exciting and magical.

Before long I forgot what it was that had brought me there. The psychologist became my mentor and I began to feel a sense of belonging in the group that quickly gathered around him. Later I learned that the psychologist had just spent his long-service leave in India where he had become a disciple of Bhagwan. Master and disciple were concepts beyond my comprehension then. Even when, a few months later, I filled out a form applying to be a *sannyas* (seeker), I did not really grasp that I was entering into a master-disciple relationship.³⁰

Jane was then instructed to take a new name, wear a mala (beads) and orange clothes, and do a daily meditation. But by then she was blind to what was going on. She continues:

I did not ask myself why I needed someone to tell me what to do. I did not give it a moment's thought. I plunged headlong into *sannyas* with a drive that should have set alarm bells ringing. If it did, I didn't hear them. For in truth, my goal was to get as far away as possible from the disappointment and confusion in my life.

Later she and her husband were deceived into wife-swapping, and ended up in a commune in India, where they lived apart and their children were neglected.

In truth, we were children, not coping with the realities of life, running to the safety of a 'master'. He would take care of us. He would tell us what to do. It felt good to hand over responsibility to someone who knew better. In those days of upheaval I could not conceive of myself as being insecure, frightened and vulnerable. I saw myself as a true spiritual adventurer, unafraid to step over the boundaries of convention, ready to give up everything I knew to surrender to the master, to serve him with all the fervour I could muster.

She finally followed her 'master' to the United States, where her family fell apart, and she was jailed for implication in attempted murder. Since then she has been rebuilding her life.

Equally in a church setting, the king-making mindset resists the kingdom of God. For anything that might threaten the stability of the leadership is anathema and will be fought ferociously. All activity of the church is measured by its effect on the numbers of members, because *mana* is a reflection of church size.

If someone else is called to start another church in that town, they will be resisted because they might 'steal my sheep' – to lose congregation to the young upstart is a loss of face, of *mana*. The kingdom of the pastor is threatened. Unless of course it is a 'church plant', that is, comes under the authority of the existing pastor. That way the *mana* of the king is enhanced.

Training of disciples ceases before they can become effective leaders in their own right, because the status of the pastor is threatened by other leaders. Such pastors find delegation very difficult, because of fears that a good assistant might walk off with half the congregation

³⁰ **Jane Stork**, *I gave up my freedom*, Mindfood magazine, June 2009, p 52-3; www.mindfood.com; extract used by permission. Her full story is in her book, *Breaking the Spell*, (2009), Macmillan, Australia

and split the church, destroying his *mana*. Bible College or other formal training is resisted also, because that threatens the natural succession of the pastor's son.

Of course the Bible shows us what is going on, and it is, as ever, instructive. We are not the first to want kings!

It is a fact of life that God has no grandchildren. Our own walk with God is no guarantee that our children will follow him in the same way. The prophet Samuel lived a unique life of dedication and commitment to the Lord, but his sons did not. He even appointed them as judges over Israel, but they *turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.*³¹ So the elders went to Samuel, and asked, '*now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.*'³²

Samuel was upset, and turned to the Lord. But God replied, '*Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.*'³³ Then the Lord told Samuel to warn them what the king would do – he would impose heavy taxes, and turn their children into his soldiers, servants and slaves. God did not want Israel to have a king, but they insisted:

*But the people refused to listen to Samuel. 'No!' they said. 'We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.'*³⁴

Here at last are the reasons why they wanted a king: Firstly, to be like all the other nations, and secondly, to fight their battles.

To be like other nations

The Lord told Samuel that *they have rejected me as their king*. In their desire for reflected glory from a worldly leader, they had forgotten that God himself was their King.

Ironically, their desire to be like other nations ultimately led Israel to suffer the same fate – to become idolatrous, to be defeated, and to be exiled. Saul fought many battles, but finally couldn't face his Goliath.

We aspire to be like other churches, other families, and other nations, because we see them as successful or want what they have. But we forget that the Lord's glory is reflected in variety, not conformity.

Though he succumbed to their requests, and even prospered Israel through the reigns of many, God does not want kings. Jesus is the only true King! When we install kings over us, we are thereby denying the *mana* that should be ascribed to the Lord Jesus himself.

To fight their battles

Jane Stork said, 'I did not ask myself why I needed someone to tell me what to do... It felt good to hand over responsibility to someone who knew better.'

I had not been a Christian very long before someone told me that we were in a war with the devil, and that I had to fight. Ephesians chapter six was quoted at length. I was highly indignant! 'I did not give my life to Jesus to become a soldier,' I replied, 'but to find peace!'

³¹ 1 Samuel 8:3

³² 1 Samuel 8:5

³³ 1 Samuel 8:7

³⁴ 1 Samuel 8:19-20

By political persuasion I was a pacifist, and nothing was going to induce me to engage in a spiritual war either. I wanted others to fight those battles for me!

It is a natural human instinct, so prevalent throughout the church. ‘Pastor, please pray for me’ can be heard on any Sunday across the breadth of Christendom. An innocent enough request, perhaps, but often the motive is, ‘please fight this battle for me’. A responsibility is being handed over. A king is being enthroned.

Surely the correct response is ‘Of course I will pray with you, but not for you!’ We must bear responsibility for our own lives, our own temptations, with the Lord helping us. In the same passage where Paul exhorts the Galatians to *carry each other’s burdens*, he also reminds them that *each one should carry his own load*.³⁵ These are not opposites, but complementary! This is a community at work under the Lordship of Christ, not under the kingship of Paul! ‘Burdens’ refers to things too great to carry, while ‘load’ refers to that which we can! As we grow in Christ, so our responsibility grows with our capacity to bear whatever life throws at us. We willingly change the nappies of an infant, but do not expect to do so for our teenagers.

We so often blame the pastor or leader for acting like a king. But let us remember that we, the people, have not only acquiesced – we have often put him there, and sometimes even against his own desire.

Often unrecognized, king-making is rife in our churches today, just as it is in every other walk of life. I believe that Scripture makes the reasons clear, but making kings does not serve the kingdom of God, and it is not the solution either in any other areas of our society. It leads to abuse of power, privilege and status. It restricts the potential in people whether they are the king-makers, or the kings themselves, and finally it destroys lives.

³⁵ Galatians 6:2,5