

Wednesday, May 20, 2020 ▫ Read 1 Samuel 8:1–8

Questions from the Scripture text: What is Samuel's age in v1? What did he do (v1–2)? What didn't his sons do (v3)? What did they do? Who gathered in v4? How many of them? To whom? Where? What did they tell him about himself (v5)? About his sons? What did they request? For what purpose? How did Samuel feel about this (v6)? What does Yahweh tell Samuel to do in v7? What reason does He give? Whom have they rejected? What did they not want? What does Yahweh say is behind their request in v8?

Everyone in this passage is wicked, except Yahweh.

Yes, Samuel is a believer, but believers sin. How very many otherwise exemplary saints in Scripture fail as fathers! Perhaps Samuel was a godly father, and his children still “did not walk in his ways,” v3. That does happen. We know more about the actual failings of fathers like Isaac, Eli, and David.

But this still does not explain why Samuel would make such sons judges. Even a child is known by his deeds, and now Samuel is old (v1). Surely he would know by now the character of his sons! Why would he appoint such men as judges instead of other biblically qualified men?

v7 fills us in: Samuel took the elders' rejection of his sons as a rejection of himself—evidently, he had thought that by appointing his sons, he could continue to exert some control over their judgments. It's no wonder, then, that he is “displeased” in v6. We sinners are easily offended when we feel that we have been rejected.

Sadly, we have a high capacity for self-deception. The Holy Spirit Himself tells us that Joel (“Yahweh is God”) and Abijah (“Yahweh is my Father”) were not living up to their names. Doubtless, “all the elders of Israel” (v4) felt self-righteously justified in their offense—and thus in their request.

Often, it is when we are right about someone else's sinfulness that we can be blindest to our own—consider the Pharisees and scribes who failed to see the sinner in the mirror, in part because they saw tax collectors and sinners all around them. Jesus doesn't say that they were wrong about others; rather, He indicates that until they understand themselves to be sinners, they will never be able to see Him as the Savior He came to be.

But, the request of these elders was not so justifiable as they might have imagined. v8 puts them in the company of people with whom Yahweh says He was disgusted (cf. Ps 95:10). In v7, Yahweh declares the real object of the elders' sinful hearts: they don't want Yahweh to rule over them.

Taken as a whole, v7 says something pretty amazing. God actually gives Israel a king as a punishment for their rejection of Him. But, from that kingship will come David and David's greater Son. So, we discover that for the unconverted, the Israelite kingdom is punishment for sin. Yet, for the believers, that same kingdom brings them Christ in the long-term. It is a painful sort of temporary discipline, as we will learn in the next passage, but it is one through which the Lord will do them some earthly good, and every eternal good!

Whether we are tempted by pride to trust our own control over God's ways like Samuel, or to overlook our own rebellious hearts because we can see others' sin so clearly like the elders of Israel, let us be free to own up to our sin by holding to this marvelous grace of God.

God sees our sin clearly, and does things to bring it to our attention. But at the same time, He is working in all of history and the history of our lives, to bring the salvation of Christ to all who hope in Him! With a God of such grace as this toward sinners such as we are, we are free to own up to it, turn from it to Christ for full and free forgiveness, and commit by His grace to battle against that sin.

Whose sin do you think you see pretty clearly? What sins of your own might you be downplaying?

Suggested Songs: ARP51AB “God, Be Merciful to Me” or TPH433 “Amazing Grace”