

BIG WORD: 1 Samuel

Homework for Chapters 8—10

Discussion Dates: 22 February 2012 (in house)
and 23 February 2012 (online)

DAY ONE: Overview

PRAY for the Holy Spirit to clear your mind so that you may focus on God's Word without distractions or preconceptions. Ask Him to help you discern only what He wants for you in this reading and for this day.

READ: 1 Samuel 8—10.

If possible, read all three chapters in one sitting. Make notes of any details that stick out to you, questions that rise and/or personal insights God gives you while you read.

DAY TWO: Reflections of Eli

Previously in this study (chapters 1—4) we contrasted Samuel and Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas. We also discussed the differences between Hannah and Eli. All this circled around parenting responsibilities.

Now we see Samuel as an adult with sons of his own. What parallels do you see between Samuel and Eli?

Read 1 Samuel 8:7. What is your response to this? Why do you think God publicly punished Eli for his disobedient sons, yet claimed no judgment upon Samuel for his?

DAY THREE: Samuel's Sons

Samuel gave his sons strong, respectable names. Joel means "the Lord is God" and Abijah means "my divine Father is the Lord." Unfortunately, neither son lived up to their namesakes.

Samuel also gave his sons jobs. He named them as judges to serve the region of Beersheba. This area was on the southern boundary of the land, about fifty-seven miles southwest of Ramah, where Samuel lived.

Whether or not Samuel should have appointed his sons as judges is questionable. Typically judgeship was a God-given position. While we cannot say this wasn't a God-given appointment, there is nothing in Scripture that commends these men to positions of honorable leadership. This is another reflection of Eli's story. As the righteous father grows old, his disreputable sons take advantage of his position and declining health. Either that or the aging father wearies of his responsibilities and relinquishes them to the closest heirs.

What were the sins of Joel and Abijah?

What was Samuel's response to the sins of his sons?

Parents do not have ultimate authority over their adult children, but, as we discussed last time in reference to Eli and his sons, some actions can be taken in certain situations. It seems from the text that both Eli and Samuel retained leadership, even if only occupational, over their sons. What actions do you think could have been taken to curb these sons?

DAY FOUR: Israel Demands a King

Based on 1 Samuel 8:5, what were Israel's reasons for demanding a king?

Samuel was not happy with their request and, at God's suggestion, attempted to deter the Israelites with the facts of having a king. He wanted them to

understand fully what they were asking for and what they would get. List the negative aspects a king would provide.

Now list the positives.

Israel is not deterred by Samuel's warning. They still insisted on a king, yet their proclamation reveals a bit more of their motivation. Read 1 Samuel 8:19-20. What do you see there?

Is this a legitimate reason to change their form of government? Why or why not?

DAY FIVE: God's Will or Not?

Based on these chapters (and others), many commentators disagree as to whether a king for Israel was God's will or not. Did God simply permit the people to go their own way? Or was this His intention all along? The text seems to go back and forth.

Looking just at chapters 8—10, list the verses that support kingship as appointed by God.

Now list the verses that support kingship as demanded by the people yet opposed by God.

What conclusions can you make?

READ Deuteronomy 17:14—20.

This section of the Law was written long before Samuel was born, long before the Israelites demanded a king. God clearly anticipated a future kingship for Israel and made stipulations for it. What were the rules He provided for kings?

As a priest and a prophet, Samuel must have known the Law well. As such, he would have understood the allowance and regulation for kings. Why do you believe he (not God) was so opposed to appointing one?

DAY SIX: God Chooses a King

We meet Saul in chapter 9. What are your first impressions?

What words would you use to describe him?

What attributes as evidenced in his pursuit of and encounter with Samuel commend Saul to the position of king?

Let's remember that just because God appoints someone to a position does not signify perfection in that person. God uses imperfect people again and again. Remember Samson? Gideon? Even Moses was not without serious faults.

Many scholars use God's seeming acquiescence here (and in other parts of Scripture) as a support for dispensational theology.

Dispensationalism encompasses many elements, the most famous of which are related of End Times prophetic interpretations and the distinct roles of Israel versus the Church. As this passage pertains to neither of those, let's focus on another foundational, yet often less emphasized element of dispensational

theology. This is the belief that God uses different means throughout history to deal with people. Clearly this is true, but to what purpose?

Dispensationalism is directly opposed to Covenantalism because of the aforementioned “big issues” of End Times and Israel vs. the Church. Lest we get into a deep-six theological debate, let’s discuss a very simplistic definition for these two schools of thought.

Covenantalists believe that the Church is the New Israel, that there is no future for Israel unless they join the church. They hold fast to two covenants: the Old Covenant (the Law) that pertained to Israel and the New Covenant (Grace) that applies to the Church.

Dispensationalists, on the other hand, believe that God’s promises to Israel yet unfulfilled are non-transferrable; the Church has been grafted into the line of Abraham, but does not replace Israel. They believe that God employed different methods of dealing with people (called “dispensations”) in order to effectively show that our only hope of salvation is through Grace. In other words, He gives them their way for a time (i.e. granting them a king when they ask for one) in order to show them – and us! – that His way is ultimately best.

We cannot be saved through the Law because it is imperfect and we are even more imperfect. The Law exists to show us the depths of our sinfulness.
(Romans 3:20)

We cannot be saved through priests or sacrifices because they offer only temporary atonement. They also are imperfect.

We cannot be saved through judges or kings because they, too, are finite and imperfect.

You get the idea. The only hope we have of salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, the perfect Priest, King, and sacrificial Lamb that provides an eternal, complete atonement for sins.

We have not yet studied the time of the kings, but what do you anticipate that God could teach us through their reign that we could not learn through the judges or priests?

DAY SEVEN: Saul’s Anointing

READ 1 Samuel 9:15—10:16.

As we will learn later when we meet David, Samuel creates a habit of anointing kings privately before announcing them publicly. Why do you think he does that?

What was Saul's reaction to being chosen as Israel's first king?

When Saul returned home, he shared part of his story with his uncle, but left out the details about his kingship. What do you think were his motivations for doing this?

When Samuel announces Saul's appointment as king, he makes quite a show of it before the people of Israel. This process is called "lot" and was trusted by the Israelites throughout their times of wandering and rule by judges and priests.

In biblical times decisions were often decided by lot. In the New Testament we see this, but by then it had become less like revelation and more like gambling. In the Old Testament it was believed to be decided by God and a legitimate means by which to determine His will. You can see examples of this both in Joshua 4 and Jonah 1. Remember the Urim and Thummin in the priests garments (Exodus 28:30)?

Why do you think Samuel, who had already received direction from God and had acted upon that Word, made such a public display with the lot?

What do you think Saul felt during that ceremony?

Can you think of a time when you doubted the Word of God in your life? What kinds of confirmations help you come to full belief?