

FOLLOWING THEIR OWN DESIRES

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

Faithlessness brings God's righteous judgment without exception.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 2:12–7:1

+ SETTING:

The story of 1 Samuel opens with a note of hope. God has not forgotten His people, and He is continuing to work out His mission to deliver them, notably through raising up a leader for them. But this theme contrasts with the reality of Israel's leaders at the time—their priests. Eli the priest and his two sons were tasked with overseeing the worship of God at the temple dwelling in Shiloh. In fact, Elkanah and his family took their sacrifices every year to the sons, Hophni and Phinehas. But in contrast to Elkanah and Hannah, these priests were a picture of rebellion. God was about to judge them, and He was raising up Samuel to take their place as the leader in Israel.

DAY 1

READ:

1 Samuel 2:12-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 2:12-17

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #37: SIN AS TRANSGRESSION

The word *transgression* means “to cross over” or “to pass by” and is often used in reference to transgressing God’s explicit commands. When God gives a specific command, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when that command is disobeyed, transgression has taken place (Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:14). In this sense, sin is law-breaking.

In passages like this one, it can be difficult to make sense of the Old Testament truth so it can be applied to our lives. Three-pronged forks of fatty meat seemingly have little to do with following Jesus today. This makes it all the more important that we have the ability to understand these cultural realities in light of the main truth of the biblical text.

At its most basic form, the issue in this passage is that God’s people were ignoring God’s holy standards and using Him for their own selfish pursuits. When you consider the passage in this light, it’s not as difficult to translate the situation and apply it to our lives as we might have first thought.

We are all prone to use God for our own designs. We can even try to use God to get what we want without thinking about what we are doing. It might be the subtle thought that if I just keep my nose clean and show up at church on Sunday, then surely God owes me a life free from pain and suffering. Or we might attempt to cover for our hidden sins by reading our Bible or presenting a polished persona when we are around our church friends. We might try to barter with God: “If I do this for You, then will You help me get what I want in this area?”

This kind of sin may be more acceptable because it is often hidden behind a facade of goodness and obedience, but it’s no less deadly. It should be unfathomable to treat God like a pawn we can manipulate rather than the God we must worship, but such is the twisted nature of sin. God refuses to bless our mockery—He sees our hearts, and He will judge our sin.

In what areas of life are you tempted to use God to get what you want?

DAY 2

READ:

1 Samuel 2:22-26

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 2:22-25

NOTES

There are many words in the Bible that we don't use in common dialogue today. "Intercede" in verse 25 is one such word. You are not likely to hear many speak of the need for an intercessor. However, we do understand the word picture here. An intercessor is one who speaks up for and advocates on behalf of someone else who has done wrong. Intercessors are found in courtrooms when a person takes the stand to advocate for the one on trial. We might not use the term "intercede," but we see the practice everywhere.

Eli's rhetorical question to his sons is packed with lingering power. There's hope for an intercessor if someone sins against another person because it's possible, in fact, likely, that both parties have some measure of fault in the conflict. Not so with God. Since God is always right, always pure, always good, if someone sins against God, then it's impossible for an intercessor to reach a conclusion in favor of the sinner. The issue is settled—God is right and the sinner is wrong, so the judgment should be swift and final.

Two New Testament passages are helpful here. Paul wrote in Romans 8:34 that Christ Jesus died and has been raised, and now He is sitting at the right hand of God interceding for us. The resurrected Jesus, innocent and vindicated, is the One who intercedes for sinners before the throne of God. Similarly, the author of Hebrews elaborated that Jesus is able to save completely all those who come to God through Him in faith since Jesus always lives to intercede for them (Heb. 7:25). The hope for sinners rests in the fact that God has appointed an intercessor—Jesus Christ—to advocate on behalf of those who have trusted Him through repentance and faith. Before God the Father, Jesus testifies that the sin of His people has been paid for and that they are forgiven and right with God because they've trusted in Him as a perfect substitute. Without this hope, Eli's question would echo throughout history with no satisfactory answer.

How should Jesus' ministry of intercession affect your worries regarding your struggles with sin?

DAY 3

READ:

1 Samuel 2:27-36

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 2:35

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Here arises a great doubt, given we know that God's promises are most certain and that his decree is immutable. How, then, does the Lord make a promise and then go back on it? The answer is that some of God's promises are absolute without any condition, as was the promise of the Messiah. However, others of God's promises are given to us conditionally, especially the temporal promises made to the Israelites. These conditional promises, such as the priesthood being promised to the family of Eli, depended on the condition of their obedience."¹

-Andrew Willet (c. 1562-1621)

If you read all of 1 Samuel 2 in one sitting you'll notice the contrast that the author intended. Though the tone of the chapter is overwhelmingly negative, there are hints of hope littered throughout.

In verse 11, we see a boy that we know to be Samuel is serving the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest. In verse 21, we're told this child grew up in the presence of the Lord. Later, in verse 26, the author indicated how Samuel grew: physically, spiritually, and relationally. And finally, in the verses we read today, God promised to raise up a faithful priest who would fulfill the role God intended for the priesthood (1 Sam. 2:35).

These hints of hope are reminders that God will never abandon His mission. The world looked bleak during the time of Hannah and Samuel, yet God sustained a remnant who were faithful to Him and His work in the world.

In the same way, the world can look overwhelming and dark in our day as well. Signs of immorality abound, and it doesn't look like God's work will prevail. But we must not lose hope. God has promised to build His church, and nothing, not even the gates of hell, will be able to prevail against His people (Matt. 16:18). Jesus assured us that we will have trouble in this world, but He also encouraged us to take heart because He has overcome the world and His people will as well (John 16:33). And God has promised to send Jesus again so we will finally be where He is for eternity (John 14:3). Therefore, we can have hope.

Whatever happens around us, God is still ruling and reigning and ensuring that He will protect a remnant of people—His church—who will worship Him rightly until Jesus returns.

Where do you see bright spots of hope because God is still working in our dark world?

DAY 4

READ:

1 Samuel 3:1–4:5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 4:1-3

NOTES

Most people have been asked a question that seemed to have a common-sense answer: Why isn't there a seat at the restaurant? Because it's the most popular spot in the city and we came at prime time. Why did our car break down? Because you didn't change the oil for over a year? Why did I get fired from my job? Because you were late every other day. All you have to do is take a quick look at the situation and you'd be able to diagnose the issue in short order.

Here, the Israelites asked a common-sense question, and the common-sense answer should have occurred to them: Why did we get routed by the Philistines? Maybe because they'd turned their backs on God to such an extent that the priestly family was stealing the sacrificial offerings and engaging in sexual sin. You would think they would quickly assume that God was trying to get their attention.

But the way they responded gives us an indication that they weren't concerned about God's displeasure. Rather than humble repentance, they pursued a good-luck charm to take into battle. They didn't do the common-sense right thing; instead, they demonstrated their selfish rebellion all the more.

Do you ever do that?

We're all prone to miss the clear issues that are before us when God tries to get our attention. We might feel like God is distant when it's actually been months since we sought Him in prayer or through His Word. We might feel frustrated in our marriage when we know we've selfishly indulged our own lusts rather than pursued our spouse as we should. We could wonder if God loves us while neglecting the very means He provides us to assure us of His love. We would be wise to look around and consider what common-sense answer God might have for the challenges we are experiencing.

How might God be trying to get your attention right now?

DAY 5

READ:

1 Samuel 4:6-22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 4:10-11

NOTES

The Word of God proves true—always. The prophet Isaiah said God's Word will accomplish what God sends it to do and that it won't return to Him empty (Isa. 55:11). As the opposite of empty, hollow, or void, God's Word has substance. He means what He says and He'll do what He says.

God promised to kill Eli's two sons on the same day in judgment as a precursor of the coming destruction that awaited all of Eli's family. We could imagine this as a vague threat, the kind a parent might make to a child: "If you don't clean up your room, you are never watching TV again." But God doesn't make vague threats.

For us, there are at least two key points of application here: one for those who are not followers of Jesus and then one for those who are.

First, for the non-believer: It's imperative that you understand that God's call to repent, to turn to Jesus in faith, and to be saved lest you face the coming judgment is not just a hollow threat. You will not get to the judgment and find God changing His mind or presenting an alternative path to salvation. You should heed God's warning now because His words aren't empty.

Second, for the believer: Christian, God's words are not empty for you either. The same words that called you from death to life are the words that should prompt your ongoing obedience. God knows what's best for you, so whether it's in the area of church involvement, Bible reading or prayer, evangelism, or any other area of faithfulness, you should take God's warnings to heart and obey.

What will you do because you believe God's words are not empty?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"God wants us to bow before his holiness with respect and reverence. There is a danger in being in the presence of the Lord of Hosts, especially when we come into his presence with arrogance or apathy. We must come before his presence with quiet humility and brokenness."²

-Stephen J. Andrews and
Robert D. Bergen

POINT 1: The priest's evil sons are contemptible (1 Sam. 2:12-17,22-25).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #37: SIN AS TRANSGRESSION

The word transgression means "to cross over" or "to pass by" and is often used in reference to transgressing God's explicit _____. When God gives a specific command, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when that command is _____, transgression has taken place (Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:14). In this sense, sin is _____-breaking.



What should we learn from God's response to the sin of Eli's sons?

POINT 2: The priest's evil sons are rejected (1 Sam. 2:30-34).

God had _____ Eli and his sons with their role as priests, but they _____ their privilege. Therefore, God would take the priesthood from them and give it to another descendant of _____.



What are some ways we can honor God?

The severe consequences God laid out for the sins of Eli and his sons serve as a _____ to all who would despise the _____ of God.



How should believers in Jesus Christ respond to the severity of God's consequences for Eli and his sons?

POINT 3: The priest's evil sons are judged
(1 Sam. 4:1b-11).

The sin of Eli's sons led to a _____ and then to a disaster—the Israelites sought a _____ of the Lord instead of the _____ Himself.

? What are some ways our sins impact others?

True to His word, the Lord judged Eli's sons, and they died on the same day, proving God is _____, sin is _____, and God alone can _____.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been spared from the judgment of our sins through Christ Jesus, we call on our evil generation to likewise repent of their sins and trust in Christ so that they too might be saved.

- **HEAD:** How does Jesus' death on the cross for our sin vindicate God's holiness?
- **HEART:** What do you need to repent of so that you will be restored to a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ?
- **HANDS:** How will you use the resources God has given you to grow in your knowledge of God, your obedience to Him, and sharing about Jesus?

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Ultimately, God's judgment will come to all who refuse to submit to God's kingdom agenda and instead seek to set up their own little fiefdoms. God grants humans freedom to separate themselves from God. In the end, humans can have their final divorce from God both as a just judgment as well as the natural fruit borne out of a life lived without God."³

-Paul Copan