

## Message #17

## I Samuel 7:15-8:5

Most people would agree that we are living in a political climate that appears to be running totally and completely out of control. There are a few who seem to reverence God, but for the most part there is arrogance and defiance and distortions and deceit. There is a lack of honesty and there is a lack of humility. Those who tell the truth are viewed as liars and liars are viewed as those who are telling the truth. People are applauded if they support killing babies. People are esteemed if they don't want rule of law. Politicians stand against police who are trying to protect us and they are viewed as heroes. This is a dangerous political climate that is a total mess.

Now where is God in this? Is God still sovereign? Does God still have a plan? Is God still working out His will? Can we count on the fact that when many people mock God, and don't know God, and obviously are not interested in obeying the word of God that God is still working? This passage answers that and what we learn is this:

**EVEN WHEN THINGS DO NOT APPEAR TO BE MOVING IN ANY GOD-HONORING DIRECTION, GOD IS STILL SOVEREIGN AND IS STILL WORKING OUT HIS PERFECT PLAN AND WILL ACCORDING TO HIS SOVEREIGN PROGRAM.**

Everything was finally going good for Israel at this time in its history. Israel was seeing God work again and she was experiencing the blessings of God. She had repented of sin and enemies were being defeated and there was peace in the land and the nation was finally submitting to the leadership of Samuel, who was leading this nation to obey the word of God and do the will of God.

But Samuel was getting older and he was turning some of his power and authority over to his sons, and his sons were not godly. His sons were not interested in accurately understanding and applying the word of God.

Now when you look at this, you think this is so tragic because that is what happened to Eli. This is historical déjà vu. Eli's sons were not interested in obeying God's word, either. As a result, things became a mess. Now the big question is this—is God still sovereign when things like this happen?

The answer from this text is absolutely “yes.” **You see, the fact that Samuel's sons are not honoring to God will be the very thing that will prompt the Elders of Israel to demand a King, which God will view as a rejection of Himself (8:7). But God will even be sovereign in this because this will be the very thing God will use to actually begin the process of raising up His Davidic King thru whom His Son would come.**

You may have a child that is bizarre. You may have a mate that does not in any way reflect the fact that they love God. You may know that God is still sovereign. You stay faithful to God because frankly, you do not know what God is actually doing.

This is one of the great passages of Scripture that shows God is silently and sovereignly working out His program in the midst of a godless world that does not care about His word, will or program.

There are three component narrative parts that make up this story:

### **COMPONENT NARRATIVE PART #1 – The ministry of Samuel. 7:15-17**

In these verses we learn three very important facts about Samuel:

#### **Fact #1 - Samuel was a leader who judged Israel. 7:15a**

Now judging things is not a fun job, but it is a leader's job. Samuel had to make judgments concerning people as it related to life and to God. He had to sift through all kinds of issues to determine God's will in a variety of contexts.

From studying Scripture we know that judgments had to be made concerning:

- 1) Relationship Issues
- 2) Discipline Issues
- 3) Worship Service Issues
- 4) Property issues
- 5) Criminal issues
- 6) Offering issues
- 7) Moral Issues
- 8) Social Issues

We may recall that Moses was overwhelmed with the job of having to make all kinds of judgments in view of God's word (Exodus 18:16).

A judge had the responsibility to analyze these different situations and issues and make a judgment in view of the word of God.

Samuel was a leader who did his job. He truly was a great man of God.

#### **Fact #2 - Samuel was a leader who judged Israel all the days of his life. 7:15b**

This is important to see. Samuel did not retire or quit just because he got old. He was a very faithful minister until the day he died. He was like the Apostle John who stayed focused and faithful until the moment he went to be with the Lord.

Growing older has positives and negatives. On the negative side you realize you don't have the energy you once had. There are some aches and pains that you experience and physiologically you don't have the strength and vibrancy of what you had when you were younger. Plus a reality that begins to set in is that unless we are raptured, we are moving closer to our own death.

Israel was blessed to have Samuel for many years. But those years were winding down. That is the way it is for any leader who has been used of God for many years. Sooner or later the years begin to take its toll.

It is such a wonderful thing to see older people still serving God and worshipping God in their twilight years of life. They still go to worship services, prayer services and still serve on committees and boards. They still minister. That was Samuel, but he was getting older.

**Fact #3** - Samuel was a leader who annually traveled through Israel to make judgments. **7:16**

Samuel was not just a prophet; he also was a Divinely sanctioned circuit judge. He would annually travel to different places and cities and people would bring him their various matters for judgment.

Samuel had a regular circuit that he would travel. He had a house in Ramah and he lived there. He had a route that he used to travel. He left Ramah and he would travel to Bethel, which was about 12-15 miles north. Then he would go from Bethel to Gilgal, which was about 25 miles southeast of Bethel. Then he would leave Gilgal and travel to Mizpah, which was about 22 miles northwest of Gilgal. From Mizpah, he would go 4-5 miles southeast back to Ramah.

So in all, Samuel would make a 65-66 mile loop trip to judge. Now the terrain is not flat. It is a mountain terrain and for an old man to make this circuit trip every year was not easy. But Samuel did this.

He would carefully assess each case in light of Scripture. He was very concerned about proper worship of God. In fact, **verse 17** says that he built an altar to the Lord in Ramah.

What that tells us is that Samuel realized he was a sinner who needed the cleansing of God. He was not a perfect man, but he did have responsibilities to make judgments and he took the word of God and he did that.

Samuel is the prototype of the ideal elderly man of God. He is still concerned that people be right with God and he is still counseling, still teaching, still worshipping and still making Biblical judgments. Age had not softened Samuel from these objectives. He was still God's man.

Frankly, in many places elderly people quit and say let the younger guys do it. Not Samuel. He stayed faithfully serving until the end of his life.

## **COMPONENT NARRATIVE PART #2 – The ministry of Samuel's sons. 8:1-3**

When Samuel was getting very old, he appointed his sons to be judges over Israel (**8:1**). He realized he could not keep up the same pace anymore so as the clock was winding down on his life, he appointed his two sons.

He had two sons whose names were Joel, his firstborn, and Abijah, his second son (8:2). He may have gotten the idea from Eli because we learn in I Samuel 1:3 that Eli had two sons and he put them in charge. He assigned them to judge Beersheba, which was a city deep in the south of Israel. It was located about 45 miles south of their home in Ramah. Now the farthest distance that Samuel had to travel was about half the distance to Beersheba, so he sent his sons to Beersheba.

**His motive was probably to extend righteous judgment and proper worship to all of Israel, including those areas he himself did not visit.**

The problem was these two sons did not have the spiritual integrity of their father. According to **verse 3**, they did not live their lives like their dad did, but instead they had their focus in dishonest gain. Apparently, when people would bring them cases to judge, they took bribes and they perverted justice. In other words, they could be bought off.

If Samuel is writing this, he is writing this concerning his own sons. It must have been hard for him to write this but he did because it was the truth.

Taking bribes and perverting justice is a clear violation of God's law (Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:18-20).

There are four observations we want to make here:

**Observation #1** - Samuel was God's man and he made this appointment of his sons. **8:1**

Samuel did have this authority. The irony of this is that Samuel became a prophet of God because Eli couldn't and didn't control his sons. **More than likely, Samuel did not know what his sons were doing because God does not hold him accountable.**

In Eli's case, he was right at the tabernacle and knew and saw the evil of his sons. In Samuel's case, they were deep in the south, a long way from his sight.

The interesting thing is that God was actually sovereignly directing events for His purposes.

**Observation #2** - Samuel's sons were not godly and faithful like their father. **8:3**

Samuel's sons wanted money. Unfortunately that can happen to minister's children. Most ministers aren't rich and most churches don't give their ministers a lot for extras. As a result, the children grow up and don't have a lot of money. Sometimes the children lose their way and their focus.

When you are a minister's son sitting in a congregational meeting, and they are talking about all the support for missionaries, who may or may not even be doing the job, and they don't seem to care much about their needs, it is a tough pill to swallow.

It may be that these two sons decided they would make the most of this opportunity and cash in on their assignment. What they did was to go after gain rather than justice in their decisions.

**Observation #3** - Just because a father is a godly leader does not mean his sons will grow up to become godly leaders.

The name Samuel goes down in history as one of the great men of God, but not his sons. It is a very rare thing when the sons carry on the faithful name and work of their father.

You can be a very faithful parent and have children who are spiritually goofy. You cannot blame this on Samuel. He wasn't the problem, the boys were.

**Observation #4** - These two boys had tremendous opportunity and they blew it.

Had they followed in the footsteps of their father, they too would have become powerful men. They threw it all away.

**COMPONENT NARRATIVE PART #3** – The request of Israel's elders. **8:4-5**

Elders are critical here and these elders took their responsibilities seriously. They were looking out for the welfare of Israel, but they will make a fatal mistake.

The last time these elders came up with some solution to a problem, they botched it. Back in I Samuel 4:2, the elders came up with their own plan to take the Ark of the Covenant out to the battlefield and they lost big time. Now these elders are coming up with another proposal and solution. At least this time, however, they do consult with Samuel.

They went to Samuel at Ramah and they told him the truth. Samuel was getting old and his sons were not walking in the ways of God. Now this was absolutely right and true. **They are faced with two problems: Samuel has an age problem and Samuel's sons have an injustice money problem.**

But at the end of **verse 5**, they make a big mistake. **They want Samuel to appoint a king over them like all the other nations have.**

They should have asked Samuel to what they thought God wanted them to do. But they don't. They were not content with having a man of God who knew the word of God lead them; they wanted a king. **They are usurping the authority of Samuel here.**

**Two things show this is wrong: 1) These elders are not content having a man appointed by God judge them; 2) These elders want a king like all the other nations have.**

These leaders had their own political agenda. They appear so pious, but frankly they are frauds.

They are not content with having a man of God who knew the word of God in charge; they want a king like the other nations. They were not motivated by the will of God, they are motivated by wanting to be like the other nations who could care less about God (8:20).

According to Leviticus 20:26, this nation was supposed to be different than any other nation. But it wanted to be like every other nation.

A God-honoring nation should be different. It should promote God and His word.

## **PRACTICAL LESSONS**

- 1. Age is not an excuse for lack of faithfulness.**
- 2. Parents are not always to blame for the rebellion of their children.**
- 3. Just because some leaders suggest something, doesn't make it right. If what they suggest makes things more worldly, it is wrong.**
- 4. God works out His sovereign will even with ignorant and unfaithful leadership.**