

Problems in the Vicarage

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I'm not going to tell you about my leaky toilet or the state of the cooking in the vicarage or the elm leaf beetle plague that I am infested by.

Anyway, rather we're looking at this passage in 1 Samuel and the problems that confronted the priest's place back in Samuel's day in 1050 BC.

People often ask me, how's your church going? It's hard to know how to answer that. I mean, do I go through the list alphabetically of 600 or 700 names and say, well, this person I think is growing as a Christian and this person might be drifting a bit and this person's serving well and this person's going on the mission field.

Do I go through a list like that of how's your church going? What do you say? A friend of mine who's a minister and I came up with an answer to this question that is always true and simple.

Sin and grace. Because in effect, that's how all of us go, how every church goes, how every Christian community goes.

[1 : 1 9] It's a mixture of sin and grace. And to an extent, although with lots of limited knowledge even as a minister, I could go through the directory of members here and for some people I know how God's grace is at work in their lives and other people I know the struggles of sin that are in their lives and so on.

Sin and grace. Sin and grace. And here in the Bible as a whole, but in this chapter too, in particular, we find quite a heady mix, in fact, tonight of sin and grace and found in surprising places.

You see, religious leadership is not always what it cracks up to be. Here is a very bad example, which we'll look at in more detail in a few minutes. But periodically in church history, Christian leadership is often very corrupt and very immoral.

Whether it's the medieval papacy, that is the Roman Catholic Church based in France and in Italy in the 13, 14, 1500s before the Reformation, maybe afterwards as well, full of promiscuity, children born to popes, lots of murder, greed for money, opulence and affluence and all that sort of stuff, power plays.

We'll jump forward a few hundred years. Seems to me the Episcopalian Church in the United States in some senses may not be much different from that. Too wealthy for its own good, too much power play, lots of immorality and overflowing with heresy.

[2 : 4 8] But in many Christian ministries over the centuries, there's abuse or corruption or misuse of power or bullying, lies, deceit, immorality at the heart of what should be a godly Christian ministry.

And in 1050 BC at the tabernacle at Shiloh, the main shrine for worshipping Yahweh in ancient Israel in those days before Jerusalem, it's very much the same.

For in the place of godliness, we find instead arrogance, might and wickedness. And if you remember back to last week to Hannah's song, we know that God is opposed to arrogance, might and wickedness.

You can look across to chapter 2, verse 3. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth, for the Lord is a God of knowledge. God is opposed to arrogance.

Or in the next verse, the bows of the mighty are broken. God is opposed to might. Personal, self-sufficient type strength and the desire for power. And if you look down to the end of verse 9, for example, the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might does one prevail.

[4 : 00] Hannah's song, if you remember, was a humble barren woman rejoicing, not just at the gift of a child, remember, but at the presentation and giving of that child in dedication at the service of God himself at this tabernacle in Shiloh.

That is, she didn't sing the song when he was conceived nor when he was born, but when she actually gave him to the temple or the tabernacle for serving God and to be brought up in effect as a priest or prophet before God himself.

So that was her song, that God had uplifted her humility and barrenness, overthrown it to give her fertility, to give her a child that she could then give back to God for service.

But at the same time in that song of Hannah, God is a God of reversal. So as well as lifting up the humble and the barren and the hungry and the poor, God is the one who's opposed to and brings down the arrogant, the mighty and the wicked.

And now we find who they are, who's being brought down. For we see it heralded here and we'll see it in eventuality in the next week or two as well. The contrast in this chapter of sin and grace is particularly clear, deliberately so in the way that this chapter is written.

[5 : 23] For every section that we get describing the horrors of the sins of Hophni and Phinehas as priests in the temple is then countered by some relatively brief mention of the grace that comes from God to Samuel as he grows up in the service of God.

You see it dotted through this section. It began in chapter 2 verse 11. The boy, Samuel that is, remained to minister to the Lord in the presence of the priest Eli.

If you jump down to verse 18, Samuel was ministering, not now in the presence of Eli, but before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod. Down in verse 21, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.

And across in verse 26, the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favour with the Lord and with the people. And then chapter 3 verse 1, the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli.

That is deliberately dotted through this chapter are the references of Samuel, the boy given by Hannah, the barren woman, to serve God, growing up in the favour of God and in the favour of people.

[6 : 34] A godly young boy, young youth growing up. But balancing that or countering it in the paragraphs in between, we get quite some detail of the horrors and atrocities performed by the priests, Hophni and Phinehas.

And what a bleak picture of sin it is. Verse 12 of chapter 2 summarises it in effect. The sons of Eli were scoundrels. That is, the writer here doesn't pull any punches.

He's quite up front. They're scoundrels. They had no regard for the Lord. Shouldn't surprise us because remember that the book of Samuel follows on from the book of Judges.

And we can see in this description and what follows in the verses later in this chapter, that if you like, the ethical ambience of Judges is unchanged. At the end of Judges, the nation of God's people Israel was corrupt through and through.

The people internally divided, each doing what is right in their own eyes, ignoring other people and ignoring the Lord. And here's Hophni and Phinehas, the priests, doing exactly that as well. We ought not to be surprised.

- [7 : 43] And what we find in the description that comes is that they are degenerate men, that they are exploitative, ruthless, rapacious, corrupt and greedy, grasping.
- They're standover thugs, basically, as we'll see in a minute or two. That is, you don't want to cross the Eli boys, Hophni and Phinehas. You'll be in trouble if you do.
- They are thugs, immoral, corrupt bullies. The root of the problem, the end of verse 12, is they have no regard for the Lord.
- No fear of Him, no faith in Him, no obedience of Him or of His word. Literally, it says they did not know Yahweh. That is, they had no relationship with God.
- Here are they priests of God in the very central shrine of God's people, but they don't even know Him. And whilst we might be surprised at that, throughout church history, the same can be said for Christian ministers of all sorts of denominations in all sorts of countries, who for whatever reason end up standing in pulpits.
- [8 : 53] They do not know Yahweh. They do not know God. They do not know Jesus Christ. And yet somehow they end up as leaders of God's people. The same is true today in various parts of the world, various places, maybe even in this city.
- You see, the root of sin is a relational root. It is a lack of relationship with God or a deficient relationship with God Himself. You see, sin is not simply something social.
- It's not simply harming a neighbour or lack of love for somebody else. Sin is fundamentally vertical in its direction. That is, it's an offence against God Himself, often demonstrated in horizontal misbehaviour.
- Sin stems from a defiance of Almighty God, a God who's revealed His word, His standards, His character and His laws to us most clearly in the scriptures.
- And so when disregard or disdain is shown to the Lord, then in the end anything goes. And see what happens. Because what follows from verse 12, which describes the root, is now we get a description of the fruit of their sin.
- [10 : 05] Verse 13 and 14 tell us, They had no regard either for the Lord or for the duties of the priest to the people. When anyone offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was boiling with a three-pronged fork in his hand.
- And he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up, the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.
- Here are the Eli boys, Hophni and Phinehas. They're employing their forklift operator to go into the pan with the fork to lift up whatever comes.
- They would claim it for themselves. It is forbidden in Old Testament law. The priests have portions of some sacrifices allotted to them. It is sufficient for their upkeep.
- They are greedy and grasping, getting somebody else to do their dirty work so that they get more meat to eat. Unless that is then offered either in sacrifice to God or is shared amongst the sacrificer or her family, friends and others.
- [11 : 16] That is, the Old Testament laws about sacrifices were very specific that for different types of sacrifices, who got what of the meat? The priests had portions of some, but here they are expressing their dissatisfaction with God's law.
- They're showing disdain for God's word. They're showing greed. Today is the same for many ministers of God's word in different places, motivated by greed.
- For one, on the one hand, whilst it's a job that's not hugely paid, it's reasonably well paid. But on the other hand, it's also the sort of job where you could easily, I reckon, make a bit on the side.

And it's quite a deal sometimes for people who are tempted on issues of money in the ministry. Keeping wedding or funeral fees or little gifts that people might have or here's a bit of money for your church, but you don't give a receipt, it ends up in your pocket.

You have to be very careful as a minister to show you, it would be easy to show the same form of greed that Hophni and Phinehas are demonstrating here. Greed again in verse 15.

[12 : 24] Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest servant would come and say to the one who is sacrificing, give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you, but only raw.

Sounds extremely fussy. I want roasted meat, not boiled meat, so give it to me raw so I can roast it. But again, notice that it's before the fat was burned and it's implying that they want part of the fat portions and the fat portions of sacrifices were burned to give to God as a sacrifice.

They didn't go to the priests. Here they are wanting the best for themselves rather than letting it be burned for God. Greed again. And then in verse 16.

If the man said to him, let them burn the fat first and then take whatever you wish. Here's a man who's being intimidated by this request and he's saying, no, no, no, the fat should be burned first.

He knows his law, but he's succumbing by saying, well, then you can have whatever you wish. The servant of the priest would then say, no, you must give it now. If not, I will take it by force. So here are the Eli boys employing their thugs to come.

[13 : 30] Intimidation, bullying. Same sort of thing sometimes happens in Christian ministry, sadly. Christian leaders can easily abuse their power and intimidate or bully people in churches, in church life.

And then verse 17. The sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord, for they treated the offerings of the Lord with contempt. It's a bleak picture, isn't it?

But sadly, it's not unique in Christian leadership. But then it's balanced by the reference to Samuel that I pointed out before. Samuel ministering before the Lord, wearing the linen ephod in verses 18 to 21.

The end of this little passage, we're told that he grew up in the presence of the Lord. And the word for grow up is along the lines of to become great in stature, to grow bigger.

And it's the same word, in effect, that's used in verse 17 to describe their sin as very great. So here's a play on words. Hophni, Phinehas, their sin is very great.

[14 : 36] Samuel was growing great in the presence of the Lord. But a contrast by using the same word. That is, the contrast is deliberate in the way this chapter is written and structured.

Notice they come from the same environment. Samuel would have been maybe four years old when he was placed by his mother into the environment in which Hophni and Phinehas had grown up under the care of their father, Eli, the old priest.

He's grown up in the same corrupt environment as them. It's not an environmental issue that causes sin. It's not educational deficiency. It's a moral problem. That's clear in the contrast here.

But then we come back to sin in verse 22. And yet again, the contrast is deliberate. Eli, in verse 20, blesses Hannah, who comes each year with a new cloak, coat sort of thing for her growing boy.

He blesses her and her husband Elkanah in verse 20. But in verse 22 onwards, he actually, in effect, curses his own son. So blessing one family, cursing the other from the same priest.

[15 : 41] There's a deliberate contrast at work here. In verse 21 at the beginning, the Lord took note of Hannah. She conceived and bore three sons and two daughters more.

That is the Lord who gives life. But as we'll see in the verses 22 onwards, God's will for the sons of Eli is to kill them.

The end of verse 25 says. And here again, we find Hannah's song at work. If you look across to Hannah's song on the left hand column, verse 6, the Lord kills and brings to life.

And here it is. Here's the Lord desiring to kill Eli's corrupt and immoral sons and the Lord bringing life to Hannah's barren womb. Firstly with Samuel himself and then with further brothers and sisters for him.

Well, Eli, this old priest, is clearly ineffectual. The sins of his sons is a public scandal. Verse 22, we're told he's very old.

[16 : 43] Later on, we're told in the next chapter, he's 98. He heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel and how they lay with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. You see, it wasn't just corrupting the sacrifices.

Here's sexual promiscuity at work from them, lying with whoever they wanted. Well, the women who served at the entrance, again, maybe with standover tactics.

They're the priests. They pull the rank. Who knows what sort of bullying or sexual abuse is at work. In the words of verse 22. It's a public scandal.

People know about it. Word comes back to Eli about it. But his leadership is weak and ineffectual. He doesn't really deal with the sin. Notice in verse 23, he does say to his sons, why do you do such things?

For I hear of your evil doings from all these people. No, my sons, it's not a good report that I hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad. And then he goes on.

[17 : 40] There's a serious sin.

It is downright blatant defiance of God himself. That is, it's not sin for which a mediator can come in. It's deliberate sin.

It's not a sort of unwitting mistake. And Eli is warning them that their sin is serious indeed. But his words bounce off them.

They have little impact on their lives, it seems. And despite his rebuke, they don't listen. And we're told at the end of verse 25, terrifying words in a way. It was the will of the Lord to kill them.

Words that perhaps ought to make us tremble. We might object to this. Isn't this just Old Testament? Don't we find in the New Testament that God's will is for everyone to be saved?

[18 : 46] How can his will be here to kill them? But it's not a brutal God at work here. It is a God who's responding to those who are deliberate and entrenched in their sin.

Those who've refused a rebuke from their father, in this case. Those who are, in a sense, set on their sinful ways. And God's will is to kill them in judgment.

Not that he would take pleasure from that. But that he who is a righteous and holy God will ultimately punish sin. And we know the wages of sin is death. We know, therefore, that the punishment of sin will be killing someone.

As it will be on the final day when Jesus returns. And those who've not known God, like Hophni and Phinehas, had no regard for him or for his law. Well, it will be God's will on that day that such are put to death.

Serious business is sin. We must not dismiss it lightly and think, oh, it doesn't matter. We can't brush it under the carpet, as so often Christian leadership tries to do.

[19 : 58] It is so serious that the death penalty hangs over people like Hophni and Phinehas. We saw it earlier in the Old Testament with Pharaoh.

His stubbornness against God and against God's servant Moses. We see it in the New Testament as well. Where those who are set on their sinful ways.

In Romans 1, for example, God hands them over in their sin. In punishment for their wrongdoing. Leading up to their ultimate death.

It's not a God of the Old Testament in contrast to the New here. It's how a holy God works. Yes, he is forgiving and merciful of sin. He does urge us to repent.

But there comes a point when we go down the path of sin that we've gone so far beyond the point of no return. And then it is God's will to put to death. For he punishes sin with death.

[20 : 54] As he warned the first man and woman, if you eat of it, you will surely die. And die they did. The wages of sin is death.

We might say that those who are firm in their sin, God confirms in their sin with the punishment of death in judgment.

Again, we switch to a contrast. This time just the verse 26. Samuel who's growing in stature. Again, the word great in effect.

Again, in contrast with Hophni and Phinehas. But notice that Samuel who's growing up as a young boy, young youth now, grows also.

Not just physically, but he grows in favour with the Lord and with the people. That is, the bigger he gets, it seems, the better he gets. Words that perhaps remind us of Jesus in Luke's description.

[21 : 51] Words that are in fact borrowed in effect from here. Of course, the bigger someone gets doesn't usually mean the better they get. Although in Samuel's case it did. And the word favour there is the word grace.

That is, it's not Samuel deserving God's applause. It's the free grace and gift of God at work in Samuel's life. Well, so dire is the situation at Shiloh that God sends a man of God.

A term that means in effect a prophet. See in verse 27. A man of God came to Eli and said to him, Thus the Lord has said. This is a prophet sent by God.

A nameless prophet. We don't need to know his name. He's a servant of God. The fact that it's God's word is what matters most in this case. And it shows the desperateness of the situation at Shiloh.

That now God is acting with this word of judgment. And a word of mercy. As we'll see at the end of the chapter. The line that has led to Eli and through him to his sons Hophni and Phinehas.

[22 : 58] These corrupt priests. Is a line that goes back to Aaron, the brother of Moses. Aaron was the first chief priest of the people of Israel. Back in the book of Exodus. Went to his sons.

And then on through a line that has now. Maybe nearly 400 years later. Come to Eli. And to Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas. So in verses 27 and 28.

That's what it's referring to. I revealed myself to the family of your ancestor in Egypt. That is Moses or rather Aaron. The brother of Moses. When they were slaves to the house of Pharaoh.

I chose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest. To go up to my altar. To offer incense. To wear an ephod before me. And I gave to the family of your ancestor. All my offerings by fire.

From the people of Israel. That is. I gave sufficient provision in the sacrificial laws. For their sustenance. Implicitly. Referring back to. The greed of Hophni and Phinehas.

[23 : 54] Who wanted more. Out of what was sacrificed. At the altar. And then. So it's a line that has begun in grace. But it ends.

In sin. The accusation comes in verse 29. Notice that it is Eli. Who is the object of this accusation. Not his sons. That is. Eli is still in fact the chief priest.

And even though he's old. He's not excused. From his weak and gutless leadership. So verse 29. To Eli. The father. Why then look with greedy eye.

At my sacrifices. And my offerings that I commanded. And honor your sons. More than me. By fattening yourselves. On the choices parts. Of every offering of my people Israel.

The picture we get of Eli. Is that he's not quite as bad as his sons. But he's certainly compromised. By their behavior. And maybe implicitly. Accepts or agrees with.

[24 : 49] Or benefits from. Some of their greed. That's the implication of verse 29. That he's quite pleased for them to get. Extra fatty portions of meat. And so on. He's fattening himself.

Verse 29 implies. On the bits of meat. That his sons are getting. For him as well as for themselves. It seems. And he honors his sons. More than his honor of God.

Maybe we could say. That one of Eli's problems. Is that he's. He's just sort of. Too weak. And too nice. He's not prepared. To put in the hard word. Or give the boot. To his sons.

He says some words of rebuke. But they fall on deaf ears. It seems that perhaps. He doesn't follow that up. With them. He doesn't take action. That is a gutless. Niceness.

Which so often you find in Christian leadership. Is actually a moral weakness. And the accusation of verse 29 against Eli. Shows that. It seems. He's morally weak.

[25 : 46] Himself. He's compromised. By his sons. Sins. Maybe he's even. A sinner like them. In some sense. I have some sympathy for him.

Moral rigor. Is I think the hardest demand. On a Christian leader. And minister. Partly because none of us. Likes confrontation. And I think the hardest things.

I've had to do in Christian ministry. Have been at the level. Of moral rebuke. And action. They are the times. That I dread the most.

I don't particularly enjoy Saturday night. Slaving over sermons. Let me say. And there's plenty of other things. That are not easy. But the thing that. That is. Hardest of all.

By miles. Are the few times. When I've had to confront somebody. On some. Blatant. Moral. Issue. Of rebuke.

[26 : 47] And I find myself. Churning up inside. And I well. Understand. The temptation. Not to act. I well. Understand. The temptation.

To turn a blind eye. I well. Understand. The temptation. To say some. General words. Of mild. Rebuke. But not act.

No one likes. That sort of stuff. But too often. Christian leadership. Is just nice. Morally. Gutless.

And what happens. Churches. Die. At their core. When the leadership. Is compromised. In effect. By the sin. Of others.

When they get by. Doing what they're doing. Without. Some form. Of church. Discipline. They are such. Difficult. And hard. Times. But I know.

[27 : 42] Of places. In Melbourne. That. Were bible teaching. Preaching. Churches. Where moral issues. Were not confronted. Or dealt with. Because you don't want. To lose people. Especially if they give.

Lots of money. In the plate. Christ. But what happens. Is the church. Dies. At its core. And the word of God. Is rare. As here it was.

Chapter 3. Verse 1 says. Think how rare it is. In Anglican churches. In Australia. And the same for parents. I think. Too often.

I suspect. Christian parents. Honor their children. More than God. Eli's mistake. So they see their children. Go off the rails. They're.

They're heartbroken. And devastated by it. But. But their love. Of their children. Their honour. Of their children. Means that their theological. Position is compromised. And their own relationship.

[28 : 38] With God. Is compromised. As a result. As well. Difficult things. I feel for Eli. The temptation.

Is to be weak. And not to take the action. That he ought. The man of God's words. Go on now. To be a word.

Of judgment. In verse 30. Therefore. Because of the description. That had preceded. The Lord. The God of Israel. Declares.

And this is the judgment. I promise. That your family. And the family. Of your ancestor. Should go in and out. Before me. Forever. That is the line of Aaron. But now.

The Lord declares. Far be it from me. For those who honour me. I will honour. And those who despise me. Shall be treated with contempt. That is. It seems to be. That God is withdrawing.

[29 : 34] An eternal promise. To Aaron. Saying. If you despise me. I will treat you. I will treat you with contempt. You will not be my priestly line. Forever. If you continue. In the contemptuous behaviour.

And moral compromise. That we have seen described. In the earlier part. Of this chapter. See. A time is coming. When I will cut off.

Your strength. And the strength. Of your ancestors family. So that no one in your family. Will live to old age. Words spoken to a very old man. But his sons were not that old. And then in verse.

32. In distress. You will look with greedy eye. On all the prosperity. That shall be bestowed upon Israel. And no one in your family. Shall ever live. To old age.

An idle prophecy. Keep reading to Samuel. For when you get to chapter 22. You discover that 85 descendants of Eli.

[30 : 34] Are murdered by Saul the king. And not in their old age. Presumably. For many of them. And then in verse 33. The only one of you. Whom I shall not cut off from my altar.

Shall be spared to weep out his eyes. And grieve his heart. All the members of your household. Shall die by the sword. And if you keep reading. Beyond the book of Samuel. Into the first book of Kings.

Descendant of Eli. Priest. A viather. Sacked in effect. By Solomon. Son of David. The king. And sent off to grieve. And we're told. In 1 Kings chapter 2.

That there is fulfilled. These words. Prophetised. To Eli. And then in verse. 34. Or how will Eli know. That he's. These are words.

To believe. Well verse 34. Says the fate of your two sons. Hophni and Phinehas. Shall be the sign to you. Both of them shall die on the same day.

[31 : 30] Often you see the prophets. Give a sign. To show that the rest of their prophecy. Will in fact come true. And here is a sign. That will happen. In chapter 4. Just wait for a week or two.

We'll see it fulfilled. And we know then. That the rest of the prophecy. Will come true. For God is speaking here. Not just a prophet. And his word is true. And his word is sovereign.

That's harsh judgment. We might think. On the line of Eli. But it's seriously contemptuous behavior. That has warranted it. It ends Eli's line.

And ultimately. That line is replaced. By the line of Zadok. In the time of Solomon the king. And so in a sense. Verse 31 to 34. This statement of judgment.

Has got an immediate fulfillment. With the death of Eli's sons. A slightly down the track fulfillment. With the slaughter of the priest. At a place called Nob. In the time of Saul.

[32 : 27] A slightly further fulfillment as well. When a Viathor is sacked as priest. And Zadok's line. Replaces in effect Eli's line. As the high priests of Israel. It ends a dynasty.

To create a new one. One of the other themes. In fact of Samuel. As later on in this book. The issue of who will be king. Will it be a king. Followed by his son. Jonathan is the son of the first king.

Or will it be a new dynasty. And so on. And so we come to verse 35. For so often words of judgment by God. Are tempered by mercy. And so it is here as well.

In verse 35. I will raise up for myself. A faithful priest. Who shall do according to what is in my heart. And in my mind. I will build him a sure house.

That is a faithful house. Literally. Same word as earlier in the verse. And he shall go in and out. Before my anointed one. Forever. The anointed one.

[33 : 24] Is probably the king. Anticipated at the end of Hannah's song. In verse 10 of chapter 2. Probably referring later in this book. To David. The second king. But ultimately perhaps to Jesus.

The faithful priest that God raises up. Is in the more immediate historical sense. Fulfilled with Zadok. Whose line replaces Elias. In the time of Solomon. But even ultimately after that of course.

In Jesus the great high priest. Of the New Testament. That is so often Old Testament prophecy. Has an element of immediate. Or relatively immediate historical. Elements of fulfillment.

But ultimate fulfillment. Found in Jesus Christ. In New Testament. Or post New Testament times. And then the judgment. And the mercy ends.

In verse 36. Everyone who is left in your family. Shall come to implore him. That is the line of Zadok. Or to Jesus even. For a piece of silver. Or a loaf of bread.

[34 : 20] And shall say. Please put me in one of the priest places. That I may eat a morsel of bread. Remember that priests. Like Eli. Had no land. No cattle. No crops. They depended on the sacrifices. That people gave.

For their own sustenance. And here we are finding. That the line of Eli. Will be cut off. And they will be hungry. So here are greedy priests. Who have been taking.

Fat portions of sacrifices. And the great reversal of God. Will mean now they end up hungry. And that is exactly. What Hannah sang about. Back in chapter 2. See it in verse 5.

Those who are full. Have hired themselves out for bread. But those who are hungry. Are fat with spoil. The God of great reversals. At work. And then the contrast continues.

At the beginning of chapter 3. With Samuel ministering to the Lord. Under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare. In those days. Visions were not widespread. That is an act of God's judgment.

[35 : 16] Is to withdraw his word. So that his word is not heard. And his word. Cannot be then. Obeyed. As we think about.

Christianity in Australia. How rare is God's word. Today. There are plenty of churches. Where. You'll hear little. If anything of it. Is that God's judgment.

It could well be. Where there's disdain. For God's word. As here. God keeps his word. Silent. He doesn't want to cast pearls.

Before swine. But rare doesn't mean. Never. God sends a man of God. Here. With his word. A word of judgment. But tempered with mercy.

For God will not let. Even sinful human beings. Thwart his good purposes. For this universe. That he's made. It could be that God. Would just cut off. Priests forever.

[36 : 19] After all. They deserved it. And let the priesthood die. But no. God says. I'll raise up. A faithful priest. Zadok appears on the scene.

Not perfect. But good. In 1 Kings 2. But it's still anticipating. The great priest. Whom God raises up. You see. God's judgment.

Is always tempered. By mercy. For his. Righteous judgment. Could be exercised. Without mercy. But we would never have got past. The garden of Eden. But because God.

Is a merciful God. He's wanting his purposes. To be fulfilled. Despite our sin. There is encouragement here. That even when we fail. There is still mercy. From God. God. He's not a harsh ogre.

Who just immediately. Obliterates the slightest of sins. These are people. Entrenched in their sin. Thoroughly deserving of death. Which is where. As we'll see in chapter 4.

[37 : 14] They end up. God. Despite human sin. Remains faithful forever. And the long. And somewhat. Tortuous story.

Of the Old Testament. For which this is just. One small part. Shows time. And time again. In all sorts of. Different ways. And stages. The absolute. Faithfulness. And mercy of God.

That will bring about. A glorious. Triumphant. Kingdom of God. At the end of the scriptures. Despite human sin. God's grace. Is bigger than that. We see it.

With the samples. Of grace. In Samuel. Foretastes. Of the grace. Of the Lord. Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.