

Mercy All Around (1 Samuel 7:6-17)

1. Preparing for Mercy (v.6-9)

Repentance: the acknowledgment, confession, and turning away from sin (negative) to the pursuit of God with a whole-hearted devotion (positive).

- Repentance does not coerce mercy because there is no merit in repentance. However, there is no saving help without it.
- Repentance is not the cause, but the condition of the LORD's deliverance. While mercy has elements of clemency, repentance will not necessarily remove the consequences of sin on this side of glory.

Mercy: The mercy of God floods v.3-6. It is the mercy of God that sent Samuel to preach repentance, and it is through mercy that the people responded favorably as they had enjoyed their idolatry and sin.

- The LORD has allowed the nation of Israel to experience pain and trials so that he can prepare His people for mercy.
- In mercy, God established the sacrificial system to allow sinful people to come before him. Samuel offered a whole-burnt offering to the LORD (Ex.22:30; Lev. 22:27). This was not to convince the LORD to act favorably, but instead, was a testimony of the people's commitment to the LORD.
- Fasting: the abstaining from food, or a particular type of food, in order to express dependence and submission to His will. Fasting in Scripture happens in order to:
 - overcome temptation (Matt. 4:1-11), seek God's wisdom and discernment (Judg. 20:26), strengthen prayer (Ez. 8:23), seek deliverance and protection (2 Chron. 20:3-4), express grief (1 Sam. 31:13), demonstrate repentance and a returning to the LORD (1 Sam. 7:6), show humility (1 Kings 21:27-29), express worship (Luke 2:37), minister to those in need (Isaiah 58:3-7), and show sympathy when someone is sick (Psalm 35:13).

The stomach, and its relentless urging, will be your greatest coach, friend, and co-laborer for the spiritual discipline of fasting; the less you give to it, the more it serves you. The longing for food will be a constant reminder on why you are fasting. Since food will provide no remedy to your condition, the grace and mercy of God will.

Prayer: Fasting and prayer are used many times in Scripture (Ezra 8:21-23; Nehemiah 1:4; Daniel 9:3; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:23, 14:23).

- While the text does not specifically state that they prayed, it is assumed because Samuel "judged the people." They asked Samuel to pray for them.

2. Enjoying Mercy (v.10-11, 15-17)

- Repentance, fasting, and prayer are the means God used to bring about the future mercy, which was to be enjoyed.
- Twenty years earlier:
 - The ark is taken from Shiloh without the LORD's permission (4:3).
 - The ark came to the Israelite camp at Ebenezer, where 30,000 men shouted with a mighty voice (4:5). There is no shout now, but prayer.
 - The Philistines were the ones who were afraid (4:8). Now the Israelites are (7:7).
 - The ark was a god to both the Philistines and the Israelites (4:3, 7-8). Now, the ark remains at Kiriath-jearim. The Israelites for the first time called the LORD "our God." (7:7).
 - The priests at Shiloh were involved in lechery and irreverence (2:13-24, 29). Now, the Israelites have cast aside the sexual idols, and worshipped correctly (7:8-10).
- The LORD generally uses natural phenomena to fight his wars: lightning (2 Sam 22:15; 1 Kings 18:38), hail (Josh. 10:11), darkness (Josh. 24:7) the stars (Judges 5:20) and disease (1 Sam 5:6).
- The LORD in mercy delivered them through "thunder." Why thunder?
 - The Baals and the Ashtaroths were gods of fertility. Baal was a storm god, who was supposedly in control of rain, thunder, and lightning. The LORD has already cut off the head and hands of Dagon (5:4), afflicted their other gods (6:5) and now, in satire, humiliated the worshippers of Baal and Ashtoreth.

The mercy enjoyed was in Israel's utter helplessness and lack of resources. The only One who was able to deliver them was the LORD.

3. Remembering Mercy (v.12-14)

- Monuments were commemorative stones that were not only acts of worship, but also a turning point and benchmark for the worshipper; it symbolized a new act on God's part (Gen. 28:16-22; Ex. 24:4; Josh. 4:19). Samuel is continuing this tradition of marking the time and place where God had helped His people.
- Ebenezer means "stone of help" or "up to this point the LORD has helped us."
- So far, there have been two Ebenezers (4:1, 7:12). Ebenezer in 4:1 was a location. The Ebenezer in 7:12 was a monument. Like bookends, they tie thematically what the LORD has done in mercy; He has humbled the nation (4:1) and has now delivered them (7:12). Like a chain that has kept the nation secure, each link was a token of mercy, either in the form of chastisement, or deliverance.