

# Maclaren on 1 Samuel Pt1

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## 1 Samuel

### Sermons

Alexander Maclaren

### 1 Samuel 3:1-14 The Child Prophet

**'And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision. 2. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; 8. And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; 4. That the Lord called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. 5. And he ran onto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. 6. And the Lord called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. 7. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him. 8. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child. 9. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if He call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10. And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for Thy servant heareth. 11. And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. 12. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. 13. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. 14. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.'**— 1 Samuel 3:1-14

The opening words of this passage are substantially repeated from 1 Samuel ii. 11, 18. They come as a kind of refrain, contrasting the quiet, continuous growth and holy service of the child Samuel with the black narrative of Eli's riotous sons. While the hereditary priests were plunging into debauchery, and making men turn away from the Tabernacle services, Hannah's son was ministering unto the Lord, and, though no priest, was 'girt with an ephod.' This white flower blossomed on a dunghill. The continuous growth of a character, from a child serving God, and to old age walking in the same path, is the great lesson which the story of Samuel teaches us. 'The child is father of the man,' and all his long days are 'bound each to each' by true religion. There are two types of experience among God's greatest servants. Paul, made an Apostle from a persecutor, heads the one class. Timothy in the New Testament and Samuel in the Old, represent the other. An Augustine or a Bunyan is made the more earnest, humble, and whole-hearted by the remembrance of a wasted youth and of God's arresting mercy. But there are a serenity and continuity about a life which has grown up in the fear of God that have their own charm and blessing. It is well to have 'much transgression' forgiven, but it may be better to have always been 'innocent' and ignorant of it. Pardon cleanses sin, and even turns the memory of it into an ally of holiness; but traces are left on character, and, at the best, years have been squandered which do not return. Samuel is the pattern of child religion and service, to which teachers should aim that their children may be conformed. How beautifully his double obedience is expressed in the simple words! His service was 'unto the Lord,' and it was 'before Eli'; that is to say, he learned his

work from the old man, and in obeying him he served God. The child's religion is largely obedience to human guides, and he serves God best by doing what he is bid,—a lesson needed in our days by both parents and children.

Samuel's peaceful service is contrasted, in the second half of the first verse, with the sad cessation of divine revelations in that dreary time of national laxity. A demoralised priesthood, an alienated people, a silent God,—these are the outstanding features of the period when this fair life of continuous worship unfolded itself. This flower grew in a desert. The voice of God had become a tradition of the past, not an experience of the present. 'Rare' conveys the idea better than 'precious.' The intention is not to tell the estimate in which the word was held, but the infrequency of its utterance, as appears from the following parallel clause. The fact is mentioned in order to complete the picture of Samuel's 'environment' to fling into relief against that background his service, and to prepare the way for the narrative of the beginning of an epoch of divine speech. When priests are faithless and people careless, God's voice will often sound from lowly childlike lips. The man who is to be His instrument in carrying on His work will often come from the very centre of the old order, into which he is to breathe new life, and on which he is to impress a new stamp.

The artless description of the night in the Tabernacle is broken by the more general notice of Eli's dim sight, which the Revised Version rightly throws into a parenthesis. It is somewhat marred, too, by the transposition which the Authorized Version, following some more ancient ones, has made, in order to avoid saying, as the Hebrew plainly does, that Samuel slept in the 'Temple of the Lord, where the ark was.' The picture is much more vivid and tender, if we conceive of the dim-eyed old man, lying somewhat apart; of the glimmering light, nearly extinct but still faintly burning; and of the child laid to sleep in the Tabernacle. Surely the picturesque contrast between the sanctity of the ark and the innocent sleep of childhood is meant to strike us, and to serve as connecting the place with the subsequent revelation. Childlike hearts, which thus quietly rest in the 'secret place of the Most High,' and day and night are near His ark, will not fail of hearing His voice. He sleeps secure who sleeps 'beneath the shadow of the Almighty.' May not these particulars, too, be meant to have some symbolic significance? Night hung over the nation. The spiritual eye of the priest was dim, and the order seemed growing old and decrepit, but the lamp of God had not altogether gone out; and if Eli was growing blind, Samuel was full of fresh young life. The darkest hour is that before the dawn; and that silent sanctuary, with the slumbering old half-blind priest and the expiring lamp, may stand for an emblem of the state of Israel.

The thrice-repeated and misunderstood call may yield lessons of value. We note the familiar form of the call. There is no vision, no symbol of the divine glory, such as other prophets had, but an articulate voice, so human-like that it is thought to be Eli's. Such a kind of call fitted the child's stature best. We note the swift, cheery obedience to what he supposes to be Eli's voice. He sprang up at once, and 'ran to Eli,'—a pretty picture of cheerful service, grudging not his broken sleep, which, no doubt, had often been similarly broken by similar calls. Perhaps it was in order to wait on Eli, quite as much as to tend the lamp or open the gates, that the singular arrangement was made of his sleeping in the Temple; and the reason for the previous parenthesis about Eli's blindness may have been to explain why Samuel slept near him. Where were Eli's sons? They should have been their father's attendants, and the watchers 'by night ... in the house of the Lord'; but they were away rioting, and the care of both Temple and priest was left to a child.

The old man's heart evidently went out to the boy. How tenderly he bids him lie down again! How affectionately he calls him 'my son,' as if he was already beginning to feel that this was his true successor, and not the blackguards that were breaking his heart! The two were a pair of friends: on the one side were sedulous care and swift obedience by night and by day; on the other were affection and a discernment of coming greatness, made the clearer by the bitter contrast with his own children's lives. The old and the young are good companions for one another, and often understand each other better and help each other more than either does his contemporaries.

Samuel mistook God's voice for Eli's, as we all often do. And not less often we make the converse blunder, and mistake Eli's voice for God's. It needs a very attentive ear, and a heart purged from selfishness and self-will, and ready for obedience, to know when God speaks, though men may be His mouthpieces, and when men speak, though they may call themselves His messengers. The child's mistake was venial. It is less pardonable and more dangerous when repeated by us. If we would be guarded against it, we must be continually where Samuel was, and we must not sleep in the Temple, but 'watch and be sober.'

Eli's perception that it was God who spoke must have had a pang in it. It is not easy for the old to recognise that the young hear God's voice more clearly than they, nor for the superior to be glad when he is passed over and new truth dawns on the inferior. But, if there were any such feeling, it is silenced with beautiful self-abnegation, and he tells the wondering child the meaning of the voice and the answer he must make. What higher service can any man do to his fellows, old or young, than to help them to discern God's call and to obey it? What nobler conception of a teacher's work is there than that? Eli heard no voice, from which we may probably conclude that, however real the voice, it was not audible to sense; but he taught Samuel to interpret and answer the voice which he heard, and thus won some share of a prophet's reward.

With what expectation in his young heart Samuel lay down again in his place! This time there is an advance in the form of the call, for only now do we read that the Lord 'came, and stood, and called' as before. A manifestation, addressed to the inward eye,

accompanied that to the ear. There is no attempt at describing, nor at softening down, the frank 'anthropomorphism' of the representation, which is the less likely to mislead the more complete it is. Samuel had heard Him before; he sees Him now, and mistake is impossible. But there is no terror nor recoil from the presence. The child's simplicity saves from that, and the child's purity; for his little life had been a growing in service and 'in favour with God and man.'

The answer that came from the child's lips meant far more than the child knew. It is the answer which we are all bound to make. Let us see how deep and wide its scope is. It expresses the entire surrender of the will to the will of God. That is the secret of all peace and nobleness. There is nothing happy or great for man in this world but to love and do God's will. All else is nought. This is solid. 'The world passeth away, ... but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' Everything besides is show and delusion, and a life directed to it is fleeting as the cloud-wrack that sweeps across the sky, and, whether it is shone on or is black, is equally melting away. Happy the child who begins with such surrender of self to be God's instrument, and who, like Samuel, can stand up at the end and challenge men's judgment on his course!

The answer vows prompt obedience to yet undisclosed duty. God ever calls His servants to tasks which only by degrees are made known. So Paul in his conversion was bid to go into Damascus, and there learn what more he was to do. We must first put ourselves in God's hands, and then He will lead us round the turn in the road, and show us our work. We get it set for us bit by bit, but the surrender must be entire. The details of His will are revealed as we need them for the moment's guidance. Let us accept them in bulk, and stand to the acceptance in each single case! That is no obedience at all which says, 'Tell me first what you are going to bid me do, and then I will see whether I will do it.' The true spirit of filial submission says, 'I delight to do Thy will; now show me what it is.' It was a strange, long road on which Samuel put his foot when he answered this call, and he little knew where it was to lead him. But the blessing of submission is that we do not need to know. It is enough to see where to put our lifted foot. What comes next we can let God settle.

The answer supplicated further light because of present obedience. 'Speak! for Thy servant heareth,' is a plea never urged in vain. The servant's open ear is a reason for the Lord's open lips. We may be quite sure that, if we are willing to hear, He is more than willing to speak; and anything is possible rather than that His children shall be left, like ill-commanded soldiers on a battlefield, waiting for orders which never come. 'If any man willet to do His will, he shall know.'

The sad prophecy which is committed to such apparently incongruous lips reiterates a former message by 'a man of God.' Eli was a kindly, and, in his way, good man, but wanting in firmness, and acquiescent in evil, partly, perhaps, from lack of moral courage and partly from lack of fervent religion. He is not charged with faults in his own administration of his office, but with not curbing his disreputable sons. The threatenings are directed, not against himself, but against his 'house,' who are to be removed from the high priestly office. Nothing less than a revolution is foretold. The deposition of Eli's family would shake the whole framework of society. It is to be utterly destroyed, and no sacrifice nor offering can purge it. The ulcer must have eaten deep which required such stern measures for its excision. The sin was mainly the sons'; but the guilt was largely the father's. We may learn how cruel paternal laxity is, and how fatal mischief may be done, by neglect of the plain duty of restraining children. He who tolerates evil which it is his province to suppress, is an accomplice, and the blood of the doers is red on his hands.

It was a terrible message to give to a child; but Samuel's calling was to be the guide of Israel in a period of transition, and he had to be broken early into the work, which needed severity as well as tenderness. Perhaps, too, the stern message was somewhat softened, for the poor old man, by the lips through which it came to him. All that reverent love could do, we may be sure, the young prophet would do, to lighten the heavy tidings. Secrecy would be secured, too; for Samuel, who was so unwilling to tell even Eli what the Lord had said, would tell none besides.

God calls each child in our homes as truly as He did Samuel. From each the same obedience is asked. Each may, like the boy in the Tabernacle, grow up 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' and so escape the many scars and sorrows of a life wrongly begun. Let parents see to it that they think rightly of their work, and do not content themselves with conveying information, but aim at nothing short of helping all their children to hear and lovingly to yield to the gentle call of the incarnate God!

## 1 Samuel 4:1-18 Faithlessness and Defeat

**And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Eben-ezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek. 2. And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men. 3. And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. 4. So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. 5. And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord**

came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again. 6. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp. 7. And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. 8. Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? these are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. 9. Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight. 10. And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. 11. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain. 12. And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head. 13. And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out. 14. And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli. 15. Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see. 16. And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to-day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son? 17. And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. 18. And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.'— 1 SAMUEL 4:1-18 .

The first words of verse 1 are closely connected with the end of chapter iii. , and complete the account of Samuel's inauguration. 'The word of the Lord' came to Samuel, and 'the word of Samuel came to all Israel.' The one clause tells of the prophet's inspiration, the other of his message and its reception by the nation. This bond of union between the clauses has been broken by the chapter division, apparently for the sake of representing the revolt against the Philistines as due to Samuel's instigation. But its being so is very doubtful. If God had sent the army into the field, He would have prepared it, by penitent return to Him, for victory, as no defeat follows on war which He commands. Probably Samuel's mission made an unwholesome ferment in minds which were quite untouched by its highest significance, and so led to a precipitate rebellion, preceded by no religious reformation, and therefore sure to fail. It was twenty years too soon (1 Sa 8:3 ). Samuel took no part in the struggle, and his name is never mentioned till, at the end of that period, he emphatically condemns all that had been done, and points the true path of deliverance, in 'return to the Lord with all your heart.' So the great lesson of this story is that when Israel fights Philistines, unbidden and unrepentant, it is sure to be beaten,—a truth with manifold wide applications.

The first disastrous defeat took place on a field, which was afterwards made memorable by a great victory, and by a name which lives still as a watchword for hope and gratitude. Happy they who at last conquer where they once failed, and in the retrospect can say, 'Hitherto the Lord helped,' both by defeat and by the victory for which defeat prepared a way! That opening struggle, bloody and grave as it was, was not decisive; for the Israelites regained their fortified camp unmolested, and held together, and kept their communications open, as appears from what followed.

Verses 3 to 5 give us a glimpse into the camp of Israel, and verses 6 to 9 into that of the Philistines. These two companion pictures are worth looking at. The two armies are very much alike, and we may say that the purpose of the picture is to show how Israel was practically heathen, taking just the same views of its relation to God which the Philistines did. Note, too, the absence of central authority. 'The elders' hold a kind of council. Where were Eli the judge and Samuel the prophet? Neither had part in this war. The question of the elders was right, inasmuch as it recognised that the Lord had smitten them, but wrong inasmuch as it betrayed that they had not the faintest notion that the reason was their own moral and religious apostasy. They had not learned the A B C of their history, and of the conditions of national prosperity. They stand precisely on the Pagan level, believing in a national God, who ought to help his votaries, but from some inexplicable caprice does not; or who, perhaps, is angry at the omission of some ritual observance. What an answer they would have got if Samuel had been there! There ought to have been no need for the question, or, rather, there was need for it, and the answer ought to have been clear to them; their sin was the all-sufficient reason for their defeat. There are plenty of Christians, like these elders, who, when they find themselves beaten by the world and the devil, puzzle their brains to invent all sorts of reasons for God's smiting, except the true one,—their own departure from Him.

The remedy suggested by the united wisdom of the leaders was as heathen as the consultation which resulted in it. 'Let us send for the ark' 'Those who regarded not the God of the ark,' says Bishop Hall, 'think themselves safe and happy in the ark of God.' They thought, with that confusion between symbol and reality which runs through all heathen worship, and makes the danger of 'images,' whether in heathenism or in sensuous Christianity, that if they brought the ark, they brought God with it. It was a kind of charm, which would help them, they hardly knew how. Its very name might have taught them better. They call it 'the ark of the covenant of the Lord'; and a covenant has two parties to it, and promises favour on conditions. If they had kept the conditions, these four thousand corpses would not have been lying stiff and stark outside the rude encampment. As they did not keep them, bringing the

chest which contained the transcript of them into their midst was bringing a witness of their apostasy, not a helper of their feebleness. Repentance would have brought God. Dragging the ark thither only removed Him farther away. We need not be too hard upon these people; for the natural disposition of us all is to trust to the externals of worship, and to put a punctilious attention to these in the place of a true cleaving of heart to the God who dwells near us, and is in us and on our side, if we cling to Him with penitent love. Even God-appointed symbols become snares. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are treated by multitudes as these elders did the ark. The fewer and simpler the outward observances of worship are, the less danger is there of the poor sense-bound soul tarrying in them, instead of passing by means of them into the higher, purer air beyond.

What right had these presumptuous elders to bring the ark from Shiloh? Eli was its guardian; and he, as appears probable from his anxiety about its fate, did not approve of its removal. But 'the people' took the law into their own hands. There seems some hint that their action was presumptuous profanation, in the solemn, full title given in verse 4 : 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord of Hosts which dwelleth between the cherubim,'—as if contrasting His awful majesty, His universal dominion over the armies of heaven and the embattled powers of the universe, and the dazzling light of that 'glory,' which shone in the innermost chamber of the Tabernacle, with the unanointed hands that presumed to press in thither and drag so sacred a thing into the light of common day and the tumult of the camp. Nor is the profanation lessened, but rather increased, by the priestly attendants, Eli's two sons, themselves amongst the worst men in Israel. When Hophni and Phinehas are its priests, the ark can bring no help. Heathenism separates religion from morality altogether. In it there is no connection between worship and purity, and the Old Testament religion for the first time welded these two inseparably together. That tumultuous procession from Shiloh, with these two profligates for the priests of God, and the bearers thinking that they were sure of their God's favour now, whatever their sin, shows how completely Israel had forgotten its own law, and, whilst professedly worshipping Jehovah, had really become a heathen people. The reception of the ark with that fierce shout, which echoed among the hills and was heard in the Philistines' encampment, shows the same thing. Not so should the ark have been received, but with tears and confessions and silent awe. No man in all that host had ever looked upon it before. No man ought to have seen it then . Once a year, and not without blood sprinkled on its cover, the high priest might look on it through the cloud of incense which kept him from death, while all the people waited hushed till he came forth, but now it is dragged into the camp, and welcomed with a yell of mad delight, as a pledge of victory. What could display more strikingly the practical heathenism of the people?

Verses 6 to 9 take us into the other camp, and show us the undisguised heathens. The Philistines think just as the other side did, only, in their polytheistic way, they do not use the name 'Jehovah,' but speak first of 'God' and then of 'gods' as having arrived in the camp. The nations dreaded each other's gods, though they worshipped their own; and the Philistines believed quite as much that 'Jehovah' was the Hebrew's God, as that 'Dagon' was theirs. There was to be a duel then between the two superhuman powers. The vague reports which they had heard of the Exodus, nearly five hundred years ago, filled the Philistines with panic. They had but a confused notion of the facts of that old story, and thought that Egypt had met the ten plagues 'in the wilderness.' The blunder is very characteristic, and helps to show the accuracy of our narrative. It would not have occurred to a legend-maker. It sounds strange to us that the Philistines' belief that the Hebrews' God had come to their help should issue in exhortations to 'fight like men.' But polytheism makes that quite a natural conclusion; and there is something almost fine in the truculent boldness with which they set their teeth for a fierce struggle. They reiterate to one another the charge to 'quit themselves like men'; and while they do not hide from themselves that the question whether they are to be still masters is hanging on the coming struggle, a dash of contempt for the 'Hebrews' who had been their 'slaves' is perceptible.

According to verse 10 , the Philistines appear to have begun the attack, perhaps taking the enemy by surprise. The rout this time was complete. The grim catalogue of disaster in verses 10 and 11 is strangely tragic in its dreadful, monotonous plainness, each clause adding something to the terrible story, and each linked to the preceding by a simple 'and.' The Israelites seem to have been scattered. 'They fled, every man to his tent.' The army, with little cohesion and no strong leaders, melted away. The ark was captured, and its two unworthy attendants slain. Bringing it had not brought God, then. It was but a chest of shittim wood, with two slabs of lettered stone in it,—and what help was in that? But its capture was the sign that the covenant with Israel was for the time annulled. The whole framework of the nation was disorganized. The keystone was struck out of their worship, and they had fallen, by their own sin, to the level of the nations, and even below these; for they had their gods, but Israel had turned away from their God, and He had departed from them. Superstition fancied that the presence of the ark secured to impenitent men the favour of God; but it was no superstition which saw in its absence from Shiloh His averted face.

Is there in poetry or drama a more vivid and pathetic passage than the closing verses of this narrative, which tell of the panting messenger and the old blind Eli?

'Eben-ezer' cannot have been very far from Shiloh, for the fugitive had seen the end of the fight, and reached the city before night. He came with the signs of mourning, and, as it would appear from verse 13 , passed the old man at the gate without pausing, and burst into the city with his heavy tidings. One can almost hear the shrill shrieks of wrath and despair which first told Eli that something was wrong. Blind and unwieldy and heavy-hearted, he sat by the gate to which the news would first come; but yet he is the last to hear,—perhaps because all shrank from telling him, perhaps because in the confusion no one remembered him. Only

after he had asked the meaning of the tumult, of which his foreboding heart and conscience told him the meaning before it was spoken, is the messenger brought to the man to whom he should have gone first. How touchingly the story pauses, even at this crisis, to paint the poor old man! A stronger word is used to describe his blindness than in 1 Samuel iii. 2, as the Revised Version shows. His fixed eyeballs were sightless now; and there he sat, dreading and longing to hear. The fugitive's account of himself is shameless in its avowal of his cowardice, and prepares Eli for the worst. But note how he speaks gently and with a certain dignity, crushing down his anxiety,—‘How went the matter, my son?’ Then, with no merciful circumlocution or veiling, out comes the whole dismal story once again.

Eli spoke no more. His sons' death had been the sign given him years before that the threatenings against his house should be fulfilled; but even that blow he can bear. But the capture of the ark is more than a personal sorrow, and his start of horror overbalances him, and he falls from his seat (which probably had no back to it), and dies, silent, of a broken neck and a broken heart. His forty years of judgeship ended thus. He was in many respects good and lovable, gentle, courteous, devout. His kindly treatment of Hannah, his fatherly training of Samuel, his submission to the divine message through the child, his ‘trembling for the ark,’ his death at the news of its being taken, all indicate a character of real sweetness and true godliness. But all was marred by a fatal lack of strong, stern resolve to tolerate no evil which he ought to suppress. Good, weak men, especially when they let foolish tenderness hinder righteous severity, bring terrible evils on themselves, their families, and their nation. It was Eli who, at bottom, was the cause of the defeat and the disasters which slew his sons and broke his own heart. Nothing is more cruel than the weak indulgence which, when men are bringing a curse on themselves by their sin, ‘restrains them not.’

## 1 Samuel 7:1-12 Repentance and Victory

**‘And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord. 2. And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. 3. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only: and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. 4. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only. 5. And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. 6. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh. 7. And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. 8. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. 9. And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him. 10. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them: and they were smitten before Israel. 11. And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Beth-car. 12. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.’— 1 SAMUEL 7:1-12 .**

The ark had spread disaster in Philistia and Beth-shemesh, and the willingness of the men of Kirjath-jearim to receive it was a token of their devotion. They must have been in some measure free from idolatry and penetrated with reverence. The name of the city ( City of the Woods , like our Woodville ) suggests the situation of the little town, ‘bosomed high in tufted trees,’ where the ark lay for so long, apparently without sacrifices, and simply watched over by Eleazar, who was probably of the house of Aaron. Eli's family was exterminated; Shiloh seems to have been destroyed, or, at all events, forsaken; and for twenty years internal disorganization and foreign oppression, relieved only by Samuel's growing influence, prevailed. But during these dark days a better mind was slowly appearing among the people. ‘All ... Israel lamented after the Lord.’ Lost blessings are precious. God was more prized when withdrawn. Happy they to whom darkness brightens that Light which brightens all darkness! Our text gives us three main points,—the preparation for victory in repentance and return ( 1 Sa 7:3-9 ); the victory ( 1 Sa 7:10, 11 ); the thankful commemoration of victory ( 1 Sa 7:12 ).

### I. We have first the preparation for victory in repentance and return.

At the time of the first fight at Eben-ezer, Israel was full of idolatry and immorality. Then their preparation for battle was the mere bringing the ark into the camp, as if it were a fetish or magic charm. That was pure heathenism, and they were idolaters in such worship of Jehovah, just as much as if they had been bowing to Baal. Many of us rely on our baptism or on churchgoing precisely in the same spirit, and are as truly pagans. Not the name of the Deity, but the spirit of the worshipper, makes the ‘idolater.’

How different this second preparation! Samuel, who had never been named in the narrative of defeat, now reappears as the

acknowledged prophet and, in a sense, dictator. The first requirement is to come back to the Lord 'with the whole heart,' and that return is to be practically exhibited in the complete forsaking of Baal and the Asthoreths. 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' It must be 'Him only,' if it is Him at all. Real religion is exclusive, as real love is. In its very nature it is indivisible, and if given to two is accepted by neither. So there was some kind of general and perhaps public giving up of the idols, and some, though probably not the fully appointed, public service of Jehovah. If we are to have His strength infused for victory, we must cast away our idols, and come back to Him with all our hearts. The hands that would clasp Him, and be upheld by the clasp, must be emptied of trifles. To yield ourselves wholly to God is the secret of strength.

The next step was a solemn national assembly at Samuel's town of Mizpeh, situated on a conspicuous hill, north-west of Jerusalem, which still is called 'the prophet Samuel.' Sacrifices were offered, which are no part of the Mosaic ritual. A significant part of these consisted in the pouring out of water 'before the Lord,' probably as emblematic of the pouring out of soul in penitence; for it was accompanied by fasting and confession of sin. The surest way to the true victory, which is the conquest of our sins, is confessing them to God. When once we have seen any sin in its true character clearly enough to speak to Him about it, we have gone far to emancipate ourselves from it, and have quickened our consciences towards more complete intolerance of its hideousness. Confession breaks the entail of sin, and substitutes for the dreary expectation of its continuance the glad conviction of forgiveness and cleansing. It does not make a stiff fight unnecessary; for assured freedom from sin is not the easy prize of confession, but the hard-won issue of sturdy effort in God's strength. But it is like blowing the trumpet of revolt,—it gives the signal for, and itself begins, the conflict. The night before the battle should be spent, not in feasting, but in prayer and lowly shriving of our souls before the great Confessor.

The watchful Philistines seem to have had their attention attracted by the unusual stir among their turbulent subjects, and especially by this suspicious gathering at Mizpeh, and they come suddenly up the passes from their low-lying territory to disperse it. A whiff of the old terror blows across the spirits of the people, not unwholesomely; for it sets them, not to desire the outward presence of the ark, not to run from their post, but to beseech Samuel's intercession. They are afraid, but they mean to fight all the same, and, because they are afraid, they long for God's help. That is the right temper, which, if a man cherish, he will not be defeated, however many Philistines rush at him. Twenty years of slavery had naturally bred fear in them, but it is a wise fear which breeds reliance on God. Our enemy is strong, and no fault is more fatal than an underestimate of his power. If we go into battle singing, we shall probably come out of it weeping, or never come out at all. If we begin bragging, we shall end bleeding. It is only he who looks on the advancing foe, and feels 'They are too strong for me,' who will have to say, as he watches them retreating, 'He delivered me from my strong enemy.' We should think much of our foes and little of ourselves. Such a temper will lead to caution, watchfulness, wise suspicion, vigorous strain of all our little power, and, above all, it will send us to our knees to plead with our great Captain and Advocate.

Samuel acts as priest and intercessor, offering a burnt-offering, which, like the pouring out of water, is no part of the Mosaic sacrifices. The fact is plain, but it is neither unaccountable nor large enough to warrant the sweeping inferences which have been drawn from it and its like, as to the non-existence at this period of the developed ceremonial in Leviticus. We need only remember Samuel's special office, and the seclusion in which the ark lay, to have a sufficient explanation of the cessation of the appointed worship and the substitution of such 'irregular' sacrifices. We are on surer ground when we see here the incident to which Psalm xcix. 6 refers ('Samuel among them that call upon His name. They called upon the Lord, and He answered them'), and when we learn the lesson that there is a power in intercession which we can use for one another, and which reaches its perfection in the prevailing prayer of our great High-priest, who, like Samuel and Moses, is on the mountain praying, while we fight in the plain.

## **II. We have next the victory on the field of the former defeat.**

The battle is joined on the old ground. Strategic considerations probably determined the choice as they did in the case of the many battles on the plain of Esdraelon, for instance, or on the fields of the Netherlands. Probably the armies met on some piece of level ground in one of the wadies, up which the Philistines marched to the attack. At all events, there they were, face to face once more on the old spot. On both sides might be men who had been in the former engagement. Depressing remembrances or burning eagerness to wipe out the shame would stir in those on the one side; contemptuous remembrance of the ease with which the last victory had been won would animate the other. God Himself helped them by the thunderstorm, the solemn roll of which was 'the voice of the Lord' answering Samuel's prayer. The ark had brought only defeat to the impure host; the sacrifice brings victory to the penitent army. Observe that the defeat is accomplished before 'the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh.' God scattered the enemy, and Israel had only to pursue flying foes, as they hurried in wild confusion down the pass, with the lightning flashing behind them. The same pregnant expression is used for the rout of the Philistines as for the previous one of Israel. 'They were smitten before,' not by, the victors. The true victor was God.

The story gives boundless hope of victory, even on the fields of our former defeats. We can master rooted faults of character, and overcome temptations which have often conquered us. Let no man say: 'Ah! I have been beaten so often that I may as well give up the fight altogether. Years and years I have been a slave, and everywhere I tread on old battlefields, where I have come off second-

best. It will never be different. I may as well cease struggling.' However obstinate the fault, however often it has re-established its dominion and dragged us back to slavery, when we thought that we had made good our escape,— that is no reason to 'bate one jot of heart or hope.' We have every reason to hope bravely and boundlessly in the possibility of victory. True, we should rightly despair if we had only our own powers to depend on. But the grounds of our confidence lie in the inexhaustible fulness of God's Spirit, and the certain purpose of His will that we should be purified from all iniquity, as well as in the proved tendency of the principles and motives of the gospel to produce characters of perfect goodness, and, above all, in the sacrifice and intercession of our Captain on high. Since we have Christ to dwell in us, and be the seed of a new life, which will unfold into the likeness of that life from which it has sprung; since we have a perfect Example in Him who became like us in lowliness of flesh, that we might become like Him in purity of spirit; since we have a gospel which enjoins and supplies the mightiest motives for complete obedience; and since the most rooted and inveterate evils are no part of ourselves, but 'vipers' which may be 'shaken from the hand' into which they have struck their fangs, we commit faithless treason against God, His message, and ourselves, when we doubt that we shall overcome all our sins. We should not, then, go into the fight downhearted, with our banners drooping, as if defeat sat on them. The belief that we shall conquer has much to do with victory. That is true in all sorts of conflicts. So, though the whole field may be strewn with relics, eloquent of former disgrace, we may renew the struggle with confidence that the future will not always copy the past. We 'are saved by hope'; by hope we are made strong. It is the very helmet on our heads. The warfare with our own evils should be waged in the assurance that every field of our defeat shall one day see set up on it the trophy of, not our victory, but God's in us.

### **III. We have here the grateful commemoration of victory.**

Where that gray stone stands no man knows to-day, but its name lives for ever. This trophy bore no vaunts of leader's skill or soldier's bravery. One name only is associated with it. It is 'the stone of help,' and its message to succeeding generations is: 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.' That 'Hitherto' is the word of a mighty faith. It includes as parts of one whole the disaster no less than the victory. The Lord was helping Israel no less by sorrow and oppression than by joy and deliverance. The defeat which guided them back to Him was tender kindness and precious help. He helps us by griefs and losses, by disappointments and defeats; for whatever brings us closer to Him, and makes us feel that all our bliss and wellbeing lie in knowing and loving Him, is helpful beyond all other aid, and strength-giving above all other gifts.

Such remembrance has in it a half-uttered prayer and hope for the future. 'Hitherto' means more than it says. It looks forward as well as backward, and sees the future in the past. Memory passes into hope, and the radiance in the sky behind throws light on to our forward path. God's 'hitherto' carries 'henceforward' wrapped up in it. His past reveals the eternal principles which will mould His future acts. He has helped, therefore he will help, is no good argument concerning men; but it is valid concerning God.

The devout man's 'gratitude' is, and ought to be, 'a lively sense of favours to come.' We should never doubt but that, as good John Newton puts it, in words which bid fair to last longer than Samuel's gray stone:—

**'Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review  
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.'**

We may write that on every field of our life's conflicts, and have it engraved at last on our gravestones, where we rest in hope.

The best use of memory is to mark more plainly than it could be seen at the moment the divine help which has filled our lives. Like some track on a mountain side, it is less discernible to us, when treading it, than when we look at it from the other side of the glen. Many parts of our lives, that seemed unmarked by any consciousness of God's help while they were present, flash up into clearness when seen through the revealing light of memory, and gleam purple in it, while they looked but bare rocks as long as we were stumbling among them. It is blessed to remember, and to see everywhere God's help. We do not remember aright unless we do. The stone that commemorates our lives should bear no name but one, and this should be all that is read upon it: 'Now unto Him that kept us from falling, unto Him be glory!'

## **1 Samuel 8:4-20 Make Us A King**

**'Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel, onto Ramah, 5. And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. 6. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. 7. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. 8. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. 9. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. 10. And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. 11. And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen: and some shall run before his**



chariots, 12. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. 13. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. 14. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. 15. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. 16. And he will take your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. 17. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. 18. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day. 19. Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; 20. That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.’— 1 SAMUEL viii. 4-20 .

The office of judge was as little capable of transmission from father to son as that of prophet, so that Samuel's appointment of his sons as judges must be regarded as contrary to its true idea. It was God who made the judges, and the introduction, in however slight a degree, of the hereditary principle, was not only politically a blunder, but religiously wrong. Our narrative, like Scripture generally, pronounces no opinion on the facts it records, but its unfavourable judgment may be safely inferred from its explanation that Samuel was 'old' when he made the appointment, and that his sons were corrupt and unjust. Our text deals with the unexpectedly wide consequences of that act, in the clamour for a king.

#### **I. Note the ill-omened request.**

A formal delegation of the representatives of the nation comes to Ramah, unsummoned by Samuel, with the demand for a king. There must have been much talk through Israel before the general mind could have been ascertained, and this step taken. Not a whisper of what was passing seems to have reached Samuel, and the request is flung at him in harsh language. It is not pleasant for any one, least of all for a ruler, to be told that everybody sees that he is getting old, and should provide for what is to come next. Fathers do not like to be told that their sons are disreputable, but Samuel had to hear the bitter truth. The old man was pained by it, and felt that the people were tired of him, as is plain enough from the divine words which followed, and bade him look beyond the ingratitude displayed towards himself, to that shown to God. But from the 'practical' point of view, there was a great deal to be said for the reasonableness and political wisdom of the elders' suggestion. Samuel had shown that he felt the danger of leaving the nation without a leader, by his nomination of his sons, and the proposal of a king is but carrying his policy a little farther. The hereditary principle once admitted, a full-blown king was evidently the best. There were many inconveniences in the rule by judges. They had no power but that of force of personal character and the authority of an unseen Lord. They left no successors; and long intervals had elapsed, and might again elapse, between the death of one and the rise of another, during which the nation appeared to have no head to guide nor arm to defend it. Examples of strong monarchies surrounded them, and they wanted to have a centre of unity and a defender in the person of a king.

Samuel's displeasure seems to have been mainly on the ground of the insult to himself in the proposal, and its bearing on the rule of Jehovah over the people does not seem to have occurred to him till it was pointed out by the divine voice. But, like a good and wise man, he took his perplexity and trouble to God; and there he got light. The divine judgment of the request cuts down to its hidden, and probably unconscious, motive, and shows Samuel that weariness of him was only its surface, while the true bottom of it was rejection of God. The parallel drawn with idolatry is very instructive. The two things were but diverse forms of the same sense-ridden disposition: the one being an inability to grasp the thought of the unseen God; the other, a precisely similar inability to keep on the high level of trust in an unseen defender, and obedience to an unseen monarch. They wished for a king 'to go out before them' and 'fight their battles' ( v. 20 ). Had they forgotten Eben-ezer, and many another field, where they and their fathers had but to stand still and see the Lord fight for them?

The very same difficulty in living in quiet reliance on a power which is perceptible by no sense, besets us. We too are ever being tempted to prefer the solid security, as our foolish senses call it, of visible supports and delights, to the shadowy help of an unseen Arm. How many of us would feel safer with a good balance at our banker's than with God's promises! How many of us live as if we thought that men or women were better recipients of our love and of our trust than God! How few, even of professing Christians, really and habitually 'walk by faith, not by sight'! Do we not see ourselves in the mirror of this story? If we do not, we should. Note that the elders had, apparently, no idea that they were rejecting God in wanting a king. Samuel says nothing of the sort to them, and they could scarcely have made the request so boldly and briefly if they had been conscious that it was upsetting the very basis of their national life. Men are slow to appreciate the full force of their craving for visible good. The petitioners could plead many strong reasons, and, no doubt, fancied themselves simply taking proper precautions for the future. A great deal of unavowed and unconscious unbelief wears the mask of wise foresight. We rather pride ourselves on our prudence, when we should be ashamed of our distrust.

Note, too, that we cannot combine reliance on the seen and the unseen. Life must be moulded by one or the other. The craving for a king was the rejection of Jehovah. We must elect by which we shall live, and from which we shall draw our supreme good.

The desire to be like their neighbours was another motive with the elders. It is hard to be singular, and to foster reliance on the invisible, when all around us are dazzling examples of the success attending the other course. One of the first lessons which we have to learn, and one of the last which we have to practise, is a wholesome disregard of other people's ways. If we are to do anything worth doing, we must be content to be in a minority of one, if needful.

## **II. Note God's concession of the foolish wish.**

The divine word to Samuel throws light on the nature of prophetic inspiration. He is bidden to 'hearken to the people's voice'—a procedure directly opposite to his own ideas. This is not a case of subsequent reflection modifying first impressions, but of an authoritative voice discerned by the hearer to be not his own, contradicting his own thoughts, and leaving no room for further consideration.

Further, the granting to Israel of the king whom they desired, is but one instance of the law which is exemplified in God's dealing with nations and individuals, according to which He lets them have their own way, that they may 'be filled with their own devices.' Such experience is the best teacher, though her school fees are high. The surest way to disgust men with their own folly, is to let it work out its results,— just as boys in sweetmeat shops are allowed to eat as much as they like at first, and so get a distaste for the dainties. 'Try it, then, and see how you like it,' is not an unkind thing to say, and God often says it to us. When argument and appeals to duty and the like fail, there is nothing more to be done but to let us have our request, and find out the poison that lurked under the fair outside. The prodigal son gets his coveted portion, and is allowed to go into the far country, that he may prove how good and happy it is to starve among the swine, not because his father is angry with him, but because such experience is the only way to re-awaken his dormant love, and to make him long for the despised place in his father's house. There are some fevers of the desires which must run their course before the patient can be well again. Let us keep a careful watch over ourselves, that we entertain no wishes but such as run parallel with God's manifest will, lest He may have in His anger, which is still love, to give us our request, that we may find out our error by the bitter fruits of a granted desire.

## **III. Note the obstinacy that, with eyes open to the consequences, persists in its demands.**

Samuel is bidden to 'show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.' He sketches, in sombre outline, the picture of an Eastern despot, the only kind of king which the world then knew. The darker features of these monarchies are not included. There is no harem, nor cruelty, nor monstrous vice, in the picture; but the diversion of labour to minister to royal pomp, the establishment of a standing army, the alienation of land to officials, heavy taxation and forced labour make up the items. To these is added ( v. 18 ) that the royalty, now so eagerly desired, would sooner or later become a burden, and that then they or their sons would find it was easier to put on than to put off the yoke; for 'the Lord will not hear you in that day,' in reference, that is, to the removal of the king. They were exchanging an unseen King who gave all things for one who would take, and not give. A wise exchange! The consequences of our wishes are not always drawn out so clearly before us as in this instance; but we are not left in darkness as to the broad issues, and we all know enough to make our persistence in evil, after such warnings, the deepest mystery and most flagrant sin. The drunkard is not deterred by his knowledge that there is such a thing as delirium tremens ; nor the thief, by the certainty that the officer's hand will be laid on his shoulder one day or other; nor the young profligate, by the danger that his bones shall be 'full of the sin of his youth'; nor are any of us kept from our sins, by the clear sight of their end. 'I have loved strangers, and after them will I go,' notwithstanding all knowledge of the fatal issue. Surely there is nothing sadder than that power of neglecting the most certain known result of our acts. Wilfully blind, and hurried on by lust, passion, or other impulse, like bulls which shut their eyes when they charge, we rush at our mark, and often dash ourselves to pieces on it. If a man saw the consequences of his sin at the moment of temptation, he would not do it; but this is the wonder, that he does not see them, though he knows them well enough, and that the knowledge has no power to restrain him.

## **IV. Note the divine purpose which uses man's sin as its instrument in advancing its designs. God had promised Israel a king ( Deut. 17:14 , etc.), and the elders may have thought that they were only asking for what was in accordance with His plan.**

So they were; but their motive was wrong, and so their prayer, though for what God meant to give, was wrong. In this case, as always, God uses men's sins as occasions for the furtherance of His own eternal purpose, as that profound saying has it, 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee.' The kingly office was a step in advance, and gave occasion to the development of Messianic expectations of the true King of Israel and of men, which would have been impossible without it. In many ways it was for the good of the nation, and the holders of the office were 'the Lord's anointed.' Modern criticism has found traces of two opposite views in this story, as compared with the passage in Deuteronomy above referred to; but surely it is a more sober, though less novel, view, to regard the whole incident as illustrating the two truths, that men may wish for right things in a wrong way, and that God uses sin as well as obedience as His instrument. No barriers can stop the march of His great purpose through the ages, any more than a bit of glass can stay a sunbeam. However the currents run and the storms howl, they carry the ship to the haven; for He holds the helm, and all winds help. The people rejected Him, and in seeking a king followed but their own earthly minds; but they prepared

the way for David and David's Son. Their children long after, moved by the same spirit, shouted, 'We have no king but Caesar!' but they prepared the throne for the true King, for whom they destined a Cross. Man's greatest sin, the rejection of the visible King of the world, brought about the firm establishment of His dominion on earth and in heaven. The cross is the great instance of the same law as is embodied in this history,—the overruling providence which bends the antagonism of men into a tool for effecting the purpose of God.

Alas for those who only thus carry on God's designs! They perish, and their work is none the less their sin, because God has used it. How much better to enter with a willing heart and a clear intelligence into sympathy with His designs, and, delighting to do His will, to share in the eternal duration of His triumphant purpose! 'The world passeth away, and the fashion thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

## 1 Samuel 9:15-27 The Old Judge and the Young King

**'Now the Lord had told Samuel In his ear a day before Saul came, saying, 16, To-morrow, about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over My people Israel, that he may save My people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon My people, because their cry is come unto Me. 17. And when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over My people. 18. Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is. 19. And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to-day, and to-morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart. 20. And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house? 21. And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me? 22. And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the parlour, and made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons. 23. And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it by thee. 24. And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, Behold that which is left I set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day. 25. And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house. 26. And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send thee away. And Saul arose, and they went out both of them, he and Samuel, abroad. 27. And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God.'**— 1 SAMUEL 9:15-27

Both the time and the place of the incidents here told are unknown. No note is given of the interval that had elapsed since the elders' deputation. All that we know is that on the previous day Samuel had had the divine communication mentioned in verse 15, and that some days are implied as spent by Saul in his quest for his father's asses, Equally uncertain is the name of the city. It was not Samuel's ordinary residence; it was in the 'land of Zuph,' an unknown district; it was perched, like most of the cities, on a hill; it had fountains lower down the slope, and a 'high place' farther up, where there was a building large enough for a feast. How strangely vivid the picture of this anonymous city is, and how we can yet see the maidens coming down to the fountains, the wearied travellers toiling up, and the voluble abundance of the directions given them!

### I. The first thing we have to note is the premonitory word of the Lord.

Observe the picturesque and forcible expression, 'had uncovered the ear of Samuel.' It is more than picturesque. It gives in the strongest form the fact of a revelation, both as to its origin and its secrecy. It is vain to represent the transition from judgeship to monarchy as a mere political revolution, inaugurated by Samuel as a fore-seeing statesman. It is misleading to speak of him, as Dean Stanley does, as one of the men who mediate between the old and the new. His opinions and views go for just nothing in the transaction, and he is simply God's instrument. The people's desire for the king, and God's answer to it, were equally independent of him. His own ideas were dead against the change, and at each step in bringing it about the divine causality is everything, and he is nothing but its obedient servant. It is hopeless to sift out a naturalistic explanation from the narrative, which is either supernatural or nothing. Note the three points of this communication,— God's sending Saul, the command to anoint, and the motive ascribed to God. As to the first, how striking that full-toned authoritative 'I will send' is! Think of the chain of ordinary events which brought Saul to the little city,—the wandering of a drove of asses, the failure to get on their tracks, the accident of being in the land of Zuph when he got tired of the search, the suggestion of the servant; and behind all these, and working through them, the will and hand of God, thrusting this man, all unconscious, along a path which he knew not. Our own purposes we may know, but God's we do not know. There is something awful in the thought of the issues that may spring from the smallest affairs, and we shall be bewildered and paralysed if once we get a glimpse of the complicated web which is ever being woven in the loom of time, unless

we, too, can, by faith, see the Weaver, and then we shall be at rest. Call nothing trivial, and seek to be conscious of His guiding hand.

The command to Samuel to anoint Saul is no product of Samuel's own reflection, but comes to him, in this imperative form, before he has seen Saul, like a commission in blank, in regard to which he has no option, and in the origin of which he had no share. It was a piece of painful work to devolve his authority, like Aaron's having to strip off his robes before he died, and to put them on his son. But there is no trace of wounded feeling in Samuel. He is true to his childhood's word, 'Speak, for Thy servant heareth,' and, no doubt, he had the reward which obedience ever has to sweeten the bitterest draught, the reward of a quiet heart.

The reason as given in the last clause of the verse ought to have made Samuel's self-abnegation easier. God sets him the example. Israel had rejected Him, but He still calls them 'My people,' and looks upon them in tender care, and hears their cry. There is no contradiction here with the aspect of the concession to the people's wish, which appeared in the former section. Hasty criticism tries to make out discrepancies in the accounts, because it does not recognise one of the plainest characteristics of Scripture; namely, its habit of stating strongly and exclusively that side of a complicated matter which is relevant to the purpose in hand, and leaving the other sides to be presented in due time. The three accounts of the election give three different reasons for it. In chapter viii. , the people put it on the ground of Samuel's age and his son's unfitness, and God treats it as national rejection of Him. Here it appears as due, on the part of the people, to their fear of the Philistines, and on the part of God to His loving yielding to their cry. In 1 Samuel xii. 12 , Samuel traces it to the fear of Ammonite invasion. Are these contradictory or supplementary accounts? Certainly the latter. Though Israel had in heart rejected God, and He gave them a king that they might learn how much better they would have been without one, it is as true that He lovingly listened to the cry of their fear, and answered them, in pity and tender care, by giving them the king whom they desired, and who would deliver them from their enemies. Let us learn how patient of our faithless follies, and how full of long-suffering love, even in 'anger,' He is. The same gift of His providence, regarded in one light, is loving chastisement, and in another is loving compliance with our cry and swift help to our need in the shape that we desire, but in both aspects is good and perfect. Note, too, that God's look is active, and is the bringing of the needed aid, and that He waits for our cry before He comes with His help.

## **II. The meeting of Samuel and Saul.**

They encounter each other in the gate,—the prophet on his way to the sacrifice, the future king with his head full of his humble quest. Samuel knows Saul by divine intimation as soon as he sees him, but Saul does not know Samuel. His question indicates the noble simplicity, without attendants or trappings, of the judge's life; but it also suggests the strange isolation of these early days, and the probable indifference of Saul to religion. If he had cared much about God's rule in Israel, he could scarcely have been so ignorant as his servant's words about 'the seer,' and his failure to know him when he saw him, show Saul to have been. He had not cared to see Samuel in any of the latter's circuits, and now he only wants to get some information from a diviner about these unfortunate asses. What a contrast between the thoughts of the two, as they looked at each other! Saul begins by consulting Samuel as a magician; he ends by seeking counsel from the witch at Endor. Samuel's words are beautiful in their smothering of all personal feeling, and dignified in their authority. He at once takes command of Saul, and prepares him by half-hints for something great to come. The direction to 'go up before me' is a sign of honour. The invitation to the sacrificial feast is another. The promise to disclose his own secret thoughts to Saul may, perhaps, point to some hidden ambitions, the knowledge of which would prove Samuel's prophetic character. The assurance as to the asses answers the small immediate occasion of Saul's resort to him, and the dim hint in the last words of verse 20 , rightly translated, tells him that 'all that is desirable in Israel' is for him, and for all his father's house. He went out to look for his father's asses, and he found a kingdom. The words were enigmatical; but if Saul knew of the impending revolution, they could scarcely fail to dazzle him and take away his breath. His answer is more than mere Oriental self-depreciation. Its bashful modesty contrasts sadly with the almost insane masterfulness and arrogant self-will of his later years. Fair beginnings may end ill, and those who are set in positions of influence have hard work to keep steady heads, and to sail with low sails.

## **III. The feast.**

Up at the high place was some chamber used for the feasts which followed the sacrifices. A company of thirty—or, according to another reading, of seventy—persons had been invited, and the stately young stranger from Benjamin, with his servant (a trait of the simple manners of these days), is set in the place of honour, where wondering eyes fasten on him. Attention is still more emphatically centred on him when Samuel bids 'the cook' bring a part of the sacrifice which he had been ordered to set aside. It proves to be the 'shoulder' or 'thigh,' the priest's perquisite, and therefore probably Samuel's. To give this to another was equivalent to putting him in Samuel's place; and Samuel's words in handing it to Saul make its meaning plain. It is 'that which hath been reserved.' It has been 'kept for thee' till 'the appointed time,' and that with a view to the assembled guests. All this is in true prophetic fashion, which delighted in symbols, and these of the homeliest sort. The whole transaction expressed the transference of power to Saul, the divine reserving of the monarchy for him, and the public investiture with it, by the prophet himself. The veil was intentional, and intentionally thin. Cannot we see the flush of surprise and modesty on Saul's cheek, as he tore the pieces from

the significant 'shoulder,' and hear the whispers that ran through the guest-chamber?

#### **IV. The private colloquy.**

When the simple feast was over, the strangely assorted pair went down to Samuel's house, and there, on the quiet house-top, where were no curious ears, held long and earnest talk. No doubt Samuel told Saul all that was in his heart, as he had said that he would, and convinced him thereby that it was God who was speaking to him through the prophet. Nor would exhortations and warnings be wanting, which the old man's experience would be anxious to give, and the young one's modesty not unwilling to receive. Saul is a listener, not a speaker, in this unreported interview; and Samuel is in it, as throughout, the superior. The characteristic which marked the beginning of the Jewish monarchy was stamped on it till the end. The king was inferior to the prophet, and was meant to take his instructions from him when he appeared. Saul was docile on that first day, when he was half dazed with his new prospects, and wholly grateful to Samuel; but the history will show us how soon the fair promise of concord was darkened, and how fiercely he chafed at Samuel's attempted control.

One can fancy his thoughts as he lay in the starlight, on the house-top, that night, and gazed into the astounding future that had opened before him. Had there been any true religion in him, it would have been a wakeful night of prayer. But, more likely, as the event proves, the ambition and arrogance which were deep in his nature, though hitherto undeveloped, were his counselors, and drove Samuel's wisdom out of his head.

As soon as the morning-red began to rise in the East, Samuel sent him away, to secure, as would appear, privacy in his departure. With simple courtesy the prophet accompanied his guest, and as soon as they had got down the hill beyond the last house of the city, he bids Saul send on his servant, that he may speak a last word to him alone. Our text stops before the solemn anointing, and leaves these two standing there, in the fresh morning, type of the new career opening for one of them. What a contrast in the men! The one has all his long life been true to his first vow, 'Speak, for Thy servant heareth,' and now has come, in fulness of years, and revered by all men, near the end of his patient, faithful service. His work is all but done, and his heart is quiet in the peace which is the best reward of loving and doing God's law. Ripened wisdom, calm trust, unhesitating submission cast a glory round the old man, who is now performing the supreme act of self-abnegation of his lifetime, and, not without a sense of relief, is laying the burden, so long and uncomplainingly borne, on the great shoulders of this young giant. The other has a humble past of a few years rapidly sinking out of his dazzled sight, and is in a whirl of emotion at the startling suddenness of his new dignity. When one thinks of Gilboa, and the desperate suicide there, how pathetic is that strong, jubilant young figure, in the morning light, below the city, as he bows his head to receive the anointing which, little as he knew it, was to prove his ruin! A life begun by obedient listening to God's voice, and continued in the same, comes at last to a blessed end, and is crowned with many goods. A life which but partially accepts God's will as its law, and rather takes counsel of its own passions and arrogant self-sufficiency, may have much that is bright and lovable at its beginning, but will steadily darken as it goes on, and will set at last in eclipse and gloom.

### **1 Samuel 10:17-27 The King After Man's Heart**

**'And Samuel called the people together unto the Lord to Mizpeh; 18. And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you; 19. And ye have this day rejected your God, who Himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto Him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands. 20. And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken. 21. When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. 22. Therefore they enquired of the Lord further, if the man should yet come thither. And the Lord answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff. 23. And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. 24. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king. 25. Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house. 26. And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched. 27. But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace.'**— 1 SAMUEL 10:17-27

These verses fit on to chapter viii. , chapters ix. to x. 16 , being probably from another source, inserted here because the anointing of Saul, told in them, did occur between Samuel's dismissal of the people and his summoning of the national assembly which is here related. That private anointing of Saul was the divine call to him individually; the text tells of his public designation to the nation. The two are perfectly consistent, and, indeed, the private anointing is presupposed in the incident recorded in this passage, of Saul's hiding himself, for he could not have known the result that he would be 'taken,' unless he had had that previous intimation.

The assembly at Mizpah was not convened in order to choose a king, but to accept God's choice, which was then to be declared.

But before the choice was announced, a last appeal was made to the people, if, perchance, they might still be persuaded to forgo their rebellious desire. It is not, indeed, said that this final, all but hopeless attempt was made by Samuel at the divine command, and we are not told that he had any further revelation than that in chapter viii. 7-9 . But, no doubt, he was speaking as Jehovah's mouthpiece, and so we have here one more instance of that long-suffering divine patience and love which 'hopeth all things,' and lingers pleadingly round the alienated heart, seeking to woo it back to itself, and never ceasing to labour to avert the evil deed, till it is actually and irrevocably done. It may be said that God knew that the appeal was sure to fail, and therefore could not have made it. But is not that mysterious continuance of effort, foreknown to be futile, the very paradox of God's love? Did not Jesus give the traitor the sop, as a last token of friendship, a last appeal to his heart? And does not God still in like manner deal with us all?

Observe how He seeks to win Israel back. It is not by threatenings, but by reminders of His great benefits. He will not drive men back to His service, like a slave-driver with brandished whip, but He wishes to draw them back by 'the cords of love.' It is service from hearts melted by thankfulness, and therefore overflowing in joyful, willing obedience and grateful acts, that He desires. 'The mercies of God' should lead to men offering themselves as 'living sacrifices.'

The last appeal failed, and Samuel at once went on to give the people the desired bitter which they thought so sweet. Of course, it was by their representatives that the tribes presented themselves before God. The manner of making God's choice known is not told, and speculations as to it are idle. Probably a simple yes or no, as each tribe, family or individual was 'presented' was the mode, but how it was conveyed is quite unknown. That is a small matter; more important is it to note that Saul was chosen simply because he was the very type of the national ideal of a hero-king. Both here and in chapter ix. 2 his stature and bravery are the only qualities mentioned. What Israel wanted was a rough fighter, with physical strength, plenty of bone and muscle. About moral, intellectual or spiritual qualities they did not care, and they got the kind of king that they wanted,—the only kind that they could appreciate. The only way to teach them that one who was a head and shoulders taller than any of them was not thereby certified to be the ideal king, was to give them such a man, and let them see what good he would do them.

There is no surer index nor sharper test of national or individual character than the sort of 'heroes' they worship. Vox populi has not been very much refined since Saul's day. Athletes and soldiers still captivate the crowd, and a mere prophet like Samuel has no chance beside the man of broad shoulders and well-developed biceps. And very often communities, especially democratic ones, get the 'king' they desire, the leader, statesman or the like, who comes near their ideal. The man whom they choose is the man whom, generally, they deserve. Israel had an excuse for its burst of ardour for a soldier, for it was in deadly danger from the Philistines. Is there as good an excuse for us in Britain, in our recent adoration of successful generals? Israel found out that its idol lacked higher gifts than thews and sinews, and experience taught them the falseness of their ideal.

Saul's hiding among the piles of miscellaneous baggage, which the multitude of representatives had brought with them, is usually set down to his credit, as indicating an engaging modesty; but there is another and more probable explanation of it, less creditable to him. Was it not rather occasioned by his shrinking from the heavy task that God was laying on him? He was not being summoned to a secure throne, but to 'go out before us, and fight our battles.' He might well shrink, but if he had been God-fearing and God-obeying and God-trusting, he would have cried, 'Here am I! send me,' instead of skulking among the stuff. There was another Saul, who could say, 'I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.' It had been better for the son of Kish if he had been like the young Pharisee from Tarsus. We too have divine calls in our lives, and alas! we too not seldom hide ourselves among the stuff, and try to avoid taking up some heavy duty, by absorbing our minds in material good. Few things have greater power of obscuring 'the heavenly vision,' and of rendering us unwilling to obey it, than the clinging to the things of this world, which are in their place as the traveler's luggage needful on the road, but very much out of their place when they become a hiding-place for a man whom God is calling to service.

The 'manner of the kingdom,' which Samuel wrote and laid up before the Lord, was probably not the same as 'the manner of the king' (1 Sa 8:9-18 ), but a kind of constitution, or solemn statement of the principles which were to govern the monarchy. The reading in verse 26 should probably be 'the men of valor,' instead of 'a band of men.' They were brave men, 'whose hearts God had touched.' Now that Saul was chosen by God, loyalty to God was shown by loyalty to Saul. The sin of the people's desire, and the drop from the high ideal of the theocracy, and the lack of lofty qualities in Saul, may all be admitted. But God has made him king, and that is enough. Henceforward, God's servants will be Saul's partisans. The malcontents were apparently but a small faction. They, perhaps, had had a candidate of their own, but, at all events, they criticized God's appointed deliverer, and saw nothing in him to warrant the expectation that he would be able to do much for Israel. Disparaging criticism of God's chosen instruments comes from distrust of God who chose them. To doubt the divinely sent Deliverer's power to 'save' is to accuse God of not knowing our needs and of miscalculating the power of His supply of them. But not a few of us put that same question in various tones of incredulity, scorn or indifference. Sense makes many mistakes when it takes to trying to weigh Christ in its vulgar balances, and to settling whether He looks like a Saviour and a King.

# 1 Samuel 12:1-15 Samuel's Challenge and Charge

'And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. 2. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. 3. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. 4. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand. 5. And he said unto them, The Lord is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness. 6. And Samuel said unto the people, It is the Lord that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. 7. Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your fathers. 8. When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the Lord, then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and them dwell in this place. 9. And when they forgat the Lord their God, He sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. 10. And they cried unto the Lord, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve Thee. 11. And the Lord sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe. 12. And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the Lord your God was your king. 13. Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. 14. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey His voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God: 15. But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers.'— 1 SAMUEL 12:1-15 .

The portion of Samuel's address included in this passage has three main sections: his noble and dignified assertion of his official purity, his summary of the past history, and his solemn declaration of the conditions of future wellbeing for the nation with its new king.

**I. Probably the war with the Ammonite king Nahash, which had postponed the formal inauguration of the king, had been carried on in the neighbourhood of the Jordan valley; and thus Gilgal would be a convenient rendezvous.**

But it was chosen for other reasons also, and, as appears from 1 Samuel 10:8 , had been fixed on by Samuel at his first interview with Saul. There the Covenant had been renewed, after the wanderers had crossed the river, with Joshua at their head, and it was fitting that the beginnings of the new form of the national life should be consecrated by worship on the same site as had witnessed the beginnings of the national life on the soil of the promised land. Perhaps the silent stones, which Joshua reared, stood there yet. At all events, sacred memories could scarcely fail, as the rejoicing crowd, standing where their fathers had renewed the Covenant, saw the blackened ruins of Jericho, and the foaming river, now, as then, filling all its banks in the time of harvest, which their fathers had crossed with the ark, that was now hidden at Kirjath-jearim, for their guide. The very place spoke the same lessons from the past which Samuel was about to teach them.

There is just a faint trace of Samuel's disapproval of the new order in his first words. He takes care to throw the whole responsibility on the people; but, at the same time, he assumes the authoritative tone which becomes him, and quietly takes the position of superiority to the king whom he has made. 1 Samuel 11:15 seems to imply that he took no part in the rejoicings. It was 'Saul and all the men of Israel' who were so glad. He was still hesitant as to the issue, and obeyed the divine command with clearer insight into its purpose than the shouting crowd and the proud young king had. There is something very pathetic in the contrast he draws between Saul and himself. 'The king walketh before you,' in all the vigour of his young activity, and delighting all your eyes, and 'I am old and gray-headed,' feeble, and fit for little more work, and therefore, as happens to such worn-out public servants, cast aside for a new man. Samuel was not a monster of perfection without human feelings. His sense of Israel's ingratitude to himself and practical revolt from God lay together in his mind, and colour this whole speech, which has a certain tone of severity, and an absence of all congratulation. Probably that accounts for the mention of his sons. The elders' frank statement of their low opinion of them had been a sore point with Samuel, and he cannot help alluding to it. It was not for want of possible successors in his own house that they had cried out for a king. If this be not the bearing of the allusion to his sons, it is difficult to explain; and this obvious explanation would never have been overlooked if Samuel had not been idealised into a faultless saint. The dash of human infirmity and fatherly blindness gives reality to the picture. 'I have walked before you from my youth unto this day.' Note the recurrence of the same expression as is applied to Saul in the former part of the verse. It is as if he had said, 'Once I was as he is now,—young and active in your sight, and for your service. Remember these past years. May your new fancy's record be as stainless as mine is,

when he is old and grayheaded!' The words bring into view the characteristic of Samuel's life which is often insisted on in the earlier chapters,—its calm, unbroken continuity and uniformity of direction, from the long-past days when he wore 'the little coat' his mother made him, with so many tears dropped on it, till this closing hour. While everything was rushing down to destruction in Eli's time, and his sons were rioting at the Tabernacle door, the child was growing up in the stillness; and from then till now, amid all changes, his course had been steady, and pointed to one aim. Blessed they whose age is but the fruitage of the promise of their youth! Blessed they who begin as 'little children,' with the forgiveness of sin and the knowledge of the Father, and who go on, as 'young men,' to overcome the Evil One, and end, as 'fathers,' with the deeper knowledge of Him who is 'from the beginning,' which is the reward of childhood's trust and manhood's struggles!

Samuel is still a prophet, but he is ceasing to be the sole authority, and, in his conscious integrity, calls for a public, full discharge, in the presence of the king. Note that verse 3 gives the first instance of the use of the name 'Messiah,' and think of the contrast between Saul and Jesus. Observe, too, the simple manners of these times, when 'ox and ass' were the wealth. They would be poor plunder nowadays. Note also the various forms of injustice of which he challenges any one to convict him. Forcible seizure of live stock, fraud, harsh oppression, and letting suitors put gold on his eyes that he might not see, are the vices of the Eastern ruler to-day, and rampant in that unhappy land, as they have been ever since Samuel's time. I think I have heard of politicians in some other countries further west than Gilgal, who have axes to grind and logs to roll, and of the wonderful effects, in many places of business, of certain circular gold discs applied to the eyes. This man went away a poor man. He does not seem to have had salary, or retiring pension; but he carried away a pair of clean hands, as the voice of a nation witnessed.

## **II. Having cleared himself, Samuel recounts the outlines of the past, in order to emphasize the law that cleaving to God had ever brought deliverance; departure, disaster; and penitence, restoration.**

It is history with a purpose, and less careful about chronology than principles. Facts are good, if illuminated by the clear recognition of the law which they obey; but, without that, they are lumber. The 'philosophy of history' is not reached without the plain recognition of the working of the divine will. No doubt the principles which Samuel discerned written as with a sunbeam on the past of Israel were illustrated there with a certainty and directness which belonged to it alone; but we shall make a bad use of the history of Israel, if we say, 'It is all miraculous, and therefore inapplicable to modern national life.' It would be much nearer the mark to say, 'It is all miraculous, and therefore meant as an exhibition for blind eyes of the eternal principles which govern the history of all nations.' It is as true in Britain to-day as ever it was in Judea, that righteousness and the fear of God are the sure foundations of real national as of individual prosperity. The kingdoms of this world are not the devil's, though diplomatists and soldiers seem to think so. If any nation were to live universally by the laws of God, it might not have what the world calls national success; it would have no story of wholesale robbery, called military glory, but it would have peace within its borders, and life would go nobly and sweetly there. 'Happy is the people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is the people, whose God is the Lord.'

The details of Samuel's resume need not occupy much time. Note the word in verse 7, 'reason,' or, as the Revised Version renders, 'plead.' He takes the position of God's advocate in the suit, and what he will prove for his client is the 'righteousness' of his dealings in the past. The story, says he, can be brought down to very simple elements,—a cry to God, an answer of deliverance, a relapse, punishment, a renewed cry to God, and all the rest of the series as before. It is like a repeating decimal, over and over again, each figure drawing the next after it. The list of oppressors in verse 9, and that of deliverers in verse 11, do not follow the same order, but that matters nothing. Clearly the facts are assumed as well known, and needing only summary reference. The new-fashioned way of treating Biblical history, of course, takes that as an irrefutable proof of the late date and spuriousness of this manufactured speech put into Samuel's mouth. Less omniscient students will be content with accepting the witness to the history. Nobody knows anything of a judge named Bedan, and the conjectural emendation 'Barak' is probable, especially remembering the roll-call in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Gideon, Barak, and Jephthah appear in the same order, with the addition of Samson. The supposition that 'Samuel,' in this verse, is an error for 'Samson,' is unnecessary; for the prophet's mention of himself thus is not unnatural, in the circumstances, and is less obtrusive than to have said 'me.'

The retrospect here given points the lesson of the sin and folly of the demand for a king. The old way had been to cry to God in their distresses, and the old experience had been that the answer came swift and sufficient; but this generation had tried a new method, and fear of 'Nahash the Ammonite' had driven them to look for a man to help them. The experience of God's responses to prayer does not always wean even those who receive them from casting about for visible helpers. Still less does the experience of our predecessors keep us from it. Strange that after a hundred plain instances of His aid, the hundred and first distress should find us almost as slow to turn to Him, and as eager to secure earthly stays, as if there were no past of our own, or of many generations, all crowded and bright with tokens of His care! We are always disposed to doubt whether the power that delivered from Sisera, Philistines, and Moab, will be able to deliver us from Nahash. The new danger looks the very worst of all, and this time we must have a king. All the while Israel had God for its king. Our dim eyes cannot see the realities of the invisible world, and so we cleave to the illusions of the visible, which, at their best, are but shadows of the real, and are often made, by our weak hearts, its rival and substitute. What does the soldier, who has an impenetrable armour to wear, want with pasteboard imitations, like those worn in a



play? It is doubtful wisdom to fling away the substance in grasping at the shadow. Saul was brave, and a head and shoulders above the people, and he had beaten Nahash for them; but Saul for God is a poor exchange. Do we do better, when we hanker after something more tangible than an unseen Guide, Helper, Stay, Joy, and Peace-bringer for our hearts, and declare plainly, by our eager race after created good, that we do not reckon God by Himself enough for us?

### **III. The part of Samuel's address with which we are concerned here closes with the application of the history to the present time.**

The great point of the last three verses is that the new order of things has not changed the old law, which bound up well-being inseparably with obedience. They have got their king, and there he stands; but if they think that that is to secure their prosperity, they are much mistaken. There is a touch of rebuke, and possibly of sarcasm, in pointing to Saul, and making so emphatic, as in verse 13, the vehemence of their anxiety to get him. It is almost as if Samuel had said, 'Look at him, and say whether he is worth all that eagerness. Do you like him as well, now that you have him, as you did before?' There are not many of this world's goods which stand that test. The shell that looked silvery and iridescent when in the sea is but a poor, pale reminder of its former self, when we hold it dry in our hands. One object of desire, and only one, brings no disappointment in possessing it. He, and only he, who sets his hope on God, will never have to feel that he is not so satisfied with the fulfilment as with the dream.

Israel had rejected God in demanding a king; but the giver of their demand had been God, and their rejection had not abolished the divine government, nor altered one jot of the old law. They and their king were equally its subjects. There is great emphasis in the special mention of 'your king' as bound to obedience as much as they; and, if we follow the Septuagint reading of verse 15, the mention is repeated there in the threatening of punishment. No abundance of earthly supports or objects of our love or trust in the least alters the unalterable conditions of well-being. Whether surrounded with these or stripped of all, to fear and serve the Lord and to hearken to His voice is equally the requisite for all true blessedness, and is so equally to the helper and the helped, the lover and the loved. We are ever tempted to think that, when our wishes are granted, and some dear or strong hand is stretched out for aid, all will be well; and we are terribly apt to forget that we need God as much as before, and that the way of being blessed has not changed. Those whose hearts and homes are bright with loved faces, and whose lives are guarded by strong and wise hands, have need to remember that they and their dear ones are under the same conditions of well-being as are the loneliest and saddest; and they who 'have none other that fighteth for' them have no less need to remember that, if God be their companion, they cannot be utterly solitary, nor altogether helpless if He be their aid.

## **1 Samuel 12:13-25 Old Truth For a New Epoch**

**'Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. 14. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey His voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord; then shall both ye, and also the king that reigneth over you, continue following the Lord your God: 15. But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord; then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers. 16. Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. 17. Is it not wheat-harvest to-day! I will call unto the Lord, and He shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king. 18. So Samuel called unto the Lord; and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. 19. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king. 20. And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; 21. And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver, for they are vain. 22. For the Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you His people. 23. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: 24. Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things He hath done for you. 25. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.'**— 1 Samuel 12:13-25 .

Samuel's office as judge necessarily ended when Saul was made king, but his office of prophet continued. This chapter deals with both the cessation and the continuance, giving at first his dignified, and somewhat pained, vindication of his integrity, and then passing on to show him exercising his prophetic function in exhortation, miracle, and authoritative declaration of Jehovah's will.

### **I. The first point is the sign which Samuel gave.**

Usually there is no rain in Palestine from about the end of April till October. Samuel was speaking during the wheat harvest, which falls about the beginning of June. We note that he volunteered the sign, and, what is still more remarkable, that he is sure that God will send it in answer to his prayer. Why was he thus certain? Because he recognised that the impulse to proffer the sign came

from God. We know little of the mental processes by which a prophet could discriminate between his own thinkings and God's speech, but such discrimination was possible, or there could have been no ring of confidence in the prophet's 'Thus saith the Lord.' Not even a 'Samuel among them that call upon His name' had a right to assume that every asking would certainly have an answer. It is when we ask 'anything according to His will' that we know that 'He heareth us,' and are entitled to predict to others the sure answer.

It seems a long leap logically from hearing the thunder and seeing the rain rushing down on the harvest field, to recognising the sin of asking for a king. But the connecting steps are plain. Samuel announced the storm, he asked God to send it, it came at his word; therefore he was approved of God and was His messenger; therefore his words about the desire for a king were God's words. Again, God sent the tempest; therefore God ruled the elemental powers, and wielded them so as to affect Israel, and therefore it had been folly and sin to wish for another defender. So the result of the thunder-burst was twofold—they 'feared Jehovah and Samuel,' and they confessed their sin in desiring a king. They were but rude and sense-bound men, like children in many respects; their religion was little more than outward worship and a vague awe; they needed 'signs' as children need picture-books. The very slightness and superficiality of their religion made their confession easy and swift, and neither the one nor the other went deep enough to be lasting. The faith that is built on 'signs and wonders' is easily battered down; the repentance that is due to a thunderstorm is over as soon as the sun comes out again. The shallowness of the contrition in this case is shown by two things,—the request to Samuel to pray for them, and the boon which they begged him to ask, 'that we die not.' They had better have prayed for themselves, and they had better have asked for strength to cleave to Jehovah. They were like Simon Magus cowering before Peter, and beseeching him, 'Pray ye for me to the Lord, that none of the things which ye have spoken may come upon me.' That is not the voice of true repentance, the 'godly sorrow' which works healing and life, but that of the 'sorrow of the world which worketh death.' The real penitent will press the closer to the forgiving Father, and his cry will be for purity even more than for pardon.

## **II. Samuel's closing words are tender, wise, and full of great truths.**

He begins with encouragement blended with reiteration of the people's sin. It is not safe for a forgiven man to forget his sin quickly. The more sure he is that God has forgotten, the more careful he should be to remember it, for gratitude, humility and watchfulness. But it should never loom so large before him as to shut out the sunshine of God's love, for no fruits of goodness will ripen in character without that light. It is a great piece of practical wisdom always to keep one's forgiven sin in mind, and yet not to let it paralyze hopefulness and effort. 'Ye have indeed done all this evil, ... yet turn not aside from following Jehovah.' That is a truly evangelical exhortation. The memory of past failures is never to set the tune for future service. Again, Samuel based the exhortation to whole-hearted service of Jehovah on Jehovah's faithfulness and great benefits (vs. 22-24 ), It is suicidal folly to turn away from Him who never turns away from us; it is black ingratitude, as well as suicidal folly, to refuse to serve Him whose mercies encompass us. That divine good pleasure, which has no source but in Himself, flows out like an artesian well, unceasing. His 'nature and property' is to love. His past is the prophecy of His future. He will always be what He has been, and always do what He has done. Therefore we need not fear, though we change and are faithless. 'He cannot deny Himself.' His revealed character would be dimmed if He abandoned a soul that clung to Him. So our faith should, in some measure, match His faithfulness, and we should build firmly on the firm foundation.

## **III. Samuel answers the people's request for his prayers with a wise word, full of affection, and also full of dignity and warning, all the more impressive because veiled.**

He promises his continued intercession, but he puts it as a duty which he owes to God rather than to them only, and he thus sufficiently asserts his God-appointed office. He promises to do more than pray for them; namely, to continue as their ethical and religious guide, which they had not asked him to be. That at once makes his future position in the monarchy clear. He is still the prophet, though no longer the judge, and, as the future was to show, he has to direct monarch as well as people. But it also hints to the people that his prayers for them will be of little avail unless they listen to his teaching. Whether a Samuel prays for us or not, if we do not listen to the voices that bid us serve God, we 'shall be consumed.'

## **1 Samuel 15:10-23 Saul Rejected**

**'Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying, 11. It repenteth Me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following Me, and hath not performed My commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night. 12. And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal. 13. And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord. 14. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? 15. And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. 16. Then Samuel said**

unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. 17. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel? 18. And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. 19. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord? 20. And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal. 22. And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. 23. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.'— 1 Samuel 15:10-23

Again the narrative takes us to Gilgal,—a fateful place for Saul, There they 'made Saul king before the Lord'; there he had taken the first step on his dark way of gloomy, proud self-will, down which he was destined to plunge so far and fatally. There he had, in consequence, received the message of the transference of the kingdom from his house, though not from himself. Now, flushed with his victory over Amalek, he has come there with his troops, laden with spoil. They had made a swift march from the south where Amalek dwelt, passing by Nabal's Carmel, where they had put up some sort of monument of their exploit in a temper of vain-glory, very unlike the spirit which reared the stone of help at Eben-ezer; and apparently they purpose sacrifices and a feast. But Samuel comes into camp with no look of congratulation. Probably the vigorous old man had walked that day from his home, some fifteen miles off, and on the way seems to have picked up tidings of Saul's victory and position, which ought to have reached him from the king himself, and would have done so if Saul's conscience had been clear. The omission to tell him was studied neglect, which revealed much.

Samuel had 'cried unto the Lord all night,' if perchance the terrible sentence might be reversed; and his cries had not been in vain, for they had brought him into complete submission, and had nerved him to do his work calmly, without a quiver or a pang of personal feeling, as becomes God's prophet.

### **I. We must go back a step beyond this passage to understand it.**

Note, first, the command which was disobeyed. The campaign against Amalek was undertaken by express divine direction through Samuel's lips. It was the delayed fulfilment of a sentence passed in the times of the Conquest, but not executed then. The terrible old usages of that period are brought into play again, and the whole nation with its possessions is 'devoted'. The word explains the dreadful usage. There are two kinds of devotion to God: that of willing, and that of unwilling, men; the one brings life, the other, death. The massacre of the foul nations of Canaan was thereby made a direct divine judgment, and removed wholly from the region of ferocious warfare. No doubt, the whole plane of morals in the earlier revelation is lower than that of the New Testament. If Jesus has not taught a higher law than was given to 'them of old time,' one large part of His gift to men disappears. The wholesale destruction of 'babe and suckling' with the guilty makes us shudder; and we are meant to feel the difference between the atmosphere of that time and ours. But we are not meant to question the reality of the divine command, nor His right to give it. He slays, and makes alive. His judgments strike the innocent with the guilty. In many a case, and often, the sin is one generation's, and the bitter fruit another's. The destruction of Canaanites and Amalekites does not change its nature because God used men to do it; and the question is not whether the Israelites were fiercely barbarous in their warfare, but whether God has the right of life and death. We grant all the dreadfulness, and joyfully admit the distance between such acts and Jesus Christ; but we recognise them as not incongruous with the whole revealed character of the God who is justice as well as love, as parallel in substance, though different in instrument, with many of His dealings with men,—as the execution of righteous sentence on rank corruption, and as sweetening the world by its removal. Most of the difficulty and repugnance has been caused by forgetting that Israel was but the sword, while the hand was God's.

### **II. Note the disobedience.**

Partial obedience is complete disobedience. Saul and his men obeyed as far as suited them; that is to say, they did not obey God at all, but their own inclinations, both in sparing the good and in destroying the worthless. What was not worth carrying off they destroyed,—not because of the command, but to save trouble. This one fault seems but a small thing to entail the loss of a kingdom. But is it so? It was obviously not an isolated act on Saul's part, but indicated his growing impatience of the divine control, exercised on him through Samuel. He was in a difficult position. He owed his kingdom to the prophet; and the very condition on which he held it was that of submission to Samuel's authority. No wonder that his elevation quickened the growth of his masterfulness and gloomy, impetuous self-will,—traits in his character which showed themselves very early in his reign! No wonder either that such a king, held in leading-strings by a prophet, should chafe! The more insignificant the act in itself, the more significant it may be as a flag of revolt. Disobedience which will not do a little thing is great disobedience. Nor was this the first time

that Saul had 'kicked,' like another Saul, 'against the pricks,' Gilgal had seen a previous instance of his impetuous self-assertion, masked by apparent deference; and the inference is fair that the interval between the two pieces of rebellion had been of a piece with them. Trivial acts, especially when repeated, show deep-seated evil. There may be only a coil of the snake visible, but that betrays the presence of the slimy folds, though they are covered from sight among the leaves. The tiny shoot of a plant, peeping above the ground, does not augur that the roots are short; they may run for yards. Nor can any act be called small, of which the motive is disregard of God's plain command: 'He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.' Saul had never much religion. He had never heard of Samuel till that day when he came to consult him about the asses. It was a wonder to his acquaintances to find him 'among the prophets'; and all his acts of worship have about them a smack of self, and an exclusive regard to the mere externals of sacrifice, which imply a shallow notion of religion and a spirit unsubdued by its deeper influences.

Such a man habitually acts in disregard of God's will; and that is great sin, though it be manifested in small acts. It is to be remembered, too, that the excepting of the best of the spoil from the general destruction, changed the whole character of the transaction, and brought it down from the level of a solemn act of divine justice, of which Saul and his army were the executors by divine mandate, to that of a mere cattle-lifting foray, in which they were but thieves for their own gain. The mingling of personal advantage with any sort of service of God, ruins the whole, and turns it into mere selfishness. Samuel, in verse 19, puts the two sides of this 'evil in the sight of the Lord' as being disobedience and swooping down on the booty, like some bird of prey.

### III. Note Saul's excuses.

Throughout the whole interview he plays a sorry part, and is evidently cowed by the hated authority and personality of the old man; while Samuel, on his side, is curt, stern, and takes the upper hand, as becomes God's messenger. The relative positions of the two men are the normal ones of their offices, and explain both Saul's revolt and the chronic impatience of kings at the interference of prophets. Here we have Saul coming to meet Samuel with affected heartiness and welcome, and with the bold lie, 'I have performed the commandment of the Lord.' That is more than true obedience is quick to say. If Saul had done it, he would have been slower to boast of it. 'Those vessels yield the most sound that have the least liquor.' He 'doth protest too much'; and the protestation comes from an uneasy conscience. Or did he, like a great many other men who have no deep sense of the sanctity of every jot and tittle of a divine law, please himself with the notion that it was enough to keep it approximately, in the 'spirit' of the precept, without slavish obedience to the 'letter'? In a later part of the interview ( v. 20 ) he insists that he has obeyed, and tries to prove it by dwelling on the points in which he did so, and gliding lightly over the others.

'Samuel had reason to believe the sheep and oxen above Saul'; and there is a tone of almost contempt for the shuffling liar in his quiet question: 'What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?' There was no answering that; so Saul shifts his ground without a blush or a moment's hesitation. 'The people spared.' It is a new character for him to appear in,—that of a weak ruler who cannot keep his unruly men in order! Had he tried to restrain them? If he had, and had failed, he was not fit to be a king. If he had not, he was a coward to shift the blame on to them. How ready men are to vilify themselves in some other direction, in order to escape the consciousness of sin, which God is seeking to force home on them! No doubt the people were very willing to have a finger in the affair; but so was he. And if the cattle was their share, Agag, who could be held to ransom, was his; and the arrangement suited all round. As to the purpose of sacrificing at Gilgal, perhaps that was true; but if it were, no doubt the same process of selection, which had destroyed the worthless and kept the best, would have been repeated; and the net result would have been a sacrifice of the least valuable, and 'the survival of the fittest' in many a pasture and stall.

But note Saul's attitude towards Jehovah, betrayed by him in that one word: 'the Lord thy God,' No wonder that he had been content with a partial and perfunctory obedience, if he had no closer sense of connection with God than that! There is almost a sneer in it, too, as if he had said, 'What needs all this fuss about saving the cattle? You should be pleased; for this Jehovah, with whom you profess to have special communication, will be honoured with sacrifice, and you will share in the feast.' If the words do not mean abjuring Jehovah, they go very near it, and, at all events, betray the shallowness of Saul's religion. Samuel, in his answer, reminds him of his early modesty and self-distrust, and of the source of his elevation. He then sweeps away the flimsy cobwebs of excuses, by the curt repetition of the plain, dreadful terms of Saul's commission, and then flashes out the piercing question, like a sword, 'Wherefore then didst thou not?' The reminder of past benefits, and the reiteration of the plain injunctions which have been broken, are the way to cut through the poor palliations which men wrap around their sins.

It speaks of a very obstinate and gloomy determination that, in answer, Saul should reiterate his protestation of having done as he was bid. He doggedly says over again all that he had said before, unmoved by the prophet's solemn words. He is steeling his heart against reproof; and there is only one end to that. Sin unacknowledged, after God has disclosed it, is doubly sin. The heart that answers the touch of God's rebukes by sullenly closing more tightly on its evil, is preparing itself for the blow of the hammer which will crush it. 'He that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.' Let us beware of meeting God's prophet with shuffling lies about our obedience, and of opposing to the words which are loving though they pierce, the armour of impenetrable self-righteousness and conceit.

#### IV. Note the punishment.

To the vain talk about honouring God by sacrifice, Samuel opposes the great principle which was the special message committed to every prophet in Israel, and which was repeated all through its history, side by side with the divinely appointed sacrificial system. In the intensity of his spiritual emotion, Samuel speaks in lyric strains, in the measured parallelism which was the Hebrew dress of poetry, and gives forth in words 'which will live for ever' the great truth that God delights in obedience more than in sacrifice. Whilst, on the one hand, he lifts the surrender of the will, and the consequent submission of the life, high above all mere ritual, on the other hand, by the same process, he sinks the rebellion of the will and the stubbornness of the nature, unsubdued either by kindness or threats, as Saul was showing his to be, to the level of actual idolatry.

**'Rebellion is divination,**

**And stubbornness is idols and teraphim.'**

Then comes the stern sentence of rejection. Why was Saul thus irrevocably set aside? Was it not a harsh punishment for such a crime? As we have already remarked, Saul's act is not to be judged as an isolated deed, but as the outcome of a deep tendency in him, which meant revolt from God. It was not because of the single act, but because of that which it showed him to be, that he was set aside. The sentence is pronounced, not because 'thou didst spare Amalek,' but because 'thou didst reject the word of the Lord.' Further, it is to be remembered that the punishment was but the carrying out of his act. His own hand had cut the bond between him and God, and had disqualified himself for the office which he filled. Saul had said, 'I will reign by myself.' God said, 'Be it so! By thyself thou shalt reign.' For the consequence of his deposition was not outward change in his royalty. David indeed was anointed but in secret, so Samuel consented to honour Saul before the people. All the external difference was that Samuel never saw him again, and he was relieved from the incubus of the prophet's 'interference'; that is to say, he ceased to be God's king, and became a phantom, ruling only by his own will and power, as he had wished to do. How profound may be the difference while all externals remain unchanged! When we set up ourselves as our own lords, and shake off God's rule, we cast away His sanction and help in all the deeds of our self-will, however unaltered their outward appearance may remain. But God left him to 'walk in his own ways, and be filled with the fruit of his own devices,' by no irrevocable abandonment, however the decree of rejection from the kingship was irrevocable. The gates of repentance stood open for him; and the very sentence that came stern and laconic from Samuel's lips, rightly accepted, might have drawn him in true penitence to a forgiving God. His subsequent confession was rejected because it expressed no real contrition; and the worship which he proceeded to offer, without the sanction of the prophet's presence, was as unreal as his protestation of obedience, and showed how little he had learned the lesson of the great words, 'To obey is better than sacrifice.'

### 1 Samuel 16:1-13 The Shepherd-King

**'And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel! fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Beth-lehemite: for I have provided Me a king among his sons. 2. And Samuel said, How can I go? If Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord. 3. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto Me him whom I name unto thee. 4. And Samuel did that which the Lord spake, and came to Beth-lehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? 5. And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice. 6. And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him. 7. But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. 8. Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. 9. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. 10. Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these. 11. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. 12. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. 13. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.'**— 1 Samuel 16:1-13

The chief purpose in these verses is to bring out that the choice of David was purely God's. The most consummate art could have taken no better way of heightening the effect of his first appearance than that adopted in this perfectly unartificial story, which leads us up a long avenue to where the shepherd-boy stands. First, we have Samuel, with his regrets and objections; then Jesse with his

seven stalwart sons; and at last, when expectation has been heightened by delay and by the minute previous details, the future king is disclosed,—a stripling with his ruddy locks glistening with the anointing oil, and his lovely eyes. We shall best catch the spirit by simply following the letter of the story.

### **I. We have Samuel and his errand to Bethlehem.**

After that sad day at Gilgal, he and Saul met no more, though their homes were but a few miles apart, and it must have been difficult to avoid each other. Samuel yearned over the man whom he had learned to love, and it must have been pain to him to see the shattering of the vessel which he had formed. However natural his mourning, and however indicative of his sweet nature, it was wrong, because it showed that he had not yet reconciled himself to God's purpose, though his conduct obeyed. The mourning which submits while it weeps, and which interferes with no duty, is never rebuked by God. He never says, 'How long dost thou mourn?' unless sorrow has deepened into accusation of His providence, or tears have blinded us to the duty that ensues. But the true cure for overmuch sorrow is work, and, for vain regrets after vanished good, the welcome to the new good which God ever sends to fill the empty place. His resources are not exhausted because one man has failed. 'There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.' Saul has been rejected, but a king shall be found; and Samuel is to dry his tears and anoint him. He evidently had no thought of a successor to Saul till this command came; and when it comes, how little it tells him! He gets light enough for the next step, but no more. That is always God's way. Duty opens by degrees, and the way to see farther ahead is to go as far as we see.

Samuel's sorrow and the incomplete command show plainly that he was but an instrument. At every step the view is confuted which makes him a far-seeing statesman who inaugurated and carried through a peaceful revolution. The history, which is our only source, tells another story, and makes God the actor, and the prophet only a tool in His hands. If we cut the supernatural out of the story, the fragments do not hang together, and no reason is forthcoming why they should be any more true than are the rejected pieces. Samuel does not show to advantage in either of the two things mentioned about him here. In neither was he true to his early vow, 'Speak, for Thy servant heareth.' But there was much reason for his fear, if once God was left out of the account; for Saul's ever-wakeful suspicion had become a disease, and it was not wonderful that he should be on the watch for any act which looked like putting the sentence of deposition into effect. If ever a man lived with a sword hanging by a hair over him, it was this unhappy king, who knew that he was dethroned, and did not know when or by whom the divine rejection would be made visible to all men. But Samuel had faced worse dangers without a murmur; and no doubt his alarm now, which makes him venture all but flatly to refuse to obey, indicates that, to some extent, he had lost his hold of God by his indulgence in his sorrow. If he had been true to his high calling, he would have 'filled his horn,' and gone on God's errand, careless of a hundred Sauls or a hundred deaths. But it is easy for us, who have never periled anything for obedience, to sit in judgment on him. 'Wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself.' God judges him mercifully, and provides a shelter for his weakness, which he should not have needed. To hide his true errand behind the cloak of the sacrifice was second-best, and only permitted in consideration of his fear which had a touch of sin in it. He was not, at the moment, up to treading the heroic plain path; and God opened an easier one for him. It is sometimes allowable to use an avowed purpose to conceal the real one, but it is a permission which should be very sparingly used.

### **II. We have Samuel at Bethlehem, with Jesse and his sons.**

An old man is suddenly seen coming up the hill to the gate of the little city on foot, driving or leading a heifer, and carrying a horn in his hand. In such humble fashion did the prophet travel; but reverential awe met him, and his long years of noble service surrounded him as with a halo. Apparently, Bethlehem had not been included in his usual circuits, and the village elders were somewhat scared by his sudden appearance. Their question may give a glimpse into the severity which Samuel sometimes had to show, and is a strange testimony to the reality of his power: 'Comest thou peaceably?' One old man was no very formidable assailant of a village, even if he did not come with friendly intent; but, if he is recognised as God's messenger, his words are sharper than any two-edged sword, and his unarmed hand bears weapons mighty to 'pull down strongholds.' Why should the elders have thought that he came 'with a rod'? Because they knew that they and their fellow-villagers deserved it. If men were not dimly conscious of sin, they would not be afraid of God's messenger or of God.

The narrative does not tell whether or not the sacrifice preceded the review of Jesse's sons. Probably it did, and the interval between it and the feast was occupied in the interview. It is evident that Samuel kept the reason of his wish to see Jesse's sons to himself; for disclosure would have brought about the danger which he was so anxious to avoid. It appears, too, from verse 13, that only the family of Jesse were present. So we have to fancy the wondering little cluster of burly husbandmen with their father surrounding the prophet, and: one by one, bracing themselves to meet his searching gaze. Again the choice is emphatically represented as God's, by the mention of Samuel's hasty conclusion, from the look of the eldest, that he was the man. Had not Samuel had enough of kings of towering stature? Strange that he should have been in such a hurry to fix on a second edition of Saul! The most obedient waiters on God sometimes outrun His intimations, and they always go wrong when they do. Samuel has to learn two lessons, as he is bidden to repress the too quick thought: one, that he is not choosing, but only registering God's choice; and one, that the qualifications for God's king are inward, not bodily. In these old days, the world's monarchs had to be men

of thews and sinews, for power rested on mere brute force: but God's chosen had to rule, not by the strength of his own arm, but by leaning on God's. The genius of the kingdom determined the principle of selection of its king. Samuel does not again attempt to forecast the choice; but he lets the other six pass, and, hearing no inward voice from God, tells Jesse, as it would seem, that the Lord has not chosen them for whatsoever mysterious purpose was in His mind.

### III. We have 'the Lord's chosen.'

Samuel was staggered by the apparent failure of his errand. God had told him that he had provided a king from this family, and now they had passed in review before him, and none was chosen. Again he is made to feel his own impotence, and his question, 'Are here all thy children?' has a touch of bewilderment in it. God seldom shows us His choice at first; and both in thought and practice we get at the precious and the true by a process of exclusion, having often to reject 'seven' before we find in some all-but-forgotten 'eighth' that which we seek. David's insignificance in Jesse's eyes was such that his father would never have remembered his existence but for the question, and his answer is a kind of assurance to the prophet that he need not take the trouble to see the boy, for he will never do for whatever he may have in view. His youth and occupation put him out of the question. We know, from the other parts of his story, that his brothers had no love for him; nor does his father seem to have had much. Probably the lad had the usual lot of genius,—to grow up among uncongenial, commonplace people, understanding him little, and liking him less. It is a hard school; but where it does not sour, it makes strong men. His solitary shepherd life taught him many precious lessons, and, at any rate, gave him the priceless gift of solitude, which is the nurse of poetry, heroism, and religion. The glorious night-piece in Psalm viii. , and its companion day-piece in Psalm 19. , may bear the impress of the shepherd life; which is idealized and sanctified for ever in the immortal sweetness of Psalm xxiii. There were many worse schools for the future king than a solitary shepherd's life on the bare hills round Bethlehem.

The delay of the feast and the pause of idle waiting heighten the expectation with which we look for David's coming. When he does come, what a bright young figure is lovingly painted for us! He is 'ruddy, and withal fair of eyes, and goodly to look upon,'—of fair complexion, with golden hair (rare among these swarthy Orientals), and with lustrous poet's eyes. What a contrast to Saul's grim face and figure,—like a sunbeam streaming athwart a thunder-cloud seamed with its own lightning! Silently the divine voice spoke, and silently, as it would seem, Samuel poured the oil on the boy's bowed curls. No word of the purpose escaped his lips, and the awestruck youth was left to wonder for what high destiny he was chosen. One can fancy the looks of his brothers as they bitterly watched the anointing with hearts full of envy, contempt, and rage. 1 Samuel 17:28 shows what they felt to David.

What was the use of this enigmatical anointing for an undisclosed purpose? It is Samuel's last act, and his last appearance, except for the mention of David's flight to him from the court of Saul, and that weird scene of Saul prophesying and lying naked before Samuel and David for a day and a night. It was therefore the solemn final act of the prophet,—transferring the monarchy; but it was for David the beginning of his training for the throne, in two ways, 'The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.' There was an actual communication of divine gifts fitting him for his unknown office, and he was conscious of a new spirit stirring in him. Beside this, the consciousness of a call to unknown tasks would mature him fast, and bring graver thoughts, humbler sense of weakness, and clinging trust in God who had laid the burden on him; and the necessity for repressing his dreams of the future, in order to do his obscure present duties, would add patience and self-control to his youthful ardour. What a whirl of thoughts he carried back to his flock, and how welcome would the solitude be!

The great lesson here is the one so continually reiterated in Scripture, from Isaac downwards, that God 'chooses the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty,' and thereby magnifies both the sovereign freedom of His choice and the power of His Spirit, which takes the stripling from the sheepcotes and qualifies him to be the antagonist of the grim Saul, and the king of Israel. There are subsidiary lessons, especially for young and ardent souls confined for the present to lowly tasks, and feeling some call to something higher in a dim future. Patience, the faithful doing of to-day's trivial tasks, the habit of self-repression, the quiet trust in God who opens the way in due time,—these, and such like, were the signs that David was called to a throne, and that God's Spirit was preparing him for it. They are the virtues which will best prepare us for whatever the future may have in store for us, and will be in themselves abundant reward, whether they draw after them a high position, which is a heavy burden, or, more happily, leave us in our sheltered obscurity.