

1 Samuel Commentary - Handfuls of Purpose - James Smith

1 SAMUEL Handfuls on Purpose by James Smith, 1943

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HANNAH; OR, THE TRIUMPH OF A SORROWFUL SPIRIT. 1 Samuel 1.

It is refreshing to find such a gracious spirit as Hannah in the midst of the moral ruin that followed the priestly rule of the kind-hearted but weak-willed Eli. The man who is more concerned about the honor of his sons than the honor of God is sure to bring the holy cause into ridicule (1Sa 2:29). Hannah means grace, and she is true to her name; so the grace of God is made sufficient for her. There is much we might learn from her.

I. She was Sorrowful. "A woman of a sorrowful spirit" (1Sa 1:15).

1. Because she was Childless (v. 5). Believing that "Children are a heritage of the Lord" (Psalm 127:3), it vexed her soul that this heritage was not hers. She counted it a shame to be fruitless. Has your fruitlessness for God ever vexed your soul? It is a shame for any Christian to be barren in the work of God (2 Peter 1:8).

2. Because she was Mocked. "Peninnah, her adversary, provoked her sore, to make her fret" (1Sa 1:6). Her childless condition brought upon her the sneer of the ungodly. It is a heart-searching and deeply humbling experience for any child of grace, as Hannah was, to have the finger of derision and ridicule pointed at them by one who loves not the Lord and yet seems to enjoy more of His favor than the other. Is God ungracious? No; but those fiery shafts of the enemy may be permitted by God to convict us deeply of the barrenness of our lives, that we may cast ourselves the more unreservedly upon the Divine all-sufficiency.

3. Because she had a very Sensitive Nature. If she had had more brass in her heart she would have had fewer tears in her eyes (1Sa 1: 7). There is great hope for any Christian worker who can weep over the fruitlessness of their lives. It is good that we should feel this "bitterness of soul before the Lord" (v. 10). Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion.

II. She was Prayerful.

1. She Prayed. "She prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore" (1Sa 1:0). She did not return railing for railing; being reviled, she threatened not. We may thank God for the trials that send us into His presence, to plead, with full purpose of heart. The scourges of the enemy only serve to drive her into the place of blessing.

2. She Vowed. "O Lord, if You will give unto Your handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord" (1Sa 1:11). She purposes in her heart that if the Lord will, in mercy, roll away her reproach, she will consecrate His gift entirely to His service. This is a mighty argument with God. What will He withhold from those who seek not great things for themselves, but who desire to honor Him with His every gift.

3. She Believed. "So the woman went her way, and her countenance was no more sad" (1Sa 1:18). The Lord had spoken to her heart, as Boaz did to Ruth (Ruth 2:13, margin). She brought her burden to the Lord, and she went away without it. It is one thing to tell the Lord about our burdens; it is quite another thing to cast them on the Lord (1 Peter 4:7). The countenance is sure to be changed when the heart has found rest in the will of God.

III. She was Joyful (1 Sa 2:1).

1. Her Prayer was Answered. "She called his name Samuel, saying, Because I asked Him of the Lord" (1Sa 1:20). She asked a son, and the Lord did not give her a daughter. Whatever you ask, believe that you receive, and you shall have. He who can make the barren woman to be a joyful mother of children (Psalm 113:9) can also make the fruitless Christian worker a happy winner of souls.

2. Her Testimony was Given. "I am the woman that stood by you here, praying; and the Lord has given me my petition" (1Sa 1:26, 27). What a simple, yet powerful, testimony this is. She knew that He heard her, now she has the petition that she desired of Him (1 John 5:15). "You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss" (Jas. 4:3).

3. Her Vow was Performed. "As long as he lives he shall be lent to the Lord" (1Sa 1:28). She paid her vow unto the Lord (Psalm 116:18). In the giving back of Samuel she was forming a powerful link of connection between herself and the Lord that must have enriched her whole life with blessing. Every sacrifice we make for the honor of our Lord will certainly increase our interest in Him. Be not like the wicked and slothful servant who hid his lord's money (Luke 19:22), but use for His glory every gift received, and every victory won, through the prayer of faith.

THE CALL OF SAMUEL.

1 Samuel 3.

"Often through my heart is pealing
Many another voice than Thine;
Many an unwilling echo stealing
From the walls of this Your shrine.
Let Your longed-for accents fall:
Master, speak and silence all."
—F. R. Havergal.

"The Word of the Lord was precious (rare) in those days; there was no open vision." Why? The spiritual heavens were shut up, because of the unbelief and unrighteousness of God's professing people (1Sa 2:12-17). In these degenerate days God takes the child Samuel and sets him in the midst, that out of the mouth of this babe He might ordain strength (Psalm 8:2). God has chosen the weak things to confound the mighty (1 Corinthians 1:27). Samuel was "lent unto the Lord" (1Sa 1:28). Now the Lord takes the loan of him that He might through him speak to all Israel. We may learn here—

I. That the Call of God may Come very Early in Life. Samuel must have been quite a child when the Lord spoke to him, perhaps about six years of age. Is it not wonderful that the Almighty, the "Ancient of Days," can make His will known to a child? "They that seek Me early shall find Me" (Proverbs 8:17). "The High and Lofty One that inhabits eternity" dwells with the humble spirit (Isaiah 57:15).

II. That the Call of God may come, although we may have had no Personal Experience of God. "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord" (1Sa 3:7). He believed in Him, but as yet he had had no personal dealings with Him. The existence of God was known to him, but the Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed unto him. He earnestly worshiped the Lord, according to the traditional faith (1Sa 1:28), but as yet he had received no definite message from Him. What a difference it makes in one's religious life when His Word

has been heard, and His will concerning us as individuals has been clearly revealed. This is eternal life, to know Him and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Those who honestly seek like Samuel shall surely find.

III. That the Call of God Comes at an Opportune Time. "Before the lamp of God went out" (1Sa 3:3). There is something melancholy in the very idea of the lamp of God going out. Had He not expressly commanded that the light of the holy lamp-stand was to burn continually (Leviticus 24:2). Does it not reveal the backslidden condition of the priesthood, that the lamp of God was allowed to go out? It is suggestive of the watchful grace of God that He spoke to Samuel before the sacred light had died away into midnight darkness. How fares it with the lamp of God in our own hearts? Is our testimony dying down for the lack of fresh oil?

IV. That the Call of God may Come in a very Natural Way. "The Lord called Samuel, and he ran unto Eli" (1Sa 3:4, 5). The voice was so humanlike that he thought it was the voice of Eli. Let us take care that those calls or rebukes that come to us in familiar forms may not be the very voice of God to our own souls. The Lord had a purpose in speaking to Samuel as He did. He wished Eli, the priest, to know at the lips of the child that the Lord had spoken. Samuel's instantaneous obedience to the call reveals what manner of spirit he was of.

V. That the Call of God Demands an Answer to God. "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears" (1Sa 3:10). Eli could give Samuel no answer to the call of God. Those called of Him must respond to Him for themselves. It is so in the matter of salvation. Every one who has gone astray from God must turn back to Him, and with a willing ear hear what God the Lord will speak. It is so in the matter of consecration and service. No man can do this for us. We must yield ourselves unto God (Romans 6:13). It is with Him we have to do. The mighty God, the Lord has spoken. Hear Him.

VI. That the Call of God may Involve Painful Testimony. "Samuel feared to show Eli the vision" (1Sa 3:15). It was a solemn and humiliating message that he had received for Eli. He and his house were to be set aside as unworthy of the priesthood. But the truth must be told, and let it be said to the credit of the old weak-kneed priest that he was prepared to hear all that God had spoken, and to acquiesce in His will (1Sa 3:17, 18). There be many who say, "Prophecy unto us smooth things," and who would be sorely offended if the whole counsel of God was told out in their ears. But the Lord will fulfill all His purposes, whether men will bear or forbear. When the learned and honored Eli prove unfaithful, then the Lord will speak to some consecrated boy and make him a preacher of righteousness.

VII. That the Call of God Insures Fellowship and Victory. "The Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground" (1Sa 3:19). He never sends us a warfare on our own charges. When the Word of God is brought home to our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit it is that it might be fulfilled in our own experience. His presence with us, in the preaching of His Word, is the guarantee that He will bring it to pass. "If the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken" (Deuteronomy 18:22). The word was not Samuel's, but the Lord's, so it will not return unto Him void. The secret of success in the Lord's work always lies in the doing of His will. "Whatever He says unto you, do it" (John 2:5). "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, and you shall find rest unto your souls."

THE LOSS OF THE ARK OF GOD.

1 Samuel 4:1-11.

The capture of the Ark of God by the Philistines was the sorest blow that had ever fallen upon the nation of Israel. The corrupt state of the priesthood was to blame for this national failure and disgrace. There is a closer connection between holy living and national prosperity than many in these days seem to think. The Philistines, as the enemies of the Lord's people, are always aggressive when Israel is in a backsliding condition. The lusts of the flesh are sure to prevail when the soul gets out of communion with God.

I. What the Ark signifies. It was the symbol of the presence of God. It was the throne on which the Lord sat, and from which He ruled and taught His people (Exod. 25:22). It was also the mercy-seat, the medium through which He communed with Israel. What the Ark was to them Christ is to us, the resting-place, the medium of communion, and the channel of revelation and blessing.

II. When the Ark was brought out. After they had been smitten before their enemies they said, "Let us fetch the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord out: it may save us" (v. 3). It is good to fall back on God in the day of defeat, but is the favor and help of God only to be sought after we have done our best to succeed without Him? "Man's extremity may be God's opportunity," but why should God's opportunity only come after we have persistently ignored Him until we are dead beat?

III. The Dread of the Philistines at the Ark. "When they understood that the Ark of the Lord was come into the camp they were afraid" (vv. 6-8). So well they might, if that Ark represents the presence of that Almighty God who smote the Egyptians with plagues, and wrought such miracles in the wilderness on their behalf (v. 8). If this is so, then in battling against the people of God they will be found fighting against God Himself. Alas! how often we Christians forget what the men of the world remember, that if Christ is with us

mighty works should show themselves, and that the more closely we are identified with Him in our work and warfare the more difficult and desperate does their own condition appear. The ungodly still dread a man full of the Holy Spirit. Well do they know that to oppose such they need to screw up their courage and "quit themselves like men" (1Sa 4:9; Luke 16:8).

IV. The Faith of Israel in the Ark. "It may save us out of the hands of our enemies" (1Sa 4:). It is quite clear that their faith in the invisible God had withered up into a superstitious reverence for the material Ark. They worshiped the form, but denied the power. The God-deserted Ark (Psalm 78:60) was everything, while He who inhabits eternity had no place in their hearts. Instead of saying, "Let us fetch the Ark," had they said, "Let us confess our sins and return to the Lord," He would doubtless have saved them. Multiplying forms in religious services will afford no security against the inroads of the enemy. The Gospel that is not in the power of the Spirit of God is only the Ark with the glory departed. The Philistines of today are in great force against the people of God. Let us fetch out the Gospel of God, but let us see that our faith is not in the mere form of words, but in the God of the Gospel. "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in Power" (1 Corinthians 4:20).

V. The Capture of the Ark. "The Ark of God was taken" (1Sa 4:11). The object of their confidence was taken from them, that their faith might be in God only. Let us learn from this—

1. That ungodly men cannot preserve the power of religion. The dissolute and licentious sons of Eli had charge of the Ark of the Covenant (1Sa 4:4). What a God-dishonoring association. Is it any wonder that the cause of God is turned into ridicule when self-seeking and unprincipled men have charge of the holy things? They must be clean that bare the vessels of the Lord.

2. That the Lord will not protect forms when the Spirit is gone. There is nothing in an empty dish to satisfy either God or man. The Pharisaic spirit is always ready to contend for the outward and the formal, because it is blind to the spiritual and the eternal.

3. That sin always brings defeat. If we regard iniquity in our heart the Lord will not hear. The secret sin of Achan brought open shame in Israel. The disobedience of Saul led to the departure of God from Him. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

THE ARK OF GOD IN THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES.

1 Samuel 5:6.

"Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain."
—Cowper.

While the jubilant Philistines were bearing away the Ark as a trophy, little did they think that they were bringing the judgment of God down among themselves. The Ark, like the Bible, may be a dead letter to some, but in the hands of the Holy Spirit it is a two-edged sword. It is always a solemn and critical thing to be brought into contact with that presence and power of which the Ark was the visible symbol, that power which kills and makes alive, that brings low and lifts up (1Sa 2:6-8). The experiences of the Philistines, with the Ark of the Covenant, are very much the same as those of the ungodly now under the power of the Gospel of Christ.

I. Their Religion was Completely Upset. "Dagon fell upon his face before the Ark of the Lord, and his head and his hands were cut off" (1Sa 5:3, 4). They put the Ark in the temple of their God, thinking to keep both. But God and Dagon cannot both rule in the same house. "You cannot serve God and mammon." When Christ comes in the false theories and opinions of men must fall. The Dagon of self may stand erect, and claim all the homage and worship until the Ark of the Truth of God comes into the temple of the heart, then he must fall on his face before the Lord, and part with both his head and his hands. Until self is completely broken he will be set up again and again. Men still think that they have to do many and great things to merit the salvation of God; but when they come into the presence of Christ the Ark, their lofty thoughts and imaginations must fall down before Him.

II. They were Severely Smitten. "The hand of the Lord was heavy upon them, and destroyed and smote them" (1Sa 5:6, 12). Not only was their God destroyed, but they themselves afflicted with painful tumors. The Ark of His presence brings no comfort or encouragement to those who are His enemies, nothing but the wounding and bruising of conviction and humiliation. "When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will reprove the world of sin, because they believe not in Me" (John 16:8, 9). The Gospel will be the savor of death where it is not the savor of life. The Ark of the Lord is a dreadful possession to the unsaved.

III. They were Utterly Perplexed. "What shall we do to the Ark of the Lord?" (1Sa 6:2). They had sent it from city to city, seeking to

get it peacefully disposed of, but this only increased their suffering and alarm. We are solemnly reminded here of how others, in after years, sought to get quit of Jesus Christ, the true Ark of God, until Pilate, almost in the exact words of the Philistines, said, "What shall I then do with Jesus?" Paul was playing the part of these troubled enemies of God when he kicked against the goadings of the Word of Truth (Acts 9:5). There is a tremendously important question that still presses with perplexing urgency upon ungodly men to whom the Gospel has come. How are you going to dispose of the claims of God and of His Christ? Submission or rejection?

IV. They Sent it Away. They made a new cart, put the Ark on it, and with a trespass offering they sent it away (1Sa 5:7, 8). Suppose we read it thus: "They made a new cross, put Him on it, and as a trespass offering they sent Him away!" The Philistines would not have this Ark to rule over them. Away with it. Christ, like the Ark, was delivered up at the instigation of the chief priests (1Sa 6:2). The presence of the holy Ark of God's covenant testified against them, but there was no repentance of sin, no pleading for mercy, but a growing desire to get back to their former Arkless condition. They felt that they could not keep it and continue as they were. They must either send it away, or be reconciled to God. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

V. They had Clear Evidence of its Divine Character. "See if it goes up by the way of His own coast, then the Lord has done this: if not, then it was a chance that happened to us. And the kine took the straight way to Beth-shemesh" (1Sa 5:9-12). Thus they had another proof, in the manner of its home-coming, that the Lord God of Israel was with it, and had been dealing with them through it. Well might they have said, as the centurion did, when he saw the manner of the home-going of the rejected Savior of men, "Truly this was the Son (Ark) of God" (Mark 15:39), The Gospel of God is still as the "Ark of the Covenant" among men. Mighty deeds are still being wrought through it, false systems of religion fall down before it, and the enemies of the Lord are smitten with terror in its presence. By its works it asserts its own divinity. Yet many, though fully convinced that it is of God, treat it as the Philistines did the Ark, they refuse to yield to its claims, and politely send it away with an offering, and remain the enemies of God.

EBENEZER.

1 Samuel 7.

If in the past we have been faithful, we will now have much cause to be thankful. Before Ebenezer comes—

1. Contrition—"Israel lamented after the Lord" (1Sa 7:2).
2. Confession—"We have sinned against the Lord" (1Sa 7:6). After this there had to be—
3. Conversion—"Return unto the Lord" (1Sa 7:3).
4. Separation—"Put away the strange gods" (1Sa 7:3).
5. Consecration—"Prepare your heart unto the Lord, and serve Him only" (1Sa 7:3). These steps are always sure to lead up to Ebenezer: "Hitherto has the Lord helped us." This "Stone of help" has many tongues.

I. Ebenezer Speaks of Redemption. "Hitherto." This points us back to the bondage of Egypt—to the slavery of sin—to the hole of the pit whence we have been dug (Exod. 12:12, 13; Ephesians 2:12, 13).

II. Ebenezer Speaks of Preservation. "Hitherto has." The Lord you keeps. He kept them by His mighty power, and guided them by the skilfulness of His hands (Psalm 78:72). While walking through the dark shadows in the valley of life we need fear no evil (Psalm 23:4). He keeps the feet of His saints, and their way too (Proverbs 2:8). May the prayer of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 be fulfilled in us!

III. Ebenezer Speaks of Answered Prayer. "Hitherto has the Lord helped." "Samuel cried unto the Lord, and the Lord heard him" (1Sa 7:9). The rain comes down according to the vapor that ascends (Job 36:27). The incense was put upon burning coals. Prayer must ascend from a burning heart. "Whatever you ask believing." Every believing prayer will yet have its store of testimony.

IV. Ebenezer Speaks of Victory. While Samuel offered the Lamb, the Lord discomfited the enemy (1Sa 7:10). This was indeed victory through the Lamb. We, too, must overcome through the Blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11). It is when the Lamb of God is lifted up in presence of the ungodly that the Lord thunders with the voice of conviction.

V. Ebenezer Speaks of Divine Faithfulness. "Hitherto has the Lord helped us"—helped us all the way. Not one good thing has failed (Joshua 13:14). He is faithful that has promised. His promises, like the barrel of meal, waste not (1 Kings 17:16). He who has begun the good work will perform it (Philippians 1:6).

VI. Ebenezer Speaks of Testimony. "Hitherto has the Lord helped us." This is a noble, God-honoring confession. They give Him all the praise. What have we that we have not received? Yet not I, but Christ in me (Galatians 2:20). What have we done worth doing

that He has not wrought in us? (Philippians 2:13). "To God be the glory, great things He has done."

VII. Ebenezer Speaks of Encouragement for the Future. The Lord who has blessed us "hitherto" will also bless us henceforth and forever. He who has delivered, and does deliver, will yet deliver (2 Corinthians 1:10). "Be of good cheer" and "have faith in God."

SAUL, THE CHOICE YOUNG MAN.

1 Samuel 9.

The morning of Saul's life was calm and bright, and full of promise; the midday was cloudy and threatening; the afternoon was cold, and dark, and stormy; the evening was terrific with the thunderstorm of despair, and suicidal blackness. His life began with a day of grace, and ended with the "wages of sin." In this chapter we have Saul brought before us as a "choice young man, and goodly." Let us take a look at him. He was so in his—

I. Personal Appearance. "There was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he" (1Sa 9:2). He had what almost every young man covets to have— an attractive and commanding persona. God had richly blessed him with a finely-formed and superior physical body. This is an inheritance that is not to be lightly esteemed, although many, both young men and young women, use this gift of God only for their own selfish ends. A healthy and well-formed body makes a beautiful temple for the Holy Spirit, and may be a mighty weapon in His hands to the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan.

II. Child-like Obedience. He went at once at his father's bidding to "seek the donkeys" (1Sa 9:3, 4). Although Saul was "head and shoulders higher than any of the people," he was not too big to obey his father. This is a lovely trait in the character of a handsome young man. When the disciples strove about who should be greatest in the kingdom of God, Jesus took a little child and set him in the midst as an example of the true spirit of greatness, and said, "He who will be chief among you, let him be the servant of all" (Mark 10:44). He loved us, and gave Himself for us.

III. Filial Thoughtfulness. "Come, let us return, lest my father leave caring for the donkeys, and take thought for us" (1Sa 9:5). He was not so anxious about the objects of his pursuit as to forget the anxious thoughts of a loving father. There be many young men who leave home in the pursuit of business who, in their new surroundings, forget the yearnings of a father's heart, so that their letters home are long in coming. They are wise fathers who are more concerned about the safety of their sons than the success of their worldly business.

IV. Generous Disposition. When his servant suggested that they should consult the prophet about the lost donkeys, he at once reminded him that he had "not a present to bring to the man of God" (1Sa 9:6, 7). This is quite an incidental revelation of the kindness of his nature. He could not think of asking a favor, even from "the man of God," without recompensing him in some way (Judges 6:18). It is said that "generous natures go most readily astray." The very depth and force of their generous affections may be their greatest temptation. But the shallow inconsiderate and selfish young man is already far astray. Look not every man on his own things (interests), but on the things (interests) of others (1 John 2:15).

V. Relationship to God. "When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said unto Him, Behold the man! . . . this same man shall reign over My people" (1Sa 9:17). Not only was he "a choice young man" in the sight of men, but he was "a choice young man" in the sight of God. The highest honor any young man can have on earth is to be a chosen one of God; it is worth sacrificing all the world for such a favor. And this honor have all the saints in Christ Jesus. A young man may have many lovely features in his character, many rich moral qualities, yet if this link of Divine approbation is wanting he is like a beautiful ship laden with valuable goods, but drifting aimlessly on the ocean of life. He is out of harmony with the purpose of God. Saul did not find the donkeys, but he found a kingdom. His disappointment was God's appointment. The Gospel of Christ is God's call to every man to inherit the kingdom of Heaven. He! weary seekers in the world of business or pleasure, turn aside and seek the Prophet of Nazareth, He will give you a kingdom.

SAUL, THE ANOINTED. 1 Samuel 10.

"Take my life and let it be,
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise."
—Havergal.

Arnold has said, "While life is good to give, I give." This is beautiful. Why should we wait until our youthful strength and vigor are shriveled up before we yield ourselves to God? Samuel, Saul, and David were all chosen of God while they were young. Surely the best of masters deserves the best of servants. We have seen Saul as "a choice young man." Let us look at him now as the "chosen of God." See how he was—

I. Separated by Anointing. "Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head" (1Sa 10:1), as a sign that the Lord had anointed him. Priests and kings were usually called out in this fashion (Exod. 29:7; 2 Kings 9:3). All God's chosen ones still are to be separated unto Himself by a holy anointing (1 John 2:27). There was but a very short interval between the revelation of the Divine purpose to Saul and the outpouring of the oil of consecration upon his head. As soon as we know the will of God we should be separated unto Him. "After that you believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13).

II. Encouraged by Promises. The prophet gave him a threefold word of assurance. There was a promise—

1. Concerning his Business. "Two men shall say unto you, The donkeys are found" (1Sa 10:2).

2. Concerning his Bodily Wants. Three men would give him two loaves of bread (1Sa 10:3, 4).

3. Concerning his Spiritual Need. "The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you" (1Sa 10:6). Thus he was assured that as the chosen of God all things would work together for his good, and that God would make all grace abound toward him. This threefold assurance have all those who have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:32). The Lord never sends any one a warfare on his own charges.

III. Changed by Grace. "God gave him another heart" (1Sa 10:9). We may not reckon this change as equal to regeneration, but by the grace of God new motives and desires were begotten in the bosom of Saul. This sudden and unexpected revelation of the purpose of God concerning him had, morally, made him another man than what he was before he knew this great transforming truth. When "the grace of God that brings salvation" is revealed to us and received by us, it will certainly make new creatures of us. No man can be the same after receiving the kingdom of God. If the Gospel has not brought to us another heart we surely have not believed it.

IV. Assured by Circumstances. "All those signs came to pass" (1Sa 10:9). It is a blessed experience to find that our outward circumstances are made to conform and confirm the thoughts and intents of the inner life. When the purpose of God has been revealed, and our hearts and lives willingly yielded to the fulfillment of that purpose, we shall certainly see, in the providence of God, many confirming tokens. The outer wheels of our circumstances never move contrary to the inner workings of the Spirit of God. There may be wheels within wheels, but they are "full of eyes," and so cannot err (Ezekiel 1:18).

V. Moved by the Spirit. "The Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied" (1Sa 10:10, 11). When the Spirit of God comes upon any one there are sure to be signs following. It is but natural for Saul to join in the song of the prophetic band when he was possessed by the same Spirit. Thus the word of Samuel was fulfilled (1Sa 10:6). Man at his best, apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, is but a poor weakling in the service of God; but the gift of the Spirit is the assurance of God to us, that all the resources of His grace and wisdom are within our reach for the honor of His Name (John 16:13, 14). This was a priceless privilege conferred upon Saul, an astonishing favor. "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

VI. Humbled by the Prospect. "Saul was taken, and when they sought him he could not be found. Behold, he has hid himself among the stuff" (vv. 21, 22). While he was little in his own eyes, all things kept working together for his good. It is not the grace of God that puffs up, but the wind of self-conceit. The kingdom had come to him, not because he had sought it, or wrought for it. It was to him the gift of God. He was deeply conscious of the insignificance of the tribe to which he belonged, and the smallness and poverty of his family (1Sa 9:21). But grace delights to lavish its wealth and honor upon the weak and unworthy (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10). They that be whole need not a physician.

VII. Despised by the Worthless. "The children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him," etc (1Sa 10:27). These sons of worthless men had perhaps known Saul from his boyhood, and like the modern sons of Belial they make no allowance whatever for the call of God and the anointing of His Spirit. It is no new thing to be despised and sneered at because we have had a new and soul-uplifting revelation of the goodness of God. The more God honors us the more will the lewd and self-deceived despise us in their hearts. But in this we are made partakers of the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. The carnal mind is enmity against God. But here Saul, like our Lord and Master, was patient in suffering. "He held his peace." It is an unmistakable proof of a young man's moral strength when he can treat his enemies with magnanimous silence.

SAUL, THE COURAGEOUS.

1 Samuel 11.

Although Saul had been already declared king (1Sa 10:24), he had seemingly gone back to his old occupation, and was tending the herd (v. 5). This in itself was a notable proof of the dignity and strength of Saul's moral character. Had he been a small, shallow, fussy soul he would have reckoned that his promotion to the kingdom had lifted him above the menial task of a herdsman. Those who are conscious that God is with them can well afford to wait. "He who believes shall not make haste." In this chapter we have brought before us a—

I. Sorrowful Message. Messengers came to Gibeah, and told how the city of Jabesh was besieged, and that Nahash the Ammonite would make a covenant with them, only on condition that he may thrust out all their right eyes for a reproach upon all Israel (1Sa 11:1-4). No wonder the people wept at such humility and barbarous tidings. But will ever the people of God be able to make a covenant of peace with the enemies of God without suffering loss? Such compromising was contrary to the Word of the Lord (Exod. 23:32). The enemy of our souls, the world, is still ready to make a covenant with us if we are willing to part with our spiritual eyesight.

II. Divine Call. "The Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly" (1Sa 11:5, 6). A man may be as much under the power of the Holy Spirit when his soul is hot with burning indignation as when it is melted with tender compassion. There are different manifestations, but the same spirit. The source of his anger was doubtless the reproach threatened to all Israel (1Sa 11:2). Does the call of God not frequently come by the awakening in the soul of some overmastering desire? Look at the case of Gideon (Judges 6:34), of Jephthah (Judges 11:29), and of Samson (Judges 14:6). If the Holy Spirit has kindled in the heart any burning desire, we may take it as the call of God to go in and possess that thing so desired.

III. Fearless Challenge. The hewing of the yoke of oxen, and the sending of the gory pieces throughout all Israel (1Sa 11:7) was like the blast of a trumpet from Heaven to a drowsy nation. "The fear of the Lord fell on the people." When a man is acting under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit there are sure to be signs following. God's man is never awanting when the national crisis comes. It was so in the days of Luther and of Knox. It has always been God's way to single out men through whom He might reveal His will and power. Fearlessness will ever characterize that one who is being borne along by the mighty rushing wind of the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:13).

IV. Great Deliverance. The summons of Saul met with a willing and general response—"they came out with one consent"—for God always works through the Spirit-inspired message. The relief of Jabesh was both timely and merciful (1Sa 11:8-11). These besieged citizens were on the brink of becoming a life-long reproach to all Israel (v. 2) by being disabled for war and bearing on their bodies the marks of a shameful defeat. This Spirit-moved leader was able to roll away the reproach. What a mighty power for Christ and His cause a Spirit-filled life may be! Are there not many today who, like the men of Jabesh-Gilead, are in jeopardy of losing their testimony for Christ, and bringing reproach upon the whole Church of God? O that that sacrifice, which was, as it were, "hewed in pieces" on Calvary's Cross, might be preached with such freshness and power throughout all the land that the people of God would "come out with one consent" to the rescue of the oppressed and the salvation of the perishing.

V. Magnanimous Intervention. When the people proposed that all those opposed to the reign of Saul should be put to death (1Sa 10:27), Saul said, "There shall not a man be put to death this day" (1Sa 11:12, 13). It well becomes those who enjoy great privileges at the hands of God to extend great forbearance to those who may trespass against us (see 2 Samuel 19:22). It ill becomes the servants of Christ to use their spiritual authority or ecclesiastical position for the purpose of avenging personal insult. Remember Him, who though He was reviled, reviled not again. The time is coming when Jesus Christ will deal with those who have opposed His rule (Luke 19:37).

VI. Happy Result. "They made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal, and there Saul and all the people rejoiced greatly" (1Sa 11:14, 15). This was the public confirmation of the secret call of God. Every secret blessing will have its open coronation (Matthew 6:6). The place, made memorable for suffering and humiliation (Joshua 5:2), has now become the place of exuberant joy. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Those who have received the special anointing must ultimately rise to special honor. The kingdom did not come to Saul because he wrought for it. It was the gift of God, and being obedient, he is now crowned with honor and glory. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.

SAUL, THE DISOBEDIENT.

1 Samuel 13:1-14.

"None could trace God's will so plain as you, while yours Remained implied in it, but now you fail, And we,

who prate about that will, are fools; In short, God's service is established here As He determines fit, and not your way— And this you cannot brook."—Browning.

Samuel, in the love of his heart, and in faithfulness to the Lord, had just sounded a note of warning to Saul and the people, accompanied with a gracious word of encouragement (1Sa 12:20-25). But in the day of prosperity we often fail to consider. "Saul reigned one year." This might be rendered: Saul was like a child of one year when he began to reign. All that we know of Saul up until this time bears this out. Like Uzziah, he was marvelously helped until he was strong (2 Chronicles 26:15-16). The pride that lifts up the heart into self-confidence will surely end in destruction. God will never fail or forsake those who trust Him and are little in their own eyes.

I. His Duty was Plain. To get the explanation of 1Sa 13:8 we have to go back to 1Sa 10:8. The word of the prophet was both urgent and explicit. "Seven days shall you tarry, until I come to you, and show you what you shall do." Although the time may have been about three years after, still Saul's way was perfectly plain; he was to do as occasion served him (1Sa 10:7) until this present crisis should come, then he was to wait for the ministry and guidance of the man of God. Our responsibility will be according to the light we have. If, like Saul, we are conscious of being chosen of God, and of being made partakers of the holy anointing (1Sa 10:1), then surely the revealed will of God must become the absolute and unconditional law of our life. This is the way, walk you in it.

II. His Faith was Tried. The Philistines had gathered in great force to fight with Israel (1Sa 13: 5). Saul had blown the trumpet throughout the land, and summoned the Hebrews to meet him at Gilgal. While he tarried there for seven days, according to the set time of Samuel, "the people were scattered from him" (v. 8). His waiting may have appeared to the already distressed army of Israel as a sign of weakness and fear, so many of them took advantage of the delay and hid themselves (1Sa 13:6). Day by day, as he waited for the prophet, he saw the strength of Israel melting away. Every hour he tarried seemed to make his case all the more hopeless. What a test to his faith and patience! What a struggle there must have been in his soul; what a conflict between faith and sight! It is always a sore trial to part with the Isaac of our hopes while we are following the bidding of God (1 Peter 1:7). "He must increase, I must decrease."

III. His Failure was Great. "Saul said, Bring hither a burnt-offering to me; and as soon as he had made an end of offering Samuel came" (1Sa 13:9, 10). Saul had waited until almost the close of the seventh day, as Samuel had appointed; but before the full time had come, through pressure of circumstances, his patience with the will of God had broken down. He had chosen his own way, and stepped out of the purpose and favor of God. Every Spirit-anointed one will have their testing time. As soon as Jesus Christ was baptized of the Spirit He was led into the wilderness to be tried (Mark 1:10-13). If Abraham had failed when the great testing crisis came he never would have become the "Father of the faithful." But he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief (Romans 4:20). The way to abiding honor and usefulness in the service of God is by "enduring as seeing Him who is invisible." To fail when we are brought face to face with the circumstances planned by God for the testing and developing of our faith is to be a life-long cripple in the work of the Lord. Whenever, as Christian workers, we choose our own way rather than wait on the fulfillment of God's Word, we become as bones out of joint in the body of Christ. Such can only live a painful life.

IV. His Excuse was Vain. "Samuel said, What have you done? Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me; ... I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt-offering" (1Sa 13:11, 12). His army was dwindling away, the Philistine host was increasing, Samuel was long in coming, and his own patience was exhausted. Yet in taking the place of the priestly prophet he acted foolishly, and in direct rebellion against the commandment of the Lord (1Sa 13:13). For unbelief and disobedience there can be no excuse. No argument or reasoning can extenuate the guilt of doing what we know to be contrary to the mind of God. He who hears the sayings of Christ, and believes them not, is the foolish man that goes on building his life on the ruinous sand (Matthew 7:26). The most melancholy feature of Saul's attempt to justify himself is that there are no signs of repentance. After Samuel's solemn warning he proceeds to number the people (1Sa 13:15). When we have discovered that we have blundered and failed, and disobeyed, genuine repentance and confession is the only way back to God's favor and fellowship.

V. His Loss was Deplorable. "Now your kingdom shall not continue: the Lord has sought Him a man after His own heart, because you have not kept that which the Lord commanded you" (1Sa 13:14). Saul has turned away from the Lord, now the Lord seeks another man after His own heart, as an instrument more willing to abide in His hand, for the working out of His purposes concerning Israel. All Saul's trumpeting and planning now can no more hinder the kingdom from settling down in David than he could hinder the sun from setting in the west. He may shake himself like Samson, but the power is gone. It is a solemn thought that we may be earnestly keeping up the form of our service for God in the energy of the flesh when the Spirit of power has departed from us. Let us never forget that to choose our own way is to choose loss and defeat. May God work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure!

SAUL, THE CASTAWAY.

1 Samuel 15.

There is a zeal that is not according to knowledge, but which is a defiance of knowledge, a violation of the Word of God and of conscience. In seeking to serve God with our own will, while we reject His, we are as it were offering swine's' flesh upon His altar. The Lord will have His altar blaze, but the sacrifice must be blameless. It would seem from these words, "Now therefore hearken you unto the voice of the words of the Lord" (v. 1), that God was loath to withdraw His favor from Saul. Such is His lingering grace which gives room for repentance. Saul is to have another chance to show himself faithful to God. Notice his—

I. Commission. "Now go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all" (1Sa 15:3). His orders were plain and explicit. Amalek, like Jericho, was to be entirely devoted to destruction (Joshua 6:17, marg.). Neither his feelings nor reason must stand in the way of the fulfillment of the divine purpose. When we have the Lord's bidding to go, even though it should be on the water, it is ours confidently to obey.

II. Disobedience. "But Saul spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, . . . and all that was good" (1Sa 15:9). The command was spare not, but he spared. He allowed his eye to govern his actions, so he walked not by faith but by sight. His natural instincts, as a judge of and dealer in cattle, overruled the direct Word of God; so he spared the best, and utterly destroyed the vile and the refuse. It is always easy to devote to God that which we do not want. Will He be pleased with the vile and the refuse while we spare the best for our own purposes? Whenever self-interest is allowed a place in our service for the Lord it is sure to be at the cost of faithfulness to Him.

III. Self-Justification. This is a very sad and melancholy episode in the life of Saul. May we take it as a trumpet-warning against self-deception. The Lord said to Samuel, "Saul has not performed my commandments" (1Sa 15:11). And when Samuel met Saul, after he had been triumphantly setting up a monument of his victory, he said with the utmost complacency, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (1Sa 15:12, 13). At the same time the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen that he had spared as spoil were a solemn mockery in the sight of God. Like the crowing of the rooster to Peter, they might have reminded Saul of his sin. But this was not all. When Samuel charged him with "not obeying the voice of the Lord," he answered, "Yes, I have obeyed" (1Sa 15:20). It is pitiful in the extreme to be seeking at any time to persuade ourselves that we are right with God when He had emphatically declared that we have "turned back." "Be not deceived, God is not mocked" (Galatians 6:7). The eyes of the Lord are upon us, as they were on Saul, watching whether we are faithful to Him and His Word. Every act of disobedience is an act of rebellion against God.

IV. Confession. Samuel had to be faithful with Saul, although he was deeply grieved at his failure, and had spent the whole night in "Crying unto the Lord" (1Sa 15:11). "To obey is better than sacrifice," he said, and "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (1Sa 15:22, 23). Saul discovered that the secret, selfish motives of his heart had blossomed and brought forth fruit that was sure to grow fearfully bitter, so he confessed, "I have sinned: I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord: because I feared the people and obeyed their voice" (1Sa 15:24). Ah! the secret is out. He feared the people, and the fear of man ensnared his soul (Proverbs 29:25). Are there not multitudes of young, vigorous, gifted lives around us that are wrecked and ruined for the service of God through the very same reason—the fear of man. "Who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die?" (Isaiah 51:12). Any backboneless soul can be a coward. Put on the armor of God, and you shall be able to stand in the evil day (Ephesians 6:13).

V. Rejection. "Samuel said unto Saul, You have rejected the Word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king" (1Sa 15:26). To reject God's Word is to be rejected of God (Luke 9:26). He who believes not God has made Him a liar. Saul's seeming repentance and confession had come too late. The moorings of God's guiding presence was cut; Saul's life was now a drifting wreck.

"There is a line by us unseen,
That crosses every path;
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and His wrath."

"The Strength of Israel will not lie" (1Sa 15:29). He abides faithful. He cannot deny Himself. What a vain show our life must be if it is not lived for the glory of God. Saul may still retain the favor of the people, but, alas, the Spirit of God had departed from him (1Sa 16:14). It is possible to be a Christian, and, like Saul, a "partaker of the Holy Spirit," yet the life, through being disobedient to the heavenly vision, may become a wilderness waste to itself, a stumbling-block to others, and an offence to God.

SAUL, THE ENEMY.

1 Samuel 18:29.

"Fool that I was! I will rehearse my fault:
I, wingless, thought myself on high to lift
Among the winged! I set these feet that halt
To run against the swift."
—Ingelow.

Lowell has said that "Best things perish of their own excess, and quality overdriven becomes defect." Who would have thought that the beautiful and childlike life of Saul would so soon be transformed and degraded into a purely selfish and God-dishonoring career He began in the Spirit and ended in the flesh. They that are in the flesh cannot please God. Like every other case of backsliding, it had its source in turning aside from the revealed will of God (1Sa 15:11-26). One step out of the path of faith is enough to put us on the way to a self-ruined life. Saul now becomes the open and avowed enemy of David, the Lord's anointed. A man possessed by an evil spirit will rush his head against the thick bosses of Jehovah's buckler. Saul in becoming the enemy of David became—

I. A Sinner against his own Family. See his dastardly conduct with Michal, his own daughter, who loved David; how he presses and schemes for their union in marriage, in the hope that she might speedily be made a widow (1Sa 18:20, 21). Think how often the tender heart of Jonathan was grieved—for he too loved David—at his father's heartless and cowardly behavior. When any father takes up an attitude of opposition to Jesus Christ, who is the Lord's anointed, he is always fighting against the best interests of his own household. Godliness is profitable for the life that now is as well as for the life which is to come. The love of Christ is meant to sweeten the home life by enabling us joyfully to bear one another's burdens.

II. A Sinner against the Testimony of the Holy Spirit. The scene at Naioth must have been an exciting one (1Sa 19:19-24). Saul hears that David is there and sends messengers to apprehend him, but as soon as they come within the holy atmosphere of the prophetic band they are influenced by the Spirit and begin to prophesy. A second, and even a third company were sent, with the same result. Then Saul himself went thither, "and the Spirit of God was upon him also." Surely if ever a man had evidence that the Spirit of God was opposed to his present actions that man was Saul, and the time was now. It would seem as if the Holy Spirit lingered over Saul, as the Shekinah glory hovered near Jerusalem before it finally departed (Ezekiel 11:23). Oh, how loath our God is to give us up! But this last manifestation of the Spirit of prophecy fails to turn him from the error of his way. The effect was only like the morning cloud. Grieve not the Holy Spirit.

III. A Sinner against the Servants of God. Saul commanded that the priests of the Lord be slain, "because their hand also is with David (1Sa 22:17, 18). Saul, in refusing to give David his God-appointed place, is compelled to become the enemy of all who favor him. It is so still. Our relationships to Christ determine our attitude toward our fellow men. The interests of Jesus Christ and His people are so vitally connected that they cannot be divided. "He that touched you touched the apple of Mine eye." The priestly house of Ahimelech are the first to suffer martyrdom for the cause of David. But the blood of the holy is never spilt in vain; the cause for which it is shed will surely prosper.

IV. A Sinner against the Best Interests of the Nation. It is worthy of special note that while Saul was pursuing after David, "the Philistines invaded the land" (1Sa 23:27, 28). While he was resisting and opposing the clearly revealed purpose of God the enemy came in like a flood. The will of the Lord was to bless the nation of Israel through David, whom He had chosen. To despise and dishonor him was to obstruct the divinely-appointed channel of blessing and rob the people of the grace of God. Is it otherwise now? God has sent His Son to bless us, nationally as well as individually. Infidelity and indifference to Christ and His cause will always be a menace and a hindrance to a nation's highest good. Men are slow to acknowledge this, but God is not mocked. In our pride and self-will we may despise and set aside the Lord's anointed, but God knows no other channel through which we can be blessed (1 Timothy 2:5).

V. A Sinner against his own Conscience. Now when David had shown the kindness of God to his would-be murderer, Saul wept, and said, "You are more righteous than I: for you have rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded you evil" (1Sa 24:16, 17). Yet for all this the bitterness of his heart against David constrained him to play the fool yet again (1Sa 26:21). A man is always playing the fool when he is warring against the revealed will of God, because he is also fighting against the deeper and truer instincts of his own nature. He who sins against the light sins against his own soul. In submitting to Christ as our King we justify our own conscience, and there is peace.

VI. A Sinner against the Providence of God. To be out of sympathy with God and His Christ (anointed) is to be out of harmony with the gracious providence of God. In 1Sa 26 we see the powerful Saul falling once more into the hands of the poor despised David. Oh, the solemn irony of such circumstances! Philip II. of Spain said, after the destruction of the Armada, "I was prepared to conquer England, but not the elements." But the elements in the hands of an overruling God have to be reckoned with. Those who are at enmity with the Son of David and His kingdom will certainly find out some time that the unerring providence of the Eternal One has ruled them outside His saving grace (Romans 8:28).

VII. A Sinner against the Purpose of God. If the mind was not blinded by the Devil, and maddened by the force of a rebellious self-will, no one would ever expect to succeed who was striving against the "determinate counsel of God" (Acts 2:23). "Why do the heathen rage, and imagine a vain thing?" (Psalm 2:1). It was the fixed purpose of God to exalt David to the throne of Israel, so it is his settled determination that Jesus shall yet become the "Blessed and only Potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:15). Those that fall on this stone shall be broken, and those on whom it shall fall it shall grind them to powder. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you shall perish" (Psalm 2:12). Fall in line with the revealed purpose of God in Christ Jesus, and you will save your soul from death and your life from failure and everlasting shame.

SAUL, THE SUICIDE.

1 Samuel 28, 31.

The above lines were suggested to the author by reading what is said of the rich young man: "He went away sorrowful" (Matthew 19:22). Like Saul, he was not sent away; his turning aside from following the Lord was his own deliberate choice. In turning away from Him who is the Light, where else can we go but into the darkness? The way of transgressors is hard. The thirty-seven years that intervened between Saul's first failure through sinful impatience at Gilgal, and his tragic end on Mount Gilboa were most eventful, chiefly because of their extreme sadness and restlessness. It is an awful thing to be out of harmony with the holy and merciful God. Let us—

I. Mark his Trembling Heart. "When Saul saw the host of the Philistines he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled" (1Sa 28:5). Samuel was dead, the Spirit of power and of comfort had forsaken him; David was still a fugitive; and the Philistines were growing in numbers and in hopefulness. Saul's poor, desolate, and self-confident heart began to give way. What is there in us, apart from the grace of God, to sustain when the dark and cloudy day comes? In me, that is, in my flesh, there dwells no good thing. There is nothing resident in us that will ever in any way compensate the grieving of the Holy Spirit of God. Our own wisdom and strength and youthful vigor are poor substitutes for the "armor of God." "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

II. Behold his Vain Inquiry. "When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not" (1Sa 28:6). A fearful heart and a silent Heaven! What a sorrowful plight for a man to be in who was once a partaker of the Holy Spirit and a companion of prophets! There are times and circumstances when God will certainly close His ears to our entreaties (Proverbs 1:28). If we regard iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear. Nothing will more effectually bar our communion with our Lord than unconfessed sin. Let us take heed lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Not to be obedient to His light is to wander into the blackness of darkness.

III. Hear his Despairing Cry. Saul, finding the door of Heaven shut, turns in his desperation to the terrible and useless expedient of witchcraft. "None can bless whom God has cursed." To the woman of Endor he said, "Bring me up Samuel" (1Sa 28:11). These words are very emphatic in the Hebrew, and betoken tremendous anxiety and determination. In the bitterness of his soul he longs for one short interview with him who had power with God. Oh, for one word more from him who poured the anointing oil upon my head! What value are we now setting upon our God-given privileges? "While you have the light, walk in the light" (1Sa 16:2). Those who turn away from the truth of God will assuredly be deceived through believing a lie (2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12). Take heed to yourself.

IV. Witness his Ruined Prospects. The reappearance of Samuel brought no relief or comfort to the dis-anointed king; it was but the breaking asunder of the last cord of hope. Samuel's message proved to be only Saul's death-knell. "The Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hands of the Philistines" (1Sa 28:19). Saul's sun of prosperity set when he disobeyed the "Word of the Lord" (chaps. 13:14). Since that time he was living only in the twilight. Now the darkness of midnight is settling down thick and fast. Such is the course of the backslider. The fruits of disobedience, an act of inward rebellion against the "commandment of the Lord," may not appear in all their fearfulness for years; and meanwhile we may be living with comparative ease upon a past experience, but all the while our Christian life is but in the Christ-dishonoring energy of the flesh, which can only bring forth corruption (Galatians 6:8). "Search me, O God" (Psalm 139:23).

V. Take Warning from his Tragic End. "The battle went sore against Saul, the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it" (1Sa 31:3, 4). The "last battle" will always go sore against the man who has "rejected the Word of God." The archers, visible and invisible, will be sure to hit him, he will be sore wounded, and the end will be defeat and death. O Saul, you have destroyed yourself. Saul sought to save his life by taking matters into his own hand, and he lost it (Matthew 16:25). To forsake the Fountain of living water is to perish of thirst, beside our self-made broken cisterns. The life that is lived in union with Christ will be a saved and victorious life, but the life that is not governed and guided by the Spirit of the Lord is already into the course of this world and drifting on to the doom of eternal loss. As Christian workers let us give heed to this solemn lesson. To fall out of line with the purposes of God as they march along is to make shipwreck of our usefulness. It was as king that Saul was

rejected; it is as servants that we may become castaways.

DAVID'S CALL.

1 Samuel 16:1-13.

Saul's utter rejection and failure through turning aside from the Word of God is a beacon of warning to every servant of Jesus Christ. It is in vain we build if we are not doing the sayings of our Lord (Matthew 7:26). The wisdom of this world will always be foolishness with God. Let us note—

I. The Choice. "I have provided Me a king" (1Sa 16:1). Samuel was forbidden to prolong his mourning for Saul. The will of the Lord ought to be more precious to us than the prosperity of our friends. Another king had been prepared and provided for His people. David was being prepared for the throne of Israel by his faithfully tending and defending his father's sheep (1Sa 17:34-36). As a well-known preacher has said, "God always begins a long way back." God may choose the foolish things of this world, but He does not choose the lazy things. What we should aim at is not promotion, but faithfulness to God. Personal acquaintance with Him, and devotion to His will and work, is the highway to success and open reward. Don't be afraid of your gifts and capabilities being overlooked because you live and move in an obscure sphere of life; the Lord knows where the instrument is lying that is fit for that special work needed to be done. Make yourself a polished shaft, and God will surely hide you in His quiver.

II. The Commission. "The Lord said unto Samuel, Fill your horn with oil and go" (1Sa 16:1). Since David, the son of Jesse, has become His chosen one, so He also chooses the means by which this end may be gained. God's providences will never contradict His purposes. He who has begun the good work in our behalf will carry it on. The anointing oil for the head of David is put in Samuel's horn at the bidding of God, so it will not be put there in vain. Neither is it in vain when the Holy Spirit fills the heart of any servant of God, as many as are ordained to eternal life through them will believe. Samuel went, as every ambassador for Christ should go, in God's Name, with God's message, carrying with them the holy anointing power. Do we wonder that "the elders of the town trembled at his coming" (v. 4). The true man of God will always be a man of authority.

III. The Search. "Send and fetch him" (1Sa 16:11). Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel; but the Lord cannot be deceived with a man's countenance or the height of his stature. It is with the heart man believes, so "the Lord looks on the heart" (1Sa 16:7). "As a man thinks in his heart so is he." Because David was the least among them, he was the last they thought of; but the last shall be first, for nothing could be done until David came. "Not he that commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends" (2 Corinthians 10:18). He who made himself of no reputation was exalted "far above all." Self-defense is often a confession of weakness and self-conceit. In the judgment of men intellectual gifts and outward appearances are of great weight; but in the balance of God the scale goes down in favor of the humble and contrite heart. Eliab and Abinadab may pad their chests and stretch themselves to the full, but they cannot take the place of the herd laddie, whose heart is right with God. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked." No amount of pretense or bribery will ever gain that which can only come through being called of God. Make your calling and election sure.

IV. The Anointing. As soon as David came the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he." So Samuel "anointed him in the midst of his brethren" (1Sa 16:13). Perhaps because of envy his brethren show no signs of gladness at their brother's high promotion. This wretched joy-choking feeling is utterly unworthy of any son of God. But the chosen one becomes the anointed one. This is God's order; this is our privilege. "The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." It was a definite and memorable experience in the life of David. Is not every truly consecrated life accompanied by the anointing of the Spirit of Power? (Acts 4:31). We are not sent a warfaring on our own charges. For every special task to which we are called there is a special supply of the Spirit of grace given. David was "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14) before he was anointed, but just because he was such a man the sacred symbolic oil of power was put upon him. "I thank you, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that You did hide these things from the wise and understanding, and did reveal them unto babes" (Matthew 11:25, R.V.). "To them that have no might He increases strength" (Isaiah 40:29).

DAVID'S VICTORY.

1 Samuel 17.

Faith is a sword "that smites with more than mortal blow." David learned to use this sword when but a lad tending his father's sheep among the uplands of Bethlehem. Those who win open and public victories for God are those who have triumphed in the lowly sphere of life and in the hidden kingdom of the heart. Goliath is a fit type of the God of this world, who blatantly defies the Lord's

people. Tradition credits him as being the one who took the Ark of God. "Choose you out a man, and let him come down to me!" cried this giant prince of boasters. But they were utterly unable to choose such a man. The overcomer of Israel's enemy must be the chosen of God, the man after His own heart, a true type of Him who came to destroy the works of the Devil, and to bruise the head of the adversary. We shall view David here in this light. Notice his—

I. Gracious Mission. "He went as Jesse had commanded him, and came and saluted his brethren" (1Sa 17:17-22). David, like Christ, came out from his father, rejoicing to do his will, and bringing the love and gifts of the father to his brethren. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. As the bright ruddy youth went forth with the ten loaves for his brethren, and the ten cheeses for the captain of their thousand, who would have thought that this (child) was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel?

II. Motives Misjudged. "And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why earnest you down hither? I know your pride" (1Sa 17:28). This eldest brother, like the kinsmen of Christ, betrays the grossest ignorance of the real character of the pure and generous-minded David. David's motives were so unselfish that the proud self-seeking Eliab could not understand him; besides, it was a gratuitous insult to his father who sent him. It is not easy for a man to judge what is white when he persists in looking through colored glasses. David's sufferings here were akin to the sufferings of Christ, and an example of how we, too, must suffer if we are faithful to the Father's word and will. David's calm reply to this libelous charge is worthy of note. "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" Yes, there is a cause—deep, far-reaching, and God-glorifying.

III. Solemn Determination. "David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight this Philistine" (1Sa 17:32). God's special purpose in bringing him into the camp at this time has come upon David as a rapidly-growing revelation. The Spirit of God has convinced him that his mission is to overthrow the defier of Israel, and, like his Lord, "he set his face like a flint" to do it. If you feel moved by the Spirit to do even some unprecedented thing for the glory of God be not deterred by the worldly wisdom which says, like Saul, "You are not able" (1Sa 17:33). As David, the stripling, stands before the tall armor-clad king of Israel, with a sling and a staff in his hands, despised and rejected by his own brethren, he looks altogether unfit for such a conflict. But God has chosen the weak things to confound the mighty.

IV. Unwavering Confidence. "Your servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he has defied... the living God" (1Sa 17:34-37). David's past and secret experiences of the power of faith in the living God nerves his soul now with fearlessness. Was it not so also with the "Greater than David?" Are there not always secret victories in the life before we openly triumph in the sight of doubting and fearful men. Those who defy the living God are not to be feared by those who trust Him. Windbags are not of much account with Him who is a consuming fire. Perhaps Saul looked upon David as one whose spirit was willing, but whose flesh was weak when he put his armor on him (1Sa 17:38). But the armor that suits a man who fights in the energy of the flesh will never suit a man who wars in the power of the Spirit. So he put them off, "for he had not proved them." The Lord's anointed must meet the enemy not as a soldier, but as a shepherd (John 10:10, 11). As an armor against the sting of pain they gave Jesus wine mingled with myrrh. But He received it not. He met the enemy in the strength of faith.

V. Invisible Armor. David said, "I come to you in the Name of the Lord of Hosts, the God whom you have defied" (1Sa 17:45). Goliath could only see the stripling and his staff; he could not see the mighty Name in which David was encased as a tower of strength (Proverbs 18:10). His Name means all that He is in our behalf, and this is "the whole armor of God." Put it on (Ephesians 6:10, 11). Our weapons are not carnal, but mighty through the Spirit. Our help is in the Name of the Lord (Psalm 124:8). "If you ask anything in My Name, I will do it" (see Acts 3:16).

VI. Decided Victory. "So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone" (1Sa 17:50, 51). It was with the sling of faith and the stone of truth that David's Lord prevailed over the enemy of souls in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). As David slew Goliath with his own sword, so Christ conquered death by dying and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil (Hebrews 2:14, 15). David went forth to the fight, as Christ went to the Cross, in the presence of those who doubtless thought that they would see him again no more alive. But he came back again, triumphant over the foe, and became the chief among the thousands. This great battle was between the representatives of two different kingdoms; each nation conquers or falls in their champion. So was it with God's anointed Son. "Thanks be unto God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). We are "more than conquerors" through Him.

DAVID AND JONATHAN.

1 Samuel 18:1-4; 2 Samuel 1:26.

"All through life there are wayside inns,
Where man may refresh his soul with love;
Even the lowest may quench his thirst

At rivulets fed by springs from above."

—Longfellow.

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God" (1 John 4:7). In this little portion of Scripture we have "apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). The love of Jonathan for David seems a pure unclouded reflection of that love of God which is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit. It was wonderful.

I. His Love was Real. "He loved him as his own soul" (1Sa 18:1). It was no mere formal business connection. Jonathan had taken David and all his interests home to the secrets and carefulness of his own soul. The love that fails to do this is shallow and selfish. How can we say that we love Christ if His interests do not appeal as powerfully to us as our own. Paul had done this when he said, "To me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21).

II. His Love was Surpassing. It passed the love of women (2 Samuel 1:26). To say this suggests that it was supernatural. The highest form of human love is found in the true motherly heart. The love that excels this is that "greater love" manifested in the only begotten Son of God (1 John 4:9), and begotten in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:19). The believer's love to Christ is more than mere natural love, for the carnal mind is enmity against God. The natural heart is an alien to the Holy One.

III. His Love was Inseparable. "Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him" (1Sa 18:3) True love will always constrain to a closer bond of union; mutual affection culminates in the marriage tie. The love of Christ constrains us. What to do? Why, like Jonathan, to yield our life's concerns into the hands of Him whom God has exalted to be a Prince and a Savior (1Sa 20:14-16). Hear the whisperings of Christ's dying love in those never-to-be-forgotten words, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:24).

IV. His Love was Self-Sacrificing. "Jonathan stripped himself... and gave to David" (1Sa 18:4). Love will not hide; "It does not behave itself unseemly: it seeks not her own" (1 Corinthians 13:5). Love gives until the giving is felt as a sacrifice. It was so with the love of Christ, who for our sakes stripped Himself and became of no reputation, that we through His poverty might be made rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). The love of Christ was manifested in that poor woman who, when overtaken by a snowstorm, stripped herself to save her child. In stripping ourselves for the honor and glory of the Christ of God we are proving the reality of our confidence in Him. If He is to triumph for us, let us give Him "even to our sword and our bow." Self-aggrandizement is always inconsistent with the glory of God.

V. His Love was Well Deserved. No doubt there were many personal attractions about David to draw out the full flow of Jonathan's affections, for David "behaved himself wisely" (1Sa 18:5), and was to Jonathan the fairest and chief among ten thousand. But the secret of the strength of his love lay in the fact that he knew David as the Lord's anointed and the coming king of Israel (1Sa 20:15). Surely the tenderest affections of his pure soul were well spent when lavished unreservedly on the beloved of God. A greater than David is here! One who spoke as never man spoke, and whose behavior has been such that neither God, man, nor devil could find fault in Him. And He says, "Love you Me?"

VI. His Love was Reciprocated. "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David" (1Sa 18:1). These two souls were knit together in their desires and motives, as the warp and woof of a web. The knitting together shows that the affections of David responded in full measure to the love of Jonathan, so that the vital interests of the one were intertwined with the vital interests of the other. This is something deeper than mere belief in outward conformity; it is the very essence of "the unity of the Spirit." Jesus Christ was moved by that yearning fathomless love when he prayed that "they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in them." This deep spiritual union can only be brought about where there is the entire surrender of all on both sides for mutual advantage through the constraining power of love. This is what Christ has done for us. What response are we making to Him? "He who loves not knows not God: for God is love" (1 John 4:8). Our Lord is abundantly willing that His life should be knit with our life. Are we equally willing that our life should be knit together with His life, and so become one in heart and purpose for the glory of God?

DAVID IN ADULLAM. THE INFALLIBLE SAFEGUARD.

1 Samuel 22:1, 2; 23.

"When God afflicts you, think He hews a rugged stone,
Which must be shaped, or else aside as useless thrown!"

—Trench.

In the closing verses of the previous chapter we have recorded what was perhaps the darkest passage in the experience of David. What a melancholy sight—the Lord's anointed one feigning himself mad through the fear of man. Even anointed ones will be constrained to play the fool when they put their trust in the arm of flesh instead of in the living God (1Sa 21:10). As soon as David

lost faith in God he changed his behavior, and took to "scribbling on the doors of the gate" like a lunatic. There is a very vital connection between our creed and our conduct; a change of faith will certainly lead to a change of behavior. Through fear of King Achish David fled to the cave of Adullam. Solitude with God is better than the friendship of the world. This act of separation was richly rewarded, for "his brethren and all his father's house went down thither to him" (see 1Sa 17:28-1Sa 18:16). There came also many others.

I. The Character of those who came to David.

1. The Distressed. It was one thing to hear about David, and perhaps to sympathize with him in his cause; it was quite another thing to be driven to him by the force of sheer necessity. We are not told what they were distressed about. The cause may have been the sufferings of David or the unsettled condition of the country, or some personal affliction and loss. In any case, it is a blessed distress that constrains us to seek the help and share the fortunes of the Lord's anointed. The self-satisfied heed not the claims of the rejected One (Rev. 3:20). It was distress that brought the prodigal home to his father (Luke 15:18).

2. The Debtors. "Every one that was in debt." In fleeing to David, and espousing his cause, those bankrupts found a way of escape out of all their liabilities under the rule of a God-rejected Saul. Under the law we are insolvent debtors, but Christ rescues such sinners, and is willing to bear their blame forever (Luke 7:42).

3. The Discontented. Those whose souls were embittered through disappointment and harassing circumstances—thirsty, restless, and unsatisfied lives. Oh, how many are smitten with this plague! Yet how few seek refuge in the presence of Him who alone can satisfy (Psalm 23:5). Around the world's self-made broken cisterns there are great multitudes of such wretched folk who are more inclined to talk of their complaints than to go to the heavenly David, who is the Fountain of Life (Jeremiah 2:13). Contentment is learned here (Philippians 4:11).

II. Why they came to David.

1. They came because they believed in him. They believed that David was God's appointed king, and his was the right to reign over them. They had in fact got converted to David. Faith comes by hearing. Have we so believed in Jesus Christ as the divinely-appointed and highly exalted King over all?

2. They came because they were decided for him. Their belief led them to take definite action. They not only heard the sayings, but did them, according to the ways of the wise (Matthew 7:24). It is one thing to believe about Christ, as the anointed Savior and King; it is quite another to take our stand with Him and for Him (John 9:27). In deciding for David, they, like us, had to go forth unto him, without the camp, bearing his reproach (Hebrews 13:13). Decision for Christ means separation from the world.

3. They came because they were prepared to submit to him. Having claimed him as their king, they yielded themselves into his hands, for the honor of his name and the advancement of his kingdom. How can we claim to have acknowledged Christ as our King if we have not surrendered ourselves to Him? Is not this our reasonable service? (Romans 12:1).

III. What David became to Them. "He became a captain over them." As soon as they took their place as followers David assumed his right and power to lead. They would thus therefore look to him—

1. For Guidance. Their attitude to David now is, "Not my will, but your be done;" what will you have me to do? Is this the attitude of our heart to Him who has received us in our dire need, having redeemed us with His Blood? One is your Master, even Christ. He guides by the unerring eye of His Word (Psalm 32:8). "Lead you me on."

2. For Protection. Having become the disciples of David, they exposed themselves to the wrath and enmity of the followers of Saul. They who obey the God of this world will always be at war in their heart with the followers of the Lord's anointed. But greater is He who is with us than he who is with them. God is for us, therefore we shall not be moved. David said, "Abide with me, fear not; for he who seeks my life seeks your life: but with me you shall be in safeguard" (v. 23). "He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him."

3. For Reward. The cause of David was no forlorn hope. It was the cause of God, therefore its ultimate triumph was sure. They who suffered with him in the days of his national rejection would, no doubt, be honored with him in the day of his exaltation. "If we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified together" (Romans 8:17). The day is coming when this despised One shall be crowned Lord of All, and those who have followed Him in the rejection will be abundantly rewarded when they enter into the "Joy of the Lord" (Matthew 25:21). He shall divide the spoil with the strong (Isaiah 53:12).

"Take love away, and life would be defaced,
A ghastly vision on a howling waste."
—Newman.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine" (2 Timothy 3:16). So that "profitable doctrine" may be found in this chapter if we consider the three prominent persons mentioned as having a typical character—David, as the Lord's anointed, representing Christ and His claims upon men; Nabal in his pride and foolishness is a fit type of the Christ-rejecting men of this world; Abigail is a beautiful example of those who believe, in obedience to the deeper and truer instincts of our nature. Let us note—

I. The Request of David. "Give, I pray you, whatever comes to your hand" (1Sa 25:8).

1. The Reason for it. David and his men had been as a wall of protection unto Nabal's herdsmen, both by night and day (1Sa 25:16), while they were keeping their sheep among the hills of Carmel. His presence had saved them from the thievish bands of marauders, therefore his request was reasonable. Surely He who has saved us by the power of His presence has a claim upon us.

2. The Manner of it. These ten young men, like the ambassadors of Christ, were sent out in the name of their lord and master (1Sa 25:5). To despise them was to despise him that sent them (Luke 10:16). They came with a message of peace (1Sa 25:6), and this peace, like that proclaimed by the messengers of the Gospel, was threefold. "Peace to you, peace to your house, peace to all you have." Suggestive of peace with God, the peace of God in the home of the heart, and the peace that passes all understanding, touching all that we have. Truly such a message coming to us, as it came to Nabal, through the servants of God's appointed King, shall constrain us to a thankful trust.

II. The Foolishness of Nabal. He is described as a man who was "very great" (1Sa 25:2), but great men are not always wise. The wisdom of folly of a man will become very apparent when he is brought face to face with the claims of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). The balance of the sanctuary is unerring. His folly is seen—

1. In Rejecting the Claims of David. "Nabal answered, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse?" (1Sa 25:0) Like Pharaoh, he makes a boast of his ignorance (Exod. 5:2). Like a backslider Peter, he says, "I know not the Man." The servants of Christ often meet with the same ungracious reception in presenting the claims of their Lord. Quibbling questions are asked in such a self-important manner that the messenger is smitten dumb with sorrow of heart. Argument is out of the question, as it is not with the servant they have to do, but with Him who sent them. So they turned back and told David all those things (v. 12). (See Matthew 14:12.)

2. In Living for Self-Gratification. "Nabal made a feast like a king, and was drunken" (v. 36). The folly of Nabal is further seen in his making a God of his belly, and seeking the honor and praise of the ungodly rather than that of the Lord's anointed. He had nothing for David, but he had plenty to spend on that which ministered to gluttony and the pride of his own heart. There are many modern Nabals who think all is lost or wasted that's given for Christ while they gorge themselves with surfeiting and drunkenness. Nabal was a fool, and so is he who lays up for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:20, 21).

III. The Wisdom of Abigail. "She was a woman of good understanding" (v. 3). Surely this was a case of being unequally yoked with an unbeliever. Abigail's wisdom is self-evident when we consider her attitude toward David. "She made haste, and took... and fell before David on her face" (1Sa 25:18-23). Thus we see that—

1. She Yielded Instantly. "She made haste" to meet all the demands made by David through his servants. This was to her a work of faith, as well as a labor of love. She believed in David, that the Lord would certainly establish his cause (1Sa 25:28), and although she saw not the messengers sent by him (v. 25), her "good understanding" constrained her to yield a hearty obedience to his will. She knew that this God-appointed king was not to be trifled with, and that there was danger in delay. Have we so believed and yielded to the claims of Jesus Christ our Lord? Or do we rather make haste to excuse ourselves?

2. She Pleaded Earnestly. She pleaded for her foolish husband, whose way was right in his own eyes (Proverbs 12:15), but was utter madness in her's (1Sa 25:25). She prayed for herself (1Sa 25:28), knowing that the power of life and death was in David's hands. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. It is when we believe in Christ for ourselves, and yield to Him, that we truly see the terrible folly and danger of those who reject Him, and are constrained through pity and compassion to fall down before Him in earnest intercession for them.

3. She Testified Courageously. "In the morning, when she told Nabal these things, his heart died within him" (1Sa 25:37). She was wise enough to wait until the wine had gone out of him; she knew the uselessness of reasoning with a drunken man. The night

before he could have faced anything under the influence of that wine which is a "mocker." But now, when the stern and solemn truth stares him in the face, the shock of death steals over his heart. Brave Abigail, she acknowledged David as king, and confessed him, fearless of the indifference and spite of her husband against him. Let no wife be hindered from trusting in Christ, and confessing Him, through the folly of her husband.

IV. The Results that Followed.

1. Nabal, the Rejecter, was Smitten. "The Lord smote Nabal, that he died" (1Sa 25:38). Perhaps Jesus Christ had Nabal before His mind when He gave that parable in Luke 12, "You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you." The plans and purposes made by the ungodly to escape the claims of Jesus Christ are weapons formed against Him that shall not prosper. The man who refuses to believe in Christ is setting the eternal God at defiance.

2. Abigail, the Believer, is Exalted. "David sent for her, and she became his wife" (1Sa 25:40-42). Assuredly this was a full reward for her faith, and an abundant answer to the desire of her heart (1Sa 25:31). Separated from the foolish worldly Nabal, she was now free to be married to another, even to the Lord's anointed. She is now, in the time of David's rejection, as closely related to him as she was when he sat upon the throne. As she was, so are we now, in Christ Jesus. "Be you separate, says the Lord, and I will receive you."

DAVID AMONG THE PHILISTINES.

1 Samuel 27-29.

"In the natural desert of rocks and sands, or in the populous moral desert of selfishness and baseness, to such temptation are we all called."—Carlyle.

Of all the moral deserts or quagmires into which a Christian may be driven by the force of temptation none is more horrible than that of selfishness. Such self-centered lives are scandals on earth and heart-griefs in Heaven. But let him that is without sin cast the first stone. Have we not all at times, in our own hearts' affections, played the prodigal in taking a journey into the far country? Or have we never, like David, while in a fit of cowardliness, sought the comfort and help of the uncircumcised? David finding rest among the Philistines is a greater marvel to us than Saul among the prophets. It is a melancholy spectacle to see the Lord's anointed one depending on a heathen king for protection, or a child of God turning aside to the pleasures of this world for refreshing. Let us note

I. Why He Went. He was tempted to take this false step because—

1. He Feared Man. "He said in his heart, I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1Sa 27:1). "The fear of man brings a snare." When David said this in his heart he was denying the holy anointing (1 John 2:24). This is dangerous ground. It was here where Saul was when he fell from the favor of God (1 Samuel 15:24).

2. He Forgot God. If this had not been so, how could he ever have said, "There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." Is there nothing better for a child of God in the day of distress than to seek the help of the ungodly? Has not he said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you, so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:5, 6). Is that not much better? In Psalm 109:4 we see David on his better behavior.

II. How He Succeeds. He—

1. Escaped Persecution. "Saul sought no more again for him" (1Sa 27:4). This is not always an unmixed blessing (1 Peter 4:13). There are always two ways by which we may escape persecution. The one is by the interposition of God on our behalf (Acts 5:19; 12:7), the other is by our backsliding into the ways of the world. The world loves its own.

2. Got Yoked with an Unbeliever. How this came about is very clear, and was very natural. He first of all "found grace in the eyes" of the king of Gath (1Sa 27:5). Then he acknowledged himself as "your servant," and so was promoted as "the keeper of the king's head" (1Sa 28:2). In this way, by denying his true character as the servant of God, and submitting himself to another master, did David become unequally yoked with an unbeliever. It was when the prodigal had forsaken his father, and sought relief in the "far country," that he was constrained to "join himself" to a citizen of that country. The backsliding in heart will soon be found backsliding in conduct. It is an infallible evidence that we are "living after the flesh" when we are more ready to consider what would be "better for me" (1Sa 27:1) than what would be better for Christ and His kingdom.

3. Was Compelled to Act in a Deceitful Manner. He and his men had invaded some of the nomadic tribes up about the borders of Egypt; and when Achish asked him, "Where have you made a road today?" David said, "Against the south of Judah." This was a

deliberate falsehood (1Sa 27:8-12). Was he not again playing the deceiver when he pretended to the king of Gath that he desired to go and fight with the Philistines against the Israelites? (1Sa 29:8). Was he not, in his heart, glad of this providential way of escape out of the desperate dilemma into which he had brought himself through fear and faithlessness? This is the wretched, double-dealing kind of life that a man is compelled to live who has experienced the saving grace of God, and been made a partaker of the Holy Spirit, when he backslides into the ways of the world and seeks to avoid all suffering for Christ. If he would please men he must act the hypocrite, for down in the deeper depths of his being the true light has shined, although he is inwardly conscious that he is not walking in the light. No man, after receiving the holy anointing, as David did, can ever be the same as he was before the anointing, no matter how far he may fall from the enjoyment and power of it. Even salt without its savor is still savorless salt. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that you be able to withstand in the evil day" (Ephesians 6:13).

DAVID RECOVERING ALL. 1 Samuel 30.

"Is God less God, that you are left undone? Rise, worship, bless Him, in this sackcloth spun, As in the purple!"—E. B. Browning.

It is not so easy for us to praise God when our circumstances are to us as a covering of sackcloth and ashes as when they are as the royal robe of unbroken favor and success. Yet the discipline of the one may be as fruitful of blessing as the other if we are found abiding in the will of God. But the willful prodigal will certainly suffer loss. David's alliance with the Philistines brought him into sore trouble, as all such unholy connections are sure to do. See here—

I. A Crushing Disappointment. "David and his men came to the city, and behold it was burned with fire" (1Sa 30:3, 5): While seeking to help the ungodly he suffers the loss of all that he had. It is the old story in another form of the prodigal son in the far country beginning to be in want. "They lifted up their voice and wept," and David was "greatly distressed" (1Sa 30:6). In attempting to watch the vineyard of others David failed to keep his own. The enemy's fire is often needed to waken us up to a true sense of our position in the sight of God.

II. A Work of Faith. "But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God" (1Sa 30:6-8). Wives, sons, daughters, cattle, houses, all gone; and the people "spoke of stoning him." David now comes to himself, and turns to the Lord as unto a friend in the time of need, for who in such circumstances could encourage himself in a stranger. The spirit of faith again sits on the throne of David's heart, as when he faced Goliath, and he is at once another man. Having remembered the Lord his God in affliction, he rises up, like a giant refreshed with new wine, to the dignity of his high calling. Yes. "What time I am afraid I will trust in You" (Psalm 56:3, 4). "He inquired at the Lord" (1Sa 30:8). We cannot encourage ourselves much in Him unless we are prepared to submit our way to Him (1 Samuel 28:6).

III. An Assuring Promise. "Pursue, for you shall without fail recover all" (1Sa 30:8). This precious word of the Lord sets every fear at rest. Although as yet there is no change in the calamitous circumstances, his heart finds peace. All will be well, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. It is no vain thing, in the day of distress, to encourage yourself in God. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart.

IV. A Providential Hap. "They found an Egyptian in the field" (1Sa 30:11, 16). David had the promise of God that all would be recovered. But how was it to be done? Where were now those invading Amalekites? Who will guide them to their rendezvous? This poor unfortunate youth, who had to drop out of the ranks of the Amalekites because of sickness, and was left by his heartless master to perish by the roadside, is the divinely-appointed means to the fulfillment of the God-given promise. The means are in His hand as well as the end; and the things that God chooses are "weak and despised" in the eyes of the ungodly, like this dying Egyptian, but mighty to the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan (1 Corinthians 1:27, 28). This little episode, by the way, has a halo of glory about it. Our heavenly David is not ashamed to pick up the world's sick and half-dead castaways, to nourish them into life and health, to engage them as His servants, and to use them for the furtherance of His cause and kingdom, having slain the enmity by the power of His kindness (1Sa 30:11, 12). Such were some of us.

V. A Complete Victory. "David recovered all" (1Sa 30:16-20). Who else could? He had yielded himself to God for this purpose, and having His promise he went in His Name, and proved the faithfulness of His Word. What a prefiguring of Him who was David's Lord, and who encouraged Himself in His God, and came forth to recover all that was lost through the sinful failure of the first Adam. His journey was short and the struggle was severe, but the victory was glorious, for Jehovah had laid help upon one that was mighty—mighty in sympathy and compassion, mighty in patience and in wisdom, mighty in meekness and in power, mighty in dying and in rising again, mighty to forgive and to save, mighty to burst the gates of death and to open the gates of glory, mighty to recover all and to keep and guard all that is recovered.

VI. A Gracious Offer. "Behold a present for you" (1Sa 30:26). The word "present" is rendered blessing in the margin. He who "recovered all" now offers a blessing to all his friends. Those who were not able to go down to the battle, but who faithfully tarried by the stuff, shall in no way lose their reward (v. 24). He who has redeemed (bought back) the lost inheritance has the alone right to give such gifts to others (Ephesians 1:7). He shall divide the spoil of His unsearchable riches with the strong in faith (Isaiah 53:12). Yes, there is a blessing for you in this glorious victory if you claim Him as your Friend and Deliverer, and are faithfully, though feebly, striving to serve Him (Hebrews 2:14, 16).