

Samuel — God's Emergency Man.

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Preface

A period of peculiar interest in the history of a people of peculiar interest is dealt with in the following pages.

The nation of Israel has a place in the ways of God such as has been accorded to no other. Israel forms the centre of all God's plans for the government and blessing of the earth. This poor disordered and suffering world will never enjoy true righteousness and peace until Israel gets right with God. This happy event will take place when the Lord Jesus returns from heaven in power and great glory.

The Samuel period was transitional in character. The priesthood, which was the divinely established link between Jehovah and His people after the death of Moses, had utterly collapsed, both morally and spiritually, and kingship in the person of the man after God's own heart had not yet been

established. During this period Samuel more or less exercised the functions of prophet, priest, and king. He certainly was a prophet (1 Sam. 3: 20); his ephod, sacrifices, and intercession were priestly (1 Sam. 2: 18; 10: 8), and his judgeship was somewhat kingly (1 Sam. 7: 15-17). Thus God graciously met the need of His people in difficult days.

Samuel's personal character is an example to us all. His simple, unaffected piety; his blameless administration; his service of intercession; and his faithful reproving of evil in ruler and ruled, furnish a delightful picture. Both writer and reader might well aspire to be a Samuel.

The Man of God

The man of God has been defined as "God's emergency man." In times of peculiar difficulty and need, such have arisen both in the Church and in Israel. If the order Divinely established were working correctly, there would be no necessity for the man of God. No persons thus described appear in the Spirit's records of the earliest days of Christianity. For a time all was well. There was indeed a moment when the whole church was "filled with the Holy Ghost," and when it could be said that "great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4: 31-33). But when first love declined and disorder set in, we read of the man of God, and Timothy is the first person thus designated in the New Testament Scriptures (1 Tim. 6: 11): There have doubtless been many such during the succeeding centuries, and their faithfulness is written on high, and it will be rewarded in the day of Christ.

There are openings today for the man of God. Gifts abound. These have been regularly given ever since the risen Head took His seat on high, and the supply will be maintained as long as the body of Christ continues on earth (Eph. 4: 7-16). Such is His faithful love. But a Christian could be evangelist, pastor, or teacher, or, indeed, all three in one without being a man of God. The truth of this will hardly be disputed.

What is a man of God? Moses is the first servant of God who bore this honoured title, and it is given to him four times (Deut. 33: 1; 1 Chron. 23: 14; 2 Chron. 3: 16; Ezra 3: 2). His whole course was one of singular devotedness to Jehovah. Gladly did he surrender the honours and comforts of the Egyptian palace that he might identify himself with God's downtrodden people; willingly did he carry the burden of them during the forty years of "the provocation"; and with marvellous patience did he bear their murmuring and ingratitude. What is still greater, he pleaded for them with God, even going so far as to pray that he might be blotted out of God's book if thereby their sin might be pardoned. His jealousy for God's holy name in connection with His people was truly marvellous. His familiar intercourse with God on their behalf, as recorded in Exodus 32: 33, is almost matchless. Not that Moses was perfect — only One was ever that — but his disinterestedness and devotion mark him out as one of the most conspicuous characters in Bible history. In him we get some idea of what is involved in the title — "the man of God."

Samuel was regarded in his day as a man of God (1 Sam 9: 6-10), and rightly so. Matters were critical in Israel when he appeared upon the scene. When Moses laid down his charge the priesthood was established as the link between Jehovah and His people, the civil and military leader holding but the second place. "He shall stand before Eleanor, the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgement of Urim before Jehovah" (Num. 27: 18-21). But in the person of Eli, the priesthood had utterly broken down. Although personally a pious man, he permitted iniquity of the gravest kind in those nearest to himself (1 Sam. 3: 13). "His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." Natural affection predominated in his mind rather than faithfulness to Jehovah, to the ruin of all.

The people were as wrong as their high priest. Those were the days when "there was no king" in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judges 21: 25). The closing chapters of the book of Judges reveal to us the appalling conditions that prevailed in the land.

Nor were things right in the household from which Samuel sprang. His father was a Levite, descended from Korah, whose children were so mercifully spared from destruction in the day of their father's rebellion (Num. 26: 11), and who were afterwards made doorkeepers and singers in the house of Jehovah. Such grace should have filled their hearts with the deep gratitude to God, and should have disposed them to be devoted to His will. But what do we find? Elkanah "had two wives the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah" (1 Sam 1: 2). Did he not know better than this. It bred unhappiness in the home, reminding us of the unrest in Abraham's surroundings when he took Hagar in addition to Sarah.

Thus we have a Korahite in failure, a high priest weakly tolerant of gross iniquity; and a nation utterly lawless. Should judgement descend from an offended God? Nay; instead He raised up an emergency man, by means of whom He might reach, recover, and bless His unfaithful people. This was Samuel's place in the ways of God.

Hannah: Her Prayer and Her Song

The fact is noteworthy that in no single instance was the Spirit of God pleased to use a woman for the writing of Holy Scripture; neither did the Lord place a woman in the apostolic band, although He was surrounded by women not one whit behind the twelve in love and devotion to His person. But it is also a fact that some of the noblest poems found in the Word of God poured from devout female lips. The utterances of Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, and Mary of Nazareth constitute spiritual treasures of priceless value.

Hannah both prayed and sang, and she became the mother of praying Samuel (Psalm 99: 6), and the ancestress of Heman the temple singer (1 Chron. 6: 33). First, she prayed for a son, in her distress weeping as she prayed (1 Sam. 1: 10). The man who should have been, of all people, in close touch with God was so thoroughly out of communion with Him that he could not discern the difference between a sorrowful woman and a drunken woman. God's priest should be both compassionate and sympathetic (Heb. 5: 2). The risen Christ is all this and more; Eli, alas, was but a poor foreshadow of Him. Being corrected for his error, he could only vaguely say, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him."

Jehovah graciously heard the cry of His handmaid, and in due time the son was born, and was named Samuel, which means "asked of God." Forthwith the mother dedicated him to Jehovah, according to that which she vowed when she prayed. He was to be a Nazarite of God. Precious example to believing mothers in all ages. Let us pause a while just here, and ask ourselves — we who are parents — whether we desire for our children above all things separation to God? Or is it possible that we wish them to distinguish themselves in this scene where Christ is not?

How often we read in the records of Israel's kings that "his mother's name was." Is this meant to be suggestive that the mothers have pre-eminently the shaping of the character of their offspring? It is certain that Timothy owed immensely to his grandmother Lois, and to his mother Eunice (2 Tim. 1: 5).

When Hannah had weaned the child, she took him to Shiloh, and on the ground of sacrifice dedicated him to Jehovah. The slain bullock for the burnt offering speaks of Christ in the absolute devotedness of His death, the ephah of flour of what He was in His lowly manhood under the eye of

God, and the bottle of wine of the joy that Gad ever found in Him. Thus typically in the value of all that Christ is to God was the boy Samuel presented to Jehovah. "And he worshipped Jehovah there.

Hannah now breaks forth into Prophetic song. The careful reader will observe a striking resemblance between Hannah's song and Mary's "Magnificat." Both were fitting representations of the faithful remnant of their time. Both felt deeply the condition of things among God's people; both felt that there was no hope in man. Of God's generous grace to those who count upon Him both were assured, and of His triumph at the last over all adversaries they could confidently sing.

Hannah's song may well be transcribed here: —

"My heart rejoiceth in Jehovah, mine horn is exalted in Jehovah; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because: I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as Jehovah for there is none beside Thee; neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceedingly proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for Jehovah is a God of knowledge and by Him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired themselves out for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath borne seven: and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. Jehovah killeth, and maketh alive. He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. Jehovah maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the Throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are Jehovah's, and He hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of His saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness: for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of Jehovah shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall He thunder upon them; Jehovah shall judge the ends of the earth; and He shall give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed" (1 Sam 2: 1-10).

Wonderful outpouring of faith, in its language going immeasurably beyond the circumstances of the moment. The gift of a son to Hannah we might suppose scarcely called for this. But God ever has Christ before His mind, and His Spirit through the humble instrumentality of Samuel's mother spoke of Him as the ultimate resource of Israel and of the earth.

A king was thus in God's mind. The fallen priesthood was no longer His link with men. A change was impending. The closing verses of the Book of Ruth have prepared us for this. That charming production is at once an appendix to the Book of Judges, and an introduction to the Books of Samuel and Kings. David's pedigree fittingly concludes it.

Although the birth of Samuel was the occasion of Hannah's prophetic outburst concerning the king, it was not he who was destined for the royal office. The man of God's choice appeared in God's time, after the man of the people's choice had brought disaster upon the nation. Yet not David, but Christ, is God's true Anointed. When God's time comes to bring Him upon the scene He will indeed thunder out of the heavens, and all adversaries shall be broken to pieces. For Him we wait: at this late hour in the world's history, assured that nothing can really be right here until the iron sceptre passes into His firm competent hand. "Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day. Isa. 2: 11.

The Child in the Ephod

It is somewhat startling to read in 1 Samuel 2: 18 that the child Samuel was "girded with a linen ephod"; for Samuel, although a Levite, was not of the priestly house. Only one other person outside the family of Aaron is ever spoken of as wearing an ephod — David, on the occasion of his bringing up the Ark of Jehovah from Kirjath-Jearim to Zion (2 Sam. 6: 14) These circumstances make the more vivid

Jehovah's change of attitude towards Israel. The Aaronic priesthood under the head continued to Perform their functions on behalf of the people in the sanctuary, but the High Priest was no longer the medium: of communication from Jehovah. Samuel and David, prophet and king, suggest the glorious One Who is coming, in Whom all the offices that man's need requires will be blessedly combined

In a solemn message to Eli by an unnamed man of God Jehovah confirmed the promise of a king and showed plainly where the priesthood would stand henceforward. "I will raise Me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in Mine heart and in My mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before Mine anointed for ever" (1 Sam 2: 35) Let the reader compare this with Numbers 27: 18: 23 There Joshua is bidden to "stand before Eleanor the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgement of Urim before Jehovah: at his word (i.e. Eleazar's word) shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in." Now, the priest, albeit faithful, and working according to Jehovah's mind and heart must walk before the king. Moreover, the title "the anointed. hitherto understood to appertain to the High Priest should henceforward belong to the king.

In the Book of Judges it is the condition of the people that is shown, but the writer is strangely silent concerning the priesthood. Only once is it mentioned, and then somewhat casually (Judges 20: 28). The influence of the priesthood seems to have been practically nil. The first Book of Samuel opens, not with the condition of the people, but with the condition of the priesthood itself. It was truly appalling. Eli scandalously weak; his sons (one of whom might be expected to succeed him) grossly wicked. Jehovah's patience had reached its limit. The order of things established by Himself when Moses passed away must now end in judgement. Here let it be noted that Eli and his sons were not in the line of succession from Phinehas, to whom Jehovah promised an everlasting priesthood because of his faithfulness at Baal-Peor (Num. 25: 10-13). Somehow during the disorderly period of the Judges the true line had been thrust aside by the family of Ithamar. This Jehovah overlooked for the time being, but the hour had now struck for judgement. Eli and his sons must lose their priesthood; Phinehas' line was to be restored; but the king was henceforward to be God's anointed, and the priesthood must serve under him.

A few touches concerning Samuel are found in 1 Samuel 2 interwoven with the story of the terrible wickedness of Eli's sons, as if the Spirit would show the contrast between God's newly chosen vessel and those men of Belial. We read in verse 11, "The child did minister unto Jehovah before Eli the priest" then follows the corrupt practices of the priests, whereby all respect for divine things was destroyed in the minds of the people (vv. 13-17); then we are told, "but Samuel ministered before Jehovah, a child girded with a linen ephod" (v. 18); Samuel's purity amidst the vilest surroundings is thus emphasised; this is followed by Eli's final remonstrance with his sons; in verse 26 we are told that "the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with Jehovah and also with men." (comp. Luke 2: 52); then comes the pronouncement of the solemn sentence that was about to be executed upon the priestly houses; and we read next, "the child Samuel ministered unto Jehovah before Eli"(1 Sam. 3: 1).

Thus everything now turned upon 'God's emergency man," who was rapidly being fitted for the grave position that he was to fill. The priesthood must be deposed from its former position of privilege and honour as the link between Jehovah and His people; the king was in mind, but not yet called; Samuel was to be the medium of communication meanwhile. To some extent he was to hold Moses' place of Mediator. The spotless ephod was not only symbolical of the personal purity of the one whom Jehovah had chosen; it also spoke of the peculiar place that he must occupy as filling the awful gap created by a corrupt priesthood.

Blessed be God, He is never without resources. If one order of things breaks down, bringing

sorrow upon men rather than blessing, He creates another. The subsequent history will show us the miserable failure of kingship. In whatever position God may place man, and however highly He may favour him, failure quickly ensues. We must learn from this that there is but One whom God can trust — our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is our rest and confidence today and for ever.

The Night Revelation (1 Sam. 3)

The story of the night revelation to the child Samuel has always appealed touchingly to devout readers of Holy Scripture. There are lessons in it of the deepest importance to us all. When the disciples asked the Lord, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? He called a little child to Him, and set him in the midst of them, saying, "Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18: 1-5). He said more than this. Following up the thought He showed that the spirit of the little child is always delightful to God. Perhaps if we were more simple in our attitude, more unquestioning in our faith, and more ready to obey, we should learn the mind of God more rapidly than we do.

In this chapter Eli presents a solemn contrast to the child Samuel. It is not without significance that it is stated that, "his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see"; the physical infirmity was only too sadly a picture of his 'spiritual condition. We read in 2 Peter 1 of the man who is not "adding" to (or in) his faith, that he is "blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." Oh, the terribleness of it There is no standing still in spiritual things; one is either going forward or going backward, continually. Let both reader and writer beware.

It is also suggestive that the lamp of God was going out in the sanctuary. Aaron and his sons were to "order it from evening to morning before Jehovah" (Ex. 27: 21). Why the failure in Eli's day? The lamp is the symbol of testimony, and Israel's testimony to the nations was at a low ebb at that time through the sinful condition of the people, and the corruption and weakness of their leaders. Very soon after this a dying saint exclaimed, "The glory is departed from Israel" (1 Sam. 4: 21), and she was right. Nothing is a testimony for God unless it be pure and holy. This is true both of assemblies and of individuals.

Eli's lack of discernment is also noted. He did not recognise that God was speaking to the child. Yet the call was thrice repeated. Poor Eli blundered quite as seriously in his dealings with Hannah. He supposed her to be drunken, when in reality she was a sorrowful woman pouring out her heart to her God (1 Sam. 1: 13-16). Nearness to God was intended to give the priests good judgement concerning holy and unholy, unclean and clean, so that they might instruct the people (Lev. 10: 9-11). The divine arraignment of the priesthood in the closing book of the Old Testament might well be studied here with profit: "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of Jehovah of hosts. But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law," etc. (Mal. 2: 7-8). How is it with us? Grace has put every believer into the priestly place, but are we in the power of it? Are we spiritually discerning?

Doubtless that which happened in Shiloh that night was altogether without precedent. Indeed there had been no divine manifestations of any kind for some time in Israel, So this chapter tells us in its opening verse. But had Eli been spiritually alert, he would have recognised the act of God sooner than he did. The poor old man was sleepy, and could only say repeatedly, "Lie down again." "Let us not sleep as do others says the Apostle, "but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5: 6). Nothing is more easy than to develop a drowsy spiritual condition. To all who are in that condition, the voice sounds like a trumpet-call, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from among the dead, and Christ shall shine

upon thee" (Eph. 5: 14). The Lord in His infinite mercy preserve us from that deplorable state which would lead us drowsily to quiet others who are awake. God forbid that we should ever say to one to whom He is speaking, "Lie down again."

At last the aged priest realised that Jehovah had called the child and so bade him say, if the voice came again, "Speak Jehovah, for Thy servant heareth." It was an appalling message to which Samuel listened. Jehovah was about to visit in wrath Eli and his house because of the vileness of his sons, and because he restrained them not. It may strike some readers as strange that such a message should have been given to a child. Could not Jehovah find an older person for this service? John's Second Epistle comes to mind here. It was written to give us the mind of the Lord concerning false teachers and their destructive doctrines. But to whom is it addressed? not to "the well beloved Gaius," but to "the elect lady and her children." These must be instructed to make a stand for the truth. They must close their doors, and refuse even the ordinary civilities of life to those who "abide not in the doctrine of Christ." National amiability might suggest that this is men's work, and that women and children might well be spared such stern action but it is important to understand that when evil is stalking abroad none can be permitted to excuse themselves. Neither age nor sex is a plea for unfaithfulness.

It was a painful shock for the lad Samuel to have to tell next morning what Jehovah had spoken. No further sleep had he that night. It was his first introduction to the solemn realities of service and testimony for God in an evil world. In reply to Eli's inquiry, Samuel told him all; but he simply bowed the head, saying, "It is Jehovah, let Him do what seemeth Him good." there was no rousing up to energetic action; no real sense of the evil and dishonour of the whole sorrowful business.

This was the beginning of many revelations to Samuel. Samuel grew, and Jehovah was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground . . . And Jehovah appeared again in Shiloh: for Jehovah revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of Jehovah" (1 Sam. 3: 19-21). Had the circumstances been normal, God would have spoken to the people in and through the High Priest, according to His own appointment. But this being impossible, He spoke to and through the man with the willing ear. This is His way still. Our Lord said when giving utterance to His parables, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13: 9). Seven times in the addresses to the churches in Asia we meet with the words, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches." This is clearly an individual thing. The mass in Christendom are more than ever indifferent to the will of the Lord, and the leaders in too many cases feed their followers with lies, for the predicted apostasy comes on apace. But the man who has the willing ear shall we say, the circumcised ear?) will not fail to make advance in the knowledge of God and His word, to his own deep blessing, and to the spiritual advantage of all who are privileged to listen to his testimony, Each one of us might well pray: —

"O give me Samuel's ear —
The open ear, O Lord,
Alive and quick to hear
Each whisper of Thy word;
Like him to answer at Thy call,
And to obey Thee first of all."

The young prophet did not fail to get the respect of the people. To every exercised heart it became apparent that although God in His righteousness was judging the priesthood He was not abandoning His people. In the sovereignty of His love He had established a new link between Himself

and them in the person of Hannah's first-born. "All Israel from Dan even unto Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of Jehovah."

In his subsequent ministry of intercession, Samuel is remarkably reminiscent of Moses Jer. 15: 1), and as the forerunner of the King he is equally suggestive of John the Baptist.

The Capture of the Ark

Samuel had no part in the sorrowful doings which culminated in the loss of the ark, but it is quite impossible to pass over the disaster, while meditating upon the life of the prophet. In Darby's Translation, 1 Samuel 4: opens with the words, "What Samuel had said happened to all Israel." We thus learn that the defeat of the people, the death of the sons of Eli, and the loss of the ark were Jehovah's fulfilment of the heavy message which he gave to the temple child in the midnight revelation.

The people were utterly wrong with God, and the evil of their leaders was glaring, yet they were so insensible to their condition that they ventured upon a war with the Philistines only to be abandoned by Jehovah to calamity and disgrace. About four thousand men of Israel were slain at a place which afterwards, in happier days, became known as Ebenezer, which means, "Hitherto hath Jehovah helped us" (1 Sam. 7: 12). A faithful and compassionate God is always ready to help those who first judge themselves, and then make their humble appeal to His mercy. But fleshly pride and insensibility of heart He will lay low; Let us not forget, beloved brethren, that "Israel's God is ours," and that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom. 15: 4).

When the defeated host returned to camp, the elders said "Wherefore hath Jehovah smitten us today before the Philistines?" "Wherefore," indeed. Was not the reason apparent? Can a holy God sanction evil in His people, and also deliver them from their foes? They acknowledged Him in terms ("Jehovah hath smitten us"), but they had no real sense of having to do with Him at all.

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3: 2) is a principle of the greatest importance. To be in special relationship with God is at once deeply blessed and deeply solemn. "Begin at My sanctuary," said the God of the Old Testament (Ezek. 9: 6); "Judgement must begin at the house of God," says the God of the New (1 Peter 4: 17). If His people lose sight of what is due to Him, it is ever present to His mind, and He will not fail to judge the dishonour to His holy name.

Israel's leaders had a remedy. "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of Jehovah out of Shiloh unto us, that when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." Mark the word "it," twice repeated. It is true that the ark went before them when they crossed the Jordan, and also went with them when they compassed the walls of Jericho, but was it the ark that wrought for them on those occasions, or was it GOD? God was now forgotten, and a mere symbol had taken His place in their wayward minds. The ark was to them a mere charm or mascot.

A terrible evil is before us in this record. God displaced by an outward and visible sign — the very essence of idolatry! Even the light of the Gospel has not Preserved Christendom from this folly and sin. Baptism and the Lord's Supper — precious ordinances of divine institution, blessedly suggestive to the spiritual mind, are the very real dependence of multitudes in our day. Not these only. "Sacred" images and pictures have been brought forth on many a day of disaster (such as a volcanic eruption or an outbreak of disease), and have been paraded through the streets in order to ward off that which the People feared. Oh, the horror of it to Him Who has made Himself known in the person of His Son, and Who has withal given to men His Written word.

Israel added to the evil by bringing amongst them Hophni and Phinehas. These vile men were in charge of the sacred vessel, an affront which an indignant God was not slow to avenge.

Israel's shout of exultation when the ark arrived, and the dismay of the Philistines when they heard of it, testified that neither the one nor the other had any sense of the reality of having to do with God. The Philistines said, "God is come into the camp." They forthwith reminded themselves how Israel's mighty God had broken the might of the Egyptians, and they nerved themselves to fight as they had never fought before. But upon their own showing they were now going to fight God! In their superstitious ignorance they mistook a symbol for the very Deity itself! Only Israel's frightful condition explains the second victory, when "there was a very great slaughter: for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen." Philistine defiance would have met its just due had not God's own people needed to be taught a terrible lesson. The ark in which they trusted was taken, "and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain." In Asaph's 78th Psalm, it is recorded, He "delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand" (verse 61). The disaster was overwhelming. Could Moses and Aaron ever have believed that "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth" (Joshua 3: 11) could have become the spoil of a pagan foe?

The news of the capture of the ark caused the death of Eli. But why did he suffer it to be taken to the war? Weakness and irresolution were the ruin of the aged priest. Barnabas, one of the choicest of New Testament saints, resembled Eli in this. May God in His mercy preserve us from this snare, so congenial to ease-loving nature. May He grant us grace to put the foot down firmly where divine interests are at stake.

Yet Eli was at heart a pious man. It was the mention of the ark of God rather than the slaughter of his sons which overcame him. In like manner, it was the loss of the ark which brought premature labour and death upon the wife of Phinehas. Whatever the character of her husband, she formed part of the true hearted remnant of that day. "Ichabod," said she, when her son was born, "the glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken." The blood-stained mercy-seat was in the hands of the enemy; on what ground did Israel now stand with God? Both Eli and the dying woman felt that everything was ruined.

Do we feel dishonour to the name of the Lord, and the condition of God's people, as deeply as these devout souls of old! Let us exercise our hearts and consider.

The Arkless Tabernacle

The ark having gone into captivity, Israel's whole religious system lay in ruins. The ark was the visible symbol of Jehovah dwelling in grace in the midst of His people. No more expressive type of the promised Christ existed in Old Testament days. The materials of which it was made spoke of His Person; the Shittim wood of His incorruptible humanity, and the gold of His deity. The mercy-seat spoke of His great propitiatory sacrifice accepted by God, for the atoning blood was never absent from it; and the contents of the ark — the budding rod the pot of manna, and the tables of the Covenant — spoke of the various offices which He is graciously pleased to fill. When the tabernacle became arkless, it might justly be said that Jehovah had departed. The proper ministry of the priesthood became impossible. How could the ordinances of the Day of Atonement be observed, seeing that the throne of Jehovah was no longer in the sanctuary to receive the sprinkled blood! Yet this was the basis of all God's dealings with His people. The foundations were now truly out of course, to the intense grief of every pious soul in the nation.

Be it noted that the ark never returned to the tabernacle. It found no resting place again until Solomon built the temple. Thus there was no resumption of proper priestly services until the reigns of both Saul and David had run their course.

Israel's loss was judgement to the foe. The Philistines in their pride of heart carried the ark into the temple of their fish-god Dagon. In their benighted minds Dagon had triumphed over Jehovah. But the God of Israel soon vindicated His majesty, and made His presence felt. First, Dagon fell before the ark, and then, on being set up again, was broken before it. Moreover, God plagued the inhabitants of the temple-city, Ashdod, so that they were glad to pass the ark on to Gath. Gath also suffered, so that it was removed thence to Ekron. Ekron's cry of dismay led to the suggestion to return the ark to Israel, their mode of procedure — the use of two milch kine with their calves tied up at home — making it abundantly clear that it was no mere epidemic that had broken out amongst the Philistines, but that Jehovah's hand had come down upon them.

Again Jehovah's hand went forth in judgement, this time upon His own people, for their irreverence in peering into the sacred vessel. Accordingly the ark of God had to move on again, and for many years it abode in the house of the pious Abinadab in Kirjath-jearim, to the great blessing of his household (1 Sam. 7: 1-2). These people felt they had God with them of a truth, albeit they did not confound the symbol with the reality.

The priesthood was never restored to its former position. It was never again the chief link between Jehovah and His people. The unfaithfulness of Eli and his sons not only caused the holy office to pass into the hands of another branch of Aaron's family, but it brought about the forfeiture of the exalted position which the priesthood had enjoyed since the death of Moses (see Num. 27: 18-23). When the king came upon the scene — not Saul, the man of the people's choice, but David, the man of Jehovah's choice — it was he who became the link between the people and their God, and the priesthood fell into quite a secondary place. This was foretold in 1 Samuel 2: 35 It has frequently been remarked that God never repairs a ruined order. Instead, in its place, he sets up something new — something that will yield even greater blessing to His people, and which marks also, a further development in His blessed ways.

We pass over the ruinous episode of Saul, and what do we find? The King is the prime mover in everything pertaining to the worship of God. Unlike Joshua, he did not stand before the priest, going out and coming in at his word. It was the King who proposed to bring up the ark from Kirjath-Jearim to Zion, and on that memorable occasion he danced before Jehovah clad in a linen ephod, and when the offerings had been offered, "he blessed the people in the name of Jehovah of hosts" (2 Sam. 6). Delightful type of Him, who, when all the purposes of God concerning Israel are brought to completion will bear the glory and be a priest upon His throne (Zech. 6: 13). It was the King, not the High Priest, who appointed Asaph and his brethren to minister before the ark continually; while the High Priest and his associated priests were appointed to serve at the tabernacle in Gibeon (1 Chron. 16: 37-43). When the plague came upon the nation as the result of the numbering, it was David, not the High Priest, who stood in the breach and offered sacrifice. Contrast 1 Chronicles 21: 26; with Numbers 16: 46-48. When the time came for the temple to be built, it was one king who charged another king (David and Solomon — 1 Chron. 22: 6), and the High Priest appears to have had no say in the matter. It was the king again who numbered the Levites and appointed to them their services (1 Chron. 23: 24-27), and it was he also who distributed the priests with reference to their work (1 Chron. 24: 3). The singers were separated to their service by the king and the captains of the host (1 Chron. 25: 1). In 1 Chronicles 28: 16, the chief priests are named among the chief officers of the kingdom, as if they were that only. What a transformation as compared with the days of Moses and Aaron. What a significant change in the ways

of God.

But it was long after Eli's failure before the new order was established. What was the divine provision meanwhile? Samuel. He — the man of God, "God's emergency man" — filled the gap, and became the link between Jehovah and his desolate people. Truly our God is never without resource. The erstwhile temple child entered into the mind of God about the condition of things; the ruin of everything by the unfaithfulness of man gripped his soul, and he gave himself up to a ministry of intercession (1 Sam. 7: 5, 8: 1 Sam. 12: 23). This at all times is very precious in the eyes of God. Many centuries later, when the kingly order had grievously failed, and was about to be set aside until the day of the Lord Jesus, Jehovah made reference to Samuel thus: "Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people; cast them out of My sight," etc. (Jer. 15: 1). Mark the link with Moses. When the people ruined themselves by the worship of the golden calf they were saved by Moses' pleading (Ex. 32: 33). Later, when the priestly order broke down, and ruin once more ensued, the people were maintained before God by the intercession of Samuel.

The value of a ministry of intercession thus stands divinely emphasised. It is God's delight. But this Precious ministry can only really be exercised by those who enter into God's thoughts concerning the times in which they live. Thus, those who today have before their souls the divine pattern — the Church as the Holy Spirit established it at the beginning, and who realise its utter failure as a witness for God in the world, are alone able to intelligently have dealings with God about it. But this is open to us all. May the Lord graciously increase the number of those who are spiritually able to fill Moses' and Samuel's part in these last days of the Christian era.

The Gathering at Mizpeh

The Singular position of our prophet in relation to the people of God is clearly seen in connection with the spiritual revival and national deliverance so graphically described in 1 Samuel 7.

While the ark was in Kirjath-jearim the people realised little by little the calamity which had befallen them, and how disorganised in consequence were all their relations with their God. Ultimately, "all the house of Israel lamented after Jehovah. This is truly delightful. Welcome discipline which can produce such a result! They missed God. They felt the distance that now subsisted between themselves and Him.

The twenty years referred to is not the length of time that the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim. As a matter of fact, it was there more than forty years. David in his childhood "heard" of it when living in Ephrath (Bethlehem); during his afflictions he vowed to Provide a resting place for it; when he became established upon the throne he found it (Psalm 132) and brought it up to Zion with rejoicing.

The twenty years was the period of divine working in Israel's heart, which led to the complete restoration to Jehovah that is now before us. Mark it well, it was really Jehovah they wanted, and not mere symbol, for the ark is not once mentioned in connection with the wonderful doings in Mizpeh. Israel was at that juncture spiritually in advance of multitudes in modern Christendom, with their reliance upon sacramental symbols, not to mention pictures, images, and other follies.

Jehovah had delivered His ark from the hand of the Philistines, but He had not yet delivered His people. The time had now come. Note the humiliating contrast with Joshua's day. Then the people were able to go forward, conquering and to conquer, no enemies being too Powerful for them; now their highest expectation was that they might be strengthened to cast off the yoke of but one of Canaan's many peoples. Similarly, we read in the Book of the Acts, with its story of the all-conquering Church

of God, and we lie low as we contrast it with what we behold in our own day.

Samuel's voice is now heard. "If ye do return unto Jehovah with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto Jehovah, and serve Him only: and He will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines." Observe the words, "with all your hearts" and "prepare your hearts." Note too the word "only." Nothing external or superficial could be accepted. Out of the heart are the issues of life (Prov. 4: 23), and the heart must be really reached.

We must pause here. Brethren, has our God our affections in their entirety. Do we "serve Him only"? Remember the reply of the Blessed One to the tempter in the wilderness, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4: 10). ONLY! ONLY! Has the world any place with us. Has self? Have we indeed seen the displacement of everything in the death of Christ. Paul saw this, and could say with holy enthusiasm, "This one thing I do" (Phil. 3: 13).

No deliverance came to Israel until they put away Balsam and Ashtaroth. In like manner today, if aught has been suffered to come in between our souls and God, so that the joy that once we experienced has fled, there is nothing for it but the complete abandonment of the evil, or the casting out of the intrusive thing. It is not sufficient to sing lustily at a Public meeting: —

"Revive Thy work, O Lord,
Thy mighty arm make bare."

Action — vigorous, stern action, is required. God ever waits to bless His people, and lead them on from victory to victory, but the platform must first be cleared of every offensive thing.

Samuel next summoned the nation to Mizpeh, "and I will pray for you unto Jehovah." Here is one who kept right with God during the years of Israel's deplorable declension. He did not suffer himself to be carried along by the prevailing current. Thus he was ready for service to the people of God when the time became ripe for it. Beloved Christian reader, if the whole Church of God wax cold, and turn aside from the right ways of the Lord, why should you not Personally be right with God, and so "be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work?" (2 Tim 2: 21)

The procedure at Mizpeh was remarkable. "They gathered together at Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before Jehovah, and fasted on that day, and said there, "We have sinned against Jehovah." We know of no precedent for this, but we are persuaded that the out-poured water gave pleasure to the heart of God. If there is one thing more dear than another in the Book of the Acts, it is that the Spirit of God is absolutely sovereign in His actings. What He is graciously pleased to do at one time furnishes no clue to what He may do at another. He may use Peter awhile, and then turn abruptly to Stephen. He may commission Philip, and quickly send forth Peter again. Then He calls out a new labourer in the person of Paul, and acts through him more extensively than through any other. The gift of the Spirit also to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles differs widely in its manner (Acts 2; 8: 8). With regard to the deliverance of imprisoned witnesses, on one occasion the doors were opened the same night (Acts 5: 19); on another not until the night before the promised execution (Acts 12); and on yet another, no angels were employed but an earthquake (Acts 16). Truly, "the wind bloweth where it listeth" (John 3: 8), but the Church has never learned the simple lesson, or she would never have clogged herself with routine and officialism.

The pouring out of water was the acknowledgement of utter weakness and emptiness. This figure was employed by the wise woman of Tekoah in her reasoning with David. "We are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again" (2 Sam. 14: 14). The action being altogether without

precedent serves to show that Israel perceived what was morally suitable to the circumstances of the moment. Such an acknowledgement of weakness cannot fail to bring blessing from God. In the spiritual realm, felt weakness is power, as the Apostle lets us know in 2 Corinthians 12. As Hannah also said, "they that stumbled are girded with strength" (1 Sam. 2: 4). Is it not a singular lesson to have to learn that our self-sufficiency is our undoing? God can use those who are "not anything," i.e, nothing (1 Cor. 3: 7). God alone counts, whether now or in ages past. When weakness calls Him in, all is well.

Samuel at Mizpeh is wonderfully suggestive of Him who is our all in all. As prophet, he admonished the people, as priest he offered sacrifice on their behalf; and he judged them as though he were the king. God's "Emergency man," most assuredly.

"Ebenezer" Indeed!

When God moves, Satan becomes active. A spiritual revival arouses his intense hostility. Nothing is so distasteful to him as to see the people getting right with their God, and placing themselves in a position in which He can bless them. His invariable practice is, first to endeavour to destroy the work of God, then when it becomes apparent that the thing cannot be done, he seeks to corrupt it. In the history of the Church both methods have been employed.

When the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together at Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel" (1 Sam. 7: 7). Here we have the marshalling of the hosts of the enemy, urged on by Satan, who understood better than they the significance of the happenings in Israel's camp. "And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines." Happy change from 1 Sam. 4: 1, when, in utter insensibility to their evil condition, they presumptuously provoked conflict with the foe. More happy still their language in the presence of danger. After their first defeat in Eli's day, they said, "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of Jehovah out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." Now they appeal to Samuel "Cease not to cry unto Jehovah our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines." There is a gulf of difference between "it" and "He." Moreover, they now say "Jehovah our God." The sense of relationship with Him has at last been recovered.

Woe to the enemy when he confronts a people who are wholly cast upon their God! Praying Jehoshaphat, surrounded by women and children, secured a victory over the Moabites and their confederates (2 Chron. 20: 13), greater far than his one-time million of armed men would have gained by ordinary military methods (2 Chron 17: 12-19). Hezekiah was more dangerous to the Assyrians clothed in sackcloth than if he had been clad in a coat of mail. An overwhelming disaster ensued for the insolent invader (Isa. 37). In like manner, Israel's very real dependence upon God at Mizpeh brought them a divine deliverance as remarkable as they had ever known. Let us not forget, beloved brethren, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort (or encouragement) of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15: 4).

Samuel now became the mediator between Jehovah and His people. He "took a sucking lamb and offered it for a whole burnt-offering unto Jehovah: and Samuel cried unto Jehovah for Israel, and Jehovah heard him" (1 Sam. 7: 9). The outpoured water had already testified to their sense of utter weakness; the fast was the expression of their self-abasement; the sucking lamb spoke to Jehovah of the Christ who was to come, in and through Whom alone, men are delivered and blessed. This is the only express mention of a sucking lamb being offered to Jehovah in sacrifice, and its moral suitability at this juncture is very apparent. It typified Christ as the One Who was obedient and devoted to God from His youth, offering Himself as a sweet savour on behalf of men who had nothing but wilfulness and

disobedience to show.

What lessons are here! Have we ears to hear, and hearts to understand? Is not Israel's Plight in 1 Samuel 7 a picture of the Church's forlorn condition today? Have we not sinned against our God? Have we not in large measure lost contact with the invisible and the eternal? Are we prepared to lie low before our God concerning these things? And will He not come to the help of those who take the place of self-judgement in His presence, and who plead the Name of His Christ alone?

A great deliverance ensued for Israel. The word in Isaiah 65: 24 relative to the day of Millennial blessing, "before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear," became literally true in their case. "And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel — but Jehovah thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them: and they were smitten before Israel." In the very place where they experienced their former disgraceful defeat, involving the loss of the ark, they now experience the delivering power of God. The contrast is great between their carnal shout of confidence when the ark came into the camp, and Jehovah's thunder out of the heavens. Laodicea is suggested in 1 Sam. 4; Philadelphia in 1 Sam. 7.

"Israel's God is ours." So we frequently sing, and it is blessedly true. We may, indeed, be very far down the dispensation, and the Church's darkest moments may be upon us, but deliverance and blessing await those who are willing to take a sufficiently low place at the divine feet. The Lord knows how to show Himself strong on behalf of those who put their trust in Him. Our part is to heed the call, to be "zealous and repent" (Rev. 3: 19); He will do the rest.

The victory at Ebenezer left no room for human boasting. It was Jehovah's thunder that overwhelmed the enemy; Israel had but to Pursue them, and complete their ruin. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1: 30). With becoming gratitude, the people erected their memorial stone between Mizpeh and Shen, saying, "Hitherto hath Jehovah helped us." The Philistines gave no more trouble until the unfaithfulness of Israel's chosen king furnished the opportunity, when again God let them loose upon the guilty nation. The very cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored. Peace prevailed all round, not with the Philistines only. The people were sustained by Samuel's intercession. Who can estimate the value of a man of prayer, whether in times ancient or modern?

Prophet and Judge

An interesting picture of Samuel's general manner of life is afforded us in. 1 Samuel 7: 15-17 "And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places. And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto Jehovah." The utter collapse of the old order in Israel is clearly seen. The tabernacle was in the land, and doubtless some successor of Eli, with his Aaronic associates, exercised priestly functions therein, but it is all completely ignored in the passage before us.

Samuel lived in Ramah, which means "heights." There, "above the restless world that wars below," he built an altar for himself, where he enjoyed hallowed communion with Jehovah. It was as if patriarchal conditions had returned (Gen. 12: 7; Gen. 26: 25). From Ramah, Samuel went forth from time to time instructing and doing justice amongst the people of God, helping to put things right here and there as opportunity offered. But where was the priest, whose moral responsibilities are so plainly shown in Leviticus 10: 8-11; Malachi 2: 7? He is omitted from the record as though he had no

existence.

Samuel's life was characterised by intercession, and the value of it is emphasised in Psalm 99: 6: "Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His name; they called upon Jehovah, and He answered them." The power of it is referred to again just before the people were swept out of the land. "Then," said Jehovah unto me, "though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people; cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth" (Jer. 15: 1).

Acts 3: 22 speaks of Samuel as the first of a line of prophets in Israel. Although there was no ordered succession of them,* as with kings and priests, prophets were never lacking from Samuel's time onward. As the evil of the people developed, God always found for Himself an emergency man, through whom He could address their consciences. This is strikingly seen in such passages as 2 Kings 19: 2 and 2 Kings 22: 12-14. In the first case, we have Hezekiah sending two of his officers, with the elders of the priests, all covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah concerning the blasphemous words of the haughty Assyrian. Note carefully, that although "the elders of the priests" formed the bulk of the deputation, they were not sent to the High Priest of the day, but to one quite outside their order, viz, the son of Amoz. In the second case, the position is much more remarkable. Josiah, perturbed about the contents of the book which had been discovered in the temple of Jehovah, sent the High Priest himself (with others) to inquire of a woman, Huldah, the prophetess!

{*There appear to have been efforts made to create an ordered succession, for the sons of the prophets are frequently found together in groups, as though for training (2 Kings 2: 3, 41, etc.). It is possible that from amongst these arose the many false prophets who spake in the name of Jehovah, while having no message from Him. These men were greater plague to God's true Prophets than the avowed prophets of pagan deities (Jer. 28). The sovereignty of God, in His choice of instruments, is clearly seen both in Old and New Testament times, but the desire to organise and systematise is inherent in the minds of men, to the hindrance of the testimony of God.}

There is a great principle in all this. It is not officialism that counts with God, but piety. Not through the great ecclesiastics of Christendom is God pleased to speak today to His people's hearts and consciences, but through far humbler souls, who walk before Him, trembling at His word, and who seek to learn His mind and will therefrom. A man may be "on the oversight" (as some express it) and yet not be one through whom God can speak in the spirit of the prophet to His saints. Shall not both reader and writer seek to be a Samuel?

Samuel seems to have made some preparations for the new order that Jehovah meant to introduce when the Kingdom was established, for he dedicated treasure to maintain the house of Jehovah, as David did soon after him (1 Chron. 26: 28). It is interesting to observe also that from him sprang some of those who led the praises of Israel when the service of song was set up in the temple (1 Chron. 6: 33).

We have thus a pious soul, entering with spiritual intelligence into the circumstances of the times, standing apart from the evils which disgraced the people, maintaining his own soul in blissful touch with God, and making ceaseless intercession for his failing brethren. What an example is here ! Need we wonder that this singularly devoted servant of Jehovah has his name recorded by the Spirit in the list of worthies in Hebrews 11. The memory of such a one is imperishable.

The Demand for a King

It is deeply sorrowful now to discover failure in the man of God, especially when we remember

the terrible object-lesson which had come before him in Eli and his sons. But where is there not failure in poor frail flesh? Only in Christ has God seen from first to last that which has given joy to His heart; and, blessed be His name, in Him will be gathered up all the broken threads of human history at the finish. All that Adam, Noah, Moses, Aaron, David, etc., should have been, and were not (albeit they were all types of Christ) will be realised at the end in God's Second Man and Last Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Samuel beginning to feel the weight of his years, "made his sons judges over Israel" (1 Sam. 8: 1). No mention of any word from Jehovah. and no record of any prayer on the part of the prophet! Yet this was the man who was conspicuous in his day for his powerful intercession! But why appoint his sons? Moses did not so. When he felt that his term of service was drawing to a close, he said, "Let Jehovah, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in, that the congregation of Jehovah be not as sheep which have no shepherd" (Num. 27: 15-17). This is beautiful, and it shows that a true shepherd heart was found in Moses. But he did not venture to appoint anyone, neither did he suggest his own sons for the service. Indeed, he willingly acquiesced in Jehovah's choice of Joshua. Why did the thought of family succession enter the mind of Samuel? Had not the sovereignty of God been strikingly manifested in his own case when the successional priesthood was in utter failure? In the Book of Acts, the principle of Divine sovereignty in our own era is repeatedly shown. Stephen and Philip were chosen by the Assembly in Jerusalem to look after widows, and were quickly called of God into the very forefront of the testimony, the one in Jerusalem, and the other in Samaria; Barnabas and Saul were selected by the Holy Spirit from amongst a group of prophets and teachers in Antioch to go forth and evangelise the Gentile world. Apollos was abruptly brought upon the scene quite apart from all other labourers; and so on. This is the way of the Spirit of God, but how feebly has Christendom understood it! Successional order has been the established ecclesiastical principle, to the damage of God's saints, and to the hindrance of the work of God.

Yet Samuel's institution of his sons into the judgeship was well meant. His one desire was to make adequate provision for God's people when he himself could serve them no longer. But did not Jehovah know the age of His servant? And did He not care for His people. Let us remember that the people belonged to God, not to Samuel. Do we sometimes feel anxious about the future of those amongst whom we labour? Are we disposed to make provision for them according to our own thoughts? Let us learn the lesson of Samuel's blunder. Creature hands need not be stretched out to support the ark; God is quite able to take care of it Himself (2 Sam. 6: 6). Remarkably, the man who spoke of getting old lived nearly fifty years longer. He lived to see his sons run their course, and pass into obscurity he saw Saul rise and fall; he anointed David to be king in his room; and he afterwards sheltered him when driven from home by his would-be destroyer. It is important to emphasise these facts. The sin of the people in demanding a king is obvious but it must not be forgotten that the error of the man of God contributed to it. Had Samuel gone quietly on with his service ministering to the people with such strength as God might be pleased to give, the episode of Saul, with all its disastrous results, might never have been. He Who kept Moses strong and vigorous until he was 120 years old (Deut. 34: 7) could have sustained Samuel until God's time arrived for the establishment of the new order. We have already seen that it was God's intention to give Israel a king, and apparently Samuel might have continued to serve the people until David — the man of Jehovah's choice — was ready to occupy the throne. Brethren, let us get on with our ministry as helped by God, and leave the tomorrow of His work to Him. The Head of the body, the Church, is still enthroned on high, and from His own hand and heart gifts will continue to be given to His saints on earth until the need is no more.

It is sorrowful to learn that Samuel's sons "walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgement" (1 Sam. 8: 3). One wonders that the sons of one so pre-eminently godly should be so evil. With the lessons of Eli and his sons before him, Samuel surely sought that his own household should be a true testimony for God. Is it possible that his going on circuit from year to year explains the breakdown. May God have mercy upon the families of those who, in our own day, are called to travel hither and thither proclaiming the Word of God.

The elders of Israel now waited upon Samuel in Ramah, and said unto him, "Behold, thou art old and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." The bearing of the man of God at this moment was delightful. There was no word of resentment at the charges made against his sons, neither was there any effort put forth to bolster up the order that he had so mistakenly established. "Samuel prayed unto Jehovah." How different everything would have been had he prayed before he made his sons judges. Brethren, is it our holy habit to take everything to God in prayer? Have we really learned that we are utterly dependent upon Him for every step?

The hand of Satan is surely discernible in Israel's demand for a king, and especially in the wilfulness with which they persisted in the demand after the seriousness of it was pointed out to them. The malignant adversary is ever seeking to forestall God — for mischief of course. The divine purpose concerning a king had now been revealed; Satan would then furnish a king. In like manner he will bring forward the Beast of Revelations 13: 1 just before God's time comes to bring out His King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But whatever the measure of forbearance, God always has His way at the last, and every purpose of His love for His own glory, and for the blessing of men is carried into full effect. What rest to the heart to be assured of this.

Saul and the Asses

The man of the people's choice — the man who personated their carnal tastes — now appears. Remarkably, he first comes before us in connection with asses, in striking

contrast with the man of Jehovah's choice, who had the care of sheep, and lambs (Psalm 78: 70-72). Even the asses Saul lost, and although they were ultimately recovered, it was not he who found them (1 Sam. 9: 20). David, on the other hand, at serious risk to himself, recovered a lamb from two ferocious enemies, a lion and a bear (1 Sam. 17: 37). How suggestive are the lessons here! The ass is the symbol of poor, turbulent flesh, "For vain man would be wise, though man be born a wild ass's colt" (Job 12: 12); and the offspring of man in Israel had to be redeemed with a lamb equally with the offspring of the ass (Ex. 13: 13). Sheep and lambs, on the contrary, are the symbols throughout the Word of God of God's own true people. For these, Saul had neither the heart nor the fitness to care. A captain he might be; a shepherd he was not.

He came too of Benjamin — a tribe notorious for its stubbornness in evil (Judges 19: 21), and now the smallest of Israel's tribes in consequence (1 Sam. 9: 21). His name means asked, for he was the answer to the people's carnal demand. He thus represents the flesh in a remarkable way; but was such a one really fitted to curb the restless evil of a revolted people? Flesh can never put down flesh; have we learned this in our Assembly difficulties? But that which flesh can only aggravate, the power and grace of the Holy Spirit can entirely remove. How often the Church of God has proved this?

Saul seemed unaware of the existence of Samuel, and of the wonderful ways of God in connection with him. In this he reminds us of Belshazzar, who, in his moment of stress, seemed ignorant of the existence of Daniel, spite of the fact that Nebuchadnezzar, his father had some very

remarkable experiences in connection with him (Dan. 5: 11). But: then Belshazzar was a pagan, while Saul belonged to a people in relationship with Jehovah. The fact is, flesh is never interested in what God is doing, nor in the instruments that He is using. Flesh may hear of them in a languid sort of way, but no impression is made upon the heart. In reality, Jehovah was more interested in Samuel at that moment than in any other person in the world, for he was the man who stood before Him on behalf of His erring people continually. Yet to Saul he appears to have been unknown!

In his difficulty. Saul had apparently no, notion of inquiring of God. It is delightful to us to know that our God is interested in small matters as well as in great. The true child of faith today, if he lost his asses, would not consider the thing too trivial for the Divine notice, for are we not invited in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make our requests known to God? (Phil. 4: 6). But Saul was favoured with an excellent servant, who told him there was a man of God in the city to which they were approaching, and he suggested that they should consult him about their journey. Servants played an important part in the blessing of Naaman, the Syrian (2 Kings 5), from which we may learn never to despise the counsel and ministry of even the humblest messengers.

But Saul had a difficulty. Would not Samuel require payment for his services? "Behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we" Their resources were well nigh exhausted, for they had been some time from home. The servant replied, "Behold, I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver, that will I give to the man of God to tell us our way. It is hard for poor benighted flesh to rise above the thought of payment. Grace is foreign to its mind. God as a giver is inconceivable to flesh. Yet it is in this blessed character that all the objects of His favour know Him. He gave His only begotten Son (the basis of all other giving); with Him He freely gives us all things; from the same generous grace proceeds the gift of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20: 35). But although flesh always thinks of God as demanding something (read especially Matt. 25: 24), it never considers that He should expect much. The best that can be said for Saul's coin is that it was at least a larger sum than the modern small coin with which Christendom's ecclesiastical treasurers are all too painfully familiar.

But it might have occurred to Saul, had he possessed the least idea of the greatness of God, and of the moral dignity of the man who represented Him, that it would have been more becoming to crave a favour than endeavouring to Purchase the information that he required for "a fourth part of a shekel of silver." But flesh is as insensible to moral propriety where God is concerned as it is to grace! The conduct of Saul and his servant suggests that neither the one nor the other had any real sense of having to do with God. This did not augur well for one who was soon to be Israel's King.

Saul's visit to Samuel has furnished us with a glimpse of the usual mode of life of the man of God. But first let us notice the two designations "prophet" and "seer." "He that is now called a prophet was before time called a seer." Put quite simply, the Seer sees something (Ezek. 13: 3); and the Prophet tells something, for it has been frequently remarked that the Prophet is rather a "forth-teller" than a "foreteller." Brethren, what do we see? Can we really say, "We see Jesus, Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death?" (Heb. 2: 9). are we in the good of our Lord's words in John 16: 14, 15 concerning the Holy Spirit. "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine and shall show it unto you"! If the risen and exalted Christ fills our soul's vision, and if by the Spirit's power there lies spread out before us that new world of life and glory of which He is the Centre and the Sun, then we have something to tell. In that case, "we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen" (John 3: 11). Let us seek to be, not preachers or lecturers merely, but spiritually Seers and

prophets.

The Manner of the King

Why did it not occur to the elders of Israel that as Samuel's sons had proved a disappointment to them, the King might be no better? Is a change of government, whether in times ancient or modern, a necessary cure for every ill? Why turn from flesh in one form to flesh in another? are we not sometimes as foolish as they when difficulties arise? "It is better to trust in Jehovah than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in Jehovah than to put confidence in princes" (Psalm 118: 8, 9). Have both reader and writer learned this simple lesson?

In answer to Samuel's prayer, Jehovah laid before him the true nature of the people's demand. It was not so much the rejection of Samuel and his sons as the rejection of Jehovah Himself. The people had grown weary of the theocracy. The wonderful privilege of being in direct relationship with God, and of being under His direct rule was nothing in their eyes, and they were willing to have done with it, and copy the practice of the nations. In like manner has the Church long lost the sense of the exceeding blessedness of union with the invisible Head in heaven, and of the guidance and control of the invisible Spirit in God's house on earth. Hence the insistence on all hands upon the necessity for a clergy, chairmen, and others to take visible control amongst God's people.

"Jehovah said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me and served other gods, so do they also unto thee" (1 Sam. 8: 7, 8). Jehovah thus shows that the demand for a king was but the climax of centuries of discontent with the position in which His grace had set them. They appear to have been confronted at the time with the threat of an Ammonite invasion (1 Sam. 12: 12). Forgetting altogether the lesson of Ebenezer (1 Sam. 7: 12), they turn, not to God, but to the arm of flesh. We observe something similar in Judges 11. There also the Ammonites were assailing them, and in their distress they turned to Jephthah for aid. When will men — when will we — learn to turn to God alone in the difficulties and perils of life?

"Like all the nations" (verse 5) were really painful words from the lips of Jehovah's chosen people. It was their glory, could they have appreciated it, that they were not like the nations. Remember what Balaam said concerning them in the first of his four parables. "It is a people that shall dwell alone; and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23: 9, K.V.). The people of God have always found it difficult to maintain the position of separation to God. The Church has failed as signally in this as Israel. What is now called Christendom is a sorry compound of paganism, Judaism, and Christianity. The arrangements and practices of the religious mass are modelled after the world's pattern, and are as unlike the charming simplicity of the days of the apostles as they could possibly be. Happy are they, however few and humble, who have learned the true nature and character of the Church of God and who seek to walk apart from all that is of the world, the flesh, and the devil. How blessed it will be at the last if the Lord is able to say to any of us, "Thou hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name" (Rev. 3: 8).

In answer to the people's demand for a king, Samuel gave them Jehovah's message, wherein is set forth in vivid terms that man in power is. There is monotony in the six times repeated words "he will take." Their sons would be required for the army, their daughters must become his cooks, the produce of their fields and of their flocks would be demanded for the king's support, and so on. It could scarcely be otherwise. How else could the dignity and majesty of the Kingdom be maintained? In the highest

days of Israel's prosperity this became intolerable. Accordingly we hear them saying to the son of Solomon, "thy father made our yoke grievous" (1 Kings 12: 4). The greater the glory of the Kingdom, the greater the burden upon the people of necessity.

It is refreshing to turn from the description of man's king in 1 Samuel 8 to the gracious words of God's king in Psalm 132. Speaking of Zion He says, "I will abundantly bless her provision, I will satisfy her poor with bread." In the day of John 6 He gave them a taste of this. Seeing the famished multitudes around Him, He opened His bountiful hand, and with five barley loaves and two small fishes, He satisfied the need of five thousand men: besides women and children, with twelve basketfuls of fragments left over. Do we wonder that the people sought to take Him by force, and make Him King? How delightful for men, after ages of kingly rapacity and oppression, to have found One Who could be a giver to His people! But neither from men nor from Satan would the Christ of God receive the Kingdom: from the hand of God alone will He take it. Then will commence that long era of prosperity and peace which so filled the mind and heart of the writer of Psalm 72 and which constrained him to conclude with an outburst of praise: "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His Glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen" (Ps. 72: 18, 19. No wonder he added, "the prayers of David the son of Jesse, are ended." From the standpoint of an earthly saint, what could he ask beyond this?

The Coming of Saul

Saul now enters Samuel's home city inquiring, "Is the Seer here?" Jehovah has already prepared His servant for his coming, just as, at a later date, Peter was divinely prepared for the coming of Cornelius' messengers (Acts 10: 19-20). Jehovah had even told Samuel the hour Saul might be expected (1 Sam. 9: 16). Truly, "Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off" (Psalm 139: 2).

The new king had arrived, and Samuel, although knowing how utterly foreign to the will of God the whole business was, must put no difficulties in the way. The man of Israel's choice must be anointed, and take his place at their head. No king ever commenced his reign under more favourable circumstances than Saul. Both Jehovah and Samuel were at hand for his counsel and help if he could appreciate it. Thus the break-down, when it came (and it came all too soon), was altogether the fault of the King himself. The goodness of God in thus placing all His resources at the disposal of the representative of the people's self-will is very wonderful, and might well read us a salutary lesson. For it cannot be denied that we sometimes pursue a vastly different course ourselves when things arise that we are unable to approve. A spirit of dogged opposition is apt to manifest itself, which utterly defeats the end that we really have at heart. Oh, that we could leave matters more completely with God that He may work as seems good in His sight For He never fails to come, sooner or later, to the help of faith.

The maidens told Saul and his companion that they would presently meet Samuel going to offer sacrifice in the high place. These words arrest us, remembering as we do the instructions given in Deuteronomy 12 and elsewhere, that Israel when come into the land were not to offer sacrifices wherever they pleased, but instead were to bring all their offerings to the place which Jehovah their God should choose to cause His name to dwell there. Shiloh was the divinely appointed centre at the first (Jer. 7: 12). But everything was now in disorder, through the people's sin. The Tabernacle indeed stood where Joshua established it, but Jehovah had forsaken it. The ark was elsewhere, so that whatever priestly functions the family of Aaron might be performing on behalf of the people, there was certainly no carrying in of the blood of the sin-offering for sprinkling on the mercy-seat, yet this was the very

foundation of all God's dealings with the nation. The new centre had not yet been named. Zion came into view when David became King. It formed part of the new order of things which God then established in sovereign grace. When the temple was built in the days of Solomon, Jehovah deigned once more to dwell amongst His people, filling the sanctuary with the glory of His presence. But for the time being, the pious must walk with God somewhat Abrahamically, and this is what Samuel did. In all simplicity he lived, enjoying personal communion with his God, and serving His failing people as opportunity offered. It was, of course, a very different thing to worship at high places at a later date when the Temple was in being and owned by God. Yet this transgression became common, and even some of the best of the kings tolerated it (2 Kings 12: 3; 2 Kings 14: 4; 2 Kings 15: 4, etc.). It was really serious neglect of the written word of God.

Unless under the stress of most exceptional circumstances, we must not individualise ourselves today. The Church is Christ's body and the Spirit's habitation, and the fellowship of saints is an unspeakable privilege. Indeed, it is one of the outstanding privileges of the dispensation. Those whose consciences are really exercised concerning the will of God may in some instances find fellowship very restricted, but the Lord has graciously said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18: 20). The reality and the sweetness of this has been abundantly proved. But if it is really so that in some locality a faithful soul finds not even one willing to walk with him in the right ways of the Lord, he must not "follow a multitude to do evil" (Ex. 23: 2). In such a case, he must be prepared to stand alone, assured that God will not forget him. But such a path calls for special grace, and needs to be trodden with the deepest possible humility and self abnegation, lest Elijah's "I, even I only, am left" develop in the soul (1 Kings 19: 14). Nothing could be more spiritually disastrous.

"When Samuel saw Saul, Jehovah said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over My people" (1 Sam. 9: 17) Had Samuel remembered these words when he went to the house of Jesse at a later date, he would not have said so hastily when he saw Eliab's fine physique, Surely Jehovah's anointed is before Him" (1 Sam. 16: 16). He blundered. Eliab was not Jehovah's anointed. One commanding personality was already in failure; Jehovah was not in search of another; the ruddy shepherd lad was more to His taste. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth."

Samuel at once told Saul two things: — (1) that the asses were found, and (2) that he was the destined King over Israel. Such words from a perfect stranger, to whom he had as yet addressed no Inquiry, were a testimony to Saul that he had to do with God from Whom nothing could be hid. Asses and Kingdom were both of interest to Him. What a help it would have been to him in after years had he remembered this! Do we remember it At the feast that followed, Samuel bade the cook set the shoulder of the sacrifice (the Peace Offering) before Saul. What a lesson for his soul, could he have read it as a type, a shoulder speaks of the strength of Christ, upon which faith counts and feeds Paul was in the reality of it when he said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4: 13) Saul was about to have tremendous responsibilities placed upon him he would need more than creature strength to carry them aright for the glory of God, and for the blessing of His people. But no man seeks the support of divine grace until he has learned his own nothingness and insufficiency. Poor Saul never at any moment got down to this.

Zelzah, Tabor, and Gilgal.

At break of day Samuel took Saul apart to the housetop, and said, "Stand thou still awhile, that I may show thee the word of God" (1 Sam. 9: 27) Thus God's own voice inaugurated a new day for

Israel, but was it to be a better day? Jehovah had said the day before to Samuel, "Thou shalt anoint him to be prince over My people Israel, that he may save My people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon My people, because their cry is come unto Me." The tender compassion of the heart of God comes out here. Whatever the waywardness of His people, however badly they may requite His goodness, He only desires their blessing. Remark, Israel said, "Give us a king to judge us" (1 Sam. 8: 6), Jehovah says, "anoint him that he may save My people." Alas for the experiment. Whatever other foes Saul might overthrow, he was helpless in the presence of the particular enemy from which he should have delivered the nation. At the last the Philistines had his head!

Samuel anointed Saul, and gave him the first kiss of allegiance. He forthwith sent him on a journey as instructive in its way as that of Elijah on the day of his translation. He was to meet "signs" (1 Sam. 10: 7); but was he able to read them, and profit by them? The Lord once said to His disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear." The mass around them were gross of heart, dull of hearing, and their eyes were closed. The Lord also said, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13: 9-16). Are our eyes and ears spiritually alert in this day? Are we able to enter into the mind of the Lord, and so walk intelligently in a dark world?

Samuel told Saul in advance who he would meet, and what should take place at Zelzah, Tabor, etc. An homely but valuable lesson for the new King. Would that he had learnt it Let us remember that we too have to do with a God from Whom nothing is hid, and with Whom there is no yesterday and no tomorrow. The knowledge of this gives rest to the heart, for it assures us that however surprising some of the circumstances of life are to us, they are not surprising to our God.

At Zelzah, by Rachel's sepulchre, Saul would meet two men, who would say to him, "The asses which thou wentest to seek are found and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son?" The man who had been labouring in vain would thus learn that everything had been done apart from him, and should also be assured of his father's yearning after him, and this at the place which spoke of death and resurrection. When Rachel was dying she called her son Benoni — "son of my sorrow," for she saw the death side of things, but Jacob called him Benjamin — "son of my right hand," speaking of life and power (Gen. 35: 18). He who would rightly serve God must first suffer these lessons to penetrate his soul. Our own works are worse than futile—God calls them "dead works": the death and resurrection of Christ is all-sufficient to meet our deepest need; and the Father's heart yearns over every lost one as Luke 15 assures us. These are the great fundamental principles of Christianity.

Passing from Zelzah, Saul would meet three men at the oak of Tabor (see R.V.) Going up to God at Bethel. Happy proof that although everything was as wrong in Israel as it could be, there was still a remnant who clave to God. Bethel speaks of God's faithfulness; it was there that He told erring Jacob He would never leave him nor forsake him (Gen. 28: 15). From the sepulchre (death) Saul passes on to the oak (strength). What strength it is to one who would walk and please God in an evil day, to know that God has preserved for Himself at least a few who are able to lay hold upon Him, counting upon His faithfulness! Elijah missed this, hence his complaint at Horeb, "I, even I only, am left." The despondent prophet was soon given to know that there were seven thousand besides himself who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19: 13-18) Somehow the prophet had overlooked them!

Two men met Saul at Zelzah. Two is the number of testimony, and thank God, the testimony is adequate that He Who died for our sins is risen again. At the oak of Tabor, three men came before him. The thought of fellowship is here. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18: 20). The three men were not merely going up to Bethel, they were "going

up to God." Is the Lord's presence in the midst the paramount thought with us when we assemble with our brethren? Are we able to see beyond the company to the invisible, Faithful Lord?

Faith was not quite extinct in Israel, nor is faith quite extinct today, although the predicted apostasy is now very near. Each of the three men whom Saul met was laden with good things, "One carrying three kids, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine." Here is sufficiency indeed, in which Saul was invited to share. The kids speak of Christ in death; the loaves, of Christ incarnate; and the wine, of His precious blood. The two or three who may come together in any given place today, in dependence upon the Lord may count upon being fed. We share God's good things together. Holding the Head, "all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col. 2: 19)

Thus refreshed by the fellowship of pious men, Saul pursued his journey, and presently he found himself in the presence of Israel's most dangerous enemy. "After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, which is the garrison of the Philistines." The enemy encamped upon "the hill of God" — what a condition of things. We also must expect to meet the power of the enemy, and operating, not only outside, but also amongst those who "profess and call themselves Christians." But Saul would meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place (note, "Two" at Zelzah, "three" at Tabor; "a company" now), with instruments of music — "a psaltery, a tabret, a pipe, and a harp." Remarkable. this! Music and song in the presence of the enemy. Why not? The enemy's power is serious, but it need not dismay us. The prophets were prophesying, and when Saul met them, the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him, and he prophesied also. Thus, as an offset to the devil's working, there is the power of the Holy Spirit. John reminds us of this when warning us against false prophets and evil spirits; he says, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4: 4). The victory is thus with God and His own, but meanwhile we must walk in humble dependence upon the indwelling Spirit. Only thus can we sing in the midst of danger, and only thus can we be preserved.

The lesson for Saul was "God is with thee" (1 Sam. 10: 7). What king ever had so favourable a commencement to his career? The Holy Spirit, not dwelling within him, but coming upon him as in the case of the soothsayer Balaam (Num. 24: 2); ever available for his help could he have appreciated it. Alas, for the hopelessness of flesh! Every divine provision is in vain. "Ye must be born anew" (John 3: 7).

Saul's present journey finished at Gilgal, the place of Israel's first encampment, when the sharp knives of circumcision were freely used (Joshua 5). This is the lesson of self-mortification, and no one can render any service to God, be it Saul or any other, who has left unlearned this great elementary lesson. Let Colossians 3 be carefully and prayerfully read, and let us humbly ask ourselves before God how far we have trained ourselves to carry out its solemn instructions.

Saul was still to be dependent upon Samuel; thus he was instructed to wait at Gilgal seven days, until the man of God arrived, when burnt offerings and peace offerings should be duly offered. Waiting times are a sore test for restless flesh. Two years later, a similar waiting time was the undoing of Saul (1 Sam. 13: 12). Patience! Patience! Patience. Everywhere pressed in the New Testament as the most necessary of lessons for souls to learn who would walk with God, and serve Him here below. (Rom. 5: 3 James 1: 3; 2 Cor. 12: 12; 2 Cor. 6: 4; 2 Tim 4: 10)

The Lot at Mizpeh

The place where Israel gathered with contrition and fasting, which resulted in an overwhelming

victory over their most dangerous foe (1 Sam. 7), was again the gathering point for the people that they might have introduced to them the King whom they had demanded (1 Sam. 10: 17-27). Samuel put the position very faithfully before them. They had by their demand rejected Jehovah their God who brought them out from the land of Egypt and who had saved them continuously out of all their adversities and tribulations. Thus it was not merely the setting aside of their faithful monitor Samuel; it was the setting aside of their God. The theocracy was at an end until the coming in power of the Lord Jesus. Israel henceforth was to be "like all other nations." Low ground indeed for the elect people of Jehovah. But it is ever sadly true that the people of God prefer to walk on lower ground than that which God has marked out for them. Where are we with regard to this?

But matters must go forward now. Accordingly the people were to present themselves before Jehovah by their tribes and by their thousands that the lot might be taken. This was necessary in order that no questions should be raised afterwards. It was true that Jehovah had looked out for them just such a man as they desired; and It was also a fact that the prophet had already anointed him, but not until the Mizpeh gathering did any public dealing take place. The lot was the familiar appeal of the people to God, settling all controversy. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah." (Prov. 16: 33) The last mention of the lot in Scripture is in connection with the appointment of Matthias to fill Judas' place in the apostolic band (Acts 1: 26). The Scriptures being now complete, and the Holy Spirit being in personal residence in the Church on earth, the lot has ceased to have any place in the ways of God.

As the lot proceeded, first the tribe of Benjamin was taken, then the family of Matri, and finally Saul the son of Kish. And then the man could not be found! Diligent search having failed to discover him, Jehovah was inquired of, who told them, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff (baggage). This was scarcely kingly dignity, neither was it true modesty. It was rather hypocrisy. Flesh is ever insincere. It hides itself when it should stand forth, and it makes itself very evident when it should be entirely out of sight. We see this sadly illustrated in two of the choicest saints in Bible history. Moses in the Old Testament and Peter in the New. Moses was hasty enough when he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand, but painfully slow and unwilling when called of God to go into Pharaoh's presence, and demand the release of His people: (Ex. 2: 12; Ex. 4: 10). Peter was bold enough in the garden laying about him with his sword, but he was cowardice itself when amongst the servant-maids in the High Priests Palace (John 18.). Never under any circumstances can flesh be trusted to do the right thing for God. It is one of the characteristics of the Christian that he has "no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3: 3). When Saul was at last found, "When he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward." To the carnal mind of the people this was admirable, and the earth rang with their shout, "God save the king." We are reminded of another Benjamite, remarkably bearing the same name as Israel's first king, who was strikingly conspicuous amongst his fellows. Harken to his words. "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more; circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil. 3: 4, 6). Yet more — "I profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1: 14) But one sight of Christ showed him the worthlessness of it all, and he was content to lay all his honour in the dust. Having learned that with God nothing counts but Christ, henceforward nothing but Christ counted with him. Happy man!

"Then Samuel told the people the manner of the Kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before Jehovah. And Samuel sent the people away, every man to his house." The book became the

standing record, useful indeed when the people became unfaithful in their new position. In like manner God keeps His book today in which is recorded everything relating to us all, and which will be opened to us, as it were, at the Judgement Seat of Christ.

Saul commenced well. He made no effort to assert himself. At the moment he sought no pageantry, but went quietly home to his house and to his farm. A few men "whose hearts God had touched" went with him. Certain factious spirits spoke of him with contempt, "but he held his peace." Samuel, we may be assured, went home to pray. The people might be jubilant but his heart felt solemn and sad. A serious position had been created, the gravity of which Israel was too dull to understand.

The Deliverance of Jabesh-Gilead

Saul's first opportunity to distinguish himself came when peril developed for the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead. The Ammonite King besieged the place, and in response to the people's appeal for terms, he proposed to thrust out all their right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel (1 Sam. 11).

Numbers 32 comes to mind here, and the singular request of the two and a half tribes to Moses. Jordan had not yet been crossed, the real enemies of Jehovah and His people had still to be overthrown, yet these tribes sought a portion for themselves where they were. The place was the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, and in their eyes was good for cattle. Material prosperity for themselves, not the glory of God, was the governing motive in their request. "Wherefore," said they, "if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan." Moses was deeply grieved, for he personally longed to go over, and participate in the goodly inheritance that a gracious God had searched out for His people. Nevertheless he granted the tribes what they asked for.

Jordan is a familiar type of death, but not (as supposed by some) the death of the body, but the death of Christ as applied experimentally to ourselves while still "in the body pent." Thus the Apostle says in (Colossians 2: 20, "dead with Christ," and in chap. 3: 1, "risen with Christ." Have we really accepted this position? If we have, then we are already in our soul's consciousness across Jordan. We realise union with Christ in the heavenly places, and we know something of the sweetness of the Apostle's marvellous outburst in Ephesians 1: 3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ."

It is a sorrowful fact, however, that in all ages the people of God have been willing to settle down with something seriously short of the calling of God for them. Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh wished to make their home in the land of Gilead, and many of God's true saints today are satisfied to regard themselves as still belonging to man's order of things, albeit they gratefully acknowledge their indebtedness to Jesus and His blood for their deliverance from eternal ruin.

But to live on the wrong side of Jordan is dangerous. The two and a half tribes experienced this frequently, for in troublous times they were the first to meet the assault of the invader, and they were the first to be led away captive by the King of Assyria (2 Kings 15: 29). The men of Jabesh-Gilead were now in sore trouble.

World-bordering is perilous for our souls in this age. It exposes us unnecessarily to the enemy. We are only safe as we take our place definitely outside everything here, as dead to it. When our minds are really set upon things above, with the risen Christ as our sole object, we are proof against the seductions of the world and the devil. A position of compromise, once accepted, lays us open to trouble at every turn.

Nahash the Ammonite had apparently the most profound contempt for the people of God. When he proposed to put out the right eyes of the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel, and furthermore, when he granted them seven days respite to seek help if they could obtain it, it is evident that he considered the nation utterly impotent. To such a condition had Israel's unfaithfulness reduced them in the eyes of their neighbours. How blessed to read, by way of contrast, what is recorded of the early Church — "of the rest durst no man join himself to them, but the people magnified them" (Acts 5: 13). This effect was produced by the manifest presence and power of God operating amongst the saints.

But God is ever merciful to His own, whatever sorrows and complications we may bring upon ourselves by our folly. Accordingly the Spirit of God came upon Saul, and all Israel was summoned to go "forth after Saul and after Samuel," and so complete a victory was granted "that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together." Oh, the goodness of our faithful God, Who, whatever the fickleness and evil of His people, never forgets them in their hour of need!

Saul did well in the moment of his triumph. When the people suggested to Samuel that the men who had said that Saul should not reign over them should be put to death, the new King in his clemency said: "There shall not a man be put to death this day: for today Jehovah hath wrought salvation in Israel." He exercised patience towards certain children of Belial in 1 Sam. 10: 27; he showed clemency in 1 Sam. 11: 13, and he acknowledged Jehovah in the great deliverance that the nation had experienced. Such was the fair start of the King of Israel's choice. But, alas, for flesh; who can trust it? It was not long ere its evil was fully manifested and the new Kingdom brought to ruin.

Samuel invited the people to go forth with him to Gilgal and renew the Kingdom there. Sacrifices of peace-offerings were offered before Jehovah, and "there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly." Gilgal was the place of the people's first encampment when they entered the land under Joshua, and to which they repeatedly returned in his day. There the sharp knives of circumcision were used, typical of the practical application of death to every working of the flesh. It was fitting therefore that Israel should resort thither after their great victory over the Ammonites. If Saul and the people could have entered into the spiritual significance of the place, and had walked before God accordingly, their whole subsequent history would have been different from what it was.

In like manner, we may indeed have accepted death and resurrection with Christ, but still more is needed; hence the exhortation in Colossians 3: 5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness," etc. Here lies the secret of a happy and fruitful life for God.

The End of Judgeship

The King being now established, the Judgeship of Samuel was at an end. It was moreover the close of an era. Paul when addressing his audience in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia tracing God's ways with Israel, said, "He gave them judges...until Samuel the prophet" (Acts 13: 20).

Samuel accordingly now retired from the active leadership of the people. The responsibility now rested upon the shoulders of the King. Henceforward he would act simply as the power behind the throne. He would pray for the people, indeed they asked him to do so (1 Sam. 12: 19), and he would instruct them as opportunity might be afforded. "God forbid that I should sin against Jehovah in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way" (verse 23). Such quiet service is not to be undervalued in any age. The men who stand forth the most prominently in the work and testimony of God, are not the only factors that count. Even sick persons, who have learned the value of

intercession, and who can only serve in the privacy of the home, are a precious asset to the Church of God. The day of Christ will declare how much of the blessing experienced publicly is due in part to the supplications and prayers of those whose faces are never seen, and whose voices are never heard. The time may come when both the writer and the reader of these pages may be denied the honour and privilege of public service for the Lord Jesus, but the time will never come when the honour and privilege of prayer will be taken from us. Epaphras in the Roman prison is an illustration of this (Col. 4: 12, 13)

Samuel's final address to the nation is recorded in 1 Samuel. 12. He pointed out to them the constant faithfulness of Jehovah to them from the deliverance from Egypt until that hour. He had never failed them, although they had frequently failed Him. In all the distresses which had come upon them from time to time as the fruit of their sin, He had readily responded to their cry of need, and had granted deliverers to them. Samuel assured them that all would yet go well if they judged once for all their rebellious spirit, and became amenable to the word and will of God. The past could not be recalled, and the King of their carnal desire was before them; it was theirs now to walk humbly in the new circumstances.

He spoke also of himself, and of the manner of his going in and out amongst them from his youth up. "Behold here I am: witness against me before Jehovah, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken, or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed, or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith, and I will restore it unto you." To this the people could only reply, "Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand."

Paul was able similarly to appeal to those who knew him. Witness his parting words to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20: 18-35), his words to his spiritual children in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2: 9-11) and his words to Timothy in the last of his inspired epistles (2 Tim. 4: 10,11). Our expositions and exhortations have no more value than our lives give them. Of the scribes and Pharisees in our Lord's day, He was constrained to say, "They sit in Moses' seat, all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not according to their works; for they say and do not" (Matt. 23: 1-3) How deeply solemn the teaching was good, but the teachers did not correspond to the teaching. Happy the man, be it Samuel, Paul, or any other, who, when the term of his service is drawing to its close, can conscientiously draw the attention of those who know him best to his manner of life from first to last. May God grant us one and all a good finish!

The Downfall of the King

Saul acquitted himself creditably in the matter of the Ammonite invasion, but the real test, whether or not he could walk with God in his new position of exaltation, was yet to come, and it came very soon. After the victory at Jabesh Gilead, he dismissed his huge army of 330,000 men; but two years later he established a small standing army of 3,000, 2,000 of which formed his own personal bodyguard in Michmash, the remaining 1,000 being with Jonathan his son, in Gibeah of Benjamin (1 Sam. 13: 1-2). We discern prudence in this arrangement certainly, but scarcely faith, for (as Jonathan said a little later "there is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14: 6). Faith needs no guards.

The real test for Saul developed when the Philistines again got the upper hand of the people of Israel. It was especially for the overcoming of these enemies that Saul was anointed King (1 Sam. 11: 16). But in this connection Saul was a miserable failure, and, in the sequel, the Philistines cut off his

head, and fastened his dishonoured body to the wall of Bethshan (1 Sam. 31).

There is a solemn lesson for us all here. It is possible for us to do well in some particulars, and fail deeply in others. There is something that will test every reader of these pages more than anything else. Each one knows in the privacy of his own soul where the weak point lies. Let us profit by Saul's utter collapse, and set a watch against every aperture by means of which the adversary may get at us and overcome us.

The Philistines were more dangerous enemies than the Ammonites or any others, being established on the west side of Jordan in Jehovah's land holding the sea-coast withal. Their name remains stamped upon the country to this day. "Palestine" is a more familiar name to the world than "Canaan." It was in vain for Saul to be victorious over more distant foes, whilst helpless against the Philistines. In like manner, there is but little value in our victories over some evils, while we suffer others more grave in character (could we but see it) to lead us captive at their will.

Jonathan made a move in faith, and smote an enemy garrison, which caused the oppressors to stir. Saul promptly summoned a national gathering, perhaps expecting that the people would come together "with one consent," as when the Ammonites were aggressive (1 Sam. 11: 7), and with the same good result. His language, however, was extraordinary. 'Let the Hebrews hear.' The Spirit says in the following verse, "All Israel heard say," etc. "Israel" was the name of grace (Gen. 35: 10); "Hebrews" was a term merely reminiscent of the fact that Abraham, their father, originally came into the land from across the Euphrates. But many things had happened since Abraham's day. His seed had, by the grace of God, crossed both the Red Sea and the Jordan, and were now God's covenant people in the land of promise. Did not these mighty facts count for something? But Saul had no real sense in his soul of the people's true relationship with Jehovah. It is not surprising that the Philistines should speak of them in contempt as "Hebrews" (1 Sam. 13: 19; 1 Sam. 14: 11); and it seems morally suitable that the Holy Spirit should so describe the cowards who fled eastward across Jordan when danger threatened (1 Sam. 13: 7), and also the traitors who allied themselves with the enemy (1 Sam. 14: 21); but should Israel's King so speak of the people of God?

However, the tribes gathered up, but there was no faith, for when they heard that the Philistines were in motion with "thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude," they trembled and scattered, some even hiding themselves "in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks." We are not always prepared for the consequences of a movement of the Spirit of God. There are dangers to be faced, and reproach to be borne, and faith in God's true saints sometimes falters at such moments. The disciples trembled for the consequences when the Lord spoke so trenchantly against hypocrisy and unreality in Matthew 15, and they said to Him: "Knowest Thou that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying? The enemy always will be offended when God is moving, but true faith goes forward, and fears no foe.

But trembling in Gilgal of all places (1 Sam. 13: 7) How utterly insensible were Saul and the people to the meaning of that spot. It was there the sharp knives of circumcision were used when the people first entered Canaan — the place where, at least in figure, flesh met its unsparing judgement. Brethren, we have nothing to fear when flesh is duly mortified with us. God's presence is known in power where evil is thus disallowed, and those of the contrary part are made to feel that the power is really there. Gilgal is a sure starting-point for victory.

Now came the test for the unhappy King. Samuel had promised to come within seven days. As the seventh day wore away, and the prophet did not arrive, Saul's Patience utterly gave way. Poor flesh, ever restless, unbelieving and turbulent. Saul recalled how Samuel offered a burnt-offering on an

earlier occasion in Gilgal (1 Sam 10: 8); he would now do the same. But Saul was not Melchizedek. What place had the burnt-offering in his mind that he should act thus? It could have been little else than a talisman, as the ark was to the people in the day of Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sam 4: 6). Brethren, it is GOD that counts, and if the outward and visible things of His own ordinances are suffered to displace Him in our minds, they become positively mischievous in our carnal hands.

What were Saul's fears? These are expressed in his string of excuses to Samuel who came upon the scene as the offering was concluded. First, "I saw that the people were scattered from me." He dreaded being left alone. But what was the value of men who had no faith? The Tachmonite lifted up his spear with success against eight hundred (2 Sam. 23: 8), and Jonathan and his armour-bearer assaulted the whole host of the Philistines. Do we fear to be left alone, forsaken, it may be, in our service and testimony for God? Second, Saul said, "I saw ... that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash." His eye was thus upon the might of the foe. Third, "I saw . . . that thou camest not within the days appointed." He thus had confidence in Samuel, but alas! the human prop was not there. But GOD was there: The poor king thus saw the defection of the people, the power of the enemy, and the absence of the man upon whom he leaned, but he saw not God. By way of contrast, listen to Paul in 2 Timothy 4: 16, 17 "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." The brave old veteran could moreover face the possibilities of the future thus, "and the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom: to Whom be glory for ever and ever. — Amen." What a contrast between these two men of the same nation, of the same tribe, and bearing the same name.

Paul felt increasingly that the greatest and most important of all lessons for the soul to learn is patience. "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience" (2 Cor. 12: 12). "Signs and wonders, and mighty deeds" follow in the verse, but "patience" holds the foremost place. "In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience" (2 Cor. 6: 4). "Let patience have her perfect work," says another Apostle, "that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1: 4).

Saul found himself after all, spite of desertions, surrounded by Six hundred men (1 Sam. 13: 15). Gideon had but half that number when he ventured forth to attack the camp of Midian (Judges 7: 7). David's band of heroes numbered but four hundred (1 Sam. 12: 2), but see what they accomplished.

The kingdom was now forfeited. It only remained for Samuel to Pronounce the divine sentence. "Thou has done foolishly: thou has not kept the commandment of Jehovah thy God, which He commanded thee: for now would Jehovah have established thy Kingdom over Israel for ever. But now thy Kingdom shall not continue: Jehovah hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and Jehovah hath commanded him to be captain over His people, because thou hast not kept that which Jehovah commanded thee." The righteousness of the sentence was fully demonstrated by the wilfulness of the unhappy king in the subsequent expedition against Amalek (1 Sam. 15). The man of the people's choice must now give place to another.

There is but One Whom God can absolutely trust in the place of power. David was but a feeble type of Him. He who was patient and obedient during the years of His humiliation, will rule in perfect righteousness for God in a day soon to come. Then the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Come, Lord Jesus.

Samuel's Last Visit to Saul

The utter hopelessness of the man of the people's choice now became manifest. The failure to exterminate the Amalekites, root and branch, proved that the will of God had no real place in his heart. It was to his own advantage to retain rich spoil, and so it was retained. In Saul is illustrated the truth of the solemn words in Romans 8: 7-8: "The mind of the flesh is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be, so then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

1 Samuel 14: 47-52 gives us an epitome of Saul's accomplishments as King over Israel. He was essentially a man of war, and was in the main successful in his campaigns. But he did nothing thoroughly. He never reached the root of things. For example, he vexed the Philistines amongst other foes, but he never subdued them, else there would not have been "sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul," and he "smote the Amalekites," but he did not destroy them. Surrounded thus by enemies vexed but not broken, "when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him." It is impossible to discover the exercise of faith in this; it is simply flesh making use of flesh

The Spirit now devotes a whole chapter to the expedition against Amalek, in order to make it absolutely clear why Jehovah rejected Saul, and the righteousness of it. The sentence of God had long gone forth against this inveterate enemy of His people. At Rephidim, Jehovah said that He would have "war against Amalek from generation to generation" (Ex. 17: 16); and Moses, in his parting charge to Israel said, "Thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it" (Deut. 25: 19). All that was wanting was a word from Jehovah as to the precise moment for the execution of the terrible sentence, and the needed word was sent to Saul by means of Samuel.

The instructions were clear and unequivocal. Samuel said to Saul, "Jehovah sent me to anoint thee King over His people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." Thus nothing whatever was to be spared. Adversaries of Holy Scripture have sometimes declaimed against the severity of Jehovah's instructions to Israel concerning their foes. If God is love, why should He bid His people act in such a manner? The answer is very simple, "God is light," as well as love. The nations in and around Canaan were so deeply impregnated with such terrible evils that they constituted a moral ulcer in the midst of the earth, and it was mercy to others, as well as righteousness in God to destroy them utterly, after enduring them with much long-suffering. How much of a cancer does the knife of a skilful surgeon spare? It was largely due to Israel's failure to do their work thoroughly that they soon became so corrupt themselves. The evil influence of their neighbours in time brought down the judgement of God upon His own people.

Amalek is a type of the flesh, and with flesh God can make no terms. In it dwells no good thing (Rom. 7: 18); the sin that is inherent in it was divinely condemned in the sacrifice of Christ (Rom. 8: 3); and Christians are viewed as having for themselves, "crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5: 24), which means that they have accepted the sentence of God against the evil thing. Nothing remains but to be unsparing with all its workings day by day (Col. 3: 5-9).

Saul and the people "utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword," and "Everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly"; but the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, they would not utterly destroy them." Alas, for Saul When his murderous heart went out against Ahimelech for his supposed sympathy with David, he was far more thorough in his work. At Nob he smote "both men and women, children and

sucklings, and oxen and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword" (1 Sam. 22: 19)

Saul's behaviour suggests terrible possibilities for ourselves. It is easy to condemn the gross manifestations of flesh, as drunkenness, fornication, and such like, while tolerating other manifestations as vanity, levity, gossip, etc. Who but the Spirit of God would have put variance, emulations, and envyings in the same category with fornication, murders, and revellings (Gal. 5: 19-22)? Yet all these things spring from the same root of incorrigible evil.

When Jehovah told Samuel what Saul had done, and that he could be no longer king, the prophet was so grieved that "he cried unto Jehovah all night." In Jeremiah 15: 1, Samuel is divinely quoted as one of Israel's conspicuous men of prayer. But prayer was in vain now. Saul had been fully tried, and had been found wanting. With every conceivable advantage he had hopelessly failed, and nothing remained but to pass sentence. Sad work for Samuel, who apparently sincerely loved the erring king. When he went in search of him, he heard that he had been to Carmel, and had "set him up a place," presumably a memorial pillar to commemorate his victory, for flesh ever seeks its own glory. Samuel at last found him in Gilgal, the place of circumcision (Joshua 5). If Saul had only known the lesson of Gilgal-self-judgement, how different his history would have been. With pious gush he met the prophet saying, "Blessed be thou of Jehovah: I have performed the commandment of Jehovah." This was a lie, and Saul knew it well. Asked what was the meaning of the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen, he replied that the people had spared the best of them to sacrifice unto Jehovah. In 1 Sam. 15: 9 the sacred historian says "Saul and the people, spared," etc. Like Adam in Eden, rather than confess his own sin, he put the blame elsewhere.

But Such a plea could not be accepted. A king must rule, or abdicate. He must teach the people what is right, and also get the right thing done. "Vote-catching" will not do for God. "I feared the people," says Saul 1 Sam 15: 24, "and obeyed their voice." The chief priests and elders feared the people in our Lord's day (Matt. 21: 23-27). All such persons, by their own confession, are utterly unfit for the seat of power. David in his "last words" describes the ideal king thus: He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Sam. 23: 3). In the matter of Jonathan eating the honey, we have the people withstanding the king, and insisting upon what was comely and right (1 Sam. 14: 41); now to Samuel he complains that they constrained him to do what was disobedient and wrong. How deeply humiliating for an anointed king! The perfect ruler will not be seen on earth until the Man at God's right hand comes forth in all His majesty and power. But shall we not seek meanwhile to walk in the fear of God, and seek above all things to do that which is well-pleasing in His sight? "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso trusteth in the Lord shall be safe" (Prov: 29: 25).

To Obey is better than Sacrifice

In few but telling words Samuel reminded Saul of Jehovah's dealings with him in the past, and of his flagrant disobedience to His word. It was no mere expression of his own opinion: I will tell thee what Jehovah said to me this night" (1 Sam. 15: 16) When Saul was little in his own sight, God made him head over the tribes of Israel. There was indeed a day when Saul spoke of himself as belonging to the smallest of Israel's tribes, and to the least of the families in that tribe (1 Sam 9: 21), but that day was a long way in the background as far as his feelings were concerned. He was now, in his own esteem, a great military commander, able to call more than 200,000 men to his standard. He had become one of the notables of the earth, a man to be feared. Uzziah fell into the same snare, after some remarkable victories. "When he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (2 Chron. 26: 16). With Paul, on the contrary, the sense of his own insignificance and unworthiness grew upon him as the years

passed. "I am less than the least of all saints," said he to the Ephesians (Eph. 3: 8); "chief of sinners," said he to his son Timothy (1 Tim. 1: 15). At a certain point in his history he abandoned the name of Saul, preferring henceforward to be known as Paul, which means "little."

Brethren, while we keep small, God has some use for us, but if perchance we become swollen with a sense of our own ability and importance, or even get occupied with our divinely granted gifts, we shall assuredly be passed by when the Spirit is in search of an instrument for His work. He has come from heaven to magnify Christ, not men. The lesson of the little child was set before the disciples by the Lord, in Matthew 18: 1-4. Have we learned it? Let us examine ourselves and see.

It was useless for Saul to blame the people for what had occurred, and to plead that the sheep and oxen which had been spared were to be offered in sacrifice to Jehovah. Samuel brushed the excuses aside sternly, saying, "Hath Jehovah as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Here we have a principle of vital importance to the people of God in all ages. There is no substitute for obedience. The Man Christ Jesus delighted from first to last in all the will of God, and He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. Our innermost thoughts; the motives of our hearts, and our actions both at home and abroad, should be under the control of the revealed will of God. No plea for usefulness in service can be accepted in extenuation of what we know to be contrary to God and His word. Toleration of evil in our ecclesiastical surroundings, in the hope that good may somehow be wrought, will not do for God. Whatever the consequences to ourselves and to others, we must obey.

Samuel stripped the disobedience bare, and revealed its true character as God saw it. "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness (i.e., self-will) is as iniquity and idolatry. Saul himself in his better days recognised the evil of witchcraft, and sought to suppress it (1 Sam. 28: 3-9) and no graven image appears to have been set up during his reign. But he is now told that his self-will was the equivalent of both witchcraft and idolatry. Why? Because it displaced God for something else. The supremacy of God was thereby challenged by a creature. Self-will — the refusal to hear the divine voice — is as serious an evil today as when Saul stood arraigned by the prophet of God in Gilgal.

"In Gilgal," be it noted. In that place above all others it was proposed to offer the fruit of self-will to God. It was Israel's camping ground at the first, the spot where the sharp knives of circumcision were used, abiding lesson of the supreme importance of self-judgement on the part of all who would have to do with God. The people later, as insensible of the significance of the place as their earliest king, made Gilgal one of the chief centres of their transgression against God (Hosea 4: 15; Amos 4: 4, 5), Samuel's faithful words produced no repentance in Saul. It is time he said, "I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of Jehovah and thy words," but the emptiness of the acknowledgement was shown in that he said immediately, "Honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel." The truly contrite heart is willing to take the lowest possible place before God. It is inconceivable that honour before men should enter into the mind of one who truly feels his sin. No one could think worse of him at such a time than he thinks of himself. David in Psalm 51 after being rebuked by another prophet, presents a great and instructive contrast to Saul in 1 Sam. 15.

The truth is that an uncomfortable position had been created by the intervention of Samuel, and Saul would end it with the minimum of delay. The lesson of the two shavings on the third day and on the seventh day, as in Numbers 6: 9, were unknown to him. It is observable that twice he speaks to Samuel of "Jehovah thy God" (vv 21, 30). All sense of relationship to God, and of having to do with Him for himself, seems to have departed from him. Unhappy man.

It is deeply solemn to notice that Samuel uses language concerning the rejection of Saul similar

to that which Balaam used concerning the blessing of Israel. Balaam said, "God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent" (Num. 23: 19). The blessing of Israel was therefore assured, whatever the enemy might do or say, or whatever unfaithfulness might manifest itself in the people themselves. Samuel said, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for He is not a man, that He should repent" (1 Sam. 15: 29). The divine rejection of Saul was thus as irrevocable as the blessing of the nation; for when once God has pledged His word, He never goes back upon it. This blessed fact is the true resting place of faith in all ages.

The execution of the Amalekite king concludes this solemn chapter. Let none doubt the righteousness of this. It is God's great governmental principle that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6: 7), and Agag's cruel sword had filled many a mother's heart with grief. His own turn had now come in the justice of God. So lightly did he feel his position, so utterly unrepentant of his enormities was he, that he approached Samuel quite jovially. "Gaily," is the word employed by Darby "cheerfully" by the Revisers in their margin. But "Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before Jehovah in Gilgal," for God is light as well as love. Another pagan king acknowledged the equity of that which befell him when his captors cut off his thumbs and great toes. To no fewer than seventy kings had he been similarly distressful (Judges 1: 6-7)

"Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and Jehovah repented that He had made Saul king over Israel."

The Man after God's Own heart

Samuel's famous dictum that to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15: 22) will never be forgotten. If Saul learned nothing from the prophet's words, multitudes have profited by them since his day. "To obey," and "to hearken" give the essence of holy living. The most costly sacrifices are no substitute for "obeying the voice of the Lord."

The wilful King — the man of the people's choice — being divinely rejected, Jehovah brought forward the "man after His own heart." How different David was from Saul may be seen in Psalm 119 (which, being an amplification of psalm 19, is almost certainly from the pen of David): "Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments; for therein do I delight" (Ps. 119: 35). "I will delight myself in Thy commandments, which I have loved" (Ps. 119: 47). "I love Thy commandments above gold; yea above fine gold" (Ps. 119: 127). "I opened my mouth and panted: for I longed for Thy commandments" (Ps. 119: 131). Oh, that there were such a spirit in both the reader and the writer of these pages.

Not that the psalmist was perfect (only the man Christ Jesus was that), but whatever his failures, his heart was ever towards God, that he might please Him, so he concludes his long psalm thus: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant, for I do not forget Thy commandments."

Samuel mourned deeply and long over Saul, and no wonder, for he could not but be interested in the King he had anointed, and the disappointment was great. But in due course Jehovah aroused him from his grief, and bade him fill his horn with oil and go to the house of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, "for I have provided Me a King amongst his sons" (1 Sam. 16.).

Bethlehem was the village of Boaz — the Kinsman-Redeemer — the One who took up the cause of the hopeless and ruined. This shows the ground upon which everything was now to be built. Boaz was himself a type of the risen Christ; and David also typifies Him, but as the suffering and rejected by men yet chosen of God, and exalted in His due time. Samuel, inquiring of Jehovah how he could safely go to Bethlehem upon such an errand, was told to take an heifer, and call the people, or at least their

elders and Jesse's family, to a sacrifice. Here again we are reminded of Christ. Everything for God's glory and for the blessing of men is founded upon what He is, and what He has done. The greatness of His person, and the infinite value of His sacrifice makes everything sure and stable for ever.

Samuel's visit to Bethlehem was regarded with apprehension by the elders, and they asked him tremblingly, "Comest thou peaceably!" What a condition of things then existed in Israel that such a question should be addressed to one who loved the nation so well. But when people are not right with God, even the visit of a messenger of God is dreaded. The Corinthian Assembly would probably have viewed with alarm an unexpected call from the Apostle while they were tolerating gross evil in their midst. He might bring "a rod" (1 Cor. 4: 21).

Arrived at Jesse's house, the prophet was about to make a serious blunder. When Jesse's sons came in, Samuel was struck by the fine appearance of Eliab, and said, "Surely Jehovah's anointed is before Him." But a man "higher than any of the people from his shoulders upwards" (1 Sam. 10: 23) was at that very moment on Israel's throne, and a deplorable failure. The divine reply to the prophet's thought is instructive far beyond the circumstances of that day. "Look not at his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for Jehovah seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh on the heart." "Let no man glory in men" (1 Cor. 3: 21).

When did God ever choose the first-born of flesh. The one who by reason of his birth has the appearance of claim is throughout Holy Scripture expressly set aside, that all may learn that blessing is altogether of grace. Not Cain, but Abel; not Ishmael, but Isaac; not Esau, but Jacob; not Reuben, but Joseph; not Ephraim, but Manasseh; not Aaron, but Moses; and so on invariably in the ways of God.

Jehovah's anointed proved to be one who was regarded as of no account, for the lad David was not even invited to meet the prophet. How suggestive of Him Who was "despised and rejected of men!" His occupation should be noted, "Behold he keepeth the sheep." Again suggestive of our blessed Lord, and in marked contrast with Saul, whose interest was in asses, and even them he lost.

When Samuel learned of the existence of the shepherd lad, he said to Jesse, "Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither." Note the margin: "Hebrew — sit round." The circle would not be complete without David, and he must be in the centre.

Christ is the centre of everything with God. His present place is in the midst of the Assembly. There He leads the song of praise to God (Heb. 2: 12). The consciousness of His presence brings blessing to those gathered, and it is His presence that gives power and validity to their acts. "Where two or three are gathered together unto My Name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt 18: 20). In the incoming Kingdom age, He will take the place in the midst of "the great congregation" (Psalm 22: 25). This means the nations and their kings, all happily submissive to His sway, and all blessed according to the earthly counsels of a gracious God. "All the kings of the earth shall praise Thee, O Jehovah, when they hear the words of Thy mouth. Yea, they shall sing of the ways of Jehovah: for great is the glory of Jehovah" (Psalm 138: 4-5) In a yet higher sphere, He will be seen as the Lamb in the midst of the throne, with elders and living creatures gazing in wonder at the glorious sight, and giving utterance to the new song of redemption through His blood (Rev. 5). Thus will a righteous God give due recompense, both above and below, to Him Who once was willing, in His fathomless grace, to hang between two thieves upon Calvary's tree. He Who was the central Object on that day of shame, will be the central Object in both heavenly and earthly glories in the ages that are yet to come.

"Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of Jehovah came upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16: 13). From the gracious Reader of

Isaiah's prophecy in the synagogue of Nazareth, we hear the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me" (Luke 4: 18). Others besides Himself may experience the anointing of the Spirit (1 John 2: 27); but in this, as in everything else, He must have the pre-eminence" therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows" (Heb. 1: 9)

David, although anointed, did not forthwith ascend the throne of Israel, but like the One of whom he was both the progenitor and the type, he must needs first pass through the bitter ordeal of years of suffering and rejection. In God's time, the man of the people's carnal choice was overthrown, and the man after God's own heart was exalted. In like manner, God has His set time for the Kingdoms of this world to pass into the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ. The need for this mighty revolution becomes increasingly apparent to observant eyes. The world's agony deepens every hour.

The Power of the Spirit of God

Having anointed both Saul and David — the man of the people's choice, and the man after God's own heart Samuel's public work was finished. Henceforward he lived in quiet retirement at Ramah. But one thus constrained to live in quietness has not necessarily ceased to be of value to his brethren. The ministry of intercession is open to all who have the heart for it. To this ministry Samuel devoted himself until his life's end. "God forbid that I should sin against Jehovah in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Sam. 12: 23).

Aged brethren, crippled brethren, imprisoned brethren, take courage! Although you can no longer run the Lord's errands, you can still serve the people of God at the throne of grace. Paul in his Roman prison ceased not to give thanks for his Ephesian brethren, making mention of them in his prayers (Eph. 1: 16); the Philippian also he remembered, in every prayer for them making request with joy (Phil. 1: 4); for the Colossians too he prayed regularly, and doubtless also for saints in other places, both known and unknown. Epaphras, when deprived of his liberty, laboured fervently for his brethren that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Col. 4: 12).

The prophet who felt that he was getting old and past active service, and who appointed his sons judges over the people (without a word from Jehovah) lived not only to anoint both Saul and David, but also to shelter David when the persecution of his enemy became dangerous. Accordingly we read in 1 Samuel 19: 18: David fled and escaped, and came to Samuel in Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him." But what could a feeble old man do for David in his distress? Saul quickly set his forces in motion. He was now so completely under the power of the devil that all respect for Samuel had departed from him. He would now invade his very home, and tear David thence. But the power of God was with His aged servant, and this Saul experienced in a truly remarkable way. He sent three bands of messengers, doubtless armed, to arrest David; but when they came within sight of Samuel and his group of budding prophets, the power of God so came upon them that they prophesied with them. This reminds us of Ahaziah in his rage against Elijah (2 Kings 1). He also sent three companies to take him, but the third captain of fifty humbled himself in the presence of the power of God as exercised by Elijah, and pleaded for his life. In Saul's day things were worse, for his third company were as willing to do their master's evil work as those who went before them. Then, solemn to say, Saul went himself. He braced himself up, and was confident that he would be strong enough to resist the holy influence to which his messengers had succumbed. He was determined to fight things out with God! poor blind dupe of Satan! The unhappy man is painfully suggestive of the self-willed king of the last days (Dan. 11: 36), who will be found reigning in Jerusalem when our Lord appears.

Behold the angry king then coming to "a great well that is in Sechu," and inquiring for the

whereabouts of Samuel and David. Would he kill the prophet as well as his own son-in-law! This is not clear, but it is certain that when he came within sight of Samuel and David with murder in his heart, the mighty power of the Spirit of God overwhelmed him. For many hours he lay prostrate, helpless to do what he intended. Well might observers say, perhaps sarcastically, knowing the character of the man, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

"How are the mighty fallen!" (2 Sam. 1: 27) At Ramah we see the King lying low in the presence of the power of God; at Endor he is prostrate in the house of a witch (1 Sam. 28: 20); and at Gilboa he is found dead on the battle-field (1 Sam. 31: 4). Miserable end to an unhappy life, a life which began with every advantage that a gracious God could bestow.

The remarkable experience at Naioth in Ramah had a voice for both David and Saul. David could thereby be assured that although years of wandering lay ahead no creature power could ever harm him seeing that Jehovah was with him. Saul might well have returned home convinced of the uselessness of opposition to God. But, alas, flesh never learns divine lessons! Another Saul did heed the voice of the Lord speaking to him out of heaven, to his eternal blessing (Acts 22.). Happy Saul of Tarsus!

We are living in the day of the Spirit's personal presence on earth. The Church is His habitation. From thence He pursues His gracious work for the blessing of men. The power of Satan is opposed to it, but we need have no fear. He who broke down the Saul of the Old Testament (although he was nothing the better for it); and Who also broke down the Saul of the New Testament, transforming him into a bright witness for Christ is able still to deal with every form of Satanic hostility to the work of God. Certainly, our God never knows defeat.

Samuel's Death

It is twice repeated that when Samuel died "all Israel lamented, him, and buried him in his house at Ramah." (1 Sam. 25: 1; 28: 3) A State funeral, with public mourning, for the man whose faithful words were unheeded while he lived, and whose later years were embittered by the wickedness of both king and people! It was a great day — "all the Israelites were gathered together," we are told. Was Saul present? It is not stated, but flesh can be inconsistent enough even for that.

Many prophets followed Samuel before our Lord appeared, but they all fared badly at the hands of men. "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" said the indignant Stephen, "and they have slain them which showed before the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7: 52). Our Lord said to the religious leaders of His day: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves that ye are the sons of them which killed the prophets." He proceeded to tell them that He would send fresh messengers to them, and that they would persecute, scourge, and kill them (Matt. 23: 29-34) The Book of the Acts records the terrible fulfilment of His words. (Read also 1 Thess. 2: 3; John 16: 2)

It is easy to honour dead men whose faithful admonitions no longer sting the conscience; flesh can even get a certain amount of gratification to itself in doing so; but what God appreciates is willing obedience to His servants' messages while they live, and loyal remembrance of their words after their departure (Heb. 13: 7).

Be not over-anxious to hold memorial services over us when our lips are silent in the grave. Say a few kind words to us while we are with you, and encourage our hearts by such obedience to the truth

that in our prayers we may give account of you "with joy and not with grief" (Heb. 13: 17). To laud the dead while refusing their teaching is one of the worst forms of religious hypocrisy, and the world is full of it.

Take a case in point. Throughout Christendom great honour is professedly paid to Peter; magnificent buildings have his name attached to them; but if the fisherman-apostle could come back to us, and were to teach in the pulpits of "St. Peter's" the truths taught in his Epistles, he would probably be flung out with scorn like his Master from the synagogue at Nazareth. For it is indisputable that Peter tells us that new birth is the fruit of the incorruptible seed of the word of God received by faith into the heart (1 Peter 1: 23); but Christendom affirms that new birth comes through Baptism administered by priestly hands. Peter also tells us that all believers in Jesus are priests, "a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2: 5), but Christendom insists that priesthood is the exclusive privilege of an official few, and thus God's saints are thrust into darkness and distance from their Father and God.

Viewed in the light of Eternity, men's buildings erected in honour of the dead, whether tombs or cathedrals, are worth very little; but who can estimate the value of the Spirit's words concerning the "great cloud of witnesses," of whom Samuel was one, "of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb. 11: 38).

Samuel at Endor

Some years after his decease Samuel had the unique experience of being sent back to earth with a message from God. The battle of Gilboa was impending, and Saul was in a desperate plight, having the dismal feeling that ruin would result. He tried to get through to God for counsel and help—the God whom he had so grievously slighted throughout his reign. But "Jehovah answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets" (1 Sam. 28: 6). "God is departed from me," he wailed, "and answereth me no more." This reminds us of Hosea 4: 17: "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." It is a serious thing for anyone to refuse to hear the voice of God, for even His patience has limits. All Christendom will prove this shortly when divinely given up to the delusions of the Man of Sin (2 Thess. 2).

Feeling the urgent need of a word from some quarter, "Saul said unto his servants, seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her." Earlier in his reign Saul had endeavoured to stamp out this appalling evil but apparently it was still practised secretly. What an inconsistent thing is poor flesh! It can wax indignant at one form of iniquity and labour to suppress it while freely indulging in other forms equally offensive to God. Even God's true saints are not free from this danger. Samuel told Saul after his disobedience in the matter of Amalek "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Sam. 15: 23). Why? Because it puts something in the place of God; and this Saul was continually doing in his career of self-pleasing.

Learning that there was a woman practising witchcraft at Endor, Saul disguised himself, and with two of his servants went to her by night. When requested to bring up the man that he would name, the woman protested that it was against the law of the kingdom, and that she might be put to death for her deed. Saul had the audacity to "swear to her by Jehovah saying, As Jehovah liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing." The wretched man could not possibly go further in sin than thus to pledge Jehovah's holy name in connection with a matter so hateful in His sight. All sense of the reality of having to do with God had utterly departed from him.

Witchcraft — sorcery — "Spiritualism" — for this great evil has many names, is very ancient. Early in the history of the race, when men turned their backs upon God, they sought to get into communication with the invisible world by illicit means. Satan was, of course, their instructor in this, for thereby he gained ears which should have been ever open to the voice of God. Deuteronomy 18 is stern in its commands to the people of Israel to deal unsparingly with this great evil when they got into the promised land. They would find Canaan full of it, but God's own people must neither learn it nor spare it.

This evil has an increasing fascination for men as the ages pass, and as the end draws near. Men have a natural desire to know something of the life beyond, and it is alleged that Spiritualism is a ready means of acquiring first-hand information from departed relatives and friends. It is even said that these are eager to communicate with us; but this is not borne out by the story before us, the only true record of a departed man ever speaking again to persons on earth. Samuel positively rebuked Saul for disturbing him. "Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?"

Samuel undoubtedly appeared to the terrified king, and addressed him with audible voice. But did the woman's movements produce him? Most assuredly not. The keys of death and of Hades are not within the reach of any mere creature (Rev. 1: 18). Departed saints are in the Lord's own presence, enjoying without hinderance His favour; and the lost are "Spirits in prison" awaiting their final sentence in the great day. Saints are not at the mercy of wicked practitioners, and liable to be disturbed at any moment in order that such may earn a fee; and sinners are closely guarded by the power of God. If it be alleged that voices are sometimes heard coming from the world of spirits, the explanation is that demons personate the dead, and their aim is to deceive foolish listeners to their eternal ruin.

In Isaiah 8: 19 God asks indignantly why people should even wish to inquire of the dead, when they could, if they were willing, inquire of their Maker. "When they shall say unto you: seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that chirp and mutter: should not a people seek unto their God. For the living to the dead?" No one could have been more shocked and horrified than the witch of Endor when Samuel actually appeared. She had never had such an experience before. Ere she could commence her incantations the person named stood before her. The astounding fact suggested to her mind that her visitor could be no less a person than the king. Only for him would God be likely to disturb the repose of the faithful prophet. What could Samuel do but pronounce the doom of one who so persistently sinned against light and privilege? For this solemn purpose God was pleased to send His servant back to earth that day. There was nothing of pity or mercy in his words "Because thou obeyedst not the voice of Jehovah, nor executedst His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath Jehovah done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover, Jehovah will also deliver Israel with thee into the hands of the Philistines: and to-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me" (1 Sam. 28: 18-19). The following day would thus be Saul's last on earth. What then? "With me" does not mean that Saul would share Samuel's bliss, but that he would be numbered amongst the dead even as the prophet. Even Saul and Jonathan parted company in the hour of death. Jonathan we shall meet in the presence of the Lord Jesus at His coming, but not Saul.

Note the distinction between body and spirit. Saul's body (with those of his sons) was nailed by the Philistines to the wall of Bethshan (1 Sam. 31: 12), his spirit, ere that indignity was perpetrated, was in Sheol.

The Endor episode has a loud voice to men today. Nothing is to be gained by even the attempt to communicate with the dead; but everything is to be gained by giving attention to the voice of God. The Holy Scriptures, now happily complete, tell us all that we need to know concerning both Heaven and

Hell. He who turns away from the divine voice speaking therein lays himself open to the worst deceptions of Satan, to his eternal ruin.

Samuel figures in Hebrews 11: 32 as one of God's worthies. David is also there; but the once-favoured and greatly privileged Saul is missing.