1 Samuel - Commentaries by Samuel Ridout

King Saul: The Man After The Flesh: Being Notes on 1 Samuel, 1 Samuel 10:17; 1 Samuel 11: The New King

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GOD having dealt faithfully and fully with Saul in private and through the prophet, now manifests to the nation at large the man whom He has chosen for them. Samuel is again the honored instrument here and calls the people to meet the Lord, as he had already, so far as possible, brought the future king face to face with Jehovah. The people are to come together at Mizpah, the place where God had signally manifested His delivering hand in rescuing them from the Philistines, and also one of the stations where Samuel was accustomed to judge Israel. Its name, as we have seen, means “Watchtower,” appropriate surely for those who would rightly survey the past and the future, and heed the admonitions with which God would address them. “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved” (Hab. 2:1). Good would it have been, for them and their king, had this attitude of soul truly marked them. It was that indeed to which God called them, as He ever does His people, to hearken to the admonitions and reproofs of love, and thus to be guarded from the snares into which we will otherwise surely fall. Well would it have been for Peter had he been spiritually at Mizpah to receive the warning of our Lord.

God again reminds them of His work for them as a nation, from the time of their deliverance out of Egypt, and from all the power of the enemy up to the present. He reiterates the fact that in their desire for a king they, and not He, have been the rejectors. He, blessed be His name, never turns from His people whom He has redeemed. His love to them is measured by that redemption, and all their future experience would be but repetitions, according to need, of that deliverance; but, alas, how prone are His people to forget the past, and measure the present by their unbelief, rather than by His power as manifested for them again and again.

It is not, however, with any view of securing a change of mind on the part of the people. They were determined in their course. That wretched watchword “like all the nations” had gnawed into their spiritual vitals and produced its necessary results. A king they must and will have, and it must be the one who answers to such a state of heart as that. What other kind of one could it be?

God deigns still to serve His people, as we have been seeing, and to interpret their own wretched minds for them, giving expression to their desires, far better than they could themselves. For this purpose He uses the lot, leaving nothing to mere chance or to the caprice of any part of the people, still less to that modern fallacy, the will of the majority. “The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing is of the Lord.” It also causes contentions to cease. We cannot for a moment think that, though thus guiding in the choice, God was pleased with it, or that the man selected thus would represent His desires for the people. We have already dwelt upon this.

And now the tribes are brought up one by one, and “little Benjamin” is taken, ominously significant as one which up to this time had been distinguished chiefly by its fearful rebellion. The one who rules others must rule himself first of all, and he who claims obedience from a nation must be preeminently the obedient one. How perfectly has our blessed Lord manifested His capacity for rule in this way, resigning, as we might say, the place of authority, “taking the form of a servant,” learning obedience in all His life of lowliness. Truly He has qualified Himself to be the true King of Israel as well as the Ruler and Lord of all His people.

There is no account of Benjamin’s repentance, and therefore we may well suppose that the tribe was still marked by that spirit of rebellion which had wrought such havoc in the days of the judges. And yet that hardihood of spirit, that rash courage which marked them at that time—one of the least of the tribes facing the entire nation, and “giving a good account of itself” in the conflicts that ensued—was doubtless rehearsed and handed down, and became matter for boasting, rather than for humiliation and true self-abhorrence before God. Thus it will ever be with the flesh. It will boast in that which is its shame, and plume itself upon a strength which must be broken to pieces before God can come in. It thus represents, as a tribe, the nation; and while we cannot say that all this was intensified in that branch of the tribe from which Saul came, neither is there any indication of its absence.

The various families are sifted out and finally the choice falls upon Saul himself. We have already looked at his genealogy. Another name is here mentioned, the “family of Matri,” which is said to mean “Jehovah is watching,” which ought, at least, to have been a reminder that the holy eye of God had seen all their past, and knew well too their present. How the mention of this should have caused both the people and Saul to halt! God’s holy eye was upon them. He had searched out their secret thoughts. He knew their motives, their state of soul, their self-confidence, their pride. Could they, with that holy eye of love resting upon them, proceed in this wretched course of disobedience, that which was practically apostasy from Himself? Alas, while Jehovah’s eye is open upon them, theirs is closed as to Him. They have eyes only for the king whom they desire, and he is soon presented to their gaze.

The lot declares that Saul, the son of Kish, is the appointed man. But he is nowhere to be found. Flesh-like, he hides himself when he ought to be present, and obtrudes himself when he should be out of sight. Self-depreciation is a very different thing from true lowliness of spirit. As the poet says; Satan’s “darling sin is the pride which apes humility.” He had already spoken to Samuel of his tribe being the smallest in Israel and his family the least in that tribe. All this had been overruled by the prophet who had anointed him. He had already received the assurance that he was the appointed king. God Himself had spoken to him through the signs that we have been looking at, and in the spirit of prophecy which had indeed also fallen upon himself. Why, then, this feigned modesty, this shrinking from the gaze of his subjects? Does it not indicate one who is not truly in the presence of God? For when in His presence, man is rightly accounted of. The fear of man indicates the lack of the fear of God, and “bringeth a snare.” In God’s presence, the lowliest can face the mightiest unflinchingly. Hear the faithful witnesses refusing to obey the command of king Nebuchadnezzar. There is no hiding there: “We are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; but if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan. 3:16-18). Faith in God produces true liberty in man.

But even if this shrinking from the people did not indicate the extreme of fear, it yet showed a self-occupation which is utterly incompatible with the true spirit of rule. Saul indeed does not appear to advantage here, and we get a glimpse of his character as he hides among the baggage, which bodes ill for himself and the people.

Indeed it is the Lord Himself who must go further in this patient care for a perverse people and tell them what has become of their king. The baggage seems a strange place in which to look for royalty; not much dignity about that, and one can almost imagine the ludicrousness of the scene. No wonder that carnal men ask, a little later on, How shall this man save us? He was indeed a part of the baggage and an illustration of the old Latin word for that, “an impediment,” no help, but a hindrance to those whom he should lead on to victory.

But he at least appears better than his people. Judged according to the appearance, he is “every inch a king,” head and shoulders above all the rest, one to whom they could look up and in whom they could boast; and if fleshly strength were to count, one who was more than a match for any who would dare dispute his right and title to the place. Do we not all know something of this stateliness of the flesh when it stands in full length before us? Hear another son of Benjamin describing how he stood head and shoulders above his countrymen: “If any other man thinketh 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, a 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). 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).

Here is another Saul, a king among men, too; but, ah how all this shrivels up under the eye of divine holiness and love; in the very noontide of his carnal greatness, he beholds One who had been crucified but now was glorified, and as he catches sight of that glorious Object on high, from the dust he can declare for the remainder of his life: “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.” Would that we ever remembered this when tempted to glory in our flesh, or measure ourselves by ourselves and compare ourselves among ourselves!

Paul was ashamed even to speak of the work of Christ in and through him, save as it was needed to deliver the poor Corinthians who were, like the Israel we are examining, tempted to judge according to the flesh. The only man in whom he could glory was the man in Christ, and well he knew that that man was “not I, but Christ.” “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2:20).

However, there is none of this knowledge of the flesh, even in an Old Testament measure, among the people. They compare their king with themselves. He is better than they are, head and shoulders above them, and exultantly they shout aloud: “Long live the king!” They have found their man. How that cry has re-echoed down the centuries ever since! King after king has been brought into view over great or small nations, and when he is seen, his prowess, his knowledge, his ability, in some sense has been recognized as above the average; at least his position has put him upon a pedestal, and “Long live the king!” has been the people’s acclaim!

But faith can detect the wail in this exultation, and the unconscious yearning for One who is indeed the true King; One who is not to be compared with the sons of men, surely not head and shoulders above them; One who took His place as servant to the lowest, humbled even unto death, the death of the cross, and who now in His exaltation is far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named. Who could compare himself with the King, even to acknowledge His superiority? No, “my beloved is one,” “the chiefest among ten thousand;” “yea, He is altogether lovely.”

“The shout of a king is in her”; but in this shout there is the echo of that other shout when the Ark was brought out to the camp of Israel and they supposed that God was going to link His holy name with their unrighteousness and give them victory over the Philistines. As we saw, He would rather let His glory be carried captive into the enemy’s land than dishonor His name among His people. This shout is like that. We yet wait for the true shout of the King: but it will come, thank God, for Israel and for this poor, groaning earth; the time when all creation shall burst forth in the shout. “With trumpets and sound of a cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King. Let the sea roar and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the Lord, for He cometh to judge the earth. With righteousness shall He judge the world.”

The scene, however, is not allowed to close with mere enthusiasm. This is not checked; but “the manner of the kingdom” is described, and God’s will is impressed upon them, if they will but hear it, together no doubt with His warning which we have been considering. All is written in a book, to leave them without excuse; to be there, too, no doubt, for reference, should penitence or faith ever turn to it—a proof of God’s faithful care, though His heart was grieved and wounded at the treatment He had received from those He had fed from His hand for so long. The book is laid up before the Lord. Surely it is there yet. He has not forgotten. He never can forget. In His own patience He still waits, and the time is coming when all will be gone over with them and they shall acknowledge, with shame, their own folly as well as His love and faithfulness.

We, too, have the book of the Lord in which His faithful testimony as to the unprofitableness of the flesh is fully recorded. This He never forgets, and oh, may we remember always that God has put a mark upon it even as He did upon Cain, and may we shrink from every form of that exaltation of the natural man, “hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.”

Saul again retires for the time, into private life. The second stage has been reached, the first being his private anointing. Still, however, opportunity must be afforded for him to make good practically that which has been publicly declared. A band of young men are touched by the hand of God and follow Saul. Many yet, however, are skeptical and ask how such an one could save them out of the hand of their enemies. The king is still despised by many of his people. There is none of the honor paid to him, no presents brought to him which would show he is enthroned in their hearts. He, however, is impressed, for a time at least, by the solemnity of all that he had been passing through, and makes no attempt to vaunt himself or claim a place which was not willingly accorded to him. He holds his peace and waits a suited time. Had he continued to do this, a different history would follow.

The occasion is not long wanting to show what manner of man the new king is. With the nation prone to wander from God, as the whole book of Judges shows, attacks were constantly invited by the enemy from various quarters. Morally, their condition was unchanged from the times of the Judges; and, as is abundantly shown in that book, so far from there being true progress, the periods of captivity increase as the years roll on. Nature never improves with time. It can only deteriorate. However, there was some gracious recovery on God’s part, of the people, which preserved them from complete disintegration. But the constant danger when they were left to themselves was from the hands of enemies, who were all too ready to take advantage of every weakness. The outbreak narrated now was significantly on the east side of

Jordan, in Gilead, and by the Ammonites, kinsmen according to the flesh, of Israel.

Remembering that the whole settlement of the two tribes and a half on the east side of Jordan was practically dictated by self-interest, that they seemed never fully to be identified with the mass of the nation on the west side of the river, it can easily be gathered that there was less devotedness to God there than even in the proper inheritance of the people. Looking at it spiritually, it is, of course, very significant. Settling down in the world, allowing selfish interests to dictate our path and testimony, is to open the gates for the enemy's assail. Alas, how frequently this is done, and what subtle tendencies there are in our hearts to repeat it!

These two tribes and a half are finally carried captive before even the remnant of the kingdom of laid in ruins. Notwithstanding this, again we find the same enemy, with the same name, revived in the times of the Judges, threatening the people with destruction, as though he had never been overthrown. This is characteristic of evil, of that which assails doctrinal truth. Jabin stands for the spirit of infidelity, and Ammon, as we have just been seeing, is the same spirit of untruth, only applied more intimately to the doctrines of God's word.

As Jabin had once been overthrown, so Ammon had been completely conquered by Jephthah during the Judges; and yet we find him here re-asserting his power with all the vigor of the early day. All this scarcely needs any comment in the way of spiritual application. We know too well how ancient heresies revive, and how it is not sufficient to have overcome them once. They must be ever kept beneath the feet of God's people, or they will quickly reassert themselves and bring havoc and destruction. At the present day, very many of the blasphemous doctrines which are being held and taught under the name of Christian truth, are the revival of old heresies which were apparently exploded centuries ago. This shows a perennial activity in things of evil, which must be met by a perennial vigor of faith far greater than the evil which it opposes.

Nahash is sufficiently insolent in his demands upon the men of Jabesh Gilead to awaken in them any slumbering manhood; but this seems impossible. He is not satisfied with their subjugation. He will rob them of their eyesight, taking away their right eye, and lay this as a reproach upon the whole nation of Israel. Thus we see the pride which is not satisfied with the local triumph, but would array itself against the entire mass of God's people. And it is just in these ways that Satan overreaches himself. He seems never to have learned, in all the centuries of his experience and with all the power of his cunning, to control that malice which, after all, is the strongest feature of his character.

It has been suggestively remarked that the right eye would speak of faith, as the left would of reason. So far from being fanciful, this seems perfectly simple. The right is the place of priority and importance, and surely faith is above reason; and yet reason has its place even in the things of God. We are not deprived of that, but where it is under the control of faith, reason can put forth all its powers without danger of leading us astray.

The challenge of Nahash, then, would be that faith is to be sacrificed. That which they know to be the truth of God is to be given up, and this is to be laid as a reproach upon all the people of God. And surely is not this the case? Wherever faith is compelled to close its eyes, it is a shame upon the saints of God throughout the world. Alas, how much there is to bring the blush to our cheek as we see how many reproaches have been laid upon us!

The men of Jabesh apparently have little hope, but are not ready to submit to this loss and indignity without at least an appeal to one who had been pointed out by God as a leader and deliverer for them. Thus they ask for a seven days' respite, and send for succor to Saul.

After his public recognition, Saul had returned to the privacy of his daily work and is here found by the messengers from Jabesh Gilead. The humiliating story of the threat of Nab ash produces in the people at least sorrow, if not indignation, but there are no stirrings of faith, only a helpless lamenting that such things should be possible. It is different, however, when Saul returns from his labor in the field. Inquiring what the cause of their grief is, he is told the shameful story; there is no weeping on his part, but rather the righteous indignation of God by His Spirit against the insolence of the enemy.

As we said, Saul shows well here. He passes from service into conflict, and the one is a fitting preparation for the other. However, certain things are wanting, which are suggestive. In the first place, let it be noticed that the Spirit of God may come upon one in whom He has not effectually wrought for salvation. The Old Testament gives instances of this, notably in the case of Balaam, who declares the whole mind of God as to Israel, while himself willing to pronounce a curse upon them, and, in fact, afterward plotting for their overthrow. Thus, it must not be understood that the Spirit that moved Saul was anything more than the external power which the Spirit of God put upon him in connection with his official place. The threat, also, against the people, with the bloody message evidenced through the oxen hewn in pieces, does not savor of that dignity of faith which alone endures. Threats may energize into temporary faithfulness and spasmodic courage, but it is only the inward abiding which can produce lasting results for God. Then, too, we see that Saul is still leaning upon another arm than that of God, even though it be the arm of the faithful servant of the Lord, Samuel. The threat is, that "Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen." Samuel never claimed a place of equality with the new king. He was perfectly willing to be his servant and that of Jehovah, and it does not look as though Saul fully realized how his relations were to be directly with the Lord, without any human intervention whatever.

However, there is, at any rate, thorough earnestness for the time being, and a real purpose to deliver Israel; and this God recognizes—as He ever does in whatever measure He can, a turning to Himself. Multitudes respond to the threatening call and are gathered after Saul. A reassuring message is sent to the men of Jabesh Gilead, and all is ready for the deliverance. Saul shows skill and wisdom in disposing his army in three companies. There is an absence of precipitateness which argues well. The early rising, too, before daylight, shows an intentness of purpose and prudence in taking the first step, which always is a presage of victory.

This reminds us of some of the old conflicts of days gone by, under Abraham and Joshua. In fact, it was under the same leadership, though perhaps with people not so willing and ready as in those days. The result is not for a moment in any uncertainty. Ammon is thoroughly discomfited, his vast hosts beaten down and multitudes destroyed, while the remainder are scattered to the winds, no two remaining together. Thus, the proud flesh, with its knowledge and insolence, is overthrown. Heresy, false doctrine. cannot stand before an attack like this. It is quite significant that King Saul should be more successful in this conflict with the Ammonites than in any of his subsequent wars. There was that in him which peculiarly fitted him, typically speaking, for such warfare.

After all, a successful conflict with doctrinal evil is not the highest form of victory. The history of the Church has shown men who were vigorous contestants for doctrinal truth and scriptural exactness, who had, alas, but little heart for the Lord Jesus, and little in their lives that

would commend Him. A certain form of the flesh may, for the time being, take special pleasure in overthrowing error. Jephthah, who had previously conquered the Ammonites, showed that a victory over false doctrine can go with bitter hatred of one's brethren; and of this, too, we have illustrations in the history of the Church. Doctrinal contentions that sprang up in connection with the great work of the Reformation are the common shame of Protestantism.

However, the victory is won, and God can be thanked for it. The people, in that revulsion of feeling which is common to human nature, wish to know who it was that had opposed Saul being appointed king. They are ready to put them to death at once, when perhaps multitudes of themselves had looked with much suspicion upon him.

Saul, however, checks all this, and still shows well in his ascribing the glory of the victory to Jehovah; at the same time he would show perfect clemency to his enemies. There is wisdom as well as mercy in this.

Samuel, however, goes further. He calls the people back: "Come and let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there." Strikingly fitting place indeed was it for all to return to. The normal camping ground after every victory, as we remember in Joshua's day, it is the true place to which we should ever come. Gilgal teaches the great lesson of the sentence of death upon ourselves, having no confidence in the flesh. It was the true circumcision, where the reproach of Egypt was rolled off, the first camping ground in the land after the people had crossed Jordan. It thus emphasizes, as we were saying, the great truth of the Cross applied practically to our lives and persons. It was the one lesson which the nation as a whole needed to learn in fuller measure than they had yet done, and which, for Saul, as their leader and representative, was absolutely indispensable.

So, it is a call of mercy which is harkened to externally, and all congregate at Gilgal. Here Saul is again made king in connection with sacrifices of peace offerings. It is rather significant that these are the only offerings mentioned. Nothing is said whatever of the burnt or sin offering. The peace offering speaks of fellowship with God and with one another; the burnt offering, of the infinite acceptability of Christ, in His death, to God; while the sin offering tells how He has borne our sins and put them away. Communion cannot be the first thought. It is appropriate, at Gilgal particularly, where death to the flesh comes in, that there should be prominent mention of that death of the cross which has put away sin and which is infinitely precious in God's sight. However, peace offerings show at least a unity of fellowship, which, as far as it goes, is good. We read that Saul and all Israel rejoiced greatly. Poor man, would that that joy had had a deeper root! It would have borne more abundant and abiding fruit. Nothing is said of Samuel's joy. Doubtless it was there in some measure, though perhaps chastened as he remembered the cause of their being there. He could not forget, spite of all this brave show and recent victory, that the people had rejected the Lord, and that the man before them was not the man of God's choice, but of their own.

They had come to Gilgal at the invitation of Samuel to renew the kingdom; and this he proceeds to do in the divine, rather than in the human way. Man's thought of reorganization, or renewal, is to strengthen everything on the basis upon which it rests. The people evidently had this in mind in connection with the celebration of their victory over the Ammonites, and the joy which accompanied it. Samuel, however, appropriately with the place, seeks to lead the people into deeper self-judgment, goes back indeed to the roots which had made possible their present condition, and shows how their desire for a king was connected with their sin and departure from God.

First of all, he speaks of himself. He is about to lay aside that government which, as judge, he had exercised for God. There was no longer need for a judge if they had a king. How significant it was that there was still the same need for him as ever, showing the utter incompetence of the king, who occupied a place officially which he could not actually fill! Samuel spreads his whole life before them, going back to his childhood days, when he had taken his place publicly before the nation as one who was to be a servant for God. From that day to the present he had walked before them. His sons also were with them. Of these indeed, as we have already seen, not much could be said, and yet the very contrast of their unfaithfulness with his uprightness would only serve to bring into bolder relief the integrity which had marked his entire course. He asks them to witness against him, even as Paul did at a later day. Had covetousness, self-interest in any of its forms, characterized him? Whom had he defrauded? Whom had he oppressed? From whom had he received a bribe, that he might pervert justice? It is the last opportunity the people will have of having their wrongs righted, if indeed there were such. What a sense of integrity must have filled his heart thus to challenge their accusations!

Not even calumny can raise its voice against this faithful old man. His pure, unselfish life spoke for itself, and they can only reply, "Thou hast not defrauded us nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught out of any man's hand." He calls God to witness that they have made this statement; and in thus silently passing over rule to the hands of Saul, he calls him also to witness that there has been nothing unjust in all his past life. Again the people reply, "God is witness." Will they be able to say the same of the young king, flushed with his recent victory, and the man of their choice? Will he prove as unselfish, as devoted, as single-eyed, as this aged servant of God, whose care is not so much for his own good name as for the honor of that gracious God whose servant and representative he has been? Samuel would have shrunk from the thought that he in any way had been a king. All his authority was derived from God; all his appeal was to God, and he had never sought to interpose between the people and their direct obedience to their rightful King and Ruler, Jehovah.

This is ever the character of all true rule. Self is obliterated. If it speak of its own faithfulness, it is simply to silence false accusation, and to awaken conscience. Thus Paul, in the eleventh and thirteenth chapters of 2 Corinthians, is compelled to speak of his own course, but is well-nigh ashamed to do so. It is only to leave the Corinthians without excuse as to the character of ministry there had been amongst them.

True service, as we have said, ever has clean hands. Love, which is the spring of all service, "seeketh not her own." Fruit-bearing is for others, and not for our own enjoyment. Samuel never sought a place nor claimed dignities for himself. It was his one desire to witness for God and to be a help to His beloved people. This his whole well-spent life testified to.

It is a searching question for us: What is our motive in ministering to the saints of God? Is it simply for the honor of our Lord and for the blessing of His people, or does self enter, as an important element, into it all? The Lord keep us in that true lowliness of spirit which desires simply the blessing of others!

Having cleared his own skirts and secured from the people themselves a witness of his integrity, Samuel next speaks of the faithfulness of God, and with it of the unfaithfulness of His people. He goes back, as he had once before done, to Egypt, and rapidly reviews the salient features of their history. In their distress in Egypt they had cried to Him. Had He failed them? He sent Moses and Aaron to deliver them out of their bondage and bring them into the place which they were now occupying. Moses and Aaron were not kings. They were God's instruments

accomplishing His will; but so far from displacing Him, they were the means of preserving the people in closer relationship with Himself. So, too, in the trials which had beset them since their entering into the land: all these trials were produced by their own departure from God, and He had never delivered them into the hands of enemies save when they had forsaken Him. But even when, in faithfulness, He was compelled to turn them over to such enemies as Sisera in the north, or the Philistines in the west, or the Moabites on the east, it had only been that they might learn the difference between serving God and serving evil. It would only intensify in their souls the absolute necessity of cleaving to the Lord in true-hearted obedience. As soon as they had begun to learn their lesson, how quickly did He respond to their cry! He had sent them one deliverer after another. Gideon, Jephthah, Barak, and Samuel himself, amongst others, had been used of God to rescue them from the most-cruel bondage. But, as we have already seen, did these deliverers become kings? Gideon distinctly refuses the crown, and even Jephthah, though he apparently dallied with it, never usurped full kingly authority; and as to Samuel, we have already seen.

Their past lessons should have taught the people, surely, both the cause of their trouble and the way of escape. What deliverance could be more brilliant and complete than that of Gideon, or of Barak? Was anything lacking in it? Had not Samuel led them victoriously against the Philistines? Could a king do more than these had done? And yet, when a fresh evil menaces them, caused unquestionably by the same spirit of departure from God, they turn now to other relief than to the living God. The Ammonites assail, and instead of crying to God with confession of the sin which had made such an assault possible, they ask for a king, thus displacing Him who was King in Jeshurun. How faithfully the aged prophet shuts the people up to a sense of their folly! They cannot escape it. They have turned away from the One who has been their Saviour and Deliverer from Egypt to that present time. They have dishonored and rejected Him, and now they may look at their king. Surely his stature and goodly appearance would shrivel into nothingness in the presence of the mighty God whom the prophet had been holding up before them. Surely, if there was a heart to hearken, such a review as this could not fail to bring them to that true self-abasement which answers to Gilgal.

He has now unburdened himself, and therefore next speaks of the future. Even though they have thus slighted the Lord, let the time past for all this suffice, and let them with their king now go on in obedience to His will; for, after all, the king, as the people, must be subject to God. If so, they will find that His path is still open for them, and blessing will follow them; but if they turn away from Him, and refuse the voice of the Lord, and depart from Him, His hand will be against them, and they will go on to the bitter end, to learn that God is as true as His word, and that departure from Him can only bring one result.

But he will not leave them even with this last word alone. There must be visible manifestation that he is speaking for God, and that God will speak with him. It is the time of their wheat harvest, a season when all nature seems at rest; but in answer to his cry, God will send storm and thunder as tokens of His displeasure at His people’s course—a witness of His resistless majesty and power. As at Sinai, the people tremble. Alas, the flesh can only tremble in the presence of God. It cannot profit by the solemn lessons of His majesty. Its one desire is to get out of that Presence, that it may do its own will. So they seem contrite enough for the time being. They acknowledge their sin in having desired a king, and ask God’s mercy. Alas, all this too is superficial, as is abundantly seen in a short time.

The prophet has not meant to overwhelm them, but only to test them. And so comes the reassuring word “Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.”

How patient and long-suffering is our gracious God! He will test the flesh down to the last, give opportunity after opportunity to see if there is still any true desire to cleave to Him. The prophet’s one anxiety is that the people should not depart from God. There is no danger that the Lord would forsake them. For His own great name, for that grace which has set its love upon them, He will not depart from them. They are His people. The very chastenings which fall upon them are but a proof of this, and so far as He is concerned they can rest assured that His love will be with them to the end. So, too, the aged prophet will ever remain loyal to the people dearer to him than his own life. It would be a sin against God to cease to pray for them. He will continue, therefore, to be their intercessor, though they have rejected him as their leader. How beautiful and gracious is all this! Into his retirement the servant bears no grudge against an ungrateful nation. He enters simply into his closet, there to pour into the willing ear of a loving God the needs of this foolish, self-confident, fickle people.

How beautifully all this speaks of the unchanging purpose of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we need hardly say. All on that side is secure: divine love and power pledged to bring us safely through, even in spite of the folly which would forget that grace alone can preserve. Our Intercessor abides before God, and bears His people’s names and needs before His Father. So, too, will it be with all true ministry for God. One will not be soured by the indifference of those whom he is seeking to help. If he has truly been ministering for God, he will continue to pray for those who, for the time being, have no desire for his service, and are glorying in the flesh.

How the prophet rings the changes on his message! “Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider how great things He hath done for you” —words surely that need not exposition, but the impress of the Holy Spirit upon our own souls! How great things has He done for us! Shall we then for a moment boast in that flesh which He condemned by the cross?

Lastly, there is a final word of warning: “But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.” How solemnly this was fulfilled in their later history, the captivity of many a king, with the people too, makes only too manifest.

King Saul: The Man After The Flesh: Being Notes on 1 Samuel, 1 Samuel 13:15 - 14:46: Saul and Jonathan Contrasted

WHEREVER there is a living faith that lays hold upon God, no apparent helplessness will prevent His manifesting His power, and we have now a refreshing contrast to the timidity and helplessness of Saul and the people with him, in the energy of faith on the part of two. Jonathan, Saul’s son, and his armor-bearer, act in independence of the king. Apparently seeing the uselessness of waiting for his father to take any initiative, the soul of Jonathan is stirred, and he proposes to his armor-bearer to go out alone. Saul still tarries at Gibeah, with his 600 men and with the priests, who would seem to speak of the presence of God, but whose names and connections remind us of the period of priestly ruin at the time of Eli. It is Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod’s brother, who is there. The glory had departed from Israel, and so far as these priests were concerned it had not returned. Neither Saul nor the people with him know anything of Jonathan’s determination, and the priests are apparently as ignorant as the rest. How truly must faith not confer with flesh and blood, nor count upon the slightest assistance from those who have but the name without the reality of priestly communion!

Things are as discouraging as possible for Jonathan. The garrison of the Philistines is strongly intrenched upon an almost inaccessible height, separated by a deep ravine from where Jonathan was.

A sharp rock on either side of this ravine would prevent his approach to the enemy, except as he had strength and courage to surmount almost impassable obstacles. The names of these two rocks are given —Bozez, which means “shining,” and would dazzle the eyes and prevent any rapid climbing, while its white, bare surface would most effectually prevent any concealment needed in an ambuscade. Seneh, the sharp declivity down which he must descend before he can ascend Bozez, means “a thorn,” which might easily pierce, and evidently suggests the extreme difficulty of his undertaking.

The spiritual meaning of all this seems quite clear. The enemy is strongly intrenched on its rock, surrounded by brilliant, shining heights, both intellectual and material. It would seem like madness to attempt to scale these shining heights in the hope of dislodging the proud enemy. All that can be associated with the side which is to make the attack is the barrenness, and even the apparent curse, suggested by the thorn. Is not God’s hand that which has permitted all this oppression, and does it not seem like resisting Him to resist the authority of those who have gained ascendency over us under His chastening hand? But faith does not reason in this way, nor does it look at either thorns or brightness. The way of the slothful is as a hedge of thorns, but the way of faith is with God, and neither thorns nor heights are aught to Him.

Jonathan confers with his armor-bearer, who is but a young man, even nameless. He proposes to him to go over unto the camp of the Philistines. Notice how they are designated—uncircumcised, people who are without the mark of covenant relationship with God, that covenant which had been made with Abraham, and the sign given to him which was ever the mark upon the Israelite. Spiritually, we know that circumcision answers to that sentence of death upon ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in the living God. It is that which was renewed at Gilgal, at which we have already looked, and speaks thus of “no confidence in the flesh.” Circumcision does not trust the flesh, knows its helplessness, its hopeless enmity against God. Uncircumcision would in like manner answer to confidence in the flesh; and, after all, what are the Philistines, with all their greatness, with all their intrenchment on the shining heights of power and position? What, indeed, are they in the eyes of faith, but those who have confidence in the flesh? They trust in human power, human wisdom, human forms, everything of man, and God is left out.

What is this, after all, for faith? Does not faith know that these things cannot be trusted in, that there is no spiritual power in them whatever? So Jonathan, as he looks at them, sees only those whose confidence is false, in the arm of flesh. On the other hand, looking at God, while not absolutely sure that He will do so, he knows His ability. “There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.” He sees that the battle is not his, but the Lord’s. What difference does it make whether the Lord uses a host, or uses his own feeble arm? Nay, if He please, can He not act without any means? What victory already is in the air as we listen to such brave words as these, coming from a heart that is fed upon the strength of God! Is not every word true? Is there any restraint with the Lord? Can He not save by the few, as well as by the many? Has He become reconciled to His bitter enemies? Has He come under the oppression of the Philistines? To ask such questions is to answer them, and one would fain feel the quickening pulsations of a courage that partakes of Jonathan’s faith.

How noble is the response of the nameless armor-bearer! “Do all that is in thy heart: turn thee; behold, I am with thee, according to thy heart.” “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” And here is the faith which responds to faith, and is developed by it.

But courage does not mean rashness, though it may often seem like that. Jonathan is really working with God, as the people say later on, and therefore he must be sure that he is in God’s path. He proposes, therefore, that the sign shall come from God Himself, even as Gideon in his day had his faith fortified by various signs in confirmation. Jonathan and his armor-bearer will show themselves to the Philistines. They will attract their attention. If this excites them sufficiently to come down to their position, they will stand and wait the attack. If, on the other hand, they invite them to come up to them, they will go forward in the confidence that God is leading them on to victory.

We notice, however, that no provision is made for retreating, and apparently there is nothing in his mind but a conflict and victory. It is simply a question whether he or the Philistines shall be the aggressors. Faith has its armor on the right hand and the left, has its breastplate, shield and helmet, but never any armor for the back. No provision is made for the cowardice which runs away. Jonathan will either go forward or stand his ground. He will not retreat. Neither, by God’s grace, will we.

How graciously God responds to the faith that lays hold upon Him in this bold way! The two show themselves to their enemies, and are invited to come up. We can well imagine the supercilious smile of contempt with which the Philistines say, “The Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves.” What a reproach, beloved, it is when we are afraid to say that we are the Lord’s, and hide in secret places—when we are afraid to let our neighbors know that we are Christ’s, and that the word of God is our sufficient guide, which we are seeking to obey! Is not such a reproach merited by the mass of the Lord’s people at this time—hidden, so that even those in closest contact with them would not suspect that they are genuinely for Christ? Of course there may be, as there is, a morality and outward walk of rectitude—even to a certain extent religious observances in which Philistines themselves can join; but where is that bold confession of loyalty to Christ our Lord? doing what we do because we belong to Christ, and not merely because it is right, or expected, or the habit of others? And when one, in the boldness and simplicity of faith, does thus show himself, speaking out frankly for his Lord’s honor, how the reproach may well fall upon all the rest of the people of God if even a few are coming out of their holes and showing themselves!

But this very showing is the presage of victory.

The Philistines will amuse themselves with this little morsel of opposition, and have no hesitation in inviting the bold climbers to come up to them. This they do, and a sorry day it was for the Philistines that they ever invited them up! Jonathan speaks out. The Lord has already delivered the enemy, not into his hands, mark, but into the hand of Israel; for Jonathan realizes that the victory is not for himself individually, but for all the people of God. How important it is, for all our spiritual conflicts, to realize that we are first of all fighting with God; secondly, for God; and thirdly, for all His people!

They climb up, as has been said, upon their hands and feet, suggesting both work and prayer. It is neither idleness nor vain confidence, but the toil of those who realize that in themselves is no strength. We read very little of the details of this conflict. The victory has already been won in Jonathan’s heart, and further details might detract us from the real lesson involved. Faith that has conquered our own coward heart can conquer any Philistines that oppose. The slaughter does not seem to be very great, judged from human standpoint, and yet what mighty results flow from it! There is a trembling everywhere. It is as though God were laying His mighty hand upon all, and causing proud oppressors

and the camp of Israel, yea, the land itself, to feel the weight of that arm which will shake not only earth, but heaven too. There is a trembling of God.

Saul and his company soon learn of the commotion among the Philistines, and of an apparent conflict and victory with which they had had nothing to do. But there does not seem to be any thought with them that God is at work—surely it must be that some of his own little company have gone to fight the enemy. “Number now, and see who has gone from us,” seems to indicate that he had some idea that human power had been at work. He finds only Jonathan and his armor-bearer are absent, and this would not be sufficient to explain the commotion.

Have we not more than a hint here that the man of flesh never rises to the thoughts of faith? Could we imagine such noble words coming from Saul as we have heard from Jonathan? The flesh never rises beyond itself, its circumstances. God is left out, for in His presence it cannot exalt itself, and must be eclipsed. Even in the measure in which Saul succeeded, this was the case.

But he is now compelled to ask counsel of God, though with apparent reluctance. It is significant that the ark of God was present, as mentioned here. The camp and field was no place for it. A resting-place had been provided for it at Shiloh, where the tabernacle had been set up when Joshua brought Israel into Canaan. It had been brought out against these very Philistines in the days of. Eli, with what disastrous results we know. God will never link His holy name with an unjudged state of His people. The ark went into captivity, and had never found an abiding-place since. In fact, it never did till David brought it to Zion.

Perhaps Saul was not far at this time from the hiding-place of the ark, and had had it brought as a sort of rallying-center for his dwindling band, as well as a witness that God was with him. Such expedients are not unknown to the flesh, which will make use of visible forms from which the power has departed, and seek to rally men around the names of what have become mere pretension. Rome’s extreme claims are an illustration of this, though by no means the only one.

While Saul is talking with the priest, and apparently while the latter is beginning to ask counsel of God, the rout of the Philistines becomes more manifest, and the king considers this sufficient reason for discontinuing what was not his first impulse. The flesh loves not to ask counsel of God, and gladly withdraws from His presence. It looks merely at what is seen; and if victory is already assured, there is no need for dependence upon God. Alas, how common is this! We turn to God in our times of perplexity, and when all other means have failed; how readily do we dispense with His aid when there seems to be no further occasion for it! The flesh in us is as hopelessly independent of God as was this man who is a type of it. It is ever going to extremes. The man who a while ago said, “I forced myself,” when intruding into what God forbade, now says, “withdraw thy hand,” and turns from God, because he thinks he can get on without Him.

And yet how utterly foolish is this! Had the lesson of Ai been utterly forgotten? The feeblest enemy can conquer a people who are relying upon an arm of flesh, though flushed with past victory.

Let us remember that we need God as much in victory as in conflict—perhaps more; for, while the issue is uncertain we naturally turn to Him, but our temptation is to forget Him when the battle is won.

We must ever return to the camp at Gilgal; but as we have seen, this had no significance for poor Saul.

But God is at work, through Jonathan, and the enemy is thoroughly routed. Indeed, they turn their weapons against one another, as is so often seen in Israel’s conflicts. Whenever they were with God, it was scarcely necessary for them to fight. They could “stand still,” and see the enemy fighting among themselves. So it was in the days of Gideon and when Jehoshaphat faced a countless host.

Saul and his little band rush up to have a share in the battle, and join in the rout. But victory was already assured. Saul was not needed; indeed, later we find what a hindrance he was.

How good it is to see the results of a work of God like this! Not merely is the enemy overthrown, but the poor scattered sheep of Israel are called back. Many of them were captives, or willing bondsmen, to the Philistines. Many had also hidden themselves in the mountains, fearing to face the enemy. But they know a victory, and rally to the Lord’s standard.

Surely it would have been faith to have needed no such recall as this, but the Lord’s people are weak, “prone to wander,” and easily lose sight of Him. How responsible is every one to see that his example does not encourage defection from the Lord! What a terrible thing it is to be a stumbling-block! May the Lord keep us lowly, in all self-distrust, that we do not by our example, or unbelief, scatter the feeblest of His own from Him.

But if the saints are easily scattered, they quickly rally when the Lord’s hand is seen. Even in Asa’s time, when division was consummated, they fell to him in great numbers out of Ephraim, when they saw that the Lord was with him.

How refreshing it is to think of these two men of faith, alone with God at the beginning, now reinforced by these scattered ones! But were they any stronger? Were not these as liable to drop off again in time of danger? Ah yes; the strength was in the Lord alone, and two with Him are infinitely stronger than the undivided host of Israel without Him. The joy is in the recovery of the wanderers; not for the help afforded by them, but rather for their own sakes, and because of the glory to the Lord’s name through His people’s recovery.

We must not despise numbers. Pride may lurk in the hearts of a few, as well as among the many. The strength of Jonathan and his armor-bearer was not in themselves. Their faith laid hold upon God. Apart from that they were as feeble as any of these fugitives. And these latter can in their turn be Jonathans if they but lay hold of the same One who wrought on that day.

We long to see recovery and unity among the people of God. Let us not seek to secure it in any other way than Jonathan did. It was not the ark with Saul that effected the victory, but the living faith of Jonathan which brought God in. The saints will be united, recovered from wherever they may have wandered, not by fleshly efforts to bring them together, but by turning to Him who still is the God of victory. Let us see to it that we are in all lowliness and self-distrust before Him, and the desire of our hearts for the recovery and unity of His beloved people may yet in some measure be seen.

King Saul: The Man After The Flesh: Being Notes on 1 Samuel, 1 Samuel 14:44-45: Saul's Foolish Oath

SAUL, having taken charge, soon turns a glorious victory into a very limited one, and, instead of the joy of conflict in God's cause, gives the people heavy hearts. He occupies them with himself rather than God, and pronounces a curse upon any who may taste food until his enemies are overthrown. He does not see God and His honor, and accordingly all takes color from this. He makes the hearts of the people sad at the very moment when they should be experiencing "the joy of the Lord."

Poor Saul! Even his religion is a gloomy, selfish thing. Like the elder brother in the parable, his service to his Father is unaccompanied even by the joy of a kid, and his friends are confessedly not his Father's. All legality is like this; self is the center and not God; and where this is the case, what can there be but depression? And its misery and discomfort is all that such a soul has to share with others. What a libel upon God's love! what a misrepresentation of Him in whose presence there is fullness of joy!

But let us again remember that Saul stands not merely for individuals, but for that principle of the flesh which is present even in the true children of God. The flesh is legal and selfish. When it intrudes into the things of God, it can only mar them. It turns the grace of God into legal claims, and even in hours of spiritual triumph would occupy the soul with itself. It has no discrimination, and would put into one common class things essentially evil and those harmless or helpful. But a little while before Saul had been glaringly disobedient to God; he now goes to the other extreme, and would command "to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth."

Fasting has its place in the realm of grace as in law, but not the place given to it by legalism. Where abstinence from food is the unstudied, undemanded act of a soul absorbed with the things of God, it has a place. One might abstain from food to avoid distraction, or, in fact, because his mind is controlled by other things. But to make fasting a merit, or even to regard it as a means of grace, is to put it in somewhat the position in which Saul put it here.

See the disaster that results from this legalism. The people are passing through a wood loaded with honey. It is at their hands, just lying in their path. Jonathan, without taking his eye off the enemy, dips his staff in the honey, tastes, and is refreshed. With renewed vigor he can speed after the flying foe. When told of his father's oath, Jonathan truly characterizes the folly of it: "My father hath troubled the land." For nothing is so distracting as the legalism of the flesh.

Let us remember, too, that under plea of conscience, a morbid self-righteousness may impose its claims upon oneself and others till liberty and joy give place to groans and bondage. As we have already said, this principle is inherent in the flesh wherever found. It flourishes under the ascetic rule of the monastery, and equally so in the bosom of one who is still seeking to coerce the flesh into subjection to God, though his creed be the opposite of that of Rome. The flesh is always selfish—always; when religious—rigid and morbid. It can know nothing of the liberty of the children of God.

Jonathan takes a little honey, which speaks of the sweetness of natural things, not in themselves evil. These things must surely be approached guardedly, and taken, as it were, on the end of a rod. If we kneel down and gorge ourselves with them, as the mass of Gideon's army did, they incapacitate us for warfare. But there is much in nature that can be enjoyed by the freeborn soul without spiritual detriment. After all, "only man is vile" in the pleasing prospect about us; and scenery, the beauties of nature, needed bodily relaxation, and much else, can be a true refreshing to the Lord's wearied people. "Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee." This is the divine rule. The world, among the "all things," is ours. But we are to use it and not to abuse it, or to be brought under its power. Here grace and the Holy Spirit alone can guide and check. Needed relaxation may degenerate into the ungirded loins; cheerful intercourse into unholy levity which blights true spiritual growth. We are absolutely dependent upon the Spirit of God, but He is ever sufficient.

The positive evil of Saul's fleshly restriction is soon seen. The people, faint from long abstinence rather than arduous conflict, reach historic Ajalon, scene of Joshua's long day of conflict. But, unlike him, they have been bound by mere human fetters, and have lost heart. The fear of God has left them, and they fall upon the prey and violate the first principle of sacrificial law—that all blood belonged to God. This brings in genuine defilement. The pouring out of blood (Deut. 12:23, 24) was ever a sort of foreshadow of that Sacrifice of "richer blood" one day to be shed. To ignore all this is defilement indeed; and this is what carnal asceticism will, by reaction, produce.

Saul here, at least outwardly, would preserve divine order, and recalls the people to the sacredness of blood. In this connection too he builds his first altar.

But the end of self-righteousness has not been reached. God has yet to put His finger upon the folly of this oath of Saul. The king proposes, and the people agree, to go down by night and spoil their enemies. But the priest suggests turning to God and seeking His mind. "Let us draw near hither to God" —a good word surely for us at all times.

And now God speaks—first, indeed, by silence, showing that it is of more importance to Him that His people should be right in their hearts than that they should pursue their enemies. This silence meant, as they knew, that some offense had been committed, and Saul rightly connects it with the oath he had imposed upon the people. But he did not yet know who the guilty person was, nor how. Like Jephthah of old, he is ready to sacrifice his child, and persuade himself he is pleasing God.

God permits all to be brought about as though Jonathan were the guilty one. The machinery, if we may so say, of the lot works out for Saul, and points at his son. And in the madness of his folly the poor king would go to the last extreme, and cut off the only man of independent faith among them.

How beautifully Jonathan shows here! He does not accuse his father, nor speak of the harshness of the oath. He frankly acknowledges his act, though he does not confess a sin. Indeed, his words imply the reverse: "I did but taste a little honey... and I must die!" How manifestly at variance with God's thoughts was such an ending to this bright life! And yet Saul is still blind. With another oath he declares Jonathan has spoken his own doom: "God do so, and more also; for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan." What can be done for a man who brings in God to carry out his own self-will, and thinks the deliverer of Israel is a malefactor? Is it not like the fatuity of the Jews at a later day, and that other Saul, of Tarsus, who invoked God's approval upon the murder of His Son, and of His people?

Saul is beyond reach, and God must interpose in another way. The people, who had so lately been demanding a king, must now withstand him. Poor Saul's authority vanishes before the hot words of a justly outraged sentiment: "Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he hath wrought with God this day." Saul is incorrigible. We do not even hear of acquiescence, nor of resistance. In sullen silence all conflict with the Philistines is abandoned, and they are permitted to return to their own territory. It has been only Jonathan's victory, and Saul has done all he could to spoil it.

We need hardly draw the evident lessons as to the flesh here. It has neither discernment of God's will, nor mercy upon those manifestly with Him. It will turn victory into defeat, put divinely-given authority to public shame by its extravagance, and turn joy into mourning and indignation. We need not go back to Israel's history for examples of this: our own hearts will furnish us with these. Oh, in how many homes has this harsh legalism broken divinely-given authority! and in how many cases has the very name of discipline become a stench because of this fleshly pretension! Need we be surprised if in such cases "the people rise and speak?

King Saul: The Man After The Flesh: Being Notes on 1 Samuel, 1 Samuel 14:47-52: Saul's Kingdom Established

WE now find Saul established in his kingdom and going on with apparent prosperity after what had previously taken place. He shows, too, considerable prowess against his various enemies. Moab as well as Ammon, the victory over whom we have already looked at, and Edom, together with the kings of Zobah and his lifelong foes the Philistines, all feel his power. It is significant that there was no complete and final overthrow of these enemies; but at any rate they were "vexed," and their assaults upon the people of God were doubtless for the time checked.

The flesh in its excellence by no means allows the unrestrained prevalence of evil. Glaring moral inconsistencies in profession, as indicated by Moab; the spirit of rationalism, as suggested in Ammon; an avowed secularity, of which Edom speaks, cannot be allowed where the flesh is taking the place of professed allegiance to God. So too the Philistine ecclesiastical assumption cannot be recognized. None of these, however, are entirely overcome. They remain in abeyance, ready to reassert themselves whenever the inevitable relaxing of fleshly rigor makes it possible.

The Philistines, indeed, continue their warfare, and Saul, whatever successes he may have had against them, was never able to check their inroads, much less to drive them from the field. But he did succeed in delivering Israel in good measure, for the time being, from their foes; and even the Amalekites, who form the subject of our next chapter, were largely subdued by him.

There was no lack of courage too on his part; and much that was excellent in administration within and conflict without, no doubt, characterized this period of his reign. We are also told, at this time, who were the members of his family and the captain of his army.

We have already learned that a list of a few names may furnish us with abundant hints as to the moral character of what is not much dwelt upon, and we might expect to find in these members of Saul's family, and those whom he gathered about him, suggestions both of the strength and the weakness which underlay his whole administration.

We may expect to find in Saul, as the first king of Israel, an intimation of what kingly rule should be; not merely what it has become in the hands of man, but, in addition to this, suggestions of what it will be in the hands of Christ. His family therefore will probably give hints of both that which is of God in government, as well as the abuse of it by man.

The names of three sons are given here, and two daughters, together with that of his wife. Jonathan, "Jehovah hath given," suggests all that is of God in this family. As the natural successor to his father, he may represent that which is of God in government, which surely always abides. It cannot, however, affect with its own God-given devotedness him who merely has the form without the reality of obedience. This explains why Jonathan, the son of Saul, acted in a way so different from his father.

Of Ishui, the next son, we have no further mention except his death, which is recorded under the name of Abinadab (chap. 31:2), two or more names being often borne by the same person. "My father is willing" would suggest that he stands for but a reproduction of the characteristics of his father. Ishui, "just," or "equitable," suggests that human government when in subjection to God is a righteous thing; but, as has already been suggested, it must be in faith, or it fails to be true justice.

The third son, Melchi-shua, "My king is saviour," also suggests that in true rule is safety and deliverance for the people. How little a measure there has been of that the history of Israel and of the world shows us. The true King must first come before a Saviour can be known. The last syllable of his name indeed is almost identical with "Jesus," which has, however, the significant addition of "Jehovah" in the place of "king."

The daughters follow, who speak of abstract principles, rather than personal characteristics. Merab, "exalted," or "increase," speaks of that advancing greatness which is the mark of a true government; and Michal, "Who can measure?" shows its boundless extent. Both these, too, wait for their true fulfillment, not as linked with Saul, but with Him of whom it is said: "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order and to establish it, with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even forever."

Saul's wife, Ahinoam, "My brother is pleasure," the daughter of Ahimaaz, "My brother is strength," suggests how kingly rule has often had as its consort, not the glory of God, but that "pleasure" which will use its unlimited "strength" to secure its own ends.

Abner, the son of Ner, was the captain of his host. Abner, "the father of light," is also the son of Ner, "light" —a strange combination. One cannot be both father and son, root and fruit. As captain of Saul's army, he would suggest to us the one who upholds kingly authority and that light which is characteristic of righteous rule. "A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes" (Prov. 20:8). These eyes suggest the light; but it must be truly that, in order to scatter away evil. The only "Father of lights" of whom Scripture speaks is quite Another than the captain of Saul's host. Well will it be for the kingdoms of this world when they are led on to victory under the glorious leadership of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and whose countenance is as the sun when it shineth in its strength.

Significantly, one son is not mentioned here. Ishbosheth, “the man of shame,” is the culmination of all human government. He will be found later on in the history; but here, at least at the outset, we are not reminded of the inevitable conclusion of human excellence apart from divine grace. God will allow that which is apparently good to live on unhinderedly until its own end is reached. This, alas, will be found to be in shame.1

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