

Saul's Career

Ellen White

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A Series of Articles from the Signs of the Times

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For whatsoever things were written aforetime
were written for our learning, that we through patience
and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Romans 15:4

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1. Israel Desire a King.

The first form of government over men was established by God himself, and acknowledged him as the only Sovereign. He made known his will by written commands and revelations, by messages to his chosen servants, by dreams, by signs, and wonders. He would have continued to be their king, had they content with his paternal care.

At the beginning, the father was constituted priest and magistrate of his own family. Then came the patriarchal rule, which was like that of the family, but extended over a greater number. When Israel became a distinct people, the twelve tribes, springing from the twelve sons of Jacob, had each a leader. These leaders, or elders, were assembled whenever any matter that pertained to the general interest was to be settled. The high priest was the visible representative of Christ, the Redeemer of his people. When the Hebrews settled in Canaan, judges were appointed, who resembled governors. These rulers were invested with authority to declare war and proclaim peace for the nation; but God was still the recognized king of Israel, and he continued to reveal his will to these chosen leaders, and to manifest through them his power.

But increase of population, and intercourse with other nations, brought a change. The Israelites adopted many of the customs of their heathen neighbors, and thus sacrificed to a great degree, their own peculiar, holy character. Their worship became less earnest and sincere. Gradually they lost their reverence for God, and ceased to prize the high honor of being his chosen people. Dazzled by the pomp and display of heathen monarchs, they tired of their own simplicity, and desired to be freed from the rule of their Divine Sovereign. As they departed from the Lord, the different tribes became envious and jealous of one another. Strife and dissensions increased, until it was vainly imagined that the installation of a king was the only means by which harmony could be restored.¹

¹ This point is vital to grasp. The manifestation of a king is the result of departing from the Lord. The envy and jealousy that arises from departing from the Lord meant that only through kingship could harmony be restored. This is what is happening to the Adventist Church. It has departed from the Lord and envy and jealousy have been springing up and the only way to maintain harmony is to have a committee to enforce its edicts and discipline those who do not comply.

The government of Israel had never been conducted with so great wisdom and success as under Samuel's sole administration. In no previous ruler had the people reposed so implicit confidence. **He had labored with untiring and disinterested zeal for the highest good of the nation.** In every transaction he had been governed by justice and benevolence. And not only was his course wholly unselfish, but he was often inattentive to his own dues and rights. Hence, the selfishness manifested by his sons appeared more striking in contrast with the course of their faithful father.

The arrogance and injustice of these judges caused much dissatisfaction among the people, who were far more troubled by dangers threatening their temporal interests than they had been by the profligacy and sacrilege of Hophni and Phinehas. Ere long many who considered themselves aggrieved presented their complaints to the elders of Israel. A pretext was thus furnished for urging the change which had long been secretly desired

Had Samuel been informed on the unjust course of his sons, he would at once have removed them, and appointed others, more upright, in their place. When, however, the complaint against his sons was laid before him, followed immediately by the petition for a king, Samuel saw that the real motive was discontent and pride. He perceived that the desire did not spring from a sudden impulse, but was the result of long deliberation and a determined purpose.

The petitioners were careful to state that they could find no fault with Samuel's administration; but they urged that he would soon be too old to serve them, and his sons had given evidence that they could not be trusted. **Despite these explanations and professions of regard, Samuel was deeply wounded. He looked upon the request as a censure upon himself, and a direct effort to set him aside.** But he did not reveal his feelings. He uttered no reproaches because of the ingratitude of the people. Had he done this, one bitter recrimination might have wrought great harm.

Samuel carried this new, and to him difficult matter to the Lord in prayer, and sought counsel alone from him. His petitions were heard; "and the Lord said unto Samuel, **hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.** 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." **The prophet was reproved for grieving at the conduct of the**

people toward himself as an individual. They had not manifested disrespect for him, but for the authority of God, who had appointed the rulers of his people.

The days of Israel's greatest prosperity had been those in which they acknowledged Jehovah as their king,—when the laws and the government which he had established were regarded as superior to those of all other nations. Moses himself in his last address, appealed to Israel, "What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?"

And yet, notwithstanding the Lord had so often wrought mightily for their deliverance, the Israelites were now disposed to attribute all their disasters to their manner of government. The Lord permitted his people to follow their own course, because they refused to be guided by his counsels. **Hosea declares that God gave them a king in his anger.** In their pride they desired to be like other nations, not considering that with the pomp of royalty they must endure also its tyranny and exaction. **This would be a bitter exchange for the mild and beneficent government of God.**

It is a hazardous step to place the scepter in the hands of finite man, and crown him monarch. God understands the human heart far better than men understand it themselves. A departure from the Lord's wise arrangement would pervert authority into tyranny, and subjection into slavery. Even if a ruler were naturally merciful and benevolent, unlimited power over his fellow-men would tend to make him a despot. Such power God alone is able to use with justice and wisdom.

The Lord had, through his prophets, foretold that Israel would be governed by a king. But it by no means follows that this form of government was according to his will. Though he foresees all things, he often permits men to take their own course, when they refuse to be guided by the counsels of infinite wisdom. In this instance, he instructed Samuel to grant their request, but to faithfully warn them of the Lord's disapproval, and also make known what would be the result of their course: "Now therefore hearken unto their voice. Howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them."

Samuel accordingly assembled the people, and faithfully represented to them the burdens which they would have to bear under a king, and the contrast between such a state of oppression and their present comparatively free and prosperous condition. He reminded them that their king would imitate the pomp and luxury of other monarchs, to support which, grievous exactions upon their persons and property would be necessary. He would take the young men for charioteers and horsemen, and would even employ some to run before and about his chariots. A standing army would require their services; and they would also be required to till his fields, to reap his harvest, and to manufacture for his service instruments of war.

The daughters of Israel, who should become the centers of happy homes, would be taken for confectioners and bakers, to minister to the luxury of the royal household. To support his kingly state he would find pretexts to seize upon the best of their lands, bestowed upon the people by Jehovah himself. The most valuable of their servants also, and of their cattle, would he take and "put them to his own work."

Besides all this, an oppressive taxation would be instituted. The people already gave to the Lord a tenth of all their income, the profits of their labor, or the products of the soil. The king would require an additional tithe of all. "Ye shall be his servants," concluded the prophet. "And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day."

But the people were bent upon following their own course. The solemn warnings from God, through his aged prophet, had no effect to turn them from their purpose. They returned the answer, "Nay; but we will have a king over us, that we may also be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles."

"Like other nations"--the Israelites did not realize that to be in this respect unlike other nations was a special privilege and blessing. God had separated Israel from every other people, to make them his own peculiar treasure. But they, disregarding this high honor, eagerly desired to imitate the example of the heathen. What blindness! What ingratitude!

With deep sadness, Samuel listened to the words of the people, and then he again sought divine guidance. And the Lord said unto Samuel, "Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king."

The prophet had done his duty. He had faithfully presented the warning, and it had been rejected. He could say no more. With a heavy heart he dismissed the people, and himself departed to prepare for the great change in the government.

Would that this passage in Israel's history had no counterpart in the present experience of God's people! But alas, we see it frequently repeated! A discontented desire for change, a longing to conform to worldly plans and worldly customs, too often controls even professed Christians. As they depart from God, they become ambitious for the gains and honors of the world. Those who stand firm against conformity to the world, discouraging pride, superfluity, and extravagance, and enjoining humility and self-denial, are looked upon as critical, peculiar, and severe. Some argue that by uniting with worldlings and conforming to their customs, Christians might exert a stronger influence in the world. But all who pursue this course thereby separate from the source of their strength. Becoming friends of the world, they are the enemies of God.

The dissatisfied longing for worldly power and display, is as difficult to cure now as in the days of Samuel. Christians seek to build as worldlings build, to dress as worldlings dress,—to imitate the customs and practice of those who worship only the god of this world. The instructions of God's word, the counsels and reproofs of his servants, and even warnings sent directly from his throne, seem powerless to subdue this unworthy ambition. When the heart is estranged from God, almost any pretext is sufficient to justify a disregard of his authority. The promptings of pride and self-love are gratified at whatever expense to the cause of God.

The unconsecrated and world-loving are ever ready to criticise and condemn those who have stood fearlessly for God and the right. If a defect is seen in one whom the Lord has intrusted with great responsibilities, then all his former devotion is forgotten, and an effort is made to silence his voice and destroy his influence. But let these self-constituted judges remember that the Lord reads the heart. They cannot hide its secrets from his searching gaze. God declares that he will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing.

The most useful men are seldom appreciated. Those who have labored most actively and unselfishly for their fellow-men, and who have been instrumental in achieving the greatest results, are often repaid with ingratitude and neglect. When such men find themselves set aside, their

counsels slighted and despised, they may feel that they are suffering great injustice. But let them learn from the example of Samuel not to justify or vindicate themselves, unless the Spirit of God unmistakably prompts to such a course. Those who despise and reject the faithful servant of God, not merely show contempt for the man, but for the Master who sent him. It is God's words, his reproofs and counsel, that are set at naught; his authority that is rejected.

When men persist in following their own course, without seeking counsel from the Lord, he often grants their desires, in order to reveal their folly or punish their iniquity.² When they lightly esteem the words of his servants, he may permit the voice of counsel and warning to be silenced. But human pride and wisdom will be found a dangerous guide. That which is most desired by the unconsecrated heart will prove the most painful and bitter in the end.

Let the servants of God carry their burdens to their compassionate Redeemer. His ear is ever open to their prayers. His eye notes every sacrifice and every sorrow. The neglect and injustice which they endure here will but make their reward greater in the coming day.

2. A King Chosen.

While a monarchical form of government for Israel had been foretold in prophecy, the regulation had been established that only those should be raised to the throne who were chosen by Jehovah himself. **The Hebrews still so far respected the authority of God as to leave the selection entirely to his hands.** The choice fell upon Saul, a son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin.

The personal qualities of the future monarch were such as to gratify that pride of heart which prompted the desire for a king.³ There was not a goodlier person than he among all the people of the hills. Of a noble and

² Let it be noted that God was punishing Israel with giving them King Saul. This is a clear case of punishing sin with sin.

³ Israel leaves the choice of a king to God and God gives them a king that they desire. This is the mirror principle at work. James 1:23. See also Agape chapter 9. The Law as a Mirror. God reveals to them what is in their hearts by giving to them what they desire. This is further proof they are not in the everlasting covenant. They are not in Christ but in the Old Covenant of their own desires.

dignified bearing, in the full prime of life, comely and tall, he appeared like one born to command. Yet with all these external attractions, **Saul was destitute of those higher qualities which constitute true wisdom. He had not in youth learned to control his rash, impetuous passions; he had never felt the renewing power of divine grace.**⁴

Saul was the son of a powerful and wealthy chief, yet in accordance with the primitive simplicity of the times, he was engaged with his father in the humble duties of a husbandman. A herd of the father's cattle having strayed upon the mountains, Saul was sent with a servant to seek for them. For three days the search was fruitless, and then, finding themselves near Ramah, the home of Samuel, the servant proposed that they inquire of the prophet concerning the missing property: "I have here the fourth part of a shekel of silver; that will I give to the man of God to tell us our way" This was not intended as a bribe; it was customary for a person in approaching a superior in rank or office to make him a small present, as an expression of courtesy and respect.

Approaching the city, they made inquiry for the seer, of some young maidens who had come out to draw water. In reply they were informed that a religious service was about to take place, that the judge had already arrived, there was to be a sacrifice upon the "high place," and after that a select feast.

A great change had taken place under Samuel's administration. The worship of God was maintained throughout the land, and the people manifested an interest in religious services. The ark still remaining at Kirjath-jearim, and there being no services in the tabernacle, sacrifices were for the time offered elsewhere; and the cities of the priests and Levites, where the people resorted for instruction, were chosen for this purpose. The highest points in these cities were usually selected as the place of sacrifice, and were hence denominated the "high place."

On the present occasion a peace-offering was to be presented before the Lord, with fervent prayer for his acceptance, and for his blessing on the service as a means of spiritual good to the worshipers. Then, a blessing having been invoked upon that part of the sacrifice which had been reserved for the people, all would unite in a sacred feast. While establishing the

⁴ Saul was not a converted man. He had never felt the renewing power of divine grace. He was a reflection the leading men of the nation.

external forms of religion, Samuel ever sought to encourage a spirit of true devotion. These services were not permitted to degenerate into a mere ceremony, or to become an occasion of self-gratification. Rightly conducted, they promoted real piety as well as a spirit of kindness and sympathy among the people.

At the gate of the city, Saul was met by the prophet himself. God had revealed to Samuel that at that day and that hour the destined king of Israel should present himself before him. As they now stood face to face, the Lord said to Samuel, "Behold the man whom I spake to thee of. This same shall reign over my people."

The request of Saul, "Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is," Samuel replied, "I am the seer," assuring him also that his father had found the lost cattle, and had now begun to be anxious about his son. Nevertheless he urged him to tarry with him and attend the feast, at the same time giving some intimation of the great destiny before him.

Saul replied, with modest self-depreciation. "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Wherefore then speakest thou so to me?"

About thirty of the principal men of the city had been invited to attend the feast, and Samuel conducted the stranger to the room where these guests were assembled, gave him the seat of honor, and when the meat was served he directed that the most honorable joint, the shoulder, be set before him.

Upon returning to his home in the city, Samuel repaired with his guest to the housetop, as the place of greatest quiet and seclusion, and there talked with him, setting forth the great principles on which the government of Israel had been established, and thus seeking to prepare him in some measure for his high position.

When Saul departed, early the next morning, the prophet walked forth with him. After a time, Samuel directed the servant to pass on, and then bidding **Saul stand still that he might show him the purposes of God,**⁵ he

⁵ In regard to the principle of God's purposes we read with interest of another case. "The prophecy of Noah was no arbitrary denunciation of wrath or declaration of favor. It did not fix the character and destiny of his sons. But it showed what would be the result of the course of life they had severally chosen and the character they had developed. **It was an expression of God's purpose toward them and their posterity in view of their own character and conduct.**" PP 118.2

anointed him captain over the Lord's inheritance. Then he kissed him, and to strengthen his faith, told him with great exactness the various incidents which would occur on the homeward journey, and assured him that he would be qualified by the Spirit of God for the important station awaiting him.

As Saul went on his way, he witnessed the fulfillment of the prophet's words. Near Rachel's sepulcher, in the border of Benjamin, he was informed that the lost animals had been found. In the plain of Tabor he met three men who were traveling to the place of sacred stones at Bethel, to worship God there. One of them carried three kids for sacrifice, another three loaves of bread, and the third a leather bottle of wine, for the offering-feast. They gave Saul the usual salutation, and also presented him with two of the three loaves of bread.

As Saul went on to Gibeah in Benjamin, he perceived a company of prophets returning from the high place where they had been to worship; and as they went, they sang the praise of God to the music of the pipe and the harp, the psaltery and the tabret. Then the Spirit of God rested upon Saul, and he joined the prophets, and with them sang the praise of the Most High and declared the wonders of divine truth. He spoke with so great fluency and wisdom, and joined so earnestly in the services of prayer and praise, that those who had known him only as the untaught husbandman exclaimed in wonder, "What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" They could not understand how so great a transformation had been effected.

Samuel had founded the first regular establishments for religious instruction and the unfolding of the prophetic gifts. Among the chief subjects of study, were the law of God with the instructions given to Moses, sacred history, sacred music, and poetry. In these "schools of the prophets" young men were educated by those who were not only well versed in divine truth, but who themselves maintained close communion with God and had received the special endowment of his Spirit. These educators enjoyed the respect and confidence of the people both for learning and piety. The power of the Holy Spirit was often strikingly manifest in their assemblies, and the exercise of the prophetic gift was not unfrequent. These schools, or colleges, were of untold value to Israel, not only as providing for the dissemination of religious truth, but as preserving the spirit of vital godliness.

As Saul united with the prophets in their worship, a great change was wrought in him by the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. **The light of divine**

purity and holiness shone in upon the darkness of moral depravity. He saw himself as he was before God. He saw and felt the beauty of holiness. He was now to commence in earnest the warfare against sin and Satan, and he was made to feel that in this conflict his strength must come wholly from God. The plan of salvation, which had before seemed dim and uncertain, was opened to his understanding with great clearness and power. That experience which some Christians have been years in obtaining was gained by Saul in a short time. The Lord endowed him with courage and wisdom for his high position. He revealed to him the source of strength and grace, and then, having enlightened his understanding as to the divine claims, and his own duty, he left him free to obey the light which he had received.

The fact that Saul had been anointed king over Israel was not then made known to the nation. The choice of God was to be publicly manifested by lot. For this purpose Samuel convened the people at Mizpeh. Earnest prayer was offered for divine guidance; then followed the solemn ceremony of casting the lot. In breathless silence the assembled multitude awaited the issue. The tribe, the family, and the household were successively designated, and then Saul, the son of Kish, was pointed out as the individual chosen. But Saul was not to be found. Assured of the result, and burdened with a sense of the grave responsibility about to fall upon him, he had remained apart from the assembly.

When his retreat was discovered, he was led before the congregation, and they observed with pride and satisfaction that he was of kingly bearing and noble form, being "higher than any of the people, from his shoulders and upward." And even Samuel proclaimed him to the assembly with the words, "See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people!" In response to his words, one long, loud shout of joy arose from that vast throng, "God save the king!"

Samuel then set before the people "the manner of the kingdom," stating the principles upon which the monarchical government was based, and by which it should be controlled. The king was not to be an absolute monarch, but to hold his power in subjection to the will of the Most High. This address was recorded in a book, wherein were set forth the prerogatives of the prince and the privileges to be accorded to the people. Samuel knew that a king would be inclined to assume undue authority, and he guarded as far as possible the liberties of the nation.

The people in general acknowledged Saul as their king, and brought him such presents as Oriental monarchs usually receive. But there was still a party who were displeased and discontented. **That a king should be chosen from Benjamin, the smallest of the tribes of Israel, to the neglect of Judah and Ephraim, the most numerous and most powerful, was a slight which they could not brook. They refused to profess allegiance to Saul or to bring him the customary presents.** He however took no notice of their insults, but wisely "held his peace." In the existing condition of affairs he did not see fit to assume royal dignity and power. Leaving Samuel to administer the government as formerly; he returned to his home at Gibeah. He was honorably escorted thither by a company, who, seeing the divine choice in his selection, were determined to sustain him.

Those who had been most urgent in their demand for a king, were the very ones who refused to accept with gratitude the man of God's appointment. Their expectations were not realized. They looked for a king to be inaugurated with great pomp and display; failing in this, they felt that little had been gained. **Envy and jealousy burned in the hearts of many. Each had his favorite whom he had wished to see placed upon the throne, and several among the leaders had hoped themselves to occupy that exalted position.** All the efforts of pride and ambition had resulted in disappointment and discontent. It is ever thus. The heart must learn to submit to God, in order to be at peace.

3. The Inauguration at Gilgal.

Saul had been chosen by God and acknowledged by the nation as king of Israel; yet he made no attempt to maintain his right to the throne. In his home among the uplands of Benjamin he quietly occupied himself in the duties of a husbandman, and left the establishment of his authority entirely to the hand of God. It was not to be long deferred. Soon after his election, the Ammonites, under their king, Nahash, invaded the disputed territory east of the Jordan, and threatened the large and powerful city of Jabesh-gilead. The inhabitants endeavored to secure terms of peace by offering to become tributary to the Ammonites. But the barbarous and cruel king refused to spare them, except on condition that he might put out the right eye of every one of them, that they might remain as so many living monuments of his power.

The people of the besieged city begged a respite of seven days for deliberation, hoping that during this time the tribes on the west side of the river might be summoned to their deliverance. The Ammonites consented, reasoning that if the matter were thus made public it would greatly increase the honor of their expected triumph.

Swift messengers spread the tidings through Israel, creating wide-spread terror and consternation. Saul, returning with his herds from the field, heard the loud wail that told of some great calamity. He said, "What aileth the people that they weep?" When the shameful story was repeated, all his dormant powers were roused, and he stood up as a hero and a king. **"The Spirit of God came upon him," as on Samson, and "he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen."**

All Israel obeyed. Three hundred and thirty thousand men gathered on the plain of Bezek, under the command of Saul. Messengers were immediately sent to apprise the people of Jabesh-gilead that they might expect help on the morrow, the very day on which they were to yield up their eyes to the Ammonites.

By marching all night, the king appeared with his army before Jabesh-gilead in the morning. He then divided his force into three companies, which approached the camp of the Ammonites upon different sides, and making a sudden and vigorous attack, completely routed them, with great slaughter. Those who escaped were so scattered that no two could be found together.

By the king's promptitude and energy upon this occasion, as well as his bravery and military skill, the people were far more strongly influenced in his favor than they had been by the Lord's appointment, Samuel's anointing, or his own prepossessing appearance. **They now, by universal acclamation, greeted him as their king, attributing all the honor of the victory to human skill, and forgetting that without God's special blessing all their efforts would have been in vain.**

In their enthusiasm, some proposed to put to death those who had at first refused to submit to the new sovereign. But the king interfered, saying, "There shall not a man be put to death this day; for today the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel." **Here Saul gave evidence of the great change which had taken place in his character. Instead of taking honor to himself,**

he gave the glory to God, to whom it rightfully belonged. Instead of showing a desire for revenge, as would have been natural, he manifested a spirit of compassion and forgiveness. **This is unmistakable evidence that the grace of God dwells in the heart.**

Samuel now proposed that the people go to Gilgal, and there solemnly confirm the kingdom to Saul, **all opposition to his authority seeming now to have ceased.**⁶ This was done, with great rejoicing, and abundant sacrifices of thanksgiving.

Gilgal was memorable as the place of Israel's first encampment in the promised land. Here Joshua set up the pillar of twelve stones to commemorate the miraculous passage of the Jordan; here the manna ceased; here circumcision was renewed; here the people kept the first passover after their wanderings; here the Captain of the Lord's host appeared. From this place they marched to the overthrow of Jericho and the conquest of Ai. Here Achan met the direful penalty of his sin, and here was made that unwise treaty with the Gibeonites which punished Israel's neglect to ask counsel of God. Upon this plain, so rich in thrilling associations, stood Samuel and Saul; and when the shouts of welcome to the king had died away, the aged prophet spoke to the people his parting words as ruler of the nation.

Lest the blessings granted to Israel should lead them to justify all their proceedings, Samuel took this occasion to admonish them that their course had been most displeasing to God. He also vindicated his own conduct and the purity of his administration. He called upon the people to cite one instance of fraud, oppression, or corruption, while he alone was their judge:--

"Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said to me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you; and I am old and gray-headed; and behold, my sons are with you; and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe, to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it to you."

⁶ The people of Israel now accept Saul because of his performance and not because Samuel had previously indicated he was the chosen one. This is further evidence of their rebellion against simply trusting the Lord.

Without one dissenting voice, the people replied, "Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand."

Samuel had a higher object than merely to justify his own course. He had previously endeavored to set forth the principles which should govern both the king and the people, and he now desired to present before them an instructive example. From childhood, he had borne responsibilities in the work of God, and during his long life, one object had been ever before him,-- the glory of God and the highest good of Israel. This had been apparent to the whole nation, and all now bore testimony to his integrity and faithfulness.

The honor accorded him who is concluding his work is of far more worth than the applause and congratulations which those receive who are just entering upon their duties, and who have yet to be tested. One may easily lay off his burdens, when even the enemies of truth acknowledge his fidelity. But how many of our great men close their official labors in disgrace, because they have sacrificed principle for gain or honor. The desire to be popular, the temptations of wealth or ease, lead them astray. Men who connive at sin may appear to prosper; they may triumph because their undertakings seem crowned with success; but God's eye is upon these proud boasters. He will reward them as their works have been. The greatest outward prosperity cannot bring happiness to those who are not at peace with God or with themselves.

It may at times be necessary for the servant of God to vindicate his own character, and to defend his course, that the Lord's name may be glorified, and the truth be not reproached. Let all who are treated with neglect or injustice, follow the example of Samuel, taking care not to make self prominent, but to maintain the honor of God. Let the injured one, instead of dwelling upon the wrongs which he has suffered, show the people how they have wounded Christ in the person of his servant. Many hearts would thus be led to humiliation and repentance, when if personal feelings were aroused, they would be as hard as stone.

Unless men constantly cherish mercy, compassion, and love, Satan will encourage a fault-finding, selfish spirit which will crowd these precious graces out of the soul. Those who have toiled long and unselfishly in the cause of God, should not be surprised if they are at last set aside. Many a man through whom God has wrought to achieve great results, whose influence

has been felt east and west, north and south, is at last rewarded with neglect or cruel contempt. Ingratitude is natural to the unrenewed heart. No man is faultless, and many are ready to find some excuse for condemning or reproaching the one who has served them unselfishly. They forget that they themselves may be guilty of sins far more offensive in the sight of God than those of which they accuse his worn, wearied, and perplexed servant.

It seems to us strangely inconsistent and almost incredible that a man of Samuel's sterling virtue, integrity, and devotion could have been set aside for one who was wholly untried, and who had been well-nigh a stranger to God's cause and to his people. Yet we see the same course often repeated. The chosen of God, who might long have continued in his service, doing the good that they desired to do, are prevented because mercy, love, and gratitude are excluded from the hearts of their brethren. When the faithful laborers are no longer permitted to hold a leading position, let them instruct those who will appreciate their efforts. Let them do all the good they can do in any capacity. They have not received their commission from men, but from God. It is he who has given them their work. If they are shut out from all other avenues of usefulness, they can pray. They have proved the Lord again and again; they are familiar with his word, and can claim his promises. God hears their intercessions.

We should learn to honor those whom God honors. Those who have toiled long and unselfishly for his cause should be ever treated with respect and tenderness, even though it may be evident that they cannot perform the work which they once could, or, that they sometimes err in judgment. Notwithstanding their imperfections, these very men may be far more useful in the work of God, than those who would criticise and reject them. All have defects of character. All need the help of God every hour, or they will decidedly fail.

Samuel rehearsed to Israel the leading events in their past history, the wonderful manifestations of divine power, and the evidence of his favor in establishing them as his peculiar people. He reminded them of their transgressions in departing from God, and seeking to imitate the example of surrounding nations; he pointed to the judgments which had been visited upon them for their sins, and the gracious deliverances which their repentance had secured. **All their calamities had been brought upon them by rebellion against God. Their prosperity was secured by obedience. Yet when threatened by their enemies, they had not made God their trust, but**

had demanded a king to stand at the head of their armies. Samuel had sought to encourage them to rely upon their Divine Helper, and had even volunteered to lead them out to battle himself; but they had obstinately rejected his proposition.

Now the Lord had granted their desire, and set a king over them; yet their prosperity would still depend upon their obedience to God. Notwithstanding their sin, the Lord would pardon and bless them if they would from this time manifest true repentance and fidelity. "But," said the prophet, "if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers."

As a proof of the truth of his words, and also as evidence of the Lord's displeasure, **Samuel called down thunder and rain from heaven. It being the time of wheat harvest, when the air is usually serene and mild, the people were greatly terrified at this manifestation, and they confessed their sin, and entreated the prophet's prayers in their behalf. They now saw that God had greatly honored the man whom they had rejected;** and they felt for the time being that they had made a great mistake in their opposition to the Lord's wise arrangement.

Samuel did not leave the people in a state of discouragement. He knew that this would prevent all effort for a better life. They would look upon God as unforgiving and severe, and thus would be exposed to manifold temptations. Such is not the character of our gracious God. He is merciful and forgiving, ever willing and anxious to show favor to his people when they will hear and obey his voice. Said the prophet, "Fear not; ye have done all this wickedness; yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; and turn not ye aside; for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the Lord will not forsake his people." Samuel also assured the people of his continued intercession in their behalf, and also of his services as judge and teacher. He ended his address with the warning, "But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."

Samuel's life of purity and unselfish devotion to God's cause, was itself a perpetual rebuke both to scheming, self-serving priests and elders and to the proud, sensual congregation of Israel. Although he assumed no pomp and encouraged no display, his labors bore the signet of Heaven. **He was honored by the world's Redeemer, under whose guidance he ruled the Hebrew nation. But the people became weary of his piety and devotion, despised**

his humble authority, and rejected him for a man who should rule them as a king.

In the character of Samuel we see reflected the likeness of Christ. The spotless purity of our Saviour's life provoked the wrath of Satan. That life was the light of the world, and revealed the hidden depravity in the hearts of men. **It was the holiness of Christ that stirred up against him the fiercest passions of profligate professors of godliness.**

Christ came not with the wealth and honors of earth, yet the works which he wrought showed him to possess a greater power than that of any human prince. The Jews looked for a Messiah who should break the oppressor's yoke, yet they cherished the sins which had bound it upon their necks. They would not bear Christ's fearless rebuke of their vices. The loveliness of a character in which benevolence, purity, and holiness reigned supreme, which entertained no hatred except for sin, they despised. Had Christ cloaked their sins and applauded their piety, they would have accepted him as their king. They hated him because he waged war with pride, injustice, lust, and hypocrisy.

Thus it has been in every age of the world. The light from Heaven brings condemnation upon all who refuse to walk in it. It is the duty of every Christian to maintain the honor of God by his own unselfish, spotless life, and fearlessly to condemn sin in all its forms. Satan will make strong efforts to sweep from the earth those who uphold purity and piety. But a stronger than he draws nigh to the believing, trusting soul, and measures weapons with the prince of darkness. In every age there have been faithful men to stand as God's witnesses in the earth. The present is a time of darkness and feebleness to the church; but this is because they are not united to Christ. The moral palsy upon professed Christians need not exist. They may have the vigor of perpetual youth, if they will put away their idols, and serve God with an undivided heart.

"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." The natural heart is as strongly opposed to God now, as in the days of Samuel or of Christ. When rebuked by the example of those who hate sin, hypocrites will become agents of Satan to harass and persecute the faithful. "But," says the apostle, "what can harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?" Such have through faith been adopted into God's family; they will become more than conquerors through Him who hath loved them.

4. The Forbidden Sacrifice.

When Saul was crowned at Gilgal, the nation seemed unanimous in his support, and he felt that his throne was firmly established. He now dismissed to their homes the vast army that had arisen at his call to overthrow the Ammonites, reserving only two thousand men to be stationed under his command at Michmash, and one thousand to attend his son Jonathan at Gibeah of Benjamin.

Elated with the honor of the recent victory, Saul was disposed to relax his efforts. He preferred to enjoyment of ease and the pomp of royalty to the toil, uncertainty, and danger of the field of battle. Here was a serious error. **While his army was filled with hope and courage, he should have proceeded at once to make war upon other enemies of Israel. By neglecting to do this, he lost the opportunity to strike a telling blow for the honor of God and the liberties of the nation.**⁷

Meanwhile their warlike neighbors, the Philistines, were active. After the defeat at Ebenezer, they had still retained possession of some hill fortresses in the land of Israel; and now taking advantage of the somewhat disorganized condition of the Hebrew nation, consequent upon the change in the government, these powerful foes had established themselves in the very heart of the country. Yet they were filled with fear at the defeat of the fierce and cruel Ammonites, and had they been attacked with the same courage and energy, they might then have been subdued.

In facilities, arms, and equipments, the Philistines had great advantages over Israel. During the long period of their oppressive rule, they had endeavored to strengthen their power, by forbidding the Israelites to practice the trade of smiths, lest they should make weapons of war. At the conclusion of peace, they had still kept the trade in their own hands, the Hebrews resorting to the Philistine garrisons for such work as needed to be done. **Had the men of Israel possessed proper energy and foresight, they would,**

⁷ It is tempting for the reader to assume that God is encouraging war but this is not the case. Israel have rejected God and are operating in the old covenant. The path to recovery involves passing through the trials they created for themselves. God does not abandon the Israelites even though they have abandoned Him. He still assists His wayward children and encourages them back to the place where they left Him.

during the long interval of peace, have secured the services of skilled workmen, and furnished themselves with weapons of war.⁸ But love of ease, and the abject spirit induced by long oppression, controlled them. Hence they had suffered even their agricultural implements to become blunt, and none among the Israelites, except Saul and his son Jonathan, possessed a spear or sword.

It was not until the second year of Saul's reign that an attempt was made to subdue the Philistines. The first blow was struck by Jonathan, who at the command of his father attacked and overcame their garrison of Geba. The Philistines were greatly exasperated by this defeat, and they made ready for a speedy attack upon Israel.

Saul was now aroused to the necessity of immediate action. He caused war to be proclaimed by the sound of the trumpet throughout the land, and also issued a proclamation calling upon all the men of war, including the tribes across the Jordan, to assemble immediately at Gilgal. This summons was obeyed.

The Philistines had gathered an immense force at Michmash--"thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is upon the sea-shore innumerable." When the Hebrews became apprised of the strength and numbers of the opposing force, and then considered their own defenseless condition, they became terrified and disheartened. Every day saw the army of Saul diminishing, as multitudes of the people stole away to hide themselves in caves, thickets, and pits; and some even fled across the Jordan, to the land of Gad and Gilead. Those who still remained "followed him trembling."

Where was now Israel's pride and confidence in their king, demanded, as they had declared, "that we may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us and fight our battles"? Alas, how utterly worthless are all hopes based on human pomp or pride!

Samuel had appointed to meet the king at Gilgal, there to "offer burnt-offerings and sacrifices, and to show him what he should do." The prophet did not arrive within the allotted time, and as Saul saw their dangers

⁸ Once again the context is important. Israel are placed in a position where they must go to war because they wanted to be like the other nations. The original plan of God was to drive out the nations with hornets (Ex23:28) rather than take the land by warfare. (PP 392)

increasing, and the hearts of the people failing for fear, he became impatient. Instead of resorting to prayer, and humbling his soul before God, he determined to do something himself to relieve the difficulties of the situation.

Here is where many have failed, and continue to fail. They will not wait patiently for the Lord to work for them. They desire to be active, and if God does not give them something to do, they will venture to do even what he has forbidden. The Lord had detained his servant, in order to test the faith and obedience of the king. Saul did not stand the test. God had promised to be with him, if he would be obedient. He should have trusted this promise, and waited patiently for divine instruction and guidance. But thinking that something must be done at once to inspire the people with courage, he commanded them to bring forward their victims for sacrifice, and then he presumptuously took the place of priest, and himself offered them upon the altar. This act was a flagrant violation of the divine command that only those should offer sacrifice who had been sacredly consecrated to the work. **Moreover, the public nature of the act, as well as the high position of the offender, added greatly to the pernicious influence of his example, and rendered prompt punishment indispensably necessary.**⁹

No sooner had Saul made an end of offering sacrifice, than he heard of Samuel's approach, and went out to meet him. But though greeted with demonstrations of reverence and affection, the prophet understood that all was not right. In answer to his pointed inquiry, "What hast thou done?" Saul endeavored to excuse his own course, by depicting the terror of the people and the danger of an immediate attack from the Philistines. But the prophet returned the stern and solemn answer,--

"Thou hast done foolishly. Thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee; for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue; the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou has not kept that which the Lord commanded thee."

Saul's transgression proved him unworthy to be intrusted with sacred responsibilities. One who had himself so little reverence for God's

⁹ This principle will become important when we later consider the story of Agag.

requirements, could not be a wise or safe leader for the nation. Had he patiently endured the divine test, the crown would have been confirmed to him and to his house. In fact, Samuel had come to Gilgal for this very purpose. But Saul had been weighed in the balance, and found wanting. He must be removed to make way for one who would sacredly regard the divine honor and authority.

An all-wise God had foreseen these events, yet Saul's threatened humiliation was chargeable only to his own sin and folly. God had given him great advantages to develop a right character. **The Holy Spirit had enlightened his understanding, giving him clear views of the divine character and requirements, and of his own duty. All this made his sin more grievous.**

Had Saul cherished the light which Christ had given him, he would have trusted less to the performance of religious rites, and would have felt more deeply the importance of humbling his heart before God. Impulse would have been guided by reason, and chastened and purified by conscience. **But it is difficult for a man whose habits are fixed, to unlearn what he has for years been learning.** Divine grace only can effect this transformation.

In the faithful performance of God's will, all the powers of the mind, all the emotions of the heart, will be called forth into their noblest, purest, happiest exercise. Great are the privileges of the Christian, and great the change which must be wrought by the Holy Spirit, ere men sinful by nature can become the sons of God. Mental abilities and spiritual affections, the treasures of memory and the anticipations of hope, are alike to be sanctified by the spirit of Christ, and consecrated to his service. The life of Christ's disciple is begun by faith and continued by obedience.

5. Victory at Michmash.

The energy and military skill displayed by Saul in the victory of Jabesh-gilead were extolled by the whole nation. **In their enthusiasm the people forgot that he was but the agent by whom the Lord had wrought for their deliverance. And though at first the king ascribed the glory to God, he afterward took honor to himself.** When first called to the throne, he was humble and self-distrustful; but success made him self-confident, and ere

long he was guilty of presumption and sacrilege, in offering the unbidden sacrifice at Gilgal.

The same blind self-confidence led him to reject Samuel's message of reproof. Saul acknowledged Samuel to be a prophet sent from God. Hence he should have accepted the reproof, even though he could not himself see that he had sinned. Such a course, showing a willingness to be set right, would have gone far to re-instate him in the favor of God. **But Saul endeavored to vindicate his own course, and blamed the prophet, instead of condemning himself.**

There are today many who pursue a similar course. Like Saul, they are blinded to their errors. When the Lord seeks to correct them, they receive reproof as insult, and find fault with the one who brings the divine message.

Had Saul been willing to see and confess his error, this bitter experience would have proved a safeguard for the future. He would afterward have avoided the mistakes which called forth divine reproof. But feeling that he was unjustly condemned, he would, of course, be likely again to commit the same sin.

The Lord would have his people, under all circumstances, manifest implicit trust in him. Although we cannot always understand the workings of his providence, we should wait with patience and humility until he sees fit to enlighten us. We should beware of taking upon ourselves responsibilities which God has not authorized us to bear. Men frequently have too high an estimate of their own character or abilities. They may feel competent to undertake the most important work, when God sees that they are not prepared to perform aright the smallest and humblest duty.

Saul was in disfavor with God, and yet unwilling to humble his heart in penitence. He desired to devise some plan by which to establish more firmly his royal authority, as well as to revive the courage of the people. What he lacked in real piety, he would endeavor to make up in pretension and display. **Saul was familiar with the terrible history of Israel's defeat when the ark of God was brought into the camp by Hophni and Phinehas; and yet, knowing all this, he determined to send for the sacred ark and its attendant priests.**

With a spirit of exultation he enters upon the accomplishment of his plans. He hopes to inspire the hearts of Israel with fresh courage, to reassemble his scattered army, and to vanquish the Philistines. He will now dispense with Samuel's presence and support, and thus free himself from the prophet's

disagreeable criticisms and severe reproofs. **He feels that Samuel does not rightly appreciate the position and authority of a king, and hence does not treat him with proper respect.** He expects that Ahiah the priest will be awed by royal dignity, and will readily yield to the king as to a superior.

The Holy Spirit had been granted to Saul to enlighten his understanding and soften his heart. He had received faithful instruction and reproof from the prophet of God. And yet how great his perversity! The history of Israel's first king presents a sad example of the power of early wrong habits. **In his youth, Saul did not love and fear God; and that impetuous spirit, not early trained to submission, was ever ready to rebel against divine authority.**

The lesson is one which all would do well to ponder. Men cannot for years abuse the noblest powers which God has given them for his service, and then, when they choose to change, find these powers fresh and free for an entirely opposite course. Those who in early life cherish a sacred regard for the authority of God, and who faithfully perform the duties of their position, will be prepared for higher service in after years. If we would conquer in the battle of life, we must take counsel of infinite wisdom, first and last and always.

Saul's efforts to inspire the people with hope and courage proved unavailing. Finding his force reduced to six hundred men, he left Gilgal, and retired to the fortress at Geba, so lately taken from the Philistines. This stronghold was situated on the south side of a deep, rugged valley, or gorge, a few miles north of the site of Jerusalem. On the north side of the same valley, at Michmash, the Philistine force lay encamped, while detachments of troops went out in different directions to ravage the country.

On the one hand was a little company of almost unarmed men, on the other, vast numbers of well-drilled troops, with their thirty thousand chariots of iron. What marvel that the hearts of the men of Israel were filled with fear! God had permitted matters to be thus brought to a crisis, that he might rebuke the perversity of Saul, and teach his people a lesson of humility and faith.

Jonathan, the king's son, a man who feared God, was chosen as the instrument to deliver Israel.¹⁰ Moved by a divine impulse, he proposed to his

¹⁰ It is most interesting to note that after the battle was won that Saul was determined to kill Jonathan, his own son. Rather than humble himself and repent, he desired to kill the one that God favoured to help Israel.

armor-bearer that they should make a secret attack upon the enemy's camp. "It may be," he urged, "that the Lord will work for us; for there is no restraint to the Lord to work by many or by few."

The armor-bearer, a man of faith and prayer, encouraged the design, and together they withdrew from the camp of Israel, secretly, lest their purpose should be opposed as presumptuous. With earnest prayer to the Guide of their fathers, they agreed upon a sign by which they might determine how to proceed. Then passing down into the gorge separating the two armies, and which here stretched out to half a mile in width, they silently threaded their way, under the shadow of the cliff, and partially concealed by the mounds and ridges of the valley. Approaching the Philistine fortress, they were revealed to the view of their enemies, who said tauntingly, "Behold, the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they have hid themselves," then challenged them, "Come up, and we will show you a thing," meaning that they would punish the two Israelites for their daring.

This challenge was the token which Jonathan and his companion had previously agreed to accept as evidence that the Lord would prosper their undertaking. Passing now from the sight of the Philistines, and choosing a secret and difficult path, the warriors made their way to the summit of a cliff before deemed inaccessible, and therefore not very strongly guarded. Thus they penetrated the enemy's camp, and slew the sentinels, who were so overcome by surprise and fear as to offer no resistance.

The whole army was seized with consternation, which was increased by an earthquake miraculously occurring at the same time. The Philistines imagined that a vast army was upon them, and in their confusion they began to slay one another.

Soon the noise of the battle was heard in the camp of Israel. Upon inquiry it was found that none were absent but Jonathan and his armor-bearer. **Saul at first desired to consult the Lord as to whether an attack should be made upon the Philistines; but the confusion among them evidently increasing, his impatient spirit could not brook delay.** Marshaling his little force, he advanced against the enemy. The Hebrews who had deserted to the Philistines, now joined their fellow country-men; great numbers also came out of their lurking-places, and as the Philistines fled, discomfited, Saul's army committed terrible havoc upon the fugitives.

6. King Saul's Rash Oath.

When Saul beheld the Philistines fleeing in terror from Michmash, he determined to make the most of his advantage. To avoid unnecessary delay, he forbade the pursuers to partake of food for the entire day, enforcing his command by the solemn imprecation, "Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies."

The king might properly have warned his soldiers not to waste time in feasting upon the spoil of their enemies; but **to deprive them of food for a whole day was unwise in the extreme.** The long abstinence rendered them weak and exhausted at the very time when they should have been strong and courageous to push the battle against the foe. And then to confirm this inconsiderate prohibition by a solemn oath showed Saul to be both rash and profane. **Such a course could not be prompted by a zeal for the glory of God.** The king declares his object to be, not "that the Lord may be avenged on his enemies," but only "that I may be avenged on mine enemies." Yet the fact was, that Saul had no real share in the battle; the victory had been virtually gained without his knowledge or co-operation.

Fearing the king's displeasure, the soldiers refrained from partaking of the spoil of their enemies, and even from eating the wild honey which was found in great abundance as they passed through a forest. But Jonathan was ignorant of his father's prohibition, and unwittingly transgressed by eating a little of the honey.

In the evening, being hungry, and faint with labor, many of the people hastily slew the cattle which they had taken, and ate the flesh with the blood, contrary to the law. Thus did Saul's injudicious severity lead to disregard of the divine command. When, however, the monarch learned what was going on, he interposed his authority, and directed that a sacrifice be first offered unto the Lord, and then the animals be properly slaughtered and the blood separated, as the Mosaic law required.

When the people had satisfied their hunger, Saul proposed to continue the pursuit that night; but the priest suggested that it would be wiser first to ask counsel of God. This was done in the usual manner; but no answer came. Regarding this silence as a token of the Lord's displeasure, Saul determined to discover the cause. **Had he properly realized the sinfulness of his own course, he would have concluded that he himself was the guilty one. But failing to discern this, he gave command that the matter be decided by lot.**

"Draw ye near hither, all ye chief of the people, and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day. For as the Lord liveth, which saveth Israel, though it were Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." The people listened in silence, their hearts thrilled with fear, as they saw the rash, impetuous spirit of their king.

Again the monarch commanded, "Be ye on one side, and I and my son Jonathan on the other." **The lot was cast; it fell upon Saul and Jonathan. Again it was cast, and Jonathan was taken.**¹¹ The Lord was pleased that the course of Jonathan should be brought to light, to manifest more fully the spirit of Saul. Thus the people would be led to see their great error in rejecting the government which God had given them. They had exchanged the pious prophet whose prayers had brought down blessings, for a king who in his blind zeal had prayed for a curse upon them.

When the lot fell upon Jonathan, the king demanded with great sternness, "What hast thou done?" Jonathan replied frankly, acknowledging the act, and deprecating the direful penalty. Now at last we might expect Saul to see and deplore his folly in making so rash a vow. Now, surely, paternal affection will rise superior to royal authority. But no; Saul wished his people to see that the justice of the king was superior to the affection of the father. He had not shared the honor of the victory; but he hoped now to secure honor by his zeal in maintaining the sacredness of his oath. **Even at the sacrifice of his son, he would impress upon his subjects the fact that the royal authority must be maintained.**¹² **How terribly significant the words which fell from that father's lips,--"God do so, and more also; thou shalt surely die, Jonathan."**

At Gilgal, but a short time previous, Saul had presumed to officiate as priest, in direct violation of the command of God. When reproved by Samuel, he had stubbornly justified his own course. Now, upon the bare suspicion of sin in another--before the lots were cast--he had sworn that the offender should surely die; not considering whether the offense might not be a sin of

¹¹ It is interesting to note how the lot fell on Jonathan reflecting Saul's desire to avoid the charge of wrong doing. God allowed the lot to fall on Jonathan that the character of the king might be revealed. A true Father would take the responsibility upon himself in this case, but not the hardened Saul.

¹² This is how men imagine God secures His own throne with the bringing death to others to show He means business.

ignorance, to be expiated by a sin-offering, instead of a willful transgression punishable with death.

When the offender is pointed out, and it is known that his only crime is the ignorant violation of an unreasonable requirement, the king and father coldly sentences his son to death. **What a contrast between the boldness with which Saul himself violates the law of God and defies reproof, and the cruel severity manifested by him toward one whom God had honored!**¹³

The people refused to allow this unjust sentence to be carried into effect. They could see where the guilt belonged; that Saul himself was the one whom God was rebuking. Unheeding the anger of the king, they boldly declared, "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." Noble decision! wise and courageous people! The proud monarch dared not disregard this unanimous verdict, and the life of Jonathan was preserved.

Saul could but feel that his son was preferred before him, both by the people and by the Lord.¹⁴ **Jonathan's deliverance was a severe reproof to the king's rashness. He felt a presentiment that his curses would fall upon his own head.** He did not longer continue the war with the Philistines, but returned to his home, moody and dissatisfied.

Those who are most ready to excuse or justify themselves in sin are often most severe in judging and condemning others. There are many today, like Saul, bringing upon themselves the displeasure of God. They reject counsel and despise reproof. **Even when convinced that the Lord is not with them, they refuse to see in themselves the cause of their trouble.** How many cherish a proud, boastful spirit, while they indulge in cruel judgment or severe rebuke of others really better in heart and life than they. Well would it be for such self-constituted judges to ponder those words of Christ: "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

¹³ And so is revealed the natural man in all his glory.

¹⁴ The character of Saul was such that when he believed others were preferred before him, his jealousy turned to rage and he went on a killing spree. This is exactly what he did. 1 Sam 14:47 So Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them.

To exalt self, to glory in what we have done or what we can do, is proof of extreme ignorance or folly. Those who have an undue estimate of themselves are often brought into positions where their true character will be developed. It was thus in the case of Saul. His own course convinced the people that kingly honor and authority were dearer to him than justice, mercy, or benevolence.

The Lord bears long with the waywardness of the children of men, and grants to all ample opportunity to see and forsake their sins. Yet he will maintain his own glory, and care for his own people; whatever the course of the rebellious and backsliding. He may appear to prosper those who disregard his will and despise his warnings; but in his own time he will surely make manifest their folly.

By one wrong decision, men may subject themselves to untold perils. One misstep may cost a lifetime of care, anxiety, and sorrow. Had not the men of Israel interposed to save the life of Jonathan, that intrepid warrior would have perished by the decree of their chosen leader. With what misgivings must that people afterward have followed Saul's guidance! **How bitter the thought that he had been placed upon the throne by their own act!**

God's people of today are in danger of committing errors no less disastrous. We cannot, we must not, place blind confidence in any man, however high his profession of faith or his position in the church. We must not follow his guidance, unless the word of God sustains him. The Lord would have his people individually distinguish between sin and righteousness, between the precious and the vile.

Those who labor faithfully and unselfishly in the cause of God should be highly esteemed for their works' sake. We may, like the children of Israel, be tempted to exchange the devoted, self-sacrificing laborer for one who appears more pleasing, but whose faith and steadfastness are yet untried. Let us beware how we manifest ingratitude or contempt for those whom God has made burden-bearers in his cause. Those who smite the soldiers of the cross are smiting the hand of God that covers them as a shield.

7. A Doomed People.

After delivering the reproof at Gilgal, Samuel had little intercourse with the king of Israel. Saul resented the prophet's stern rebuke, and avoided him as far as possible; and Samuel did not intrude his presence or his counsel. But the Lord commanded him to bear another message to the king. **God purposed again to work through Saul, to destroy the enemies of Israel.**¹⁵

Obedying this command, the prophet reminded him that he had been commissioned by the Lord to anoint him king, and that he still spoke by the same authority. Then he declared the divine message. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, **I remember**¹⁶ **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."

The Amalekites were a wandering people inhabiting the wilderness to the south of Palestine, between that country and Egypt. Like most of the neighboring tribes, they were idolaters, and bitter enemies of Israel. Soon after the exodus they attacked the Israelites in the desert of Rephidim, but were signally defeated by Joshua. The Amalekites were not among the nations whose lands were granted to Israel, nor had they received any injury from them. This assault was, therefore, wholly unprovoked. It was also most cowardly and cruel; the foe, **not daring to risk an open encounter with the Hebrews, had attacked and slain those who from feebleness and exhaustion had fallen behind the body of the host.**

Moses was commanded to preserve a record of the battle, and also of the final doom of that idolatrous people, as pronounced by God himself: "I will blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven, because [marginal reading] the hand of Amalek is against the throne of Jehovah." The Lord of all the earth had fixed his throne in Israel, and had shown his glorious power and majesty in bringing the chosen people from their bondage in Egypt. **When Amalek made an assault upon them, he attacked the throne of God,**

¹⁵ God worked through Saul in the sense that He visited the iniquity of the Amalekites with the iniquity of Saul. No one can prove that Saul was in a right relationship with God thus the Lord is bringing events to the place that sin will punish sin.

¹⁶ The word remember here is pāqad H6485. It is the same word for visit in Exodus 20:5 to visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children. This gives evidence of a visitation of God's justice by punishing sin with sin. He will oversee events to ensure that men will reap what they have sown.

who determined to vindicate his authority, as a warning to all future generations.

After denouncing judgments against the Amalekites, the Lord waited long for them to turn from their evil ways; but they went on in sin until their iniquity had reached its height, till their day of probation ended, and **divine justice demanded their destruction.**¹⁷ That wicked people were dwelling in God's world, the house which he had prepared for his faithful, obedient children. Yet they appropriated his gifts to their own use, without one thought of the Giver. **The more blessings he poured upon them, the more boldly they transgressed against him.** Thus they continued to pervert his blessings and abuse his mercy. They strengthened their souls in iniquity, but God kept silence; **and they said in their hearts. "How doth God know?** and is there knowledge with the Most High? "But the dark record of their crimes was constantly passing up to Heaven. There is a limit beyond which men may not go on in sin,--

"A hidden boundary between
God's mercy and his wrath."

When that limit had been passed, God arose in his indignation to put them out of the house which they had polluted.

Our gracious God still bears long with the impenitent. He gives them light from Heaven, that they may understand the holiness of his character, and the justice of his requirements. He calls them to repentance, and assures them of his willingness to forgive. But **if they continue to reject his mercy, the mandate goes forth devoting them to destruction.**¹⁸

¹⁷ Psa 9:16 The LORD is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands

¹⁸ God keeps a reckoning with the nations. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice. **Those who work evil toward their fellow men, saying, How doth God know? will one day be called upon to meet long-deferred vengeance.** In this age a more than common contempt is shown to God. Men have reached a point in insolence and disobedience which shows that their cup of iniquity is almost full. Many have well-nigh passed the boundary of mercy. Soon God will show that He is indeed the living God. He will say to the angels, **"No longer combat Satan in his efforts to destroy. Let him work out his malignity upon the children of disobedience; for the cup of their iniquity is full.** They have advanced from one degree of wickedness to another, adding daily to their lawlessness. I will no longer interfere to prevent the destroyer from doing his work." {RH, September 17, 1901 par. 8}

Thus was it with Sodom. Behold the fairest city of the plain, set in a garden of beauty. To human vision it is a scene of quietness and security. The fertile fields are clothed with harvests. There is an abundance for the supply of every want, almost without labor. The distant hills are covered with flocks. The merchants of the East bring their treasures from afar. The people live for pleasure and make one long holiday of the year.

Idleness and riches are their curse. They are absorbed in worldly pursuits and sensual gratification. Yet no visible token of God's wrath hangs over the devoted city. Their last day is like many others that have come and gone. Their last night is marked by no greater sins than many others before it. But mercy, so long rejected, ceases at last her pleadings. **The fires of divine vengeance are kindled in the vale of Siddim.**¹⁹ The beautiful but guilty Sodom becomes a desolation, a place never to be built up or inhabited.

The flames which consumed the cities of the plain shed their warning light down even to our time. They bid us shun the sins that brought destruction upon the ungodly at that day.

God requires the service of all his creatures. Everything in nature obeys his will. The measureless heavens are ablaze with his glory. Of all that he has created upon the earth, only man rebels against the Creator. Puny, erring men, the creatures of an hour, dare to enter into controversy with the Eternal, the Source of all wisdom and all power. They who are constantly dependent upon God's bounty, dare to spurn the Hand whence all their blessings flow. There is no ingratitude so sinful, no blindness so complete, as that of men who refuse to acknowledge their obligation to their God.

Not only are men dwellers in God's great house, and partakers of his bounties, but they are the objects of his unceasing care and love. He makes it their privilege, through the righteousness of Christ, to call him Father. They may ask infinite blessings without exhausting the treasures of his grace. In their ignorance they may be guided by the counsels of unerring wisdom. In calamity they may shelter themselves beneath the shadow of his throne, and find safety in his secret place.

This mighty God pledges his immutable word that those who love and trust him shall not want any good thing. **But he declares that he will surely punish the transgressors of his law. The wickedness of the race is not**

¹⁹ Ibid

forgotten nor overlooked because God does not at once visit them with judgments.²⁰ Each century of profligacy and rebellion is treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath.

When the scribes and Pharisees rejected the teachings of Christ, he bade them fill up the iniquity of their fathers, that it might be time for God to work; that the message of glad tidings might be given to others, who would joyfully receive it. When at last the divine forbearance was exhausted, God's wrath fell signally upon a people who had rejected so great light.

The Lord does not delight in vengeance, though he executes judgment upon the transgressors of his law. He is forced to do this, to preserve the inhabitants of the earth from utter depravity and ruin. In order to save some, he must cut off those who have become hardened in sin.²¹ Says the prophet Isaiah: "The Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act." **The work of wrath and destruction is indeed a strange, unwelcome work for Him who is infinite in love.**²²

Again, the divine message comes to Ezekiel: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." The very fact of God's unwillingness to punish sinners shows the enormity of the sins that call forth his judgments. And yet to every transgressor of his holy law is addressed that earnest, pleading call, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?"

The records of sacred history declare, that while God is a God of justice, strict to mark iniquity, and strong to punish the sinner, he is also a God of

²⁰ I was shown that the judgments of God would not come directly out from the Lord upon them, but in this way: They place themselves beyond His protection. He warns, corrects, reproves, and points out the only path of safety; then if those who have been the objects of His special care will follow their own course independent of the Spirit of God, after repeated warnings, if they choose their own way, then He does not commission His angels to prevent Satan's decided attacks upon them. 14MR 3

²¹ The question is how does God cut them off? The next sentences in this paragraph reveal the process.

²² See the booklet. God's Strange Act. The first word for strange means *to turn aside*. The second time the word means to become an alien of a stranger. God's strange act is to let his wayward children receive the consequences of their own choices. This is painful for God to do this. Yet, He will do it in strict justice.

truth, compassion, and abundant mercy. **While he visits judgments²³ upon the transgressors of his law and the enemies of his people, he will protect those who respect his statutes and show kindness to his chosen.**

When he commanded that a war of extermination be waged against Amalek²⁴, he also directed that the Kenites, who dwell among them, should be spared, because they had shown mercy to Israel in their distress. Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, and a prince among the Kenites, had joined Israel soon after the latter came out of Egypt. His presence and counsel at that time was of great value to the Hebrews. Moses afterward urged Hobab, the son of Jethro, to accompany them in their journeyings through the wilderness, saying: "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you. Come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

Hobab declined, choosing to live in his own country and among his own people. But Moses knew that his brother-in-law was well acquainted with the country through which they were to pass, and that he could greatly assist them in their journey. He therefore earnestly entreated: "Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes. And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee." Hobab consented to this; but the journeyings of Israel over, he and his followers forsook the neighborhood of the towns, and betook themselves to freer air, to the wilderness of Judah, on the southern border of Canaan.

The promise of special protection and friendship given by Moses to the Kenites, was made by the direction of the Lord. **Hence when Saul was commanded to destroy the Amalekites, special directions were given that the Kenites should be spared. Jethro and his family had been devoted worshippers of the true God;²⁵** but though the Kenites were still friendly to Israel, and acknowledged the living God as the ruler of the earth, their

²³ Note the use of the word *visit*. God visits these judgments in accord with Ex 20:5 found in the second commandment. He visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him. This means He oversees the process of sin punishing sin.

²⁴ This command is a reflection of Saul's own thought process as we will soon see.

²⁵ Without this special instruction, Saul might have destroyed them also.

religion had become corrupted with idolatry. After this time they degenerated more and more into heathenism, and their influence became a snare to the Hebrews. Hence they were finally visited with divine judgments.

Balaam, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, foretold the destruction of both the Kenites and the Amalekites: "When he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable and said, Amalek was the first of the nations, but his latter end shall be that he perish forever. And he looked on the Kenites and took up this parable, and said, Strong is thy dwelling-place, and thou puttest thy rest in a rock. Nevertheless, the Kenites shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive. And he took up his parable, and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this!"

8. The Final Test.

The defeat of the Philistines at Michmash seemed a turning-point in the fortunes of Israel. **Though the Lord was displeased with Saul, and purposed to set aside his family, yet he granted him success in battle against the oppressors of his people.** No enemy seemed able to stand against him. He made war in turn against Moab, Ammon, and Edom, **and against the Amalekites**²⁶ and the Philistines; and wherever he turned his arms, he gained fresh victories. Yet, having missed the opportunity which God had granted him, he was never able permanently to subdue the Philistines. He had sore war with them all the days of his life.

When commanded to destroy the Amalekites, Saul did not for a moment hesitate. To his own authority was added the command of the prophet, and at the call to battle the men of Israel flocked to his standard.²⁷ Two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah were numbered at Telaim. With this force, Saul attacked and defeated the king of Amalek, and overran the country.

²⁶ Note carefully that Saul was already at war with the Amalekites before the command came in 1 Sam 15:1-3

²⁷ The commandment of God added to Saul's own authority. Saul was already at war with the Amalekites but God then provides a catalyst for Saul to advance that which he had already was doing in the frame of mind of one in rebellion against God.

This victory was by far the most brilliant which Saul had ever gained, and it served to kindle anew that pride of heart which was his greatest danger. The divine edict devoting the Amalekites to utter destruction was but partially executed. Ambitious to heighten the honor of his triumphal return by the presence of a royal captive, Saul ventured to spare Agag, the fierce and warlike king of Amalek.

This act was not without influence upon the people. They too felt that they might safely venture to depart somewhat from the Lord's explicit directions. Hence they covetously reserved to themselves the finest of the flocks, herds, and beasts of burden, destroying only that which was vile and refuse.²⁸

Here Saul was subjected to the final test. His presumptuous disregard of the will of God, showing his determination to rule as an independent monarch, proved that he could not be intrusted with royal power as the Lord's vicegerent. Unmindful of all this, Saul marshals his victorious army, and with the captive king and the long train of flocks and herds--a booty highly valued in the East--set out on the march homeward. At Carmel, in the possessions of Judah, he set up a monument of his victory.

While pride and rejoicing reigned in the camp of Saul, there was deep anguish in the home of Samuel. **His intense interest for the welfare of Israel had not abated. He still loved the valiant warrior whom his own hands had anointed as king. It had been his earnest prayer that Saul might become a wise and prosperous ruler. When it was revealed to him that Saul had been finally rejected, Samuel in his distress "cried unto the Lord all night," pleading for a reversal of the sentence.**²⁹ With an aching heart he set forth next morning to meet the erring king. But when he heard that Saul had erected a monument of his own exploits, instead of giving glory to God, he turned aside and went to Gilgal.

Thither the monarch with his army came to meet him. Samuel had cherished a longing hope that Saul might, upon reflection, become conscious of his sin, and by repentance and humiliation before God, be again restored to the divine favor. But the king came forward with great assurance, saying,

²⁸ Saul's act of sparing Agag provided an example for his men to keep some of the spoils of war against what they understood was the commandment of God.

²⁹ Simply amazing. Samuel's love for Saul and pleading for his life revealed the character of Christ.

"Blessed be thou of the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord." Saul had so often followed his own will, regardless of the command of God through his prophet, that his moral perception had become dulled. He was not now conscious of the sinfulness of his course. ³⁰

The sounds that fell upon the prophet's ears, disproved the statement of the disobedient king. To the pointed question, "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" Saul made answer, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." The plea here urged was at best but an excuse for covetousness. The beasts saved from the spoil were to be offered by the Israelites in place of their own animals required for sacrifice.

The spirit which actuated Saul is evinced by the fact that when proudly boasting of his obedience to the divine command, he takes all the honor to himself; when reproved for disobedience, he charges the sin upon the people. Samuel was not deceived by the king's subterfuge. With mingled grief and indignation he declares, "Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night." Then he reminded Saul of his early humility: "When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel?" He repeats the divine behest concerning Amalek, and demands from the king the reason for his disobedience.

Saul stubbornly persists in his self-justification; "Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroy the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal." Had Saul himself obeyed the command of God, and enforced it upon the people with the same decision that he had manifested in carrying out his own decrees, he would have had no difficulty in securing obedience.

³⁰ The brazen attitude of Saul, the falsehood he uttered and the sight of all the animals would have caused Samuel great sorrow. Especially as he had been awake all night weeping for Saul and praying for a change in him. Then to see the extent of the apostasy would have been extremely hard for Samuel.

God held him responsible for the sin which he basely endeavored to charge upon Israel.

In stern and solemn words the prophet of the Most High sweeps away the refuge of lies, and pronounces against Saul the irrevocable sentence: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. **For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft,**³¹ and **stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.** Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king."

As the king heard this fearful sentence, he cried out, "I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and thy words because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice." Saul was filled with terror by the denunciation of the prophet, but he had, even now, no true sense of the enormity of his transgression. He still persisted in casting blame upon the people, declaring that he had sinned through fear of them.

This was the same excuse urged by Aaron to shield himself from the guilt of making the golden calf. But so far from accepting the excuse, **Moses sternly rebuked Aaron, in the presence of all the people.**³² As the high priest of Israel, and the representative of Moses in his absence, Aaron should at any risk have opposed the rash and godless designs of the people. His neglect to do this brought upon them sin, disaster, and ruin, which he was powerless to avert. While he found it easy to lead them into sin, he sought in vain to lead them to repentance. Moses afterward declared, "The Lord was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him." His sin would have been punished with death had he not in true penitence humbled himself before the Lord. Had Saul, in like manner, been willing to see and confess his sin, he too might have been forgiven.

³¹ "Samuel informed Saul that his rebellion was as the sin of witchcraft. That is, when one commenced to travel in the path of rebellion, he yields himself to be controlled by an influence that is in opposition to the will of God. Satan controls the rebellious mind." 4aSG 76

³² "When Moses saw the idolatry of Israel and his indignation was so aroused at their shameful forgetfulness of God that he threw down the tables of stone and broke them, Aaron stood meekly by, bearing the censure of Moses with commendable patience. The people were charmed with Aaron's lovely spirit and were disgusted with the rashness of Moses. But God seeth not as man sees. He condemned not the ardor and indignation of Moses against the base apostasy of Israel." {3T 300.3}

It was not sorrow for sin, but fear of its penalty that actuated the king of Israel as he entreated Samuel, "I pray thee, pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord."

"I will not return with thee," was the answer of the prophet; "for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." **As Samuel turned to leave,³³ the king, in an agony of fear, laid hold of his mantle to hold him back, but it rent in his hands. Upon this, the prophet declared, "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine that is better than thou."** And knowing how lightly his words had heretofore been regarded by the king, he adds the solemn assurance, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent." Saul had gloried in his exploits, as though he were the deliverer of his people. The prophet rebukes this pride by reminding the haughty monarch that God was the strength of Israel.

Even now Saul fears only personal disgrace and the loss of his kingdom. He is far more disturbed by the alienation of Samuel than by the displeasure of God. He entreated Samuel to pardon his transgressions, as if the prophet had authority to reverse the divine sentence against him. **He knew that the people had greater confidence in Samuel than in himself. Should another king be immediately anointed by divine command, he felt that his own case was hopeless. Should Samuel denounce and forsake him, he feared an immediate revolt among the people.**

As a last resort, Saul entreated the prophet to honor him before the elders and the people by publicly uniting with him in the worship of God. Samuel remained,³⁴ but only as a silent witness of the service. Without humility or repentance, Saul's worship could not be accepted of the Lord.

An act of justice, stern and terrible, was yet to be performed. Samuel must publicly vindicate the honor of God, and rebuke the course of Saul.³⁵ He commands that the king of the Amalekites be brought before him. Above

³³ Samuel intended to leave. At this point he had not planned to kill Agag.

³⁴ "By divine direction Samuel yielded to the king's request." PP 632

³⁵ Saul's act of sparing Agag caused the people to believe they could also disregard some of God's directions if they wished. As we read earlier "This act was not without influence upon the people. They too felt that they might safely venture to depart somewhat from the Lord's explicit directions."

all who had fallen by the sword of Israel, Agag was responsible as the upholder of the debasing heathenism of his people, and the instigator of their revolting cruelties; it was just that upon him should fall the heaviest penalty. He came at the prophet's command, in the pride of royalty, flattering himself that he could overawe the servant of God, and that all danger of death was past. **Samuel's words dispelled his assurance: As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be made childless among women."** **"And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord."**³⁶ This done, Samuel returned to his home at Ramah, Saul to his at Gilgal. The prophet and the king were never to meet again.

Samuel was a man of great tenderness of spirit, and strong affections, as is evinced by the anguish which he felt when commanded to declare the divine sentence against Saul. Yet when required to execute justice against the wicked king of Amalek, he performed the unwelcome task unflinchingly. He would maintain his fidelity to God, however great the sacrifice of personal feeling.

How wide the contrast between the conduct of Samuel and the course pursued by the king of Israel. To serve his own purpose, Saul could be exceedingly cruel; **but when divinely commissioned to destroy utterly a rebellious people, he smites only the lesser criminals, and spares the one upon whom the curse of God especially rested. In his pride of heart he flattered himself that he was more merciful than his Maker.** By his course of action he declared the divine requirement unjust and cruel.

The case of Saul should be a lesson to us, that God's word is to be respected and obeyed. All the crimes and calamities of ancient Israel resulted from their neglect to heed the instructions of their divine Ruler. Here is our danger. We must give diligent heed to what the Lord has spoken, even in apparently small matters. God requires his people not merely to assent to his word, but to obey it with all the heart. To comply with the Lord's instructions

³⁶ The intensity with which Samuel hewed Agag in pieces speaks to the zeal with which he took these actions. We remember the words of the Lord that He *remembered* or *visited* the deeds of Amalek. All of these judgments are under within the context of visiting iniquity with iniquity. There is no mention of a direct command from heaven to take this action. Yet in order for the people to come into a correct understanding, God wrought through the events to see that justice was understood to be done.

when it is compatible with our own interests, and to disregard them when this best suits our purpose, is to pursue the course of Saul. Pride in our own achievements or a stubborn adherence to our own will, renders the most exalted profession or the most splendid service odious in the sight of God.

9. Obedience Better Than Sacrifice.

"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." These words of reproof, addressed to the king of Israel by Samuel the prophet, contain a lesson that should be pondered by the people of God in every age. **The sacrificial offerings of ancient times were of themselves of no value in the sight of God. Those who presented sacrifice before the Lord must have a true sense of its import, acknowledging their lost condition as sinners, and accepting the death of Christ in their behalf. They must repent of their transgressions of God's law, and exercise faith in Jesus as the only one who could remove their guilt.**³⁷ **When the offering of a sacrifice was substituted for true, willing, glad service to God, when it was regarded as having any virtue or merit in itself, or when the type was exalted above the object typified, then it became displeasing to the Lord.**

Had Saul presented an offering of the greatest value, from his own flocks and herds, obeying in every particular the requirements of the law, yet in a spirit of self-sufficiency, and without true penitence, his offering would have been rejected. But when he offered the spoils of Amalek, upon which the divine curse had been pronounced, how utterly abhorrent must have been his course in the sight of a holy God. He had presumed, in the presence of all Israel, to show contempt for the authority of his Maker.

"To obey is better than sacrifice." This lesson is of special importance at the present time, when the claims of God's law are urged upon our attention. **The light now shining from the sacred word reveals the fact that an alien power has tampered with the statutes of Jehovah. The papacy, "the man of sin," has attempted to change the times and laws of divine appointment. The Creator of the heavens and the earth commanded, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work." This**

³⁷ Just the same as we do today.

command was enforced by the example of its Author, proclaimed with his own voice, and placed in the very bosom of the decalogue. But the papal power has removed this divine ordinance, and substituted a day which God has not sanctified, and upon which he did not rest, the festival so long adored by heathens as the "venerable day of the sun."

In all this, Satan is the master spirit. He has no particular regard for Sunday, but he desires that his will shall be obeyed, rather than the will of God. It was Satan that incited Adam and Eve to transgress the command of their Maker, and he has continued this work even to our own day. We see the success of his attacks upon the law of God, in the wide-spread disregard for the ancient Sabbath of Jehovah, and the well-nigh universal veneration for the institution of heathenism and papacy. And we see the terrible results, in the skepticism which everywhere prevails. The Sabbath was instituted in Eden, as a memorial of creation. It points men directly to the true God as the Maker of the heavens and the earth. Thus it stands as a mighty barrier against idolatry, atheism, and infidelity. Had the Sabbath been universally kept, not one of these evils could have gained a foot-hold in our world. There could not have been an infidel nor an idolater.

Even the political regulations given to Moses when he was in secret council with Jehovah, contain important lessons for the people of every age. But the law proclaimed from Sinai in the hearing of assembled Israel, and written by the finger of God, is obligatory upon all men to the close of time.

When God commissioned Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites, he did not leave it to Saul's judgment to destroy or keep alive as he should see fit. When he forbade our first parents to eat of the tree of knowledge, he did not leave it to them to eat or not to eat, as they pleased. When he commanded men to keep holy the seventh day, he did not make it optional with them to obey if convenient, and if not to sanctify a day of their own choosing.

Many endeavor to evade the claims of the fourth commandment by urging that the law of God was given to the Jews exclusively; that the seventh day of the week is the Jewish, while the first day is the Christian Sabbath. This distinction is not recognized in the Scriptures. **There is no such contrast as is often claimed to exist between the Old and the New Testament, the law of God and the gospel of Christ, the requirements of the Jewish and those of the Christian dispensation. Every soul saved in the former dispensation was saved by Christ as verily as we are saved by him today. Patriarchs and prophets were Christians.** The gospel promise was given to the first pair in

Eden, when they had by transgression separated themselves from God. **The gospel was preached to Abraham. The Hebrews all drank of that spiritual Rock, which was Christ.** It was by Christ that the worlds were made. **By Christ the law was proclaimed from Sinai. Hence, Christ is, in the fullest sense, as he declares himself to be, "Lord of the Sabbath." He made the day sacred to himself, on which to receive the worship of angels and of men.**

How dare any, understanding the claims of the fourth commandment, trample upon its requirements? Saul stated, as an excuse for his transgression, that he "feared the people." Are there not many in our day, even among the professed ministers of Christ, who could give no better reason for their course? Though the word of God is plain, they dare not offend the prejudices or arouse the fears of their hearers; therefore they let them go on unwarned in their violation of God's law. In the day of final judgment the excuse of Saul will avail for them no more than it availed for him.

"Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." Rebellion originated with Satan. Notwithstanding the exalted position which he occupied among the heavenly host, he became dissatisfied because he was not accorded supreme honor. Hence he questioned God's purposes and impugned his justice. He bent all his powers to allure the angels from their allegiance. The fact that he was an archangel, glorious and powerful, enabled him to exert a mighty influence. His complaints against God's government, at first met with no favor; yet being urged again and again, they were finally accepted by those who had before been loyal and happy subjects of the King of Heaven. There was not the shadow of justification or excuse for disaffection; but envy and jealousy, once cherished, gained a power that paralyzed reason and destroyed honor and loyalty. As the result, Satan and all his sympathizers were cast out of Heaven.

In his rebellion, Satan showed contempt for the authority of God, and virtually trampled upon every precept of his law. He is the grand prototype of all transgressors. To indulge unbelief, ingratitude, apostasy, defiance of God, or enmity against him, is but to repeat the course which Satan pursued in Heaven. Rebellion against God is as directly due to Satanic influence as is the practice of witchcraft. Like witchcraft, it exerts a bewitching, deceptive power almost impossible to break. Those who set themselves against the government of God have entered into an alliance with the arch-apostate, and he will not lightly lose his prey. All his power and cunning will be exercised to

captivate the senses and mislead the understanding of his victims. Everything appears to them in a false light. Under his bewitching spell they can, like our first parents, see only the great benefits to be received by transgression. To achieve the desired object, they will stop at no means, however great the danger to another or the sin to themselves.

No stronger evidence can be given of Satan's delusive power than that many who are thus led by him deceive themselves with the belief that they are in the service of God. The Jewish scribes and elders in the days of Christ professed great zeal for the honor of God, and yet they rejected his Son. Jesus gave them the most conclusive evidence that he was the Promised One. Upon one occasion, the Spirit witnessed so powerfully to his claims that the hearts of all who were in the synagogue responded to the gracious words that proceeded from his lips. Here was the turning-point with that company. As Christ's divinity flashed through humanity, their spiritual sight was quickened. A new power of discernment and appreciation came upon them, and the conviction was almost irresistible that Jesus was the Son of God. But Satan was at hand to arouse doubts, unbelief, and pride. They steeled their hearts against the Saviour's words. As they yielded to the control of Satan, they were fired with uncontrollable rage against Jesus. With one accord they would have taken his life, had not angels interposed for his deliverance.

The same spirit still exists in the hearts of those who set themselves to follow their own perverted judgment in opposition to the will of God. The struggle between truth and error will reveal the same pride and stubbornness, and the same unreasoning hatred against the advocates of truth, as was displayed by the unbelieving Jews.

He who could cause all the glories of earthly empires to pass before Christ in his hour of temptation, exerts a wizard-like power upon the minds of all who do not implicitly trust and obey God. It is this moral infatuation which steels their hearts against the influence of the Holy Spirit. It was this that led Korah, Dathan, and Abiram to rebel against the authority of Moses. Satan deluded them with the idea that they were opposing only a human leader, a man like themselves. But **in rejecting God's chosen instrument, they rejected Christ, their invisible leader.** They insulted the Spirit of God; and judgments followed close upon their sin. They were deceived by Satan, but by their own consent; because they placed themselves in his power.

Thus was it with Saul. He had the most decisive evidence that Samuel had been divinely appointed and inspired. It was in opposition to all the dictates

of reason and sound judgment, that he ventured to disregard the command of God through the prophet. **His fatal presumption must be attributed to this Satanic sorcery, which made him blind to the sin, and reckless of its consequences.** Saul had manifested great zeal to suppress idolatry and witchcraft, decreeing that all found guilty of these practices should be punished with death. Yet the prophet shows him that in his disobedience to the divine command **he had been actuated by the same spirit of opposition to God, and had been as really inspired by Satan, as though he had practiced sorcery.** And, further, when reproved, he had added stubbornness to rebellion. Instead of confessing his sin, and humbly seeking pardon, he rejected reproof, and hardened his heart in transgression. He could have offered no greater insult to the Spirit of God, had he openly united with idolaters.

It is a perilous step to slight the reproofs and warnings of God's word or of his Spirit. Many, like Saul, yield to temptation until they become blind to the true character of sin. They flatter themselves that they have had some good object in view, and have done no wrong, in departing from the Lord's requirements. Thus they do despite to the Spirit of grace until its pleading voice is no longer heard, and they are left to the delusions which they have chosen.

Saul's Career

In the life of Saul we see the fruit of Israel's desire for a king. Israel had rejected God as their leader. They departed from Him and in His place providence provided them a manifestation of their own hearts.

They say that power corrupts but absolute power corrupts absolutely. Saul was not given absolute power but he acted as though he did. Saul rejected the appeals and rebukes of Samuel.

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