

# CHAPTER 12

We left the general assembly of the states together, in the close of the foregoing chapter; in this chapter we have Samuel's speech to them, when he resigned the government into the hands of Saul, in which,

**I.** He clears himself from all suspicion or imputation of mismanagement, while the administration was in his hands (v. 1-5).

**II.** He reminds them of the great things God had done for them and for their fathers (v. 6-13).

**III.** He sets before them good and evil, the blessing and the curse (v. 14, 15).

**IV.** He awakens them to regard what he said to them, by calling to God for thunder (v. 16-19).

**V.** He encourages them with hopes that all should be well (v. 20-25). This is his farewell sermon to that august assembly and Saul's coronation sermon.

## <0920>1 SAMUEL 12:1-5

### SAMUEL'S DISCOURSE TO ISRAEL

Here,

**I.** Samuel gives them a short account of the late revolution, and of the present posture of their government, by way of preface to what he had further to say to them, v. 1, 2.

**1.** For his own part, he had spent his days in their service; he began betimes to be useful among them, and had continued long so: *“I have walked before you, as a guide to direct you, as a shepherd that leads his flock (<880E>Psalm 80:1), from my childhood unto this day.”* As soon as he was illuminated with the light of prophecy, in his early days, he began to be a burning and shining light to Israel; *“and now my best days are done: I am old and gray-headed;”* therefore they were the more unkind to cast him

off, yet therefore he was the more willing to resign, finding the weight of government heavy upon his stooping shoulders. He was old, and therefore the more able to advise them, and the more observant they should have been of what he said, for *days shall speak* and *the multitude of years shall teach wisdom*; and there is a particular reverence due to the aged, especially aged magistrates and aged ministers. “I am old, and therefore not likely to live long, perhaps may never have an opportunity of speaking to you again, and therefore take notice of what I say.”

**2.** As for his sons, “*Behold*” (says he), “*they are with you*, you may, if you please, call them to an account for any thing they have done amiss. They are present with you, and have not, upon this revolution, fled from their country. They are upon the level with you, subjects to the new king as well as you; if you can prove them guilty of any wrong, you may prosecute them now by a due course of law, punish them, and oblige them to make restitution.”

**3.** As for their new king, Samuel had gratified them in setting him over them (v. 1): “*I have hearkened to your voice in all that you said to me*, being desirous to please you, if possible, and make you easy, though to the discarding of myself and family; and now will you hearken to me, and take my advice?” The change was now perfected: “*Behold, the king walketh before you*” (v. 2); he appears in public, ready to serve you in public business. Now that you have made yourselves like the nations in your civil government, and have cast off the divine administration in that, take heed lest you make yourselves like the nations in religion and cast off the worship of God.

**II.** He solemnly appeals to them concerning his own integrity in the administration of the government (v. 3): *Witness against me, whose ox have I taken?* Observe,

**1.** His design in this appeal. By this he intended,

**(1.)** To convince them of the injury they had done him in setting him aside, when they had nothing amiss to charge him with (his government had no fault but that it was too cheap, too easy, too gentle), and also of the injury they had done themselves in turning off one that did not so much as take an ox or an ass from them, to put themselves under the power of one that would take from them their fields and vineyards, nay, and their very sons

and daughters (~~1~~ 1 Samuel 8:11), so unlike would the manner of the king be from Samuel's manner.

(2.) To preserve his own reputation. Those that heard of Samuel's being rejected as he was would be ready to suspect that certainly he had done some evil thing, or he would never have been so ill treated; so that it was necessary for him to make this challenge, that it might appear upon record that it was not for any iniquity in his hands that he was laid aside, but to gratify the humour of a giddy people, who owned they could not have a better man to rule them, only they desired a bigger man. There is a just debt which every man owes to his own good name, especially men in public stations, which is to guard it against unjust aspersions and suspicions, that we may finish our course with honour as well as joy.

(3.) As he designed hereby to leave a good name behind him, so he designed to leave his successor a good example before him; let him write after his copy, and he will write fair.

(4.) He designed, in the close of his discourse, to reprove the people, and therefore he begins with a vindication of himself; for he that will, with confidence, tell another of his sin, must see to it that he himself be clear.

2. In the appeal itself observe,

(1.) What it is that Samuel here acquits himself from.

[1.] He had never, under any pretence whatsoever, taken that which was not his own, ox or ass, had never distrained their cattle for tribute, fines, or forfeitures, nor used their service without paying for it.

[2.] He had never defrauded those with whom he dealt, nor oppressed those that were under his power.

[3.] He had never taken bribes to pervert justice, nor was ever biassed by favour for affection to give judgment in a cause against his conscience.

(2.) How he calls upon those that had slighted him to bear witness concerning his conduct: "*Here I am; witness against me.* If you have any thing to lay to my charge, do it *before the Lord and the king*, the proper judges." He puts honour upon Saul, by owning himself accountable to him if guilty of any wrong.

**III.** Upon this appeal he is honourably acquitted. He did not expect that they would do him honour at parting, though he well deserved it, and therefore mentioned not any of the good services he had done them, for which they ought to have applauded him, and returned him the thanks of the house; all he desired was that they should do him justice, and that they did (v. 4) readily owning,

**1.** That he had not made his government oppressive to them, nor used his power to their wrong.

**2.** That he had not made it expensive to them: *Neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand* for the support of thy dignity. Like Nehemiah, he *did not require the bread of the governor* (~~418~~Nehemiah 5:18), had not only been righteous, but generous, had *coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel*, ~~418~~Acts 20:33.

**IV.** This honourable testimony borne to Samuel's integrity is left upon record to his honour (v. 5): "*The Lord is witness, who searcheth the heart, and his anointed is witness, who trieth overt acts;*" and the people agree to it: "*He is witness.*" Note, The testimony of our neighbours, and especially the testimony of our own consciences for us, that we have in our places lived honestly, will be our comfort under the slights and contempts that are put upon us. Demetrius is a happy man, that has a *good report of all men and of the truth itself*, ~~412~~3 John 1:12.

## ~~416~~ 1 SAMUEL 12:6-15

### SAMUEL'S DISCOURSE TO ISRAEL

Samuel, having sufficiently secured his own reputation, instead of upbraiding the people upon it with their unkindness to him, sets himself to instruct them, and keep them in the way of their duty, and then the change of the government would be the less damage to them.

**I.** He reminds them of the great goodness of God to them and to their fathers, gives them an abstract of the history of their nation, that, by the consideration of the great things God had done for them, they might be forever engaged to love him and serve him. "Come," says he (v. 7), "stand still, stand in token of reverence when God is speaking to you, stand still in

token of attention and composedness of mind, and give me leave to reason with you.” Religion has reason on its side, <sup><2018></sup>Isaiah 1:18. The work of ministers is to reason with people, not only to exhort and direct, but to persuade, to convince men's judgments, and so to gain their wills and affections. Let reason rule men, and they will be good. He reasons of the righteous acts of the Lord, that is, “both the benefits he hath bestowed upon you, in performance of his promises, and the punishments he has inflicted on you for your sins.” His favours are called *his righteous acts* (<sup><0511></sup>Judges 5:11), because in them he is just to his own honour. He not only puts them in mind of what God had done for them in their days, but of what he had done of old, in the days of their fathers, because the present age had the benefit of God's former favours. We may suppose that his discourse was much larger than as here related.

- 1.** he reminds them of their deliverance out of Egypt. Into that house of bondage Jacob and his family came down poor and little; when they were oppressed they cried unto God, who advanced Moses and Aaron, from mean beginnings, to be their deliverers, and the founders of their state and settlement in Canaan, v. 6, 8.
- 2.** He reminds them of the miseries and calamities which their fathers brought themselves into by forgetting God and serving other gods, v. 9. They enslaved themselves, for they were sold as criminals and captives into the hand of oppressors. They exposed themselves to the desolation of war, and their neighbours fought against them.
- 3.** He reminds them of their fathers' repentance and humiliation before God for their idolatries: *They said, We have sinned*, v. 10. Let not them imitate the sins of their fathers, for what they had done amiss they had many a time wished undone again. In the day of their distress they had sought unto God, and had promised to serve him; let their children then reckon that good at all times which they found good in bad times.
- 4.** He reminds them of the glorious deliverances God had wrought for them, the victories he had blessed them with, and their happy settlements, many a time, after days of trouble and distress, v. 11. He specifies some of their judges, Gideon and Jephthah, great conquerors in their time; among the rest he mentions Bedan, whom we read not of any where else: he might be some eminent person, that was instrumental of salvation to them, though not recorded in the book of Judges, such a one as Shamgar, of whom it is said that he *delivered* Israel, but not that he *judged* them,

~~Ques~~ Judges 3:31. Perhaps this Bedan guarded and delivered them on one side, at the same time when some other of the judges appeared and acted for them on another side. Some think it was the same with Jair (so the learned Mr. Poole), others the same with Samson, who was Ben Dan, a son of Dan, of that tribe, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him Bedan, inn Dan, in the camp of Can. Samuel mentions himself, not to his own praise, but to the honour of God, who had made him an instrument of subduing the Philistines.

**5.** At last he puts them in mind of God's late favour to the present generation, in gratifying them with a king, when they would prescribe to God by such a one to save them out of the hand of Nahash king of Ammon, v. 12, 13. Now it appears that this was the immediate occasion of their desiring a king: Nahash threatened them; they desired Samuel to nominate a general; he told them that God was commander-in-chief in all their wars and they needed no other, that what was wanting in them should be made up by his power: *The Lord is your king*. But they insisted on it, *Nay, but a king shall reign over us*. "And now," said he, "you have a king, a king of your own asking — let that be spoken to your shame; but a king of God's making — let that be spoken to his honour and the glory of his grace." God did not cast them off, even when they in effect cast him off.

**II.** He shows them that they are now upon their good behaviour, they and their king. Let them not think that they had now cut themselves off from all dependence upon God, and that now, having a king of their own, the making of their own fortunes (as men foolishly call it) was in their own hands; no, still their judgment must proceed from the Lord. He tells them plainly,

**1.** That their obedience to God would certainly be their happiness, v. 14. If they would not revolt from God to idols, nor rebel against him by breaking his commandments, but would persevere in their allegiance to him, would fear his wrath, serve his interests, and obey his will, then they and their king should certainly be happy; but observe how the promise is expressed: *Then you shall continue following the Lord your God*; that is,

**(1.)** "You shall continue in the way of your duty to God, which will be your honour and comfort." Note, To those that are sincere in their religion God will give grace to persevere in it: those that follow God faithfully will be divinely strengthened to continue following him. And observe,

Following God is a work that is its own wages. It is the matter of a promise as well as of a precept.

(2.) “You shall continue under the divine guidance and protection:” *You shall be after the Lord*, so it is in the original, that is, “he will go before you to lead and prosper you, and make your way plain. *The Lord is with you while you are with him.*”

2. That their disobedience would as certainly be their ruin (v. 15): “*If you rebel*, think not that your having a king will secure you against God's judgments, and that having in this instance made yourselves *like the nations* you may sin at as cheap a rate as they can. No, *the hand of the Lord will be against you, as it was against your fathers* when they offended him, in the days of the judges.” We mistake if we think that we can evade God's justice by shaking off his dominion. If God shall not rule us, yet he will judge us.

## 1 SAMUEL 12:16-25

### SAMUEL CALLS FOR THUNDER

Two things Samuel here aims at: —

I. To convince the people of their sin in desiring a king. They were now rejoicing before God in and with their king (1 Samuel 11:15), and offering to God the sacrifices of praise, which they hoped God would accept; and this perhaps made them think that there was no harm in their asking a king, but really they had done well in it. Therefore Samuel here charges it upon them as their sin, as wickedness, *great wickedness in the sight of the Lord*. Note, Though we meet with prosperity and success in a way of sin, yet we must not therefore think the more favourably of it. They have a king, and if they conduct themselves well their king may be a very great blessing to them, and yet Samuel will have them perceive and see that their *wickedness was great in asking a king*. We must never think well of that which God in his law frowns upon, though in his providence he may seem to smile upon it. Observe,

1. The expressions of God's displeasure against them for asking a king. At Samuel's word, God sent prodigious thunder and rain upon them, at a

season of the year when, in that country, the like was never seen or known before, v. 16-18. Thunder and rain have natural causes and sometimes terrible effects. But Samuel made it to appear that this was designed by the almighty power of God on purpose to convince them that they had done very *wickedly in asking a king*; not only by its coming in an unusual time, in wheat-harvest, and this on a fair clear day, when there appeared not to the eye any signs of a storm, but by his giving notice of it before. Had there happened to be thunder and rain at the time when he was speaking to them, he might have improved it for their awakening and conviction, as we may in a like case; but, to make it no less than a miracle, before it came,

**(1.)** He spoke to them of it (v. 16, 17): *Stand and see this great thing*. He had before told them to *stand and hear* (v. 7); but, because he did not see that his reasoning with them affected them (so stupid were they and unthinking), now he bids them *stand and see*. If what he said in a *still small voice* did not reach their hearts, nor his doctrine which dropped as the dew, they shall hear God speaking to them in dreadful claps of thunder and the great rain of his strength. He appealed to this as a sign: “*I will call upon the Lord, and he will send thunder, will send it just now, to confirm the word of his servant, and to make you see that I spoke truly when I told you that God was angry with you for asking a king.*” And the event proved him a true prophet; the sign and wonder came to pass.

**(2.)** He spoke to God for it. Samuel called unto the Lord, and, in answer to his prayer, even while he was yet speaking, *the Lord sent thunder and rain*. By this Samuel made it to appear, not only what a powerful influence God has upon this earth, that he could, of a sudden, when natural causes did not work towards it, produce this dreadful rain and thunder, and bring them out of his treasures (<sup><19067></sup>Psalm 135:7), but also what a powerful interest *he* had in heaven, that God would thus *hearken to the voice of a man* (<sup><19064></sup>Joshua 10:14) and answer him *in the secret place of thunder*, <sup><19070></sup>Psalm 81:7. Samuel, that son of prayer, was still famous for success in prayer. Now by this extraordinary thunder and rain sent on this occasion,

**[1.]** God testified his displeasure against them in the same way in which he had formerly testified it, and at the prayer of Samuel too, against the Philistines. *The Lord discomfited them with a great thunder*, <sup><19070></sup>1 Samuel 7:10. Now that Israel rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit, he turned to be their enemy, and fought against them with the same weapons which, not long before, had been employed against their adversaries, <sup><23610></sup>Isaiah 63:10.

[2.] He showed them their folly in desiring a king to save them, rather than God or Samuel, promising themselves more from an arm of flesh than from the arm of God or from the power of prayer. Could their king *thunder with a voice like God?* ~~1810~~ Job 40:9. Could their prince command such forces as the prophet could by his prayers?

[3.] He intimated to them that how serene and prosperous soever their condition seemed to be now that they had a king, like the weather in wheat-harvest, yet, if God pleased, he could soon change the face of their heavens, and persecute them with his tempest, as the Psalmist speaks.

2. The impressions which this made upon the people. It startled them very much, as well it might.

(1.) *They greatly feared the Lord and Samuel.* Though when they had a king they were ready to think they must fear him only, God made them know that *he is greatly to be feared* and his prophets for his sake. Now they were rejoicing in their king, God taught them to rejoice with trembling.

(2.) They owned their sin and folly in desiring a king: *We have added to all our sins this evil*, v. 19. Some people will not be brought to a sight of their sins by any gentler methods than storms and thunders. Samuel did not extort this confession from them till the matter was settled and the king confirmed, lest it should look as if he designed by it rather to establish himself in the government than to bring them to repentance. Now that they were *flattering themselves in their own eyes, their iniquity was found to be hateful*, ~~1810~~ Psalm 36:2.

(3.) They earnestly begged Samuel's prayers (v. 19): *Pray for thy servants, that we die not.* They were apprehensive of their danger from the wrath of God, and could not expect that he should hear their prayers for themselves, and therefore they entreat Samuel to pray for them. Now they see their need of him whom awhile ago they slighted. Thus many that will not have *Christ to reign over them* would yet be glad to have him intercede for them, to turn away the wrath of God. And the time may come when those that have despised and ridiculed praying people will value their prayers, and desire a share in them. "Pray" (say they) "*to the Lord thy God; we know not how to call him ours, but, if thou hast any interest in him, improve it for us.*"

**II.** He aims to confirm the people in their religion, and engage them for ever to cleave unto the Lord. The design of his discourse is much the same with Joshua's, 23 and 24.

**1.** He would not that the terrors of the Lord should frighten them from him, for they were intended to frighten them to him (v. 20): “*Fear not; though you have done all this wickedness, and though God is angry with you for it, yet do not therefore abandon his service, nor turn from following him.*” *Fear not*, that is, “despair not, fear not with amazement, the weather will clear up after the storm. Fear not; for, though God will frown upon his people, yet he will not forsake them (v. 22) *for his great name's sake*; do not you forsake him then.” Every transgression in the covenant, though it displease the Lord, yet does not throw us out of covenant, and therefore God's just rebukes must not drive us from our hope in his mercy. The fixedness of God's choice is owing to the freeness of it; we may therefore hope he will not forsake his people, because it has *pleased him to make them his people*. Had he chosen them for their good merits, we might fear he would cast them off for their bad merits; but, choosing them *for his name's sake*, for his name's sake he will not leave them.

**2.** He cautions them against idolatry: “*Turn not aside from God and the worship of him*” (v. 20, and again v. 21); “for if you turn aside from God, whatever you turn aside to, you will find it is a vain thing, that can never answer your expectations, but will certainly deceive you if you trust to it; it is a broken reed, a broken cistern.” Idols could not profit those that sought to them in their wants, nor deliver those that sought to them in their straits, for they were vain, and not what they pretended to be. *An idol is nothing in the world*, ~~400~~ 1 Corinthians 8:4.

**3.** He comforts them with an assurance that he would continue his care and concern for them, v. 23. They desired him to pray for them, v. 19. He might have said, “Go to Saul, the king that you have put in my room,” and get him to pray for you; but so far is he from upbraiding them with their disrespect to him that he promised them much more than they asked.

**(1.)** They asked it of him as a favour; he promised it as a duty, and startles at the thought of neglecting it. *Pray for you!* says he, *God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in not doing it*. Note, It is a sin against God

not to pray for the Israel of God, especially for those of them that are under our charge: and good men are afraid of the guilt of omissions.

(2.) They asked him to pray for them at this time, and upon this occasion, but he promised to continue his prayers for them and to cease as long as he lived. Our rule is to *pray without ceasing*; we sin if we restrain prayer in general, and in particular if we cease praying for the church.

(3.) They asked him only to pray for them, but he promised to do more for them, not only to pray for them, but to teach them; though they were not willing to be under his government as a judge, he would not therefore deny them his instructions as a prophet. And they might be sure he would teach them no other than the *good and the right way*: and the right way is certainly the good way: the way of duty is the way of pleasure and profit.

4. He concludes with an earnest exhortation to practical religion and serious godliness, v. 24, 25. The great duty here pressed upon us is to *fear the Lord*. He had said (v. 20), “*Fear not* with a slavish fear,” but here, “*Fear the Lord*, with a filial fear.” As the fruit and evidence of this, serve him in the duties of religious worship and of a godly conversation, in truth and sincerity, and not in show and profession only, with your heart, and *with all your heart*, not dissembling, not dividing. And two things he urges by way of motive: —

(1.) That they were bound in gratitude to serve God, considering *what great things he had done for them*, to engage them for ever to his service.

(2.) That they were bound in interest to serve him, considering what great things he would do against them if they should still do wickedly: “*You shall be destroyed* by the judgments of God, *both you and your king* whom you are so proud of and expect so much from, and who will be a blessing to you if you keep in with God.” Thus, as a faithful watchman, he gave them warning, and so delivered his own soul.