

BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

1st Samuel

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assembly Bible studies, some from home life and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "First Samuel: Bible class notes," by Peter J. Pell, Gospel Folio Press
- "The Life Application Bible." Tyndale House and Zondervan

1st Samuel 1

A FIRST LOOK

At the beginning of the book of Judges, the children of Israel had gradually become more complacent regarding the idol-worshipping people around them, and soon found the nation in a downward cycle of departure from God. For over two hundred years the Lord had raised up judges from Othniel to Samson who led them into infrequent periods of partial recovery. By the time of the leadership of Eli, spiritual darkness had settled upon Israel to the extent that his own sons who were priests, "Knew not the Lord." Those two men also took for themselves that which belonged to God, and immorally slept with the women who had duties at the tabernacle. We would naturally think the people of Israel had gone well past the point of no return. However, in approximately 120 years God brought Israel from the lowest point of its national identity to the highest period of Israel's glory. And it began with one heartbroken woman praying for a son to deliver God's people.

The book of first Samuel has a number of good beginnings and bad endings that teach us the importance of not getting smugly complacent and self-centered. In every part of our lives: personal, marriage, family, business, social and religious life we need to be conscious of God's interest in everything. One of the features of first Samuel is the practice of prayer. It began with Hannah praying for a son and the answer was Samuel. Samuel in his days as a judge in Israel was also a man who prayed for the people of God, both as an intercessor and a supplicant. He recognized that for him not to pray was a sin against the Lord.

The title, "Lord of hosts," is first mentioned in this book and gives the God of Israel, His supreme title as Lord over all the hosts of heaven and earth. This title impresses us with the fact that our Gracious Heavenly Father who were we are able to address as "Abba Father" is not some Person to be casually spoken of, or in any way taken for granted. "All power in heaven and earth" is His. The title "Messiah" ("His anointed") is first spoken of in the Bible in the words of one of Hannah's prayers [2:10]. The first of five "precious" things in the Old Testament is in this book where we are told "The Word of the Lord was precious (rare) in those days [1Sam.3:1]." Other "precious" things are redemption [Ps.49:8; the death of the saints [Ps.72:14; 116:15; lips of knowledge [Pro.20:15; and the thoughts of God [Ps.134:17]. Names and phrases, we know today, were first mentioned in first Samuel - "God save the king," "Ichabod," and "Ebednezer." Also, we learn that prophets were first called "seerers" which indicates they had special perception, discernment and vision that came from God.

In this book teaching about the Holy Spirit is important for our learning. He gives a new heart that would speak to us of the regenerating power of the Spirit in the new birth we have experienced ourselves when God saved us. The Holy Spirit producing and controlling righteous anger against sin as is taught in first Samuel. He gives to us the courage and wisdom to speak appropriately or "prudently," and also preserves us from evil as it is taught in this book. In those days the Holy Spirit actively came upon God's people to accomplish a work that needed to be done at the time. By God's grace and gifting, the Holy Spirit now resides in us today, enabling us to be ready for any and all activities of life.

First Samuel gives warnings to us in a number of areas of life in which we live. We have a warning in regards to marriage that isn't according to the original mind and will of God. To have more than one wife increases the problems in families and interpersonal relationships. Eli, the priest-judge was an indulgent father who was sitting down on the job when he should have been standing as a priest doing his work. Beside this he overlooked the sins of his sons. Those sons who did not know the Lord were involved in a work that should have been holy and inspiring, but instead was ritualistic and formal. The dangers of impatience and partial obedience along with formalism and ritualism shows the end of a thing may be seriously wrong even though the beginning was the way it should have been.

The impact of prayer, even in the dark days of departure, is felt in this book and should never be underestimated by us. At the beginning of this book we are introduced to a dysfunctional family who lived in an obscure place and was far from being a happy family, yet still maintained a degree of devotion to God. Elkanah had not followed a basic principle of home life of one man and one woman for life, and was suffering the consequences and the difficulties he could do nothing about. It is not easy to keep family life the way it should be even in the best of circumstances. Yet this man did take his family to the place God intended and observed what God wanted from him. We are not hopelessly abandoned because we do not do a good job in our families. But when we apply ourselves to what God intends to the extent we can, then we have to trust God to do what we cannot do. Elkanah had a spiritual wife even though she seemed so sad and forlorn. No doubt she prayed in that home from a grieved spirit.

The marital problems of Elkanah's forbearers like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob should have made him consider the consequences before he acted in taking two wives. And yet we cannot be assured we will not have difficulties even though our marriages are as God intended. Any marriage needs more than natural affection to be fulfilling. Husbands and wives need to share their full lives - body, soul and together. We know Hannah prayed about and we know Elkanah took his family to the place God intended. A blended spiritual life of husband and wife is fundamental to joy and contentment for both.

When a husband shares with his wife his commitment to truth and his goals in service for the Lord, she can sense she is a part of the most important things in his life. This leads to perhaps the highest dimension of joy in a marriage relationship. When a woman shares with her husband her desire and devotion to God and they both can pray together over the concerns of family life and all other aspects of life, then theirs is a special spiritual unity that is far more meaningful than anything else they do together.

This obscure family, living in an obscure village in the mountains of Israel when spiritual darkness and declension had come over the whole nation, would probably be the last place we would look for deliverance. But a man who didn't always do what was right, but did not honor God, and an unhappy woman who didn't seem to have anything going for her, were the ones God chose to begin a revival that reached the whole nation.

There are times when we are almost sure nothing more can ever be done
Defeat is in the minds and hearts of God's people, we are sure the enemy's won
But in some isolated place a broken-hearted woman kneels to pray
And angels watch as God bends His head low to hear what she has to say.

Way in the corner of a simple house in a far and distant place
A voice is lifted, and tear-dimmed eyes look earnestly to the throne of grace
To make an appeal on behalf of a nation that has turned from God to its own way
And a very few saints who have a real concern take time to intercede and pray.

We are not many to all of those around who have no interest in spiritual things
But who can tell what the Almighty God will do with the requests those few of us bring;
By His grace we will continue in prayer even though in our smallness, we may sometimes
doubt

On the other hand, because of God's power and authority He can quickly turn the bad
things out.

Then in a short time He raises up a man or a woman who in faith believes fully in God
And they trust Him implicitly to do what man can't because He is the Master and Lord
In one plain answer God changes things around so that from men all glory will be given to
Him
The desired solution starts to take form which from earnest intercession and prayer did
begin.

"Father, I will keep on praying that Thy sovereign purposes will be continuously recognized among us as an assembly here. May we be able to carry on doing Thy will whether we know it clearly or not. I ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 1:1-8

A CERTAIN MAN

In various places and times in the scriptures we learn that God, by His grace, takes people from obscurity and uses them to bring about blessing to His people. Some of the judges were not well-known men or women and were used of God in spite of what could be considered, unfavorable circumstances. The

incarnation of Christ began in a very humble setting, but the angels of heaven watched and worshipped. Some of those recorded in the book of Acts were not well-known people but a brief word is mentioned about them to let us know that God knows every effort put forth to bring glory to him. It is not uncommon for people to say today that they are inadequate to do a certain work for God because of their background and lack of education or some other reason. None of these excuses means anything to God who is determined to bring the proud man down and is determined to bring the humble man up. This principle and practice of God is testified to at the beginning of the book of first Samuel.

Elkanah lived in a small village in the hill country of Ephraim with mountains all around that probably would limit the production of his fields and would expose his flocks to the wild animals that are inclined to live in the mountains. It was in this place of small beginnings, where streams of water begin that become large rivers, roads from little villages lead to large highways to travel, and small fields that produce little, provide sustenance for many as their produce is added to that of many other small fields in a city market. Obscurity in a small place does not limit God nor does it give us an excuse for not diligently seeking to live our lives for Him. Our surroundings, even in an evil day when the majority of people have no interest in, or time for God, do not absolve us from our responsibility to serve Him and obey His word. Great congregations of people may attend places of "worship" but our commitment is to "worship the Father in spirit and in truth." This has nothing to do with the building or the amount of people who gather together. This is me and God, my Gracious Heavenly Father.

Elkanah is introduced at the beginning of the book as a "certain man," of a certain place, from a certain tribe, from a certain family background who had "two wives." Apparently to some people living in those days, polygamy was a sign of wealth because of potentially having a lot of children. It also may have been accepted as a practice because of those sons who died in battle and the need of others to carry on the family name and preserve the family inheritance. For whatever reason Elkanah had two wives, there are problems that come with doing things our way than the way God intends. Husbands have a certain lack of understanding of women that can lead them, not only to be ignorant of what their wife needs, but to even be insensitive to what they should be like toward her. To have two wives would double that problem. It calls for a deliberate desire to understand one's wife on the part of a husband in order to find and maintain that special bond that makes a marriage such an important part of life. When a man begins to take his wife for granted, he has created a low wall between them that can gradually build up to create a barrier between them.

This man took one of his wives, Peninnah for granted because she bore him children and would be busy about caring for them from day to day. He got used to her. That is not a good thing to happen in any relationship particularly the husband-wife relationship. Underlying bitterness toward her husband moved Peninnah to take out her bitterness and jealousy on Hannah. Elkanah apparently made it no secret that he loved Hannah in a special way. In his male simplicity, he didn't realize his love for Hannah and his lack of personal attention to Peninnah was the cause of friction in his household. Even though a man may be legitimately busy with his daily work and his work for the assembly and meeting the needs of other people, that does not excuse him from his priority of loving his wife "even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it." When we sense things are not right between us as a married couple, it is the husband's responsibility to find out the cause of the difficulty and deal with it as quickly as possible. To look for areas of blame in order to excuse ourselves is never right. Find the problem, act to bring about the solution and if there is blame in some way, take that, and be grateful that you can do so.

Elkanah was a man of spiritual understanding [v.3]. The need of obedience to God was important to him personally. It is a very positive thing about this man that he preserved his family by including them in the journey to the house of God. Year after year he and his whole family journeyed to Shiloh where the tabernacle was and offered the suitable offerings to the Lord. It would have been a very special time for him to take his portion of the peace offering and pass it to his wives and children. But even there he let his favor of Hannah be seen. The first few times Peninnah and her children may have thought he was feeling sorry for her barrenness. Even though he could have legally divorced her, he kept on loving her and seeking to show her evidence of his caring heart. This partiality created irritation and provocation in the family. Elkanah would have known about the terrible evil going on at the house of the Lord because of Eli's lack of discipline and Hophni and Phinehas' sinful practices. However, he went there anyway and worshiped in spite of the failure of others.

We know there is failure in others who attend our assembly gatherings because there is failure in us. Because of some things we personally don't think is right according to our opinion doesn't give us the right to absent ourselves. When there is something we can do, to correct something wrong, then we should do what we can to accomplish that. If it is our own opinion and others don't seem to share that, then we should

check ourselves out to see if I am the one who is wrong, and do something about it. There are times when uncorrected evil is allowed to continue and teaching is given that is doctrinally wrong. Then we may have to go to some other place where the word of God is carried out after having made clear why this is necessary.

There was another positive characteristic of Elkanah. He seemed to have a natural understanding [v.4] of the value of including his wives and children as participants in spiritual things. He knew the limitations of his wife Peninnah and her children. He didn't expect from them what they couldn't give. Natural affection is a wonderful thing but we need more than that in our homes in order to bring out the potential that is inherent in each one. We need to know, or at least seek to understand, what is needed by each person and is consistent with their personality. To compare one with another is not a good thing. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it," does not mean we can guarantee our desired result from our children. When we take time to know their bent and the way they respond to different things, we have an opportunity to nourish that and hopefully guide that person to be a successful person in their own right.

Emotional understanding [v.5] can be evasive to some men because most males are goal oriented people and the emotional side of a personality is hidden under a cloak of masculinity. To Elkanah's credit he knew that in distress and despair, one is more conscious of the need of God. He could understand, at least in a measure, the need of his wife Hannah. He would have heard her prayers perhaps, or at least knew her grieving heart was because of her lack of a child. He didn't realize the depth of her spirituality because he thought she wanted a child for her own sake. That was doubtless part of her concern, but her real desire was for a son to give to the Lord for his life to be lived for the Lord and to guide the Lord's people back from the "dark paths of sin." She had to share her husband with a woman who ridiculed her. Even though her husband loved her, he could not solve the problem.

In learning from this man, we understand the value of encouragement to our wife even though we cannot solve all the problems she might have. We need to love our wives in spite of social criticism and we need to accept their difficulties as our own and take that burden from them as much as possible. Our families are important to God and what they do has an effect on our credibility as parents even though we cannot make them be what we might want or expect of them. We can take them to the house of the Lord even though things may not be there what we know they should be. Take our families anyway because there are impressions created in them when they are young that they will not forget no matter how far they may stray. The importance of God in a person's life is usually instilled in our children when they are young. Another lesson for us to learn is that ignorance of a problem is not an excuse for being insensible to the feelings and needs of others, especially our spouse. Linked with that in a way is the fact that jealousy is not an excuse for bad behavior. "Jealous is as cruel as the grave" and has a negative effect that reaches farther we would expect. An encouraging lesson to learn, even from this dysfunctional family, is that God will work in families and individuals in families in spite of problems that may be in the home life. God is a sovereign God, even when there is failure, despair and defeat all around us, and He can bring good from the place we least expect it.

He was only a simple man of old who didn't do everything right
He didn't seem much like a man of faith, but more like one who lived by sight
However, he knew in his heart things that were important for the sake of his family to do
God had a claim on this man, and whatever he was, his wives and his children all knew
They needed his leadership and practical guidance for each of them to understand
What God said in His word wasn't a choice he made, God's word was an authoritative
command
To meet at the place chosen by God alone and at the time God Himself did decree
So that there He would meet with His own chosen people, and that His glory there they
could see.

Family life is not always easy, sometimes there are complications that abound
It is in times like that parents bowed low on their knees are often found
By rebellious and wayward children who look with shame-filled eyes and then walk away
Conscious that their parents are supplicating and making intercession whenever they pray
So, when they continue to reject God and His interest in the salvation of them
Hopefully their conscience will stop them from doing what is wrong and they will repent of
their sin
God's grace reaches out to them in distant places farther than our voices can reach
And brings back to their memories and consciences long hidden truths that their parents
did teach.

We will know the results of prayer when the day of recompense before God will come

The results of the prayers of parents, and their influence of life and labor on daughters
and sons
Even though the days are evil in the world and in churches truths are gone that were once
held
Hopefully there will have been enough reality seen that in an awakened conscience will tell
One who had turned away that God in great mercy still in love and grace yet awaits
The prodigal who will return in genuine repentance, and turns in simple childlike faith
To accept the fact that God still offers salvation full, sufficient and free
That they saw first in their parents lives when they bowed low on their knees.

“Father God, our prayers continue daily for our children and grandchildren. Grant that they will not only repent to Thee when they sin in honest confession, and have their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, but that they will commit themselves to following the Lord and walking by faith in the light of Thy word. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Samuel 1:9-28

WHEN ONE PRAYS

In God's sovereign plan for Israel's recovery, He began with a heart-broken woman living in a dysfunctional household. It was in His mind to postpone her child-bearing until the right time that she would see the need of a person to deliver the nation from the evil that had overtaken it for over two hundred years. In spite of the ridicule from another wife and her own unhappiness, she was to remain steadfast and confident in God. We choose how we react to hurtful words others may direct toward us. We cannot keep others from unjust criticism, but we can choose how we accept that criticism and respond to it. Rather than dwelling on the problems we have think about the relationship we have and enjoy them. Hope and friendship are far better responses than self-pity.

Hannah shared a husband with a woman who ridiculed her. Her husband could not solve her problem. Instead of giving up hope, she prayed, and in her prayer, brought the whole problem to God in prayer. Prayers of urgency and desperation create a different outlook and effect on the one who prays. Our burden is cast on the Lord in times of darkness and weeping, but "joy comes in the morning." In spite of discouragement, keep on praying. Prayer opens the door for us to see how God works. God may choose to answer our prayers with a much longer purpose in His mind than was in ours. Spiritual blessings do not come by natural ability, learning or human refinement. Sorrow and suffering kept us sensitive to God and His will and plans for us. Pride and even arrogance often characterize natural accomplishments. Humility and gratitude accompany the blessings grace gives and continues to give.

Two of the people in the house of the Lord must have been notable by the contrast between them. One was an old, fat priest who was sitting by a side post watching people instead of being at the altar in service for the Lord. Not far away was a young woman down praying before the Lord with her soul so burdened, she was forming the words with her lips. Her prayer was not only thoughts moving rapidly through her mind but earnest supplication from the depths of her heart. Eli was sitting in official dignity and place; Hannah was at the true altar and the throne of grace. The old priest was going through the forms of religious activity without even being able to discern the earnestness of a woman's prayer. let alone the mind of God. Hannah was in her prayer was calling into action the eye of God - "look on the affliction of Thine handmaid;" the heart of God - "remember me;" and the hand of God - "give me a man-child."

It is one thing for us to know what are the problems that face God's people. It is quite another thing to know what is needed to deal with that problem. When a spiritual woman like Hannah understands a need, and she knows the word of God, and how it applies to a matter, that has a sanctifying effect upon her so that when prayer is made it is with the assurance that God hears. To know the mind and heart of God does not come by accident but by fellowship with God through a knowledge of His word and faith in Him. We learn fundamental principles of prayer and effective communication with God by following the example of Hannah. Her prayer was of real concern. She knew what was needed, a man to deliver God's people, and there was no half-hearted prayer as she poured out her heart in fervent expectation to the Lord. Her prayer was not a brief formal expression of the issues involved but was a prayer of real commitment. There was real communion with God that gave no room for just mere outward forms. The matter was so important to Hannah that she held nothing at all back from her real consecration to the Lord and His will. This kind of praying means there is no question about an answer coming. She had placed real confidence in God.

When one makes promises to God, one must keep the promise. God always keeps His promises and that assurance in prayer, lifts the spirit, changes our attitude and gives us peace. When we pray, we must be honest before God, accept the real encouragement of others and leave the problem with God and move

forward in faith. The right attitude in prayer takes care of discouragement and then we are inclined to accept the support of those who want to honestly help us and share in the fellowship needed to bring about a new day in the work of God. Eli had judged Hannah by suspicion and sharply criticized her by accusing her of being drunk even though he did not judge his own evil sons. He knew more about being drunk than being holy even though he was in the position of a priest.

1st Samuel 1:13. *"Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken."*

SPAKE IN HER HEART.

Many things are left unheard, but they are not left unsaid -
In the depths of real concern of soul there are no easy words
That flows to make a prayer that's heard say really what I meant -
When prayer comes from deep inside the heart, it is only for the Lord.

Real concern is not half-hearted with phrases that are known.
The situation calls for much more than doing what is usual -
With words to God of real commitment there is no outward form
That public-type of praying, to a burdened heart is not useful.

When Hannah prayed her silent prayer, her heart was burdened down.
She wanted a son it's true, but also her nation was in trouble.
She was asking God to send a man who would the nation turn around -
Her real communion with the Lord was that His answer would be double.

She had a lot of love to give, and wanted to bestow it upon a son -
She also had insight and promised to consecrate him to the Lord.
There was no holding back, she wasn't going to keep him for her own
There was a lot at stake here, and she wouldn't keep him even if she could.

In fervent prayer there is a difference when we pour out to God alone
The burdens that we have, rather than having a simple time of prayer.
Both are important times it true, but one we must go through on our own
Others may not feel the same urgency about the burden that we bear.

"Heart-felt prayers, Father, are probably not coming to You very often. I am afraid I think I can handle a lot of things on my own. I know I am not able to meet the of this assembly we are visiting now and to me there is an urgent need for something to be done either by them or for them. If there is something I should say tonight, that I have not planned on, I am ready if You will give me the right words. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

When Eli realized the reality of Hannah's prayer when he heard her humble explanation, he then was able to understand need of giving her comfort and the value of his blessing to her. The grace and humility of one who gratefully accepts the blessings of God's grace, brings peace after sorrow and an urgent prayer becomes a calm assurance that God is in control and doing what will be right in His eyes. Hannah accepted the promise of grace given before the answer even came. She could eat her portion of the peace offering now because she had the joy of fellowship with God which was an intent of the peace-offering. She had joy on her face which would be an attraction to all the other members of her family. She had a "new day" dawn in which she shared in worship with others from her full cup. The return journey was not with the heavy heart with which she left home. With joy in her steps the family returned to Ramah to a home that was not filled with tension but with promised blessing.

Doubtless the change in Hannah because of simple faith in the word of God through the priest would have made a change in Elkanah, in their worship, in their home, in their lives from then on. In the lives of God's people there is a fellowship that is contagious and that fellowship has far-reaching effects. Hearts rejoice and spirits are lifted when we are conscious of God working in us, for us and among us. Hannah's heart rejoiced when she bore a son, Samuel whose name means, "heard of God."

To keep her promise, Hannah gave Samuel to the Lord when he was around three years old. He was presented to God on the day the people of God brought costly sacrifices. Sacrificial gifts are not mere tokens, but that which costs us dearly. When we are willing to "present our bodies as a living sacrifice," that is the best we have to give. However, Hannah went a step further when she presented her son to Eli for service as a Nazarite for life. even though she said she "lent him to the Lord," she retained no further claim on him. Hannah did come each year with a new garment to fit the growing boy, but her sacrifice had been

made with no strings attached. Any costly sacrifice we make for the Lord has far greater benefit than we could ever imagine because the Lord knows our hearts.

1st Samuel 1:22. *"But Hannah went not up; for she said to her husband, 'I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then will I bring him, that he may appear before the Lord.'"*

APPEAR BEFORE THE LORD.

There is a special time when we appear to worship -
A time planned by God to meet with His own.
True, we can worship and enjoy God's fellowship -
But there is a difference when the saints come as one.

To worship and sacrifice can be a daily event
When we give back to God what first He gave to us.
When the saints gather considering what Christ's coming meant
There is a special meaning when we gather to Him thus.

There are many times in a day when speaking to God in my heart
I am conscious of the fact; He knows just what I mean.
My lips may move and at times words may start -
At other times in prayer there is no movement seen.

The results may come quickly or maybe take a year.
When leaving a thing with the Lord, I need no more be sad.
The burden had transferred when my heartfelt prayer He hears
And I can go on my way with a heart He has made glad.

Sometimes it is just me - other times with my wife -
Other times God's people come together to pray.
Whatever the nature of prayer in my daily life -
I am confident that God hears every word I say.

"This brief prayer, O God, is an assurance that whether in the silence of my mind; the whisper or words of my voice - even when unsure what to say - You hear the prayer of Thy servant. I thank Thee for this blessing, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 2:1-11

A SONG CAN BE A PRAYER

One of the best ways believers in Christ can express their joy is by singing. Sarah, Miriam, Mary and Elizabeth as well as Hannah were women who expressed their thoughts and joy in the Lord by singing praise unto Him. "Whoso offereth praise, glorifies God." A song can be a prayer when there are responses to blessings received rather than requests to be made. A song can be a prayer because it is addressed to God rather than to men. Much modern Christian music in many church gatherings are to attract people so they will attend the meetings of a church. Often music is the main attraction and a message from the Bible is a secondary part of a church gathering. We testify to people in many of our songs as we sing of grace, faith, salvation and events that make us think about Bible truths. That is why we have Gospel singing in Gospel meetings. Christians sing of our faith and blessings as well as give thanks in hymns of praise in other meetings of the saints. We sing of the power of prayer, of the joys of fellowship with others, of our appreciation of the cross work of Christ in many places and that is all quite acceptable.

By "singing and making melody in our hearts unto the Lord" we are able to minister to each other as believers as well as minister to ourselves. By singing, words that would be discordant if we said them in a normal tone of voice, are made very intelligible and beautiful. The rising and falling of cadence in singing unifies not only the voices of those participating, but the words themselves are easily heard and understood. When instruments are added to the music we make with our voices, the words usually are more easily lost in the sounds and the point of a song is lost in the entertainment of the harmony of the music and the power of the words is diminished.

There are a number of spiritual songs as well as psalms that are recorded in the word of God to give us understanding of the value of praise both to God and to us. Hannah's song at the beginning of first Samuel and David's song at the end of second Samuel are very much alike. These songs are directed to the Lord in praise, thanksgiving and worship. Hannah's second prayer is given as a song to be sung in praise to the Lord. It expresses her confidence in God's sovereignty and thankfulness for all He had done. Her prayer is

similar to Mary's prayer. She recognizes God is in full control of all events and this brings praise from a full and happy heart for the perfections of the Lord Himself of which she is very conscious.

The Lord is the Source of her joy and that could not be taken away from her. He is the Strength of her soul. A "horn" in the scriptures refers to strength given and an anointing for a specific purpose in which a horn contained oil to bless. It was also used in a call to serve in some capacity and a call to worship. Horns were on the altar to maintain an order in the offerings to God. The Lord is "the Horn" that keeps things in order and well controlled. The Lord was the Sound of her voice. All she had to say was about Him through whom she has triumphed, been delivered and been raised up from humiliation. The Lord was the Salvation of her life. Now she rejoices with great delight instead of being deeply troubled about that which was lacking and because of her enemies.

Now she praises the Lord as the Holy One of whom there is no one to which He can be compared. He is the only One who is all-sufficient. God, a Rock of safety, is firm, strong, unchanging, and a solid foundation. God is as solid as a Rock that cannot deteriorate nor be changed by all attacks made against Him. In Him we trust without any reservation as to whether He will fail or not. Hannah had come to know Him as the God of knowledge (all-knowing). He is the One who knows our hearts and motives and we can face all foes because He is our God. By Him is pride denounced and the arrogant brought low because He is the God of judgment. God is One who knows what we do.

When worshippers come to the Lord, they all come in at the same level no matter what their station in life may be. High and low are all alike before Him when they come to worship in spirit and in truth. Hannah sang of God's character and of His work. She sang about the future that is in His hand. Her heart was filled with good words she must have learned from the scriptures she had learned from before. Her words are not mere formality as she gives God glory for His goodness and blessings. He is in control and has all authority in heaven and on earth. All powers are subject to His sovereign will. He gives needed strength and satisfies the hungry soul with good things. He who has the keys of life and death, gives life.

Hannah mentions six characteristics of God in her song. He saves us from reproach and shame. He is the Savior. He is holy in His Person and commands His own to "be ye holy for I am holy." He is true in every action as well as in His being, and can be depended on to do what is right in every situation regardless of what we might want. He is the "Way, the Truth, and the Life." God can be trusted to keep every promise He has made, to fulfill every prophecy He has give, to meet every need as He sees fit. He is also the Judge of all and His judgments are always true and reliable. We may not understand every reason for His decisions because we only have finite minds, but this we know - God is the Sovereign over all affairs of people.

Not only did Hannah sing of God's Sovereignty, but she also sang of God's Grace and Glory. When we consider God's grace, we think of Him reaching down to the lowest place where we were and bringing us to the highest possible place we could be where we are "seated with Him in heavenly places." God holds the keys of death and life and gives eternal life. "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish" [v.6]. He is the One who will resurrect the dead. He is the God of rich and poor alike and "there is no respect of persons with God" [v.7]. As the God of creation, He is great in glory for "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork" [v.8]. We have experienced Him as the God of His people [v.9] who gives faith to live beyond the circumstances of life in which we are found. He will guard and guide our footsteps and lead us "in the way in which we should go."

As the Sovereign God we know Him as the One who rules over our personal life. "Our times are in Thy hands." We know our social life is of great interest to Him, therefore we "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." Our family life is one of the places where He manifests Himself to us by showing concern for our preservation and well-being. Even in business life we are to do what we do as "unto the Lord," and in national life we are to be "subject to the powers that be." We can be assured as we learn from this song-prayer of Hannah's that our God is as solid as a Rock. He knows all that we do. He is sovereign over all the affairs of men. God is the Supreme Judge who administers perfect justice. In His righteous judgment all opposition will be silenced. In the "thunder of His power," Christ, the Anointed One, will come to earth. The wicked will be silenced; adversaries will be destroyed; the living and dead will be judged and Christ in all His exalted strength will rule as King righteously and be exalted in all the nations.

In the surroundings of evil even being done in the house of the Lord, Samuel ministered before the Lord by serving Eli the priest. Eli half-heartedly tried to correct his sons, Hophni and Phinehas but they continued their wicked ways. It was a spiritual desert at the house of the Lord, and yet Samuel flourished as a young boy and grew like a strong plant in the right ways of the Lord. The background of sacrilege and greed in the priestly family was exposed by the brightness of a little boy growing in the Lord, shining brightly in that place.

The weakness of a polluted sanctuary doesn't stop the work of God in the souls of individuals who have a desire for God and His ways. The darkness of the days in which we live cannot put out the light of holiness practiced by the few that shows the right ways of scriptural gathering and practice. God enables us to keep the right perspectives of life lived for Him in their proper place in spite of the circumstances of the place in which we live. When we serve other people even carrying out ordinary tasks, we are serving the Lord. When we serve the Lord, every job we do has dignity and deserves our best efforts.

1st Samuel 2:2. *“There is none as holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: Neither is there any rock like our God.”*

NONE BESIDE THEE.

The foundations are shaken, O Lord God Almighty!
The righteous are wondering, “What shall we do?”
The things men once trusted and believed, O God,
Are disappearing in the dust of man's vain empty show.

I turn to Thee only, for there is no rock like Thee -
The shaking foundations leave fear in their place.
For Thou art the same Lord, let feeble men see
Thou art the Sovereign, I bow before Thy face.

I wonder if this deception has reached to my children -
O God, hear my plea of intercession for them!
There are so many voices, I fear for the family when
The subtle voices of men sound much like a hymn.

O Lord, help them grow to be men and women for God -
Help me to help them to get back from the edge
Of compromise and forsaking the truth of Thy Word -
To appreciate more, all the truths Thou hast said.

May each one, individually commit to spiritual growth,
May they never accept anything but Thy best.
May the words of truth always come from my mouth -
May each member of my family by Thyself be blest.”

“What else can I say Father, except keep them for Thyself. Put within each one of them a desire for Thee. Keep them from evil and succumbing to the guile that tempts them to a lesser life. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Samuel 2:12-36

A SMALL BRIGHT LIGHT IN DARKNESS

Some things in our lives happen over which we have no control. Other things come into our lives and we may not think they are too serious at first but as time passes, we can see the danger that they bring. There are still other things we must act on quickly and firmly lest the results that come have an evil effect on our family and others. Eli's sons took advantage of their position as priests to satisfy their own lust for power, control passion and possessions. They treated the people of God, the priesthood of which they were a part and the worship of God with contempt. They treated the offerings the people brought to the Lord with contempt. This called for execution because they were taking their portion *before* the offering was on the altar and *before* the fat was burned off.

The law said that those who did what Hophni and Phinehas were doing were to be put to death which is likely why Eli didn't deal with the situation the way he was supposed to. The problems resulting from his inaction were that many other lives were adversely affected. Priests were allowed to eat of the meat of a sacrifice by putting a hook down into the pot and whatever was pulled up was theirs. The servant of these priests used a rod with three hooks to satisfy their greed. Irreverence for God and the house of God is still a problem today. Irreverence and immorality often go together but is overlooked because the practice of them is so common. Even some so-called spiritual leaders do those things hoping that either no one will notice, or that their sin will be overlooked because of the leadership position they hold. Some look down on people of simple faith and take what has been given them to further the work of the Lord and use it to make themselves rich.

These sons of Eli are called "sons of Belial," or worthless men," "children of corruption." They sinned against God's people by robbing their sacrifices and they sinned against God by taking that which belong to Him alone. They enriched themselves by robbing God and other people. It is possible for us to keep for ourselves

that which really belongs to God. I have to search my heart to make sure that I am not doing that which is unlawful for me as a son in the family of God. As a father I am responsible for what goes on in my home. When reports of evil come to my ears about my children. I need to correct that behavior right away. I am responsible to guide my family as well as guard it. I must do whatever is necessary to change wrong behavior and bring righteousness of life before them.

Right in the middle of all this moral and spiritual darkness going on among the people of God in the place where Israel was called to bring their sacrifices and offering, God was getting His portion from the heart of a child. While all the evil was going on around the door of the tabernacle and at the altar, out of sight in the sanctuary was Samuel, wearing an ephod, the vestments of a priest, bringing joy to the heart of God. He was "ministering to the Lord." What a delight that must have been to the Lord as a happy child, glad to be serving his Lord, went about day after day and year after year, just doing what was right. Hannah's family teaches us that blessings are not always immediate. Things taught to children as infants and small children do not leave them. They would have learned from a praying mother and faithful father that deliberate acts, good and bad, have God's eye. Children learn more about living, at home in early years than they will ever learn from secular teachers and/or college professors. The seemingly small candle-light of a boy doing what was right when everyone else around him was doing wrong was not unnoticed by the Lord of the universe.

1st Samuel.2:30. *"But now the Lord saith, 'Be it far from me; for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."*

HONOR.

There are some principles that we can count on no matter what happens. The Lord will never let a person down who gives the Lord the right to make the choices we live by. I have had the privilege of coming from a long line of people who have committed themselves to letting the Lord direct their lives. Great-grandfather Henry Goff, made a decision in England with his wife, Emma Caroline, that it was the Lord's mind for them to move to North Dakota in the 1880's. All but two of their family gave evidence that they were real and committed believers. The other two professed faith in Christ but made some decisions based only on how much money they could make rather than what was God's will. Then my grandfather chose to make a move west that was opening up because he felt it was God's will to make a new start for his family. The results of that move made over 100 years ago proved to be one God has blessed and many members of our extended family will be in heaven because he and grandma chose to honor God.

My father and mother knew that unless the Lord had first place in their lives and home, everything else they did would not last and would not honor God. Linda and I have tried to do this in our life from the time we were able to make decisions and it has led us to a lot of wonderful blessings.

"O Father of families: You have moved so wonderfully on our behalf. We know all glory for all the benefits we have received as a family comes from You. Help me to pass on to our children and grandchildren, a sense of the dignity and responsibility that is ours as those who have had fore-bearers who honored God. Our heritage brings with it the need of passing on to succeeding generations the fact of God's grace to us as a sanctified family. Amen."

Indulgent fatherhood brings disaster on their children and others influenced by their children. Eli as a father carried out no discipline when his children were in their learning time. There are some people who refuse to act on the light they have been given in order to have others feel good about them. It is better for children to respect their parents than to love them. Love may come as time passes but if respect isn't learned early in life it will be fundamentally lost. When we do not maintain the standard we have been given, and we know it is right, corruption of people and even worship follows the course of the leadership. Eli as a priest over priests acted in the same way he had as a father. He had no standard of discipline that he followed or expected of those he led. Overcoming natural relationship is one of the greatest and hardest tests of leadership. No discipline of children and no discipline of those we are called to lead leads to disobedience and disregard for people and God. To allow this made Eli guilty too.

The main characters in the book of first Samuel, Eli, Samuel and David all made the same mistake when it came to their families. Some men are willing to act scripturally in dealing with other people, but they try to find ways to avoid carrying out scriptural discipline when it comes to their own family. An impartial leader is a man who is esteemed by the Lord's people. The first Phinehas was that kind of man and he carried out the needed justice in the needed way. He was honored by God and promised an on-going priesthood for his family because of the action he took against sin. Corrupt living and covetousness seem to go together. Once it is allowed to start there seems to be no way to stop it. That in turn sets a trend for others to follow. They soon are degraded and live wicked lives with habits, passion and dishonor that is not acceptable in the

Lord's people. Those who want a leadership position for power and prominence adversely effect other people and take away that which should be for God alone.

The man of God who was sent to prophesy to Eli had a message from God to deliver the consequences of which he could not escape. The judgment of God was coming on his household and there were specific reasons for this. First, the call to remember. Eli's forbearers had the honor and privilege of being separated to God generations before when they were still in Egypt. The trust given to priests was a solemn trust to be engaged in divine service. They were also given all the provision they needed right from God's table. Second, the reason why. God's blessings and ample provision had been set aside by Eli in the interest of honoring his sons instead of God. The blame for the lawlessness of his sons was laid at Eli's door. His toleration of their behavior was considered honoring them more than God. Third, the warning given. God judges evil as well as giving grace. The judgment that was coming would suit the sin that had been committed. Fourth, the description given. We all have a legacy that we leave behind us usually for several generations. Eli was leaving behind a legacy of calamities and judgment to his family, while God was going to show good to the children of Israel. Fifth, the day of judgment. Both of Eli's sons would die on the same day and Eli would live to see that day. Sixth, the other priest. A faithful priest will take Eli's place who will do God's will and will bring God's blessings to His people. Seventh, the contrast. Eli's heritage to his family will be degradation, destitution and poverty.

We need to remember that worship and authority are linked because one without the other is meaningless and dangerous. Some people want to "worship God in my own way." They are not too concerned about what God says as long as it is suitable to themselves. The respect of people does not come just because we hold some particular "office." Cut and dry teaching does not create devoted hearts because we tell them about it or demand it of them. Devoted, warm and grateful-hearted teachers produce that effect on others, even if the person speaking is simple and not nearly as gifted as others. A young believer, a simple, faithful man or woman or a child who loves the Lord and appreciates the privilege of ministering to Him, exposes the dark things that have been hidden from men, not because of their condemning words but because of their living light. Samuel ministered before the Lord. He grew before the Lord and he grew on in favor both with the Lord and also with men. What a blessing a little light shining in a dark place can be to the Lord's people. This is what we should all be committed to as we live in these dark days.

1st Samuel 2:30. *"Them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."*

HONOR ME.

How do I honor the Lord?

"Honor the Lord with thy substance." I honor Him, when everything entrusted to me is used in a way that can maintain the cycle of honor. When I claim what I have been given as my own, I will lose a personal sense of honor that is very important for me to have in order to be happy in myself. If I claim what God has given me to be my own, I will be looked upon by others as selfish, self-centered and self-serving. If I keep what God has given me with a tight fist, it is despising Him. God forbid that such a thing will ever happen – that I should ever despise Him in such a way.

I honor Him when I hold Him in reverence and all that is about Him. His name, His word, His house, His people are to be honored when He is honored. When I speak His name to others, is it with an audible expression of reverential fear? When I hold, handle and read His Word, is it with respect and carefulness of speech? When I am in the place of His name, do I show by my ways that holy things are done here? When I am with His people, do I honor Him by giving them the proper respect they deserve, the dignity that children of the living God have a right to have because they belong to their heavenly Father?

There is a lifestyle in which God is honored throughout one's whole life as a child of God. Often there are successes granted by God to such people. They will be the first to credit God and His grace for everything that has been done. They know that it hasn't been done by their own power and so God can trust them with the honor that He gives. Ezra 7:27-28.

"O Honored God and Father, and Honored Lord Jesus Christ: I honor Thee here from my heart. But I want it not to be just something inward; I see the need of it being visible to my family, my brethren, my fellow-travelers on this road of life. With voice and words, with songs and prayers, with attitudes and deeds, I want Thee to be honored in my sphere of influence. Amen."

1st Samuel 3.

GOD CALLS THE YOUNG

Listening and responding are vital in forming and retaining a meaningful relationship with God. In the days of the judges the voice of the Lord had been rarely heard for those three hundred years. There were very few prophets speaking to God's people because they had let too many things come in the way. Before long we Christians can become used to the way things are and think everything going on around us is not all that bad. Some people are waiting for God to speak to them not willing to accept the fact that He already has spoken to us in His word. When people refuse to accept as truth that which God has already said in words that we can understand, then any "vision" would have no meaning. To many today the "word of the Lord is precious (rare)" because they would rather read the books people write about the Bible than the Bible itself. God speaks to us clearly through the written word and we must learn to act upon that word and what it tells us.

There are a number of things we can learn from this boy, Samuel, that we can apply to ourselves - old or young. Samuel was serving in the tabernacle, the house of God. There is service we can do for the Lord where He has placed us. That is where we begin with God. Then Samuel was clothed with priestly garments. There is a difference even in the outward appearance that reveals the attitude of heart of those who want to please and serve God. It is not a small thing to be engaged in priestly service no matter how insignificant it may seem. Also, when one is serving in a respectable and dignified way, there is evidence of spiritual growth. Both people and the Lord see evidence of growth when one is in the right place, doing the right things in spite of all that goes on around them. More than that, and perhaps because of that, Samuel pleased God and found favor with men. It is no accident that those that honor God He honors. There are good reasons for this. In contrast to the evil of Eli's sons and Eli's lethargic approach to the work of the Lord to which he had been called, there was the brightness of Samuel's testimony as a young boy growing in the Lord at the same time Eli was declining in eyesight.

God speaks to those He knows will listen and do what He says. Eli's experience as a priest, his age and his position did not make him a man of faith and obedience. He had spent his whole life in the service of God by serving God's people but he had overlooked his responsibility to his family. Our desire to do the work of the Lord can cause us to neglect our own family who may suffer the effects of that neglect. If our own sense of personal importance overrides our family responsibility, we have sinned. Eli was "laid down in his place," which must have been in or very near the holy place and within earshot of the Holiest of all. He had become so used to the way things were that the lamp of God which was supposed to burn perpetually went out shortly after he was used to going to sleep. Samuel would not have known the difference so it was normal for him to go to sleep nearby. It is incumbent on us to not forget the necessity of keeping into the word of God for our guidance. In that way we are ready to act when directed by the Lord and to do so within the boundary of God's revealed will in the scripture. When God speaks, we must be ready with "here am I" to act on this call.

"In those days" God was silent to the nation, the priest was failing and the light was going out in the house of the Lord. There was a spiritual famine in the land of Israel because there was "no open vision and to hear from God was not common. Moral darkness had settled down upon the nation; the priest had laid down on the job; and the lamp of God was burning down. Such a condition would make us so discouraged and pessimistic that we would figure we had passed the place of recovery. But God's chain of command is based on faith, not age or position. We need to be prepared for God to work at any place, at any time, and through anyone He chooses. Eli's service for God apparently caused him to neglect his family. Service can degenerate into a quest for personal importance. The sin of Eli's sons could not be covered by sacrifice.

In that setting, that to man's perspective was hopeless, there was a small boy serving the Lord in a simple way and with the devoted service peculiar to those who have no personal agenda to which they are committed. God can, and will use, who He chooses to do what needs to be done, even when more qualified people are there. Like Samuel, it is when we are ready and willing to obey Him, we hear the call of the Lord and we learn to recognize His voice. When we read the word, He reveals His plans and will to us. Then the messenger of the Lord by which He communicates His mind comes to us and then the presence of the Lord by which blessing is given to us and our ministry, is effective.

Samuel was resting near where God rests, "where the ark of God was." That is a good place to be because one is able to hear the voice of God when they are close to Him. A child can hear the word of God. He can hear about God. Samuel was where he could hear God. Four times he heard God speak before he was guided by Eli to understand the voice was from God. Waiting upon God is never wasted time. Often is time is needed so we do not make a mistake. We need to listen to God more than listen to those who talk about God. "The words of wise men are heard in quiet," so when we hear the voice of God we should speak in a ready and willing way. Don't keep God waiting when He speaks to us. Receiving a message comes to those who hear Him and serve Him. Samuel received a message very similar to the message of the prophet to Eli.

Now Samuel knew what Eli knew. Disaster was coming on Eli's home was the message to both of them. Receiving a message from God comes to those who hear Him and truly want to serve Him. Judgment is necessary when sin is committed, but mercy is offered when repentance is real.

When "judgment begins at the house of God," all the people of God are affected. Counterfeit Christianity is going to be judged as counterfeit Judaism was judged. Samuel probably lay awake until morning thinking about what was coming. After he opened the doors of the house of the Lord in the morning, he knew he would have to tell Eli what God told him. "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." Even though he was a child Samuel was old enough to understand the message from the Lord and was able to recount it to Eli. People need to hear the bad as well as the good when God speaks to us through His word and His servants. Anything left out that should be heard is really dishonest. When Samuel heard the voice of God and the message He gave, he also received a revelation of what "Lord" means. There is authority to which we all must bow when God speaks.

The word of the Lord broke the silence of God and Samuel, the last of the judges, became the beginning of the line of prophets. His first prophetic word was to unveil sin and its consequences to the people of God. However, his ministry would reveal God's love for His people and His plans to bring a day of glory that will be seen. The old priest had been by-passed and a new generation was to speak for God. God is raising up people of a new generation in our day to preach the Gospel and teach His people. They deserve our support and we need to listen to their message from the position of the new generation, and help them to see and understand the value of the things we have learned. It is up to us who are older to assist them in moving forward to take responsibility for the people of God.

Samuel told it all to Eli who knew he had been set aside and a young person had been taken up to lead in service for God. Eli bowed in submission and resignation rather than in repentance and faith. Samuel is raised up as "the man of God" with the presence of the Lord real to him and the power of the Lord giving impact to his words at the place where the Lord again appears - Shiloh. Samuel heard the Lord speak to him at other times and the messages he received came to pass. Early conversions followed by the life of a young person lived for God, help a young person get through the pressures of youth and teenage years and get established in maturity with their faith on the solid rock of the word of God. Young people need the help of those who are spiritually mature as soon as they are saved. From then throughout the rest of his life, Samuel was recognized by the children of Israel as a prophet of God.

In the privacy of life when a person is young, they are able to hear the voice of the Lord in simple understandable terms. They are able to minister to the Lord in simple and practical ways when no one else is looking and do what they do as "unto the Lord," not trying impress anyone. In that time of our Christian life, our attitude toward God, His word and His people are formed. Our actions are not complicated and not a whole lot is expected of us but that which we do attempt for the Lord is very special to us as well as others. It is during those early years of our Christian life that the habits are formed which stay with us and will bless others and honor the Lord throughout our lifetime.

1st Samuel 3:1. *"And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision."*

LISTENING AND RESPONDING.

For years, decades, centuries - God's voice was rarely heard.
Very few people were concerned about nor listened to God's Word.
But a young boy fresh from faith and supported by his mother,
Was one God could speak to when He couldn't find another.

He had served the Lord well by serving an ancient man -
We are not sure what he did, but God was - and still can
See when a service is done for the highest reason -
Serving others is serving God - it is a way we can please Him.

When we are ready and willing, this is when God will speak;
He knows the motivation and directs the way we take
Such a person can be trusted who has done well in smaller things;
God can trust that person to the service that He brings.

Even when times are dark and there seems no end in sight,
God will find a listener and let him turn on the light
Of truth that will lead men from darkness into day -
As the truth of God affects all they do and people hear what they say.

Graceful living for God has a powerful effect -

Especially from one who is young; inexperienced yet.
That person is fresh from God, through Him God can to others speak -
Bringing life to a generation who God's expectations cannot meet.

"I pray for the young believers, Father God - some who have just been saved. Help them to listen to Thee above all the worldly voices that call for their attention. Help them understand the value of Thy voice speaking to them through Thy Word. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 4

BITTER FRUIT

There is a biblical principle that is true for individual, families and nations - and that is "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever and man soweth, that shall he also reap." When disobedience or lack of obedience to God takes place, and when God's wisdom and will is ignored as being out-of-date or not applicable to us today, there comes a harvest of bitter fruits. "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm." Israel went out on their own to do battle with the Philistines. That same attitude is not just with those people of ancient times but people do the same today. For some reason people think they can do what they want, when they want and how they want - and it doesn't make any difference what God says. The people of Israel had ignored God's specific instructions regarding warfare, as to how and when they were to engage in it. The Israelites didn't obey those instructions nor did they seek the counsel of Samuel who was notable all over the nation for hearing the word of God.

We need to be conscious of the fact that over-confidence really only displays personal weakness. Any who seek their own glory or to display their own valor in the things of God, will be brought down. We can say "Ebenezer" (stone of help) all we want, but if our help is in the arm of flesh, that will not change failure to victory. Obedience is what God expects and requests of us because it is when we are weak in ourselves, we are strong in the Lord. Valor is no substitute for faith and dependence on God.

The Philistines were descendents from Ham, Noah's son, who lived in five major cities in southwest Canaan and were wanting the land Israel had claimed years before. That made the Philistines one of Israel's major enemies. In their history was awareness of all God had done in Israel going back to the time they were in Egypt. After the Israelites lost 4000 men, they called a council, not to find out the mind and will of God, but to decide what they were going to do. They were only concerned with what they thought themselves. "Let us fetch the ark ... unto us ... cometh among us ...it may save us."

In the war with the Philistines the Israelites began to use the ark, a wood and metal box, as a good-luck charm. The ark was holy because of what it contained and because God had dwelled between the cherubim that were on the mercy seat - the cover of the box. The reason it was holy was because God is holy. It was a wood and metal box, not an object to be worshipped. Israel thought their glory was in the ark and God had deserted them. The problem was, they had deserted Him. A symbol of God does not guarantee His presence and power. We cannot live on memories of God's past blessings. We must keep our relationship with God new and fresh. When sin dominates our lives, even God-given joys and pleasures are empty. God demonstrates His power how and when He chooses and responds to those who draw near to Him in faith and obedience.

Hophni and Phinehas should have known better than to bring the ark but they had long before gone their own ways and had rejected what was right. Even the Philistines were afraid because they had heard about divine intervention on behalf of Israel from their forefathers. Now all that Israel had was a form of godliness without power. Because God had blessed us in the past doesn't mean He is with us now. When we go our own way and do things as a form, God is not in that with us. What God says - happens. The Israelites were smitten before the Philistines but not in their hearts before the Lord and consequently many thousands died. They had not learned the lessons of the past and now blamed God for their own failure in the present.

Instead of repentance, they tried to remedy their failure in their own way. They knew of the past victories the Lord brought to pass in Israel and how the Lord used hornets, unnatural weather and other means to bring those victories about. But because of their lack of interest in the Lord Himself, they wanted the ark to fight their battle. When the ark left Shiloh, it never came back there and in fact, the city is never mentioned existing after that. Probably it was destroyed either at that time of Philistine rule or soon after. God isn't among us because we say He is. There is evidence of the presence of God among His people, when we follow the road He has laid out for us. When He is in the center of all we do, and when we gather together unto Him, not just symbols or symbolic programs, then we know He is with us because that is evident in the holiness of the gathering, the Christ-likeness of His people, the character and sincerity of their worship, and their obedience to His divine will revealed in the scriptures.

The ungodly sons of Eli had no respect for God and His glory. They had profaned that which was holy in the way they treated the sacrifices of the people with which they were entrusted. Now they did the same with the ark, that which testified of the presence of God Himself. People made a great noise when the ark came into the camp, but heaven was silent. A lot of noise doesn't mean God is approving of what we do. He does not approve of that which centers on us and ignores divine principles. Confusion in churches today should be a cause of repentance and humiliation rather than a lot of noise and shouts of "praise" that people make in the name of God. Our testimony to His grace and power is not the outward form or appearance. Rather it is in the degree in which we conform to Christ morally and spiritually. The times we read about our Lord raising His voice are at the grave of Lazarus, and that was for the benefit of the people who needed to understand the extent of His authority, even over death. He "cried with a loud voice" when He knew He had accomplished the redemptive work needed to bring us to God when He was hanging on the cross with His strength still in fullness - so He could declare "Finished" in His victory over sin. When He calls His church at the rapture, He will shout as a declaration of victory over the world, the flesh and the devil on behalf of His own - and we are changed to be like Him.

If the spirit of those who are like Hophni and Phinehas is left unjudged, God is not with us no matter how loud we shout "Praise the Lord." The great shouts of the children of Israel did not stop the Philistines because it was only the sound of the flesh. Even though the Philistines heard the shout and were afraid that God had come into the camp of Israel to deliver them, it only made them more determined to defeat them. The battle that followed was simply a battle between two worldly fleshly interests and the strongest won. Much religious noise is made today but that will not defeat the sacrilegious and profane noises that are going on in the world. Both are simply, sounds of the flesh, even though one uses religious words. Discipline and responsibility are needed when we see the works of the flesh taking over a work that is supposed to be of God. We need to act rather than react to a situation which we know is not right.

Because of the willfulness and sin of the Israelites, and the evil of the two religious-leaders, Hophni and Phinehas, 30,000 more men died that day bringing the total to 34,000, and also the prophecy regarding Eli's two sons dying the same day came to pass. "The Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man to his tent (home), and there was a very great slaughter." Even more serious was the fact that "the ark of God was taken." Israel was left on its own - helpless, defeated, dismayed and in disarray because they had ignored God and chosen to do things their own way. The prediction of Hophni and Phinehas dying the same day came to pass and the whole city of Shiloh wailed when they heard of the disaster that took so many lives of the men of the nation. The lessons to us are unmistakable. If we are ever inclined to make spiritual decisions based on our own opinions or the "majority rule" concept instead of what the word of God says, we are bound to lose the battle for the salvation of the lost. If we decide to take situations into our own hands without the strength of the Lord giving power to the work and the Holy Spirit guiding us, the outcome will be wrong. If we think we can fine-tune what the scriptures say to make it fit what we want to be the outcome, we will be found fighting against God and we will lose what we have as well as what we hoped to gain.

It would have been very hard for poor blind Eli sitting by the road waiting for news to hear about the death of thousands of Israelites. It would have been harder for him to hear about the death of his two sons just the way the man of God prophesied. But when he heard of the ark of God taken by the ungodly enemy it was too much for him to take and he died of a broken neck like an unclean donkey when he fell backwards off of his seat. Phinehas' wife could not be comforted even when her son was born. Ichabod had to live all his life as a reminder of that dark day and the evil remembrance of his father. The desolation that came over Shiloh was so great that it became a lost city and a monument to unfaithfulness. Eli's death marked the end of the dark period of the judges in which Israel for most of three hundred years ignored God. The beginning of Israel's time in the land of Canaan was bright but even today there is spiritual darkness still over the nation. The time of the judges began with hope and ended with despair. When sin takes over and dominates a personal life, a family or a nation, even the natural joys like a child being born seem empty.

However, God is not done with His people, and His purposes are going to be fulfilled because they have been established by His own sovereign will. One man, Samuel, though he was the last of the judges, became the first interim priest who offered sacrifices on behalf of the people in different places around the nation. He led a national revival that lasted over one hundred years and gave Israel a whole century of glory in which they came from nothing to being a world power. This is a foretaste of what will yet become of Israel in this world as God's earthly people. They are small and despised now but a day is coming in which they will be the major world power under the reign of the King of kings, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is important for us to remember the lessons that when the leadership of the people of God fails, we can't expect any difference from those who follow them.

1st Samuel 4:21. *“And she named the child Ichabod, saying, the glory is departed from Israel because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband.”*

THE ARK OF GOD WAS TAKEN.

Is Thy presence still among us or have You left?
O God, sometimes I feel we are so bereft
That maybe all we have left is ability to follow a form
Thinking we still are vital because of the way we have come
For a hundred years and more to witness in this town -
And that in some way those years will deserve a crown.
Is the glory departed because You are not here?
Or is there virtue in still gathering in spite of advancing years?
We are able to meet and sing our spiritual hymns -
We still minister the Word, but seldom do sinners come in.
Our responsible giving still helps us maintain
A sense of fellowship when the visitors came
To give us some teaching, we have something to give -
And they travel on with wonder that we still live.
But, O God, there are so few and we are dying off -
Another leaves today who is not a Goff.
Is there something about us smacking of family pride?
Are we maintaining a work that has already died?
O God, hear my prayer on behalf of this assembly,
Give us some evidence as we gather weekly
That Thou art still here, we are not left alone
Without a “church-messenger” speaking for us at Thy throne.
Are there not some believers who live around here
Who care for the Word and the Savior’s name they bear?
Perhaps some poor sinner is looking for Thee -
Send him to us, and help us all to see -
God still trusts us to publicly bear His name
And now, as for one hundred years, we should continue the same.

“O God, hear my prayer for this little assembly, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Samuel 5.

"AN OPEN SHOW OF THEM"

The ark was a symbol of God’s presence. The ark started on a journey that revealed the power of God that was victorious over all the power of the enemy. Satan has his ways and means to seek to stop the work of God in and through His people. When God’s people fail, He can work without them. God is faithful to Himself and will not be humiliated by the failure of His people to honor Him. Even though the people of Philistia had won a victory over the failing people of God, they had lost the war without even knowing it. The real war was not against flesh and blood but against "principalities and powers."

Without a human hand being put to the conflict, the victory over the Philistines was like the one our Lord won when He "spoiled principalities and power, He made a show of them openly. Dagon was the god the Philistines believed sent rain and a bountiful harvest. They must have thought the God of Israel would help them the same as He helped Israel. Until they had experienced physical pain, they were not willing to take action. Do I listen to truth for truth’s sake or do I only listen when I am hurting? Each of the five cities of the Philistines ruled by a lord, experienced the chaos that comes when God acts in judgment upon those who do not know Him.

When a nation fails to meet its corporate responsibility, God directs His attention to individuals. From that time on the ark of testimony was connected to individuals who were loyal to the Lord and rejoiced in what that ark stood for - fellowship with the Lord. Loyalty to God is not limited to our connection with an assembly. An assembly in which there are loyal saints is a strong place of fellowship. Fellowship and communion with God are necessary for truth taught to be truth that is real to us. When we cherish the truth of God, our testimony for Him is consistent with what we do.

When the Lord Jesus Christ was here on earth, His journey from place to place testified to the presence of God in spite of what people said or did. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." In the same way it happened in Israel, the power that was given to the early church was lost when outward forms took

the place of spiritual reality. It is possible for us to hold the truth with a firm hand and be out of communion with God. The enemy thought they had triumphed because they had the ark of God in their hands. Forms and facsimiles of divine things such as the Lord's Supper, baptism, church fellowship and even church discipline have no value if they are contrary to what God's intention is.

It doesn't take long for pride and triumph to become humiliation and shame when God takes care of His own business in His own way for His own glory. The failure of men does not mean that God can or has failed in any way. It does mean "My glory I will not give to another." The first stop of the ark at Ashdod testified to the weakness of Satan's power when confronted with the glory of God. Failure may be written over us like "Ichabod," but triumph belongs to God. After the first and second fall of the idol, Dagon, nothing was left but the "stump." The absolute supremacy of God could not be denied - and yet the Philistines still did. From city to city the ark was carried for seven months. In every case the bad effects increased until the boils and diseases prostrated the men of the Philistines.

They had to learn it is a "fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." At first, they feared the ark when Israel brought it into the Israeli camp. Then they gloried in having captured the ark. Again, their fears came, not because of what they heard from ancient stories, but because of what they were experiencing first hand. Now the power of God was directed against them without human agents. They learned they were up against God Himself. If we do not learn from those who seek to teach us from their own experience what they know is the truth of God, we may have to suffer the consequences of deliberate ignorance.

The attitudes of both the Israelis and the Philistines toward that ark which represents the presence of God. People tolerate a form of Christianity today because it blends in with the rest of the world. Professing Christians can get along well in the world of materialism, pleasure and religious counterfeit as long as it doesn't interfere with their chosen lifestyle. But when God intervenes, they turn against the true God with a vengeance. The words people use today sound very similar: "God shall not abide with us;" "What shall we do with (the ark) God?" "God ---slays us and our people;" "God is to blame for all of our difficulties." "Send -- God away." The city of the Philistines reacted the same was as did the children of Israel when they realized God was not on their side. "The cry of the city went up to heaven." We need to make sure we never take God for granted in any way in our life. God can make a show of us in the same way He made an open show of them, if we forsake the Lord.

1st Samuel 5:11. *"So they went and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and your people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there."*

GO AGAIN TO HIS OWN PLACE.

It is like a living thing, the awareness of God's presence -
Not seen, but extremely real imposing in its essence -
Overpowering the normal life of natural men
Claiming authority without saying a thing.

It has been here unnoticed by most in this town.
We haven't disturbed the peace much nor turned it upside down
With challenges made to the status quo -
And yet there is a presence here that the old folks know.

The young have forgotten that God rules over men.
They live life much different - it all centers on them.
The presence of God in their midst they don't know -
And won't care at all until sin's darkness in them shows.

They don't - and the most - will never believe -
Because they live for today measuring what they have
As the reason for living, they want no hope in the future -
Satan has deceived them appealing to their sinful nature.

But still in the midst of this worldly city
Is the presence of God, although many will pity;
The few that believe in, and trust Jesus as Lord -
Committing ourselves to go just by God's Word.

I don't know what will happen in years yet to come,
But by God's grace and power, we'll continue till then.

O God, let us finish as victors when our Lord shall come,
Or the closure is evidenced by the ones gathered home.

“Father, some more have gone home this year. Others are nearly there. Give the needed grace to maintain what is here until the plain evidence says we are done. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Samuel 6.

THE DANGER OF CURIOSITY

What are we to do when we are made conscious of our guilt? People respond to guilt in many different ways. Some try to ignore it. Some excuse it as an innocent mistake. Others look for someone else to blame for what is wrong with me, so guilt is not even my fault. Still others get religious and impose on themselves pain and affliction to try to pay for the sin that caused the guilt. Religious symbols have even been formed to identify themselves with like snakes and other creatures like demons and gargoyles. Many have formed beads like small tumors and they pray over these things that symbolize the sins they have done. The Philistines made images of those things that had brought disaster upon them. They formed emeralds (tumors) out of gold and made gold images of rats that spread disease, as symbols of the things that plagued them. The focus of the Philistines was on what was wrong and they ignored repentance for their sin and doing what was right before God.

Our own interests and methods in seeking the Lord are not necessarily what is right before God. Many do what they do in religion to try to get to God their own way. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the way of death." After seven disastrous months it was easily seen that the presence of the ark in the land of the Philistines was impossible to continue. Their victory had turned to disaster that spread and was demonstrated from place to place that it was because of the ark being there. However, they had either not been willing to learn the lesson of humility before God, or they were not willing to act on what they knew. Either way adversely affects us if we act similarly when God deals with us. The chastening hand of God is to bring us to humble ourselves before Him and commit ourselves to changing what is wrong and doing that which pleases the Lord.

The Philistines were still not sure if it was the "God of Israel" who was bringing judgment on them or if the things that were happening to them were acts of chance. They did know that God was greater in power than normal acts of nature so they used two cows with nursing calves as a test. They wanted to rid themselves of the presence of God. Bondage to sin makes awareness of God very troublesome to people today the same as in those days. The test the idolatrous priest used was that if two cows acted against their natural instinct it could be concluded that God brought the judgment on them. Even though they acknowledged the hand of God in their troubles, and the fact that propitiation had to be made, they chose to do it their own way which was an insult to God.

They only recognized that "the God of Israel" was a god among other gods. Many people today include "God" as another ingredient in the mix to provide for them what they consider a successful life. "Worshipping God" is just one of many things they do to feel satisfied in themselves. It is a memorial to what is wrong in them rather than what is right about God. The practice of the Philistines is a common practice in religious activity today. A formal, gaudy religion with expensive "new carts" and the trappings of wealth is insulting to God because it exalts man and hides his need of Christ.

A "new cart" is a work of men designed to connect what it carries to the earth to support it, and relieve the responsibility of men to carry the weight of truth. Modern methods of worship and remembrance carry little resemblance to the original pattern God gave. These new ways have replaced the biblical practices that are clearly taught in the scriptures. Natural ability has taken the place of the filling and guidance by the Holy Spirit. Human learning taught by scholarly people who pass on their own ideas about God and the scriptures have taken the place of teachers our Lord set in the church in which "the prophets speak two or three" and the others judge. Teaching of the Lord 's people has been taken over by one man (or woman) instead so those things they hear are without the safety of plurality. Religious ceremonies have taken the place of divine simplicity even in the Lord's Supper. That which is esteemed by men in "Christian" churches has no authority from God if it is not according to the word of God. To set aside the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit leaves the people of God open to the attractions of a "new cart" and the appeal of the "traditions of the early fathers." All of this appeals to those who are unsaved or to carnal believers.

God who can make "the wrath of man" to praise Him, brought the ark back to Israel by His own power even though the materials and the method was not of His choosing. The Holy Spirit is still moving today to give the Lord Jesus Christ His right place among His people who gather in His name. There are still those who

He moves from darkness to light. How gracious is was of God to allow the test of unbelief to work under His divine authority. In His grace He condescended to act in a way to convince even the hard unbelief of idolaters. Those animals went from what was natural to an altar testifying to the fact that that the spiritual has precedence over the natural.

The Ark returned, announced by lowing cows walking without human guidance, followed at a distance by five Philistine leaders who watched this remarkable act of God to its conclusion. The painful tumors that God sent on the Philistines finally produced the necessary results. "The ark of the God of Israel" was returned in the Philistine way – on a cart pulled by beasts. To walk in faith is not complicated. It simply means to take the next step God places in front of us no matter what might call to us from either side. "Make straight paths for your feet" and it will lead to the place of blessing, worship, testimony and rest of soul.

Bethshemesh, means "the house of the sun" which is where the path of separation leads to. God manifests Himself there in the light of His Person through the light of His word. In times of revival, light from God radiates as truth is preached even in dark places. The truth of God has not changed and light characterizes the recovery of God's people to Christ and to gather unto His name alone. When the ark came to the valley at the wheat harvest, the harvesters saw "the ark". When the truths of God come home to the souls of God's people, the "valley of Baca (weeping)" becomes a well of water and spiritual truth recovered moves God's people to rejoice. There was great weeping and wailing when the ark was taken. Now there was rejoicing when it was returned. Though they reaped in joy what they had sown in sorrow seven months earlier, and there was re al joy, they still saw only the object, not the "ark of God." They should've fallen down in worship. Shiloh was no more, so there was no resting place for the ark. Even though the testimony of God's people may be in reproach, when "we see Jesus" there is joy.

We do not live in the heady days of the early church during which thousands were saved and gathered to the name of the Lord, but our Lord is the same One who they lived for in those days. We rest in our Lord Jesus Christ even in these dark days of departure. We can never design our own methods of worshipping God. We must always serve Him in the way He requires. God's mighty power over-rides all-natural things. God could not allow people to think they use His power for their own ends. In the field of Joshua (Jehovah the Savior) there was a rock that may have been considered a nuisance to farm around, but that rock became a very special place when it became an altar where sacrifices were offered, a place of worship and a resting place for the ark based on a sure foundation.

When we are looking by faith on our Lord and rejoicing in Him, we have joy and gladness. His truth is unchanging as the rock is. "Whoso heareth these sayings on mine and doeth them is like a man who built his house upon a rock." His love, mercy, and grace that have been shown to us, lifts our hearts in praise to Him. But when we leave the enjoyment of what we know of Him revealed to us in the Word of God, and go into speculation and questioning about things not revealed to us by the Spirit of God - and try to pry into the mystery of an Infinite Person, we are in danger of being chastised as sons. With our frail, limited, puny finite minds we are not able to form right teaching regarding the Person and work of Christ or any other biblical doctrine. Most cults have their own explanation of Jesus. "What think ye of Christ is the test, to try both the state and the scheme. You cannot be right in the rest, until ye think rightly of Him."

We cannot disregard His warnings and treat the things of God lightly. Joy turns into sorrow when we act impulsively according to our own desire rather than in a manner suitable to the holy things of God. When we lose the adoration of our hearts toward God and substitute our curiosity or intellectual interest into the things of God, we have lost the sense of holy awe that is essential in our worship and our dealings with Him. A fleshly approach to divine truths dishonors God, hardens our own heart and divides God's people. A personal awareness of the holiness of God, keeps us from carelessness and carnality in dealing with spiritual truth. Our fellowship with God, our communion and dependence on Him is maintained by the Holy Spirit guiding and leading us "into all truth."

To look into the ark was to disregard God. Everything inside of that ark was of special significance to them because of who God is. By their curiosity instead of reverence, they were reducing God to be of no more value than themselves. It is amazing to me that after the first few who gathered around the ark to look in and died, there were others who kept coming and did the same thing until someone must've had the sense to close his eyes and cover the ark again. Whether the number was seventy or 50,070 who died – they needed to be reminded that "the ark" is more than a gold-covered box. It was where God dwelt with His people. Those Israelis died because they still looked at the ark in the same way as they had before - as an idol. They had not, or would not, accept the fact that God alone is to be worshipped because He is the Living God. He could not permit them to make up their own minds as to what they believed and use that which belonged to Him in a way that disregarded Him.

His warnings were to the people of God who had strayed were very clear. No longer will you disregard, disrespect, dishonor, disobey and defy that which belongs to God and in doing so - God Himself. Any presumptuous sin affects others beside those who are engaged in it. This discipline was not only on those who looked in the ark, but on those around "that others might fear." Finally, Israel learned that that box was "The Ark of the Lord." However, the men of Israel living in Bethshemesh didn't repent or judge themselves. Their curiosity didn't bring them to the ark in a humble spirit or a contrite heart. They actually wanted others to come and remove the ark from their community. It is possible that an individual or even an assembly, to be so self-centered and self-satisfied that they do not want even God Himself to upset the status quo which they are used to.

Kirjathjearim seems like a strange place to take the ark of God. Instead of being in the center of the nation, it was taken to "the city of the woods," and more or less hidden there in the forest. But there was one man there named Abinadab who lived out of town on a hill who gladly opened his home to shelter the ark of God. He even had a son with a priestly name, Eleazar, who would tend to the ark. He was glad to have his home used as a sanctuary for the ark of God. That which was of God had a place of affection in his heart, and he "kept" it as a cherished trust from the Lord. He was a true steward. Abinadab and his family opened their hearts and home to the testimony of that which belonged to God for twenty years. Each child that would be born into that family circle would be conscious of the testimony of God in that home. We need to always give our Lord the supreme place in our hearts, homes and gatherings.

1st Samuel 6:8. *"And take the ark of the Lord, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away that it may go."*

A NEW CART.

It is one thing when those who don't know
Do what is wrong in the sight of the Lord.
They often from the limit of their experience
Do what they do because of ignorance of God's Word.
But when those of us who know better,
It is a terrible and serious spiritual sin
To do something "for God" in a worldly way
Ignoring what God says pleases Him.

A new cart is a plan conceived in a moment
Which makes things easier for us - causing no pain.
Acting as if what God wants is not a big deal -
Not wanting to carry the weight for me is no gain.
The people of God should continually remember -
God doesn't change - His edicts are forever.
What to Him is important, to many is small -
But God is not accepting of only human endeavor.

The things of God must be done as He wants -
It is wrong to change anything on a wish or a whim.
His way and plan must always guide our acts -
Our responsibility is to do what pleases Him.
When a suggestion of some need of change
Arises and a decision is made in which I have a part -
May I never allow myself to stray from His Word -
Lest others turn aside, or die because I have allowed a "new cart."

"It is not popular with very many, O God, to stay the course with the Bible and the Spirit only as our Guide. Give me the courage to not be manipulated by what pleases men. May I at all costs - please Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 7.

AN END AND A BEGINNING

Shiloh is out of the picture in the history of Israel from now on. It probably was destroyed by the Philistine war [4:1-18]. To mourn and complain does not solve the problems of our own making or even those things which come upon us unexpectedly. It is easy to complain about our problems, even to God, while we refuse to act, change and do what he requires. Complaints without corrective action from now on will do nothing. Returning to the Lord is the first thing that must be done when we know problems must be faced. We no longer should we allow anything to dictate to us as to what we do with our lives. Unless the Lord is first,

whatever has that place is your idol. Money, material goods, success, pride and pleasure - anything that takes the place of God can never be a rival when one returns to the Lord. God must be Lord of all or He is not Lord at all.

Israel had been subservient to the Philistines for twenty years and had come to the place where they were mourning and finally were seeking the Lord. Samuel's prophetic ministry was to bring the word of God to His people but teaching that is not wanted was not accepted then any more than it is today. The kind of teaching Samuel gave was to first reach the conscience of the people and then the hearts after that. Apparently, he waited twenty years in comparative obscurity until the people of the Israel "lamented after the Lord." They were mourning because of the situation there were in under Philistine domination, but finally they began to seek the Lord Himself. It is not easy for a servant of God to wait patiently for God to do in the hearts of the people that which he cannot do.

For twenty years God was doing two things. He was preparing Samuel for the faithful, fearless and effective ministry that was needed, and He was bringing a self-willed sinful people to the place where their idols were no longer important to them and the Lord was the occupation of their hearts. Any barriers between us and God has to be removed before we can experience God's blessing, power and deliverance from the domination of our sinful flesh. No other claim can be allowed in our lives and hearts if we are seeking the Lord.

Baal, the so-called god of thunder and rain, was the chief god of the Philistines. It was their belief that in that way their god gave growth to the plants and success to agriculture. Ashtoreth was their god of love and war. People took advantage of that false belief to have sexual union with others beside their spouses. Worldliness today has claimed much of the influence and power of the church. There is not a real clear difference between those who claim to be Christians and those who are not. The only way back to spiritual power is repentance of sin and a return to a living active faith on the part of true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mizpah, means "watchtower," and Israel had some occasions take place there that made it a place of significance to them. Samuel was appointed by God to lead His people and it was to Mizpah he called Israel to come for prayer. Mourning for sin, penitence and repentance mark the beginning of revival among the people of God. It was at Mizpah, where he anointed Saul to be leader and identified as king [10:17]. Pouring water out before the Lord was a sign of repentance, turning from sin, turning from idols, determining to obey God alone. Confession and repentance go together when people come in faith to God. Sometimes it can be a help to remember crucial things of the past to help us through the present.

Samuel filled many different roles in his lifetime. He was a judge, a priest, prophet, counselor and God's man to communicate with God's people because he was God's servant. "Thy servant heareth." He was both a religious leader and political leader. He was God's spokesman. He administered justice as one of the greatest judges in Israel. He was dedicated to God and took that responsibility seriously. He obeyed God as a faithful steward to his calling. God had used His servant Samuel, who was the last of the judges, to be His answer to the prayer of the Israelis. He was the one chosen to act for God as the one to give direction and rule to the nation. He had all the characteristics of the judges before him and was used by God to bring in the time of the kings.

Israel had shouted with overconfidence twenty years earlier, but now twenty years later they had learned that dependence on God is the only way to victory. In their weakness and contrition, they were "like water spilled on the ground." The water on the ground and water from the eyes of the people of God drove them to seek the Lord. The restoration to fellowship with God comes when self-confidence is rejected and faith in God is real. We then turn our eyes to God rather than to be looking at the power of the enemy.

A new lamb in its weakness, sacrificed in its innocence to God, opened the doors to heaven to meet the weakness of God's people. God will glorify His Son and it is through Him alone we are accepted. On behalf of the people Samuel cried unto the Lord for deliverance from the enemy gathered to fight them. Samuel was not before them as a general leading an army, but in the middle of them all offering a sacrifice to God as a father would for his family. The thunder-god, Baal, the Philistines believed in was exposed as only the figment of human imagination. The response to Samuel's intercession was the thunder of God's power. The thunder of God's power was obviously real and the battle was won by the Lord Himself and the victory was Israel's. Our Lord Jesus Christ won the battle against sin and the power of darkness, and the blessings are ours.

On several occasions in the history of Israel memorials were raised as reminders of God acting for His people in miraculous ways. In Mizpah the stone of remembrance called "Ebenezer" was raised in the place of their defeat twenty years before and the victory the God gave them. God is the God of recovery and can restore failing people to become profitable to Him. Samuel didn't take any glory to himself but stood the rock up as a memorial to the glory of God. This rock would remind those who followed in the generations to come of the power of God when He acts for the benefit of His people.

These first seven chapters of first Samuel are about God's dealing with Israel through Eli and Samuel. Samuel was beginning to rise up in his service for God, and Eli's ending. Samuel's circuit of service in Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah and Ramah illustrate four areas of service in our lives as servants of the Lord. The names of each of those places give us insight as to what God does through us when we are faithful to Him in our service for Him. Bethel, the house of God, is the "pillar and ground of the truth," where we serve Him in our assembly life. We are accountable to God and to His people and the safety of God's house keeps us from going away from His revealed word. Gilgal was the first place the children of Israel stopped when they came into the promised land. The first thing done there was circumcision which means cutting off the flesh. To cut off the "lust of the flesh," is essential in Christian service. Mizpah was the place where Israel finally proved itself as being faithful to the Lord. Samuel also was approved at Mizpah both by the Lord and His people. The approval of the Lord's people and of the Lord is still an essential part of our service for God today. Ramah reminds us that what we preach and teach elsewhere, we need to practice where we live. Our communion with God and the reality of our worship is dependent to a great extent on our personal fellowship with God and our fellow believers in Christ.

The beginning of the Lord's dealings in the Eli and Samuel story in chapters 1-7. starts with Hannah's request answered by the gift of Samuel. Then it moves to his birth given in answer to prayer and Hannah's prophetic prayer. His call happened in the same place Eli's wicked sons were living. It was also the place a grave warning was given to Eli by an unknown prophet. Then the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel. From the time of his call, Samuel's ministry was during the time of the capture of the ark and death of Eli and the seven months the ark was among the Philistines and the return of the ark. For twenty years Samuel waited patiently until Israel was finally humbled and turned in repentance to the Lord. Through Samuel's intercession God brought victory in response to the repentance of the people and earnest prayers.

1st Samuel 7:6, 12. *"And they gathered together to Mizpah, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, we have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpah... And Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, hitherto hath the Lord helped us."*

MIZPEH ... EBENEZER.

They came from all over, it was good to see
The ones God had planned to be His family -
Come in repentance after putting false gods away -
All coming to the watch-tower of Mizpah that day.

They fasted and prayed, that's the way it should be -
Even now when sin's affect has stumbled others and me.
Some things must be faced and ejected from life
If there is ever to be a new outshining of light.

Mizpah was revealed where the big picture was seen
And Mizpah revealed all the wrong that had been
Hindering God's people from what God truly wanted -
He was willing to help them after they truly repented.

Things turned around, and it didn't take long -
God did what was needed after His people faced wrong -
And forsook it and turned to the Lord alone -
He accepted their offering and for their sin did atone.

"Ebenezer" reminds us the Lord is not far away.
He sees and knows all we do and what we say.
He draws near and helps the helpless - like we -
And brings the victory that so greatly we need.

Lord, if ever there was a time, we need help,
It is now - before this testimony is put on the shelf.

We are dying, the evidence is right before our eyes -
Hear us, O God, give us a holy surprise!

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Samuel 8.

ANOTHER BEGINNING

The aging process brings with it, problems for which there is not always a way to prepare. It may be unexpected chronic illness that affects us constantly. Financial problems come when we realize that the value of money for which we have labored so hard has decreased by half or even more. Family ties which we thought were strong and our expectations were that they would not change, do change because of distance, differences of opinions regarding convictions, other ties from other family connections and/or economic necessities that young people face which older people never had to deal with. When we look at life only from the perspective of the natural man who doesn't know God, and may not even believe there is a God, we may find ourselves tempted to be like everyone else. To stand out alone like a sore thumb because of our convictions and commitment to biblical principles, means we will be considered "odd," "old fashioned," "out of date," "eccentric."

Israel as a nation had settled down comfortably among the nations and now wanted to be like them. To be under the guidance and control of an unseen "King" who is "The Lord of Hosts," wasn't what everyone else around did. They wanted to be able to be independent when they chose and wanted the kind of leadership who could be blamed when things went wrong. Natural man does not like to be under the authority of God who they cannot see, but who is with us at all times and in all circumstances. For some reason people think if they are only under the authority of a person they can see, when that person or one who represents him is out of sight, then they can act independently and do what they want with no fear of repercussion. Unbelief and independence are not too far apart as far as guiding practices in life. Our ethics, integrity and honesty is basically controlled by the belief there is One who sees and knows what I do and I am accountable to Him.

Israel wanted a king. They wanted to be like the nations around them. Unfortunately, many of God's people who started out in quiet confident faith in God, look around and see how other places are well attended and there seems to be a whole lot of activity that attracts people to attend their "church." When we look at them and look at us, the comparison is so different that we think something is wrong with us and we must change. Doubtless there is failure in leadership at least to some degree and we are not doing what a lot of people think we should be doing. Leadership that has been appointed by the Holy Spirit is not always perfect because we are not perfect people. In order to "keep up with the times" we have to innovate in order to make our teaching and practices more "seeker friendly." Innovations to make God, our commitment to the Bible as our only source of authority in belief and conduct, and the Gospel message more popular are wanted by many people who one time held the truth. But we need to consider the fact that adapting to the ways of the religious world to appeal to the people of the world, is rejecting God. It may be corrections need to be made, but abandoning biblical principles should never happen. The world's politics and the world's religion follow the same pattern.

At Ramah Samuel received a delegation of elders who wanted him to resign from leadership because he was old. Aging is inevitable and it is possible when a man gets old, he becomes unable to reason well or to make wise decisions in present circumstances. But being old does not disqualify a person. It is his cognitive ability and ability to communicate truth that makes his leadership relevant. The charge these elders brought about Samuel's sons was true. Samuel's sons were not fit leaders. They were not like their father. They didn't believe like their father. They were crooked judges who didn't care about what was right. Parenthood is an awesome responsibility. However, when our children are grown, they are no longer our responsibility so to feel guilty if they are not following God is pointless. The twelve tribes of Israel were not united. Each had its own leader and territory but Israel wanted to be like the nations around. It wasn't wrong for them to want a king. The problem was they were rejecting God as their leader.

Samuel did not do right by designating his own sons as judges on his own authority. He did not do right by his sons by being "soft" on wrong doing. But the elders of Israel also were not right when they used the failures of Samuel's sons to put a "guilt trip" on him. In essence they were saying, "Your failure has created our problems. We want the same kind of government as every other group in the world (system) has." The voice of the people said one thing, "You are the cause of our problems," but it really meant another, "We want to be like everyone else." True, Samuel had made a mistake in his old age by appointing his sons as judges. He must have wanted to be sure the people of God were taken care of after he died. Samuel's decision was a failure on his part. The argument of the elders was that it was only a step further to do what they wanted done, and after all, they were the elders.

It would have been a heart-felt blow to Samuel in his old age. He knew the behavior of his sons, and he also knew how far the nation would go away from God's leadership if it had a king. He may have felt he was a failure, and to add insult to injury, the elders more or less put the knife in and gave it a twist. He felt the ingratitude of those he had spent his life serving. All he had done in his life was for the benefit of God's people. An even greater hurt to him was he could see they had left fellowship with the Lord and wanted to be "like all nations."

Older servants of the Lord feel the same way today when we see the drift away from biblical principles and practices. When those we have invested our lives in turn to follow some "new approach to the Bible and church practices," we do feel like failures if we only look at ourselves. All we can do is maintain a consistent attitude in our contacts with them and consistent practices in our labors for the Lord. Others may ignore the fact that our strength is in our differences from all that is around, not in being the same as everyone else. Instead of being a "peculiar people," and a "peculiar treasure," like the children of Israel, some want to blend in. We do not correct evil by changing laws and abandoning what is right to suit ourselves. We may temporarily escape some consequences, but "payday comes someday."

The end of an era when God's was the only leader of His people came. Samuel did not try to vindicate himself to show his displeasure and sorrow of heart. He went to the Lord he knew personally because He knows all - the end from the beginning. In prayer Samuel received comfort from the Lord, counsel as to how to deal with the issue at hand, and the support from God that he needed. This unhappy nation was in a way severing their unique connection with the invisible God who had given them all their victories. Now they would win or lose battles, for the most part, just like other nations under the leadership of the flesh. Samuel was left alone standing by faith and "protesting solemnly to them" regarding the choice they were making. When we have committed ourselves for standing for the truth of God as it is revealed in the Bible as opposed to the books of men, we will find ourselves in a very great minority, "few there be that find it," and on some occasions, standing all alone in front of men - but with our unseen Lord.

That attitude and that decision they made was what God did not want. God was their real leader and they were rejecting God as their leader. They wanted to run the nation through human strength not divine empowerment. They needed unified faith, not unified rule. If Israel had submitted to God's leadership, they would have thrived was the promise in Deuteronomy 28. They refused to listen to negative consequences. The beginning of a monarchy was described in detail by Samuel when he told the elders "the manner of the king." But "men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." A king after man's heart is in great contrast with a man after God's heart. Often, we let other's values and actions dictate our attitudes and behavior. Samuel warned them of the problems they would have with a king.

A king takes control of the homes and takes the best people and things from the home for himself. Their young men would be drafted into the army at the king's demand. Young men would have to run in front of the king's chariot because he wanted to put on a show for himself and if necessary, would make slave laborers out of their families. A king would take control of the land God gave them as an inheritance from Him and the king would use it as he chose. He would take the best fields and vineyards for his own use and use your property for the king's gain. More than that, a king would demand a ten percent of your flocks and harvest from the seeds you plant, the animals you raise to the fruit off of your trees and vineyards. A king takes the tithe that previously belonged to God to use to sustain His work and workers. A king would take control of all the people who would be considered his servants from then on. This was the new beginning.

When we turn aside from biblical teaching and practice to be like every other group of people who gather as a "church," we lose our character, our liberty in Christ. our privilege of the public practice of priesthood in offering sacrifices and offerings to God, of being led by the Spirit in worship and service, and losing our enjoyment of "oneness in Christ" that is "without respect of persons." The king's yoke is very tight and his burden is heavy. How much better for those who "labor and are heavy laden," to take the yoke of our unseen Lord on us by our choice, for "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

The people of God rebelled against the Lord who had brought them from Egypt and who for hundreds of years through good and bad times, had remained true and faithful to them in spite of what they had done to Him. Now in this new beginning, they started on a course that still leaves Israel today in an uncertain and tenuous position because the children the Lord had nourished and brought up, had "rebelled against Him." Millions of the people of Israel have died unhappy because they made a bad choice one day when the elders took their grievances to Samuel because they wanted to be "like the nations." They will have to accept the consequences of those bad choices, as do all other nations, until the One reigns over the nations of earth from Jerusalem who is "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

We need to learn ourselves that when we set our minds and hearts on something, we must be sure it is what God wants because there are lasting consequences with every action. We must be very sure it is what is in the mind and will of God. If our desire is wrong but we insist, then He may give us what we ask for and we will have to live and die with the consequences. The first seven chapters of first Samuel were mainly about Samuel and Eli and events that were connected with those two men. The next eight chapters of first Samuel deal with Samuel and Saul and their effect on the people of God.

1st Samuel 8:7. *“And the Lord said unto Samuel, hearken to 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.”*

THEY HAVE REJECTED ME.

What is wrong with a king, is leadership wrong?
That was not the problem they had in those days.
The wrong was they wanted a king in the place of God -
Not just visible leadership, but rejecting what He says.

This is a lesson we must learn here and now -
For God has not changed what He says or who He is.
All around there are those, not strangers, but those I know -
Who for some reason think God's will is submissive to theirs.

How God must have felt when Israel rejected Him -
And wanted a king like evil nations around.
We wouldn't have been surprised if He rejected them -
But still he cared for them when a king they found.

God's grace is seen and experienced in so many ways
Even when ignored and rejected by us.
Lord, I pray that I will listen to Thee for all of my days.
And never take for granted all the ways I've been blest.

“Father God, I look to Thee to give clear signals to me when there are pressures and temptations that try to turn me aside. I love Thee, Father God, and never in any way want to reject Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Samuel 9.

OUTWARD APPEARANCE

The whole narrative of Samuel and Saul is a sad and pitiful story of one who was chosen to be king over Israel. His early days were bright and full of promise, but his last days were days of unbelief and disobedience that ended in suicide. It is a demonstration of the kind of person people want to lead them, and the willingness of God to allow them what they desire. He uses this section of Israel's history as a teaching time as to why their own choices are so limited. "Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart." When we choose people to lead us using our own template, we have boxed ourselves in to the limitations of that person's weakest point of personality.

Saul came from a notable family line in the tribe of Benjamin. Most of the men of one whole generation of the tribe of Benjamin were killed because of their immorality. But apparently Saul's family had not been involved in that tragedy. His father, Kish, was a man of wealth and good standing in the tribe of Benjamin although Saul depreciated that standing in words at least. A false sense of humility because of parentage does not really hide a self-centered person who is conscious of himself and how he appears to others. He could have been grateful for his lineage with a genuine sense of appreciation but as was common to this man, he was the center of his own ego.

The people's request for a king was answered in Saul. Samuel had taken their request to the Lord in prayer and God began to use normal circumstances in the life of Saul, the son of Kish, to lead him to a divine appointment. In our lives we may not realize the significance of the normal activities of our lives until we look back and see how, unknown to us, divine appointments changed our lives. Good and bad events affect us and how we respond to them comes from the character we have built within us. Some character traits come to us from our gene pool. Others come from training in family life and other forms of education in life's experience. But basically, our character is built on those things which we allow to be taken in through our senses. For whatever reason, Saul was quite conscious of what he appeared like outwardly.

He was an outstanding man physically and naturally. Because he was tall and imposing in stature, and his apparent humility hid his insecurity, he was attractive to the people who wanted a man to be their king instead of God. He was a "choice young man" in contrast to the old "man of God." Saul's spiritual interests appeared to have been very limited if he had any at all. Saul's servant knew more about the man of God than Saul even though they were in the same family circle. Samuel lived not far from where Saul lived, but apparently Saul had no previous interest in knowing the man of God nor hearing what he taught. His interest was in himself, not spiritual things. Our lives are characterized by those things that take up the most of our attention. If our interest in spiritual things is only limited to how they help me reach my personal goals, we are carnal people. Some people attend the meetings of an assembly simply to interface with other people to gain some material advantage. Others come because they are socially accepted by trusting people.

Saul is introduced as a seeker for something his father had lost. That reminds us of people today who are seeking for the blessing of God that has been lost to us through sin when the first Adam "by transgression fell." When Saul met Samuel in the gate, he did not know him. That is a common response among people who know about God and about the Lord Jesus, but they do not know Him. His outburst regarding Samuel's words revealed the instability of Saul's character. Instead of dignified humility and respect, he seemed to feel inferior, at least in front of others, because of his background and parentage. On the other hand, he revealed himself as a narcissistic young man who was worried about how things would affect him. It seems strange that he had nothing to give others with him. Even his servant and a bit of silver to loan to this young man who felt entitled to things he could only get from others. He was the kind of young man who didn't take responsibility for his own actions and the actions he wanted others to take. He was one of those kinds of people who look for others to blame for their faults and failures.

At Saul's first meeting with Samuel we have demonstrated the power and accuracy of God's word through His servant. He was reminded of his own failure to find the donkeys and that they were already found. He was brought to the place where he could have learned his need for divine guidance, and learned how to act on it when it was given. He was also made aware of the fact that God knows everything about him and his doing, and so even his inward attitude was known by God. If he had been willing to learn, he would have learned how to pass on authority to others without bitterness, envy and jealousy. Samuel had none of these in his heart as he went about passing on to Saul the leadership role he had for a lifetime. For the forty years of Saul's leadership there was nothing but turmoil, uncertainty, division and bitterness - even when it came time to pass on leadership.

These principles apply in leadership today and we need to give them the attention they deserve. It is important to listen to what others say. Saul's servant knew Samuel to be "a man of God" in his relationship to God. He knew Samuel was "held in honor" in his relationship to people. He also knew that "all he says comes to pass" so he was a reliable prophet. Saul was slapping his pockets and looking in his knapsack to see if he had any little thing to give God through the man of God. If that attitude is in us when we give, it must be insulting to our Lord after what He has freely given us. Actually, that is not evidence that one even knows the Lord. The contrast between Samuel and Saul is like light and dark. Samuel had dignity and grace. Saul had pride and arrogance. Samuel was a spiritual man. Saul was a carnal man. God designated Saul to be king but he was never committed to God. Saul never found rest in his soul, so he never became God's man for the need that had to be met.

Three things that are notable that we can learn from Saul. He was not able to recover that which was lost, and we cannot expect people that wander from God to be recovered by an incapable person. David was probably a shepherd boy then keeping his father's sheep even from the lion and the bear. What a contrast. Actually, Saul and his servant were lost themselves. A second lesson is that a person who does not know the man of God is not able to lead God's people in the paths of the Lord's leading. A leader who is self-centered is not a holy person who can expect people to follow his leadership. Saul obviously had never felt his need of Samuel as a priest. He just did things his own way for his own pleasure. A third lesson is that one who tries to lead and has nothing to give, is ignorant of the grace of God. If that person feels they have to give something trivial, that does not earn God's favor. Saul's servant had a little silver piece to give which speaks of the atonement and redemption in the scripture.

Saul was to be the king like the people of Israel wanted in their natural desire. He was young, good looking and had natural strength and ability. He came from a good family and Saul was seventh in line. In good and bad circumstances, God has a purpose. Saul's lack of knowledge about Samuel shows his lack of knowledge of spiritual matters. Saul vacillated between feelings and convictions. Saul never became God's man. He was always feeling inferior. He never did let God's love give him rest in his heart. When God gives us what we want, we need to be sure that what we want is what He wants.

It is interesting to notice that there were other young people doing the right thing in the right place at the right time. They in turn were able to give directions to the right person. That is our role as God's people going about our daily business (those young women were going to get water) where we meet with people looking for some guidance as to where to go or how to find the Person to meet their need. The city on a hill could only be reached by leaving the lowlands of worldly experience and ascending to the higher ground where people are in touch with God. When we are doing what God wants us to, we can give others the directions they need. Those young people knew what was going on. They knew Samuel the seer. They knew where to find him and where Saul could find him. They were in touch with the things that were important - people, not lost animals. People are always more important than things. One of the greatest services we can do for God is to point others to our Lord Jesus Christ, tell them where to find Him and assure them of His welcome.

Saul met Samuel first in the gate and didn't recognize him. A person can never go inside the gate of heaven without knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. He is the Way to heaven. Saul may not have realized the importance of meeting the man of God who could tell him what was in his heart, relieve him of his anxiety, tell him of the favor into which he had come, and show him the word of God. At the feast in Samuel's house, Saul was the guest of honor. The shoulder which belonged to the priest as a symbol of his authority, was given to Saul indicating the transfer of power from Samuel to Saul. Samuel did the act with respect and dignity as this godly old man realized that God had acquiesced to the desire of the people and the results were not going to be good. However, he did give respect to "God's anointed." The first meeting of these two concluded in the parlor of Samuel's house and then down at the end of the city. The last meeting of these two was in the house of a witch.

1st Samuel 9:27. *"And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, bid the servant pass on before us (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God."*

STAND STILL ... THAT I MAY SHEW THEE THE WORD OF GOD.

He was tall and he was handsome -
Everything about him was attractive in the eyes of men.
He seemed like he was humble, asking for some help.
He came to the judge and showed due respect to him -
But in him, like in us is this tendency to trust
In what we see rather than what God has planned -
And we easily can mistake for truth what is a fake -
The consequences of which will stumble many a man.

It is important that I stop and take this time to see,
An event or some work through the eyes of God.
Often there is much that I cannot see or touch
That is contrary to the leading and teaching of God's Word.
So even though it seems to be the way of ease -
It may cause serious damage in the days that are yet to come.
Take the time to listen, and then commit to hasten
To only those things that are true and you know from whence they come.

The ideas and views of men can be deceiving when
I look at them only through my earthy wakened eyes.
If I act without the Word as certainly I always should,
Failure in the things of God will pare me down to size.
I always need to stop and pray, then see what God does say
About everything, before in haste I duly act -
In that way I will see what God wants from me -
And the results will be based on biblical facts.

"I stop to read, O God, and I trust what I am hearing is the right things needed to make this decision. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1 Samuel 10:1-16

THE ANOINTING

The act of anointing was a religious act of making the king God's representative to the people. The anointing oil was a symbol of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the king's life and was a reminder to him that he had the responsibility to lead his people by the wisdom of God rather than his own wisdom. The coronation of a king was a political act in which the crowned king was established from then on as the ruler of the people. Believers today have been "anointed" by the Holy Spirit with "power from on high." As a result, right from the beginning of the church at the day of Pentecost until now near the end of this age of grace,

God's power has been experienced and communicated to the world in and by believers. "By one Spirit have we been baptized into one body." The indwelling Holy Spirit does not just come upon us for specific activities but is in us to enable us to do God's will by His power. So, Saul was anointed to be the king of Israel.

The Holy Spirit gave power to do what God asked but because He "came upon" people, not "indwelt" people, the fruit of the Spirit was not always produced. As Saul's power grew, so did his pride, and the Holy Spirit left him. His humble attitude melted away. Saul was afraid to step forward and accept his responsibilities because he was feeling inadequate in himself rather than trusting God's provision. The changes in the attitude of Saul was because of who he was in himself - a self-centered, often out-of-control person. Some times he was well and capable and at other times he was evil and incapable of functioning as the king should. Regulations for kings of Israel were already given [De.17:14-20]. Israel's kings had to answer to a higher authority - the Lord of heaven and earth. The instructions were "laid before the Lord" or "deposited before the Lord" in a special place at Mizpah.

The kiss of interest and affection was also an act of Samuel's blessing on the one who was to be the new king as he resigned his authority and leadership and bestowed it on Saul. He gracefully passed over his leadership to another without bitterness even though he knew what would happen under the leadership of a king would be "second best." We learn the lesson from Samuel as a man who was not "seeking his own" but was "in honor preferring one another." That mindset of mature believers is needed when the passing of time makes it plain that others are to lead the people of God in an assembly. A graceful acceptance of the inevitable change of leadership makes it much easier for the Lord's people to accept the change than if there is resistance and bad feelings. Samuel reminded Saul of his responsibility to God. "The Lord hath anointed thee to be captain." Any one who takes the responsibility for rule must rule in dependence on God. He must represent God's interest and not act independently from the revealed will of God.

One who rules must also remember the true nature of his position. He rules under divine authority and his life and interests are bound up in the interests of the people over whom he rules. He is to work for them, care for them and lead them in times of difficulty and danger. He is not to tell them what to do and then not show up himself. Thirdly, he is to take account of the fact that the people he leads belong to God. As the captain, he is a steward of the Lord who has been entrusted with those who are the people of God. He will have to give account of his stewardship. Samuel, the prophet, was one who spoke for God. The prediction of events and/or the future was part of what the prophet did, but the most important part of his work was to instruct the people of God and challenge them to be faithful to God in their lives and service for Him.

There were given to Saul signs from Samuel to follow from Rachel's tomb to the throne. At the tomb he learned that what was lost (donkeys) was found, and now he was the object of concern and love. Two men gave him that important message in a similar way two men at another tomb, that of the Lord Jesus, told the message of the resurrected Lord and of His interest in those who followed Him. The Lord went from the tomb to a higher throne where He sits on the right hand of God. Saul went to the oak of Tabor (purpose) and there we learn of the purpose of God that does not fail. Our faith that rests on the foundation of God does not change.

Three spiritual men were going up to God to Bethel, the house of God. Their interest was in the God of Bethel, not just the place. They were also intelligent men because they were not going to meet God empty-handed. They had appropriate gifts for Him they knew He could accept. The one who had three kids of the goats knew what was needed for the sin offering to approach to God. Another had three loaves for the meal offering that God could be satisfied with them. The third man had wine for the drink offering of testimony to be poured out. Not only were these men spiritually intelligent, they were also men of grace. They received Saul and were willing to give him two loaves of their bread. Spiritual men today come to meet with God and His people with a psalm to comfort, a doctrine to exhort and a revelation to edify.

At the "hill of God" that was located in the possession of the Philistines, he would exercise his gift under the guidance of the Spirit of God. In spite of the condition and position of failure, God was still working with His people there. The Lord raised up His "standard" right in the middle of the worldly people all around. Praise to God and the word of God are not bound by time or place. Our gathering unto our Lord takes place in the middle of all the ungodly activities that surround us, and He is willing to receive us there. Our gathering together to worship, remember, testify and proclaim his word, is to Him, not to a place of our convenience or of our choosing.

Samuel also told Saul to wait there for him to come. Waiting is often a test of faith that many of the Lord's people fail. It was at Gilgal two years later that Saul got impatient and failed to wait for God's time and God's man. That was the beginning of his downfall as a leader. When we wait on the Lord, we should never put

our confidence in the flesh. Saul had never before shown interest in spiritual things so it was with astonishment to the on-lookers that Saul fell under the influence of the prophets. It appeared to them outwardly that he was under the power of the Spirit of God inwardly. It would create a response similar to those today who would look at a worldly person adapting to the activities of the Lord's people. People would say, "You've got to be kidding!!! Saul had found religion?!" "Is Saul among the prophets?" was a statement of surprise and incredulity. "Him, a Christian?" would be a way many people look at those who claim to be a child of God and who are known for their worldliness.

Gift and grace are two very different things. Some people have "tasted of the heavenly gift" but have never experienced the grace of God in their hearts. They can do what is expected of a Christian without being born again of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God came temporarily upon Saul, but for him the work of the Spirit of God in "prophesying," saying what was right and what would happen, was superficial. It wasn't a word that came from his heart. People can say right things, and know the right answers to problems without having the divine nature within them. The indwelling Holy Spirit today enables God's people to not only say what is right but be what is right and do what is right when they are yielded to the Holy Spirit and have "no confidence in the flesh."

When Saul met his uncle, who wanted to know everything that had happened to him, he only told of his search for the donkeys, not anything about his contact with Samuel regarding being anointed Israel's king. He didn't mind speaking of the trivial things, but for some reason didn't speak of that which was important. It may have been that he was embarrassed about being chosen king, or even that he didn't realize the importance of being chosen by God. If we don't confess the Lord Jesus before men, He "will not confess us before the angels in heaven." As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we may find it strange that people would rather have a human leader and guide in spiritual things rather than be guided by the Spirit of God. But all through human history this has been true of the natural man.

However, more serious and startling is the fact that many professing Christians would rather have a human religious leader to speak for God, then to feel their own personal responsibility to God. They want a person to speak to God for them and then if there is failure of some kind, they have someone else to blame for their sin. God intends for every believer to follow the Lord by faith personally. There are gifts given to each believer for the benefit of other believers and it is the responsibility of every one to "not neglect the gift that is in thee." One well said, "Giving encouragement to others is a most welcome gift, for the results of it are lifted spirits." For any person to push God to one side, and establish a man as their authority in spiritual things, is a rejection of the preeminence of our Lord Jesus Christ. Saul was a man of the flesh and that human weakness was demonstrated in his life and during his reign as king of Israel.

1st Samuel 10:6-7. *"And the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man. And let it be, when the signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee."*

GOD IS WITH THEE.

It happened just like God said
On the way up to Bethel
The place known as the house of God -
That God gave clearly the answers
And though other people brought them
He had something to offer to God.

When God's Spirit is at full liberty
To work out to others through me
It is an occasion to be cherished for sure -
Some things are made clear
And there are other things I must hear
In order that such efforts will endure.

I pray that I never will
Hinder the Holy Spirit's endeavor
To bring blessings to others through me -
May I always be so close
That the One who me has chose
Will be honored and others His glories will

see.

"O Gracious God, I thank Thee for the leading of the Holy Spirit. May I ever be ready and willing to act on His prompting. May the filling of the Spirit for service be a daily

event in me. May the Spirit find this vessel to be one He can use. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 10:17-27

CALL THE PEOPLE

The call went out, "Come to Mizpah," and from all over the land they came. But something was different this time than the times before when the people of God came together. This wasn't a celebration of joyful hearts gathering to worship and honor the Lord who had given them great victories. They were not gathering to Him. They had rejected the Lord as their Gathering Center. Now it was simply a call to come together similar to an election day. Popular opinion was behind this gathering, not the will of God. This is a common practice today even in religious circles. Find an entertainer. Get a "good group" to come and sing, and people will come to hear them. They may have "Christian words" in the songs, and as they dance about; attractive young people seem enthusiastic about what they are doing, but the objective is to "call the people." The gathering is to the event, not unto "Him, the homeless Stranger."

Mizpah was a place of happy memories and the stone was still standing there bearing witness to the victories the Lord had given them, but their interest had faded and "God was not in all their thoughts." Now their eyes are only to a man instead of the One who is the True King. The people stood unmoved by the final farewell words of their Rejected King. For hundreds of years the nation of Israel had experienced the hand of God working on their behalf in deliverance from enemies, providing for them when they had nothing, bringing joy to their hearts year by year as they kept His feasts. Now they wanted to do things their way. They wanted to be like everyone else and do the things the way others who did not know the Lord did them. It is a strange thing when one who has tasted the blessings of God in salvation and who has experienced the guiding hand of God in life, turns aside to seek to live and do "the work of the Lord" in the way that religious people who do not know God apply the works of the flesh to their "ministry." Activities are divided up into "a ministry" rather than serving the Lord Himself.

When we ask why they demand another way, they usually answer that "they do it that way over there, and they really get the people to come." The motivation is not on what pleases the One to whom we have gathered, but on the results of the ministry. Even the review of the way God led the children of Israel did not change the mind of the people toward Him. They had rejected Him as their King-Leader-Lord and now His final words turn them over to the authority of a mere man. I wonder if the people of God understand the seriousness of rejection? How it must grieve the Lord who "all the way has led us," when we adapt ourselves and even our spiritual worship and activities to the ways of the religious world. Has God ever failed us? Without question we have failed Him in our complacency and lack of response to His commission. The problem arises when we try to excuse our apathy and personal responsibility by applying the works of the flesh to the work of God. The big question is why are we not satisfied with God Himself? When we measure the spiritual growth of an assembly by the numbers who attend the Lord's Supper, or the number of baptisms per year, we have stepped back from divine leadership and placed ourselves under the authority of men. If the leadership is charismatic, the numbers increase. If the leadership is old and seemingly old-fashioned even though it is a spiritual leadership, numbers decrease.

To avoid the responsibilities laid on us by the giving of gifts by divine Persons, we become susceptible to the leadership of the flesh and men chosen only by men. Why would we be afraid to act when we know this is what God wants of us. Our feelings of inadequacy come when we depend on the flesh. All of these things apparently affected Saul when he realized he was anointed king of Israel. God in mercy did not leave them without guidance and even in our failings, He is still there in mercy and grace to guide us into all truth. God used the man-method to identify Saul as king. The lot was cast, perhaps with the Urim and Thumin, (a "yes" or "no") so that God would point out the right person. Strangely, the man-king was hiding. Maybe he was afraid of taking responsibility because as far as he was concerned, he had to make the decisions that would affect the nation. A leader who thinks he has to lead God's people by his own wisdom is not a God-appointed man. Every suitable leader knows his need of God in decision-making, both for himself and for the decisions he makes on behalf of others.

Every person who has been given authority to lead, guide and make decisions that affect others, is answerable to God. God has established guidelines for us to follow in every situation. The great variety of situations illustrated for us in different parts of the scripture, give us all the understanding we need when we are submissive to the Holy Spirit. When Saul was presented to the cheering crowd of men and women, he was like a sports star through whom people vicariously live out their own fantasies. The reality sets in when he does not produce the results they were hoping for and the cheers turn into boos. The people of Israel had eyes only for the man of their choice. The voice of God went silent. It must have been insulting to the Lord God, when the people had to appeal to the One they rejected, to find the one they accepted. The shout they

raised was not the "shout of a king," but the shout of emotional enthusiasm. That kind of noise can go as quickly as it comes because it is based only on the momentary gratification of the flesh.

Even then when the crowds were cheering, there were those who criticized. What should be our response when we are criticized? If the criticism is just, we should pay heed and make the necessary changes. If the criticism is unjust, the wise person moves quietly forward without argument, retaliation, or bitterness and acts before the Lord leaving the outcome to His sovereign will. When we become the objects of jealousy, a quiet, compassionate consistency is about the best way we can deal with that problem. We have no control over what others think or do. But we do have control over our reaction to criticism and/or jealousy. "Who when He was reviled, reviled not again. When He suffered, He threatened not." How do we discern appropriate companions to accompany us, or fellow-laborers to work with us? We need to be sure those we counsel with are people who can be trusted to keep their counsel and not pass on things that are no one else's business. As fellow-laborers trust is a necessity. In both cases we have to have confidence in their ability and discernment before we delegate responsibility to them no matter how willing they might be.

Opposition always comes in the work of the Lord. It is to be expected from those who are "lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God." When people hear us say their works, sincerity and good living do not give them entrance into heaven, we can expect them to oppose our biblical teaching and preaching. The need of grace by every person, goes against the independent spirit of those who want God to submit to their opinions. Saul learned to his own failure, the cost of self-will and acting independently of divine wisdom. So did those people who wanted Saul as their king. Being subject to an earthly king made them subject to human failure. When opposition arises against those who seek to go on in the ways of the Lord, we will have to commit the whole matter to God and rest in Him. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you."

Even though an earthly king over His people was not God's intention, in mercy and grace towards those He loved, He was willing to work on their behalf. To be rejected by those you love is a very bitter pill to swallow. To show grace to those who have rejected you, is evidence of the divine nature imparted in one by God. The Lord had Samuel write out "the manner of the kingdom" by His divine decree and kept as a book in safe-keeping. The will and purpose of God extends to His people even when they choose second best. How gracious God is to those who fail!! What mercy He shows to those who have rejected Him!! What love He must have for His own people who take from His own hand all He gives, and returns very little!!

GOD SAVE THE KING

The voice of the people with their complaints and all -
Was heard by the Lord when for a man they did call
Instead of on God who for generations had guided
Their nation as a people with whom He had resided
But now they wanted their nation to be just like the others
They wanted all men, not just God's family, to be their brothers
To be liked by those who hated God, and to be like them was their choice
So the Lord God who loved and preserved them paid attention to their voice.

It is possible to be blessed above measure, and to take that for granted
It is possible to ignore divine guidance that by the Spirit in us is planted
But when we do that willfully, there are consequences we must accept
Self-will and sin, has a high price to be paid when God's grace we neglect
To want to please people is the first downward step in neglecting God
That is followed quite closely by worldliness and the neglect of His Word
Soon we will find very little difference in the Lord's people and worldly men
And to own Jesus Christ as Lord is seldom thought of by then.

To follow a man instead of our Lord, is a path fraught with danger
We become susceptible to the flattery of men, or the object of their deep-seated anger
It is like we are left alone in this world of men in which we do not fit
And the world is increasingly dissatisfying the more we try to conform to it
The only thing we can do is call a halt and repent, and our sin to face
And to the course of God's choosing, to that pathway our steps we retrace
There we will find the Lord Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever
And with His love and forgiveness, His grace our failures will cover.

"I thank Thee Father, for the assurance that Thou dost never change. Thy righteousness and justice do not deviate because of man-made laws. Thy mercy and grace are still extended to those who are lost and to those who fail. Thy love and forgiveness are realities to be experienced when Thy people return to Thee. I praise and thank Thee for this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 11.

RELIEF AND RENEWAL

Those Israelites who settled on the east side of Jordan because they liked it there and it was a good place to raise cattle, found that they were near to the enemy. The Ammonites knew they were easily susceptible to those who lived next to them because there was no separation between them. The Jordan River separated them from their brethren, not the enemy, which was God's original intention. Nahash (serpent), the leader of the Ammonites knew Israel was still not organized under the leadership of king Saul. He probably believed he could conquer the people of Jabesh Gilead without any opposition. When the people of God are divided because of self-interest, they are easy prey to those who put pressure on them to be like those around. Those on "the other side of Jordan," the world side of the cross, look at things through earthly eyes.

To come to terms with that which is easily conformed to the world, is to act on our own without the Lord. The people of Jabesh didn't call on the Lord to deliver them when they were threatened and given an ultimatum. They turned in desperation to those brethren from who they were separated to come and deliver them. From time to time we are asked to "cross-pollinate" with those who follow a more worldly view of "church truth." We need to be assured of the fact that what we do where we are has divine approval. Man's approval is not the criteria for coming together to "present a united front."

The terms of surrender were high to those of Jabesh Gilead. The "right eye" of discernment would be taken away and they would be dependent on their enemy for guidance. The Ammonites would rather have a quick surrender that to have to lay a long siege against the city. Satan has tactics he has used that can affect God's people so quickly that they have lost the battle before they even realize they are in a war. However, if that doesn't work, our enemy will lay a long siege against the truth by sending some darts of doubt and unbelief that raise questions which can be taken more than one way. Or he will sow the seeds of discontent and discouragement and wait until it brings a harvest of division. It may be on the very ground of victories we won in the past that Satan will seek to defeat us again.

Whatever way you look at it sin is a hard master. If we are unfaithful to our Lord and we seek to conform to the world, we will lose to sin. The bondage of sin is strong and freedom in Christ to walk with the Lord and not with the world, is worth fighting a battle for. We must take our stand against sin. However, the people of Israel were so far away from God, they never turned to Him at all. Either they had forgotten the ways of God with them before, or they had no desire to submit to Him. So, they turned to the brethren on the other side of Jordan for deliverance.

The loud cries of fear in the voices of the people of Gibeah alerted Saul when he came from the fields that something serious was wrong. The first act of leadership in which he was engaged was motivated by anger. Israel's new human deliverer did not resort to prayer for guidance from God, but in anger threatened the whole nation if they did not come to follow him. The bloody pieces of meat gave testimony to the fact they were now under his authority. Anger is a powerful emotion. When it is directed against sin and mistreatment of others it is not wrong. The Holy Spirit used Saul's anger to bring justice and freedom when Israel was threatened. We must be careful how we allow anger to be used lest it use us. By divine sovereignty the Holy Spirit gave direction even though Saul did not act in faith like divinely chosen leaders of Israel before him. He had only external power and extreme anger with which to urge the people to follow him. Saul, a carnal man, acted in the flesh in contrast to prayer and faith. Yet in grace the Holy Spirit used him to lead in delivering God's people.

We may win victories through our own schemes simply because of God's mercy, but "without faith it is impossible to please Him." God in sovereign mercy and grace, may intervene and bring about a good result, but the bent of one's life will soon become obvious. Saul's intercession on behalf of those who had previously opposed him was commendable, but this soon was to be seen as an exception, not the rule of his nature. His plan of a three-sided attack at dawn succeeded and that victory established his kingship in the minds of the people. Saul at least acknowledged the fact that the Lord had given the victory.

Saul had been anointed at Ramah and had been publicly chosen at Mizpah. When he led the defeat of the Ammonites, his kingship was confirmed. The Israelites offered sacrifices after the victory but this attitude did not last. At Gilgal, the first place Israel stopped when they entered the promised land, was an appropriate place for them to gather to recognize Saul as "king before the Lord." The three places where he was chosen each have a certain significance, but it was at Gilgal (a rolling away) where human will, bowed to the will of God. Peace offerings were sacrificed there "before the Lord," and the joy of fellowship became real.

330,000 men made an intimidating army and established a reputation under Saul's leadership. Of that there was no question. The danger was they could have rested in their own perceived strength if it wasn't for Samuel, the man of God, calling the people to remember that it was the Lord's doing that brought victory. Saul had acknowledged the Lord as the One who had given the victory and Samuel did not want that attitude to fade away from the minds of the people or from Saul's mind. To "renew the kingdom" was to give a new start to those who had forgotten from where they had come. It is important for us all to remember Calvary and all that happened there. It was there our sin was judged. It is there the reproach of the world is removed and God's people gather to Him who redeemed us and saved us.

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by who the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." [Gal.6:14]

1st Samuel 11:13. *"And Saul said, there shall not a man be put to death this day: for today the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel."*

THE LORD HATH WROUGHT SALVATION.

Why are they coming from every place?
Who has power to put fear in each face?
He is only a man but God is with him,
For the first time Israel gathered and Saul became king.

Some times we feel desperate with no place to turn
And wonder if forever our call for help will be spurned.
But if it is men only, we turn to for needed help,
We will find no real deliverance or need to fill.

God does use others to help meet our need
When we call to Him, our voice He will heed -
And we will find someone He has sent to fill the gap
Preserving us now from some greater mishap.

If our eyes are only on men to help us
We miss the whole point that God wants to bless
His people who trust Him, and Him alone -
He is the One who brings our salvation.

Men are not able to produce victory over sin.
They are not capable over strong forces to win
A battle that is spiritual when evil foes attack,
But God is able to bring our peace back.

"O Powerful, Righteous God, there are enemies around here and they are ready to put out my "right eye." Give me heavenly eye-salve that I may rest in peace. What is happening here allowed by Thee - so I'll rest in that fact. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 12.

THE RIGHTEOUS ACTS OF THE LORD

In Samuel's farewell speech he asks them to point out any wrongdoing they might have thought he did. He was reminding them in this way that the idea of a king was not his and that he could not be blamed when God punished their selfishness. Even though they now had a king, God's commands remained the same. He was the True King in every area of life and we, as they, are to conduct our relationships, work-life and home-life according to God's principles. The thunderstorm God sent was evidence that He was not pleased with them wanting a king. They were "His people" in spite of all and He was not going to let them away with sin nor would He abandon them [De.7:7-8]. We too are given two responsibilities: [1] pray consistently for others, Ep.6:18 [2] teach others the right way, 2Tim.2:2. It is always a good thing to remember what God has done for us. It helps us to move ahead with gratitude.

Samuel's service for the Lord and His people continued on as a priest, prophet and judge. The political side of national life was now the king's responsibility, but his work as a spiritual guide continued to the end of his life. His life before the people was such that they trusted his word to be true and through him the voice of God was heard. The people testified publicly that his work was without reproach. A public testimony of the righteous life of a servant of God is of great value and needs to be nurtured and guarded. A good reputation before men has an impact on a whole community. Some of Samuel's work was passed on to Saul and his

on-going work was of a higher service of intercession with the Lord as a priest for the people, and as a prophet he had a ministry from God for the people. After Samuel had pled his case before the people, he pled for the people before the Lord. That work continues for the Lord's servants today as we represent the Lord to the people around us and then intercede for the lost before the Lord.

The Lord answered His servant in a severe thunderstorm and heavy rain at harvest time, an unusual time of the season. Samuel had told them this would happen and as a miracle of divine intervention, it came to pass. This was a sign to the people that even though they had gotten their own way, God was still in control and was not pleased with them choosing a human king and rejecting His Kingship. The review from the man they rejected, Samuel, was to remind them of the fact that God's commands, and all He required of them, had not changed even though they had a king. The change of administration did not change their responsibility to the Lord as the Supreme Ruler. Men may make their own decisions as to what they are going to do and how they are going to live, but God is unchanging and we are still accountable to Him no matter what society may choose to believe.

Samuel's grey head, and the dignity and integrity of this aged man that would have showed on his face was because of his continual service from the Lord from his youth up. He had "walked before them" as a faithful guide showing the value of a righteous life and walk in the dark days of departure. In spite of every pressure of the world to conform or mold us into its ways, we need to remain consistent to the truth of God. The people we know may reject us and what we believe and teach, yet we must remain faithful to the Lord and them in spite of their attitude. Days of rejection will come to an end when the One we serve comes to get us and take us home. Our Lord controls the weather, but no earthly king can do that. All laws men make are ultimately subject to the laws of God and so it will be with all people. The authority of God supersedes all other considerations in a nation, assembly, business and family relationships. It is a righteous act of God to punish disobedience in order to bring about repentance and recovery.

The reminders Samuel gave to the people as he spoke to them about the Lord they had rejected, started with God's deliverance from Egypt. We need to remember Calvary and all that has come to us since we came by faith to Christ and began our new life with God. It was there our hope was placed on our Lord Jesus for our life and future. Love for God became real to us there and as a result of the new nature, "We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." A love for God and His people is evident in those who have been delivered from "Egypt" by the shed blood of the Lamb. Forgetting God and taking Him for granted brings defeat, and at times, disaster in our Christian life. It happened to Israel in the past and it can happen to us when we leave the walk of faith.

When repentance is genuine and people turn to the Lord, he is willing to respond to our cry for mercy and forgiveness. The judges Samuel spoke to the people about had to do with the divine intervention of God in the lives of the Israelites. Divine Power, Divine Command, Divine Position and Divine Appointment had been seen in the lives of the previous judges and Samuel indicated that he was the one who had received the Divine Appointment. He committed himself to prayer for the people of God. That practice should be continued by us and our commitment to teaching the truth to others so they will come to the Lord is the priority which are to maintain. Reflection on God's ways and works with us will make us appreciate His grace and goodness. It will strengthen our faith and further establish our fellowship with Him. In times of reflective gratitude, we look back and see the benefits of the corrective times, the judgments of God, and see that these are all the "righteous acts of God."

Samuel reminds the Israelites of the God they had in essence forgotten in their ignorance and unbelief. By ignoring Him they revealed they had eyes only for an earthly man who looked like they thought a king should look. Their allegiance to Saul didn't relieve them from their responsibility to the Lord. If they would walk under His direction, they would be blessed. If not, He would bring judgment. The great thunderstorm was like God was saying "Amen" to Samuel reasoning with them of all the "righteous acts of God." To ignore God's will and word is to ignore Him. We need to resolve before the Lord that we will not treat divine truth as something we can take or leave at our own will. Even when others seem to fail, we can learn from Samuel the value of being a loving father, and faithful mentor, a trusted prophet, a talented advocate and a true guide to the people with whom we have influence.

1st Samuel 12:7. *"Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and your fathers."*

ALL THE RIGHTEOUS ACTS OF THE LORD.
Stop and listen! Quit what you are doing -
This is more important than to harvest a crop.

Consider carefully the choice you have made -
There are consequences for your choices that will not stop.

Consider what God has done for you in the past -
And think carefully before you turn your back on Him.
He is the One caring for you from the first to the last -
But He will let you suffer the consequences of sin.

It is His intention you turn from your ways
And return to find mercy when your sin is confessed.
But it is a righteous act when you ignore what God says,
To allow you to suffer instead of by Him being blessed.

It is part of our work to intercede for you -
And this we will do anxiously looking for change.
But understand this is a righteous act it is true -
When God visits your life with affliction and pain.

He is seeking your best but you have chosen the worst,
His righteous acts are allowed to turn away from sin.
Those things you have wanted are like bubbles that burst -
The righteous acts of God are so you will return to Him.

“Father God, this is a prayer of intercession for those who have turned to sin. You know their names. I am not writing them here, but please, do what is needed for they seem to be going away farther and faster. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Samuel.12:22-23. *“For the Lord will not forsake His people for His great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you His people. Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way.”*

HIS PEOPLE.

His people? They’re the ones who took the ark of God to war when they went out to fight in their own strength.

His people? When the ark was taken by the enemies of the Lord, they ran.

His people? For months they got used to the presence of God not being among them. The ark was with the Philistines.

His people? When miraculously the Lord brought the ark back to them, curiosity for the forbidden made them look inside - and die.

His people? They lamented for 20 years and made half-hearted responses to return to the Lord.

His people? Finally, a victory or two and some peace for awhile.

His people? Wanting a king instead of the Lord who had led and delivered them?

His people? That’s what the new king will call them - he’ll claim them for his people.

His people? Back to their old ways of refusing to obey the voice of the man who speaks for God.

His people? Wanting to be like all the people around who don’t know the Lord: copycats, not willing to take responsibility for their own actions. “We want a king to lead us;” Dissatisfied with the Lord who for generations had kept all His word and promises.

His people? Shouting with voices loud, “God save the king!” “Let the king live!” What about your God?

His people? Overjoyed now that they had a handsome man to look at instead of an unseen God who proved Himself over and over.

His people? Standing, in time of the wheat harvest, in terror and shaking fear as the rain poured down and the thunder crashed.

His people? Saying after the fact, “We have sinned. Pray for us that we do not die.” Why not ask your king?

Mistakes and all - He will not forsake them. Weakness and fear - He will not forsake them. No, they are not great, they are despised, they are arrogant and self-centered, they are alone among all that is around them, they are misunderstood, mischievous and willful. But they are His people, and I must pray for them. I will sin if I don’t. That’s all I can do - right?

After all, the Lord will have to step in to recover them, but I will certainly pray for them and leave the rest up to the Lord. But no, there is more. The one who prays also has to teach them the “good and right way.” They have to learn again and again. Someone has to teach them. Why me? Because I am the one who cares enough to pray for them. God placed that

interest in them, in me. The responsibility is mine. I can blame no one else. His people are my people. I must do as He would do.

“O holy and righteous God; In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I pray for these people. They are not perfect and neither am I. They are not the best as far as the world sees them and neither am I. But I pray that they will turn wholeheartedly to You, and so must I. I pray that they will get fresh vision of who You are and who they are as Your people, and so might I. I pray that they, and I, will get teaching that will produce change and challenge; grace and grit; faith and foresight; vision and vitality; courage and commitment; dignity and devotion that You will be glorified among the nations. Amen.”

1st Samuel 13

WHAT HAST THOU DONE?

There are going to be times in our lives when we are faced with a crisis and have to decide how to face this issue and act if the right way. A man of the flesh doesn't take time to pray and seek God's will. Behind this attitude is a self-confidence, and in self-confidence the fleshly man acts in the same way as other people around expect us to. There are at least three "perils" that are found in 1st Samuel. In chapter 4:3 there is the peril of ritual and formalism. In this chapter the peril that Saul fell under was that of impatience. Later in chapter 15 we learn the peril of partial obedience. In chapter 13 we learn that impatience leads us to organize our response to a matter rather than agonize in prayer over a serious matter. To do this, limits us to only human plans and shuts God out of our decision-making process.

Saul's son, Jonathan, was different that his father and acted in faith counting on God to bring about the victory that was needed and the best possible result to the pressures of the enemy. He knew what God's will was and acted in faith leaving the outcome with God. He knew what needed to be done and trusted God to accomplish the best result. In faith instead of cautious fear like Saul who depended on human forces, Jonathan did what needed to be done and the battle was done. Saul, in pride, took credit for the victory Jonathan had won. Pride has a way of growing and destroying. Taking credit for that which others have accomplished is evidence of pride taking control of one's life. The only way to deal with that tendency is to give credit where credit is due, and whatever the outcome, to give God all the glory.

Saul blew the trumpet instead of waiting on God for guidance as to the time and action to take. When the flesh asserts itself, it starts a chain of events that cannot be stopped without divine intervention. All Israel heard that Saul had done what Jonathan really had done. When a work of God is done among His people or in an assembly of gathered saints, let us always give God all the glory!!! To think one will profit by claiming credit and prominence, will leave one on his own without God.

It seems like the flesh has a mind of its own. Saul wanted to "let the Hebrews hear" about his self-proclaimed victory. His inner attitude toward the Lord's people is exposed in this simple phrase. As far as he was concerned, God's people were just "the Hebrews." He looked at the nation over which he was king as just another one of the nations to be identified by the same name they were called by the tribes around them. The contrast between Saul and the godly leaders before him is very plain. Those previous leaders who interceded for the nation of Israel, knew these were the people of God - a special people, not just Hebrews.

This same attitude is held by many religious systems who call themselves by the names of human leaders or religious forms. The flesh is also very self-centered because of that mind-set the people were called together "after Saul." When people gather together unto a name or a man, they will not necessarily stay because their commitment is only to a mortal man. The only One who can keep the people of God together is the Lord Himself when we are gathered unto Him.

Joshua years before had met the Captain of the Lord's host at Gilgal. Israel had cut off the flesh at Gilgal. Now at the same place Saul calls the people to him but he had no moral strength to keep them together. There was nothing spiritual about Saul's attempts at leadership. He did not have what was needed to give the people courage or vision as to what God could do through them, even though they only had tools to use to defend themselves. God can use a hoe, a shovel, a mattock or a goad as well as He can use a sword. The uncertainty of the leader led to uncertainty among those who followed him. The same thing happens today to God's people when difficulties arise. Discouragement sets in and they stay away from assembly meetings to hide in their own sheltered caves of disappointment rather than meet with others who depend on the strength of the Lord.

Some who once gathered with God's people give up the walk of faith and light to go back "across Jordan" to escape and blend in with the world. The flesh is impatient. Saul could not wait seven days for the man of God had instructed him. The few who were still with Saul were trusting him instead of the Lord. Instead of waiting and doing things God's way, Saul in the energy of the flesh, took matters into his own hands and disobeyed God. He tried to do a spiritual work in the energy of the flesh, and that always fails. The sin-polluted works of the flesh may have the appearance of a spiritual work or have the name of something spiritual, but that does not make it a work of God.

When we trust in ourselves and feel we are losing control of an event, we are in danger of being impatient with God's timing. Faith waits until there is nothing to do but trust. The flesh takes matters into its own hands, and in the case of Saul, thinks that ritual is all that is needed. He substituted ritual for God and God rejected both the burnt offering and Saul who was entirely out of his place. Even God's people can be careless about the commands of the Lord and be willing to have the false forms of religion. We may substitute religious acts that appear outwardly right, but instead of blessing God's people, they are a hindrance to them. Outward appearances that look like service for God result in God's people forfeiting the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the prompting of their own consciences.

Excuses for disobedience include blaming other people for the things that go wrong, even though I am responsible for that work. It is not uncommon for some people to complain about the circumstance in their lives and saying that their failure is due to a unique situation. When Samuel confronted Saul, about the wrong he had done in offering burnt sacrifices which was a priest's work, he made it plain to Saul he had disobeyed God because he had not kept the command of the Lord and there were serious consequences for that. The penalty of disobedience could not be avoided. In the very place Saul was crowned, he hears the words of his condemnation. We cannot disobey God and think He is going to overlook our willfulness and there will be no consequences. It is our responsibility to act on what God says for us, and not impose ourselves in another person's place of responsibility.

"What hast thou done?" was the question Samuel asked Saul. Saul foolishly attempted to excuse himself and to justify his wrong action. When we are tested and fail, we learn that the flesh "profiteth nothing." God wanted a man after His own heart to lead His people, and that man would truly believe in Him and wait for God to guide him before he acted in the flesh. The place of victory when Israel first entered the land of promise was also the place of circumcision where the flesh was cut off years earlier, now becomes a place of judgment when the flesh took control. Our greatest victory may have taken place in the very spot where our greatest defeat will come. We need to be on our guard against the actions of our flesh.

Samuel left Gilgal where the sinful flesh had taken over and went to Gibeah where faith was still active and Saul followed him there though there had been no evidence of repentance or recovery. He numbered the people so he was still trusting in the flesh and the army of men, not in the Lord. In the sad picture of a helpless nation who would not trust God, and was in no position to fight in their own strength, the "Israelites went down to the Philistines." With God, they could have won victories without swords or man-made weapons. Wherever reason takes the place of faith, and forms take the place of spirituality, God's people are in a place of defeat. If we find ourselves in such a state, we should ask, "What has thou done?"

1st Samuel 13:14. *"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 hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee."*

A MAN AFTER HIS OWN HEART.

It doesn't take long for pride to assert
Itself over a man who thinks a lot of himself.
When humility is set aside and you believe your own press,
It won't take very long for the Lord to put you on a shelf.

Two years ago, doesn't seem all that long
But much happens in a short time that's beyond reverse
There can be times of blessing when God shows Himself strong -
And within two years things can get much worse.

When one takes his eyes off God and looks only at men
There are serious consequences because that is not faith.
Once a wrong is started and a downward course begun -
A person then lives by sight, ignoring what God has saith.

God is looking for one who loves the Lord so deeply -
He will not turn aside, no matter what others do.
Such a man can be trusted, he loves God supremely -
And will, even under pressure, commit to what is true.

We can learn to think like God, when we obey His Holy Word -
We can learn to act like God, when we follow what Jesus did.
We can learn to love like God, when our hearts are thus assured
His heart is revealed to us through all Christ has endured.

“O Gracious God, I pray today that I will not act in an impetuous way for any self-directed reason. May I be able to think of people and events in a spiritual and godly way. May I not ignore the needs of others and yet be wise when the pressure comes to act in haste. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Samuel 14:1-23

NOTHING HINDERS THE LORD

We are living today in a time of increasing moral and spiritual departure that is having an effect on the younger generation more than the old people. However, among us there are those who are younger who are people of faith. Saul's son, Jonathan, in spite of the religious form and lack of faith in his father, had the marks of faith on him. Faith lets us see the things around us through God's eyes and takes its orders from God, not from that which is expedient or the opinions of men. Israel was in despair and hopelessness because of the dishonor and defeat that came on them under Philistine influence and occupation.

Jonathan and his armor-bearer, in faith, and knowing the present state Israel was in was intolerable, acted to do what was needed while his father was sitting under a pomegranate tree. When we live by faith, we realize that defeat and failure is a dishonor to God. It is our responsibility to rise above whatever situation that has brought sin and unbelief on God's people, and determine to go forward in the power and name of the Lord. Saul was doing an awful job of leading God's people. For some reason he did not communicate with Jonathan under whose authority he had delegated previously one thousand men. Saul also made a foolish decree, which no common sense person, let alone a leader, would make for his soldiers not to eat. And more, he did not even consider the needs of his own men.

The kind of decisions Saul made were not just because he had a weak personality. Decisions made on the spur of the moment and with due consideration of God's will are because a person has a failing spiritual character. Our spiritual condition affects our spiritual decisions. Jonathan was a man of faith who was in fellowship with his armor-bearer as the two of them separated from the politics and religion of his father. Even though the priests, the people and the ark of God was with Saul, the Lord was with Jonathan. Faith looks to God alone to guide us and to bring about the right results.

Faith also does not act because of the influence of people and circumstances around us. The enemy had a strong position on the high ground. As far as man's strategy is concerned high on the top of the cliffs seemed to be a perfect place. But faith sees beyond the obstacles to the sovereign God who holds the highest position of all. When we trust God, the size of the opposition is not a major consideration. "In vain do earth and hell oppose, for god is stronger than His foes." God honors faith and we can act with confidence even when all that is in opposition seems much stronger than we are. The resources and power of God are unlimited, and when He puts them in place for our use, we can accomplish the tasks He gives us and He can do His will through us.

Faith counts on the power and presence of God to use us as the channel through which He does what is right. We do not doubt God's ability to do beyond what we ask or even think. Our confidence is in Him, and He can easily deal with a situation with many or few, using either many or few. The strength of a human being really doesn't matter when the Lord uses His strength. Simple trust in Him brings the right result either in success as we see it, or more importantly, as God sees it.

Both Jonathan and his armor-bearer were men of faith, who by faith waited for the unmistakable leading of the Lord. They were not in haste to do something. They were not looking around for something of which to boast. They were willing to stay where they were until they had unmistakable assurance the Lord was with them and directing them. The contempt of the Philistines and their mocking words gave assurance to them that God wanted them to go forward in faith, and God would take it from there.

We do not have to be "terrified by our adversaries" when we are "striving together for the faith of the Gospel" in the place and time of God's choosing. Jonathan realized he was a representative of Israel even though

there was only he and his armor-bearer to attack the enemy. "One person and God are a majority." He identified himself with the people of God even as we do today although we may be isolated from them for awhile. Those two men were where all Israel should have been, but in spite of that Jonathan acted on their behalf.

Our faith is, and will continue to be, challenged. The unfaithfulness of other believers has made many Christians the objects of scorn, but people of faith move ahead in spite of the reproach and derision that may be heaped upon them. Faith carries out the will of God with enthusiasm even though the obstacles are like high cliffs in front of us and at the top are the enemies of God. We may never know the end result of a matter, but one thing we can do is trust God.

The reward of faith is victory that may come in an unexpected or unusual way of which we had never thought. We can be sure God has acted on our behalf even though the actions and outcome may be not be what we had hoped for or wanted. The panic that overtook the Philistines came from the Lord and must have astounded Jonathan. The revival of Israel followed although Saul didn't have enough spiritual sense to discern what was happening. When we are called by God to act, then we use what we have as best we can, and rely on Him to bring the needed victory, or the result that best suits Him. Jonathan could not do everything, but he did what he could, where he was, to the best of his ability and the Lord brought the needed assistance from unexpected places.

Some without courage got their courage back. Some who were with the enemy came back with God's people. God was glorified in many ways as He worked for and through, His people. Saul, the powerless leader who depended on the flesh, sits waiting, perplexed as what to do next. He had called for the ark to try and hear God's voice but his ears don't hear God even though he can hear the tumult of the enemy. In unbelief and uncertainty, he finally joins in the fight only to find it has been won without him. Frightened people have rallied; wanderers were brought back; people are united and the battle is won - all without Saul. The faith of Jonathan brought God into the whole situation and God was able to "restrain by many or by few." These principles in the ancient historical event are all applicable to us today in our life-situations.

1st Samuel 14:6. *"And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, come, and let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."*

THE POWER OF GOD vs THE FOOLISHNESS OF A MAN.

God moved a man who had God's interests at heart -

A king moved a nation at his own foolish whim.

God used a man to do way beyond his part -

A king was going to kill his son who knew God better than him.

God has given promises, we can count on every one -

Men make promises they know they can't fulfill.

God saves to the uttermost making us His sons -

Men can only be trusted if others bow to their will.

God can do through frail men great exploits to His glory -

Men are willing to act if they think it will them please.

God uses feeble men to declare to the world His story -

Men want what they want, so a compromising moment will seize.

God can use a few to do great and wonderful things -

Men plan and scheme to gain personal advantage.

God may use many so that many His praises sing -

Men want personal honor using power as leverage.

God's power is in a message of salvation to the lost -

Man's power is in his numbers to overwhelm some obstacle.

God's power is seen in lives changed who do not count the cost

Of walking with the few, not the many who are willful.

"I have seen Thy power O God, witnessed in the lives of those to whom Thou hast revealed Thy Son as their Savior. Give each one in Thy service courage, and save by the many or by few to Thy own glory. Amen."

1st Samuel 14:24-52

HE HATH WROUGHT WITH GOD

Because of his impatience Saul never got divine guidance while he waited by the ark with the priest. He finally told the priest to not bother and went about doing things his own way again. He watched the enemy flee as he stood on the high ground of Gibeah and realized Israel was winning the battle without him. So instead of having divine guidance, in the energy of the flesh he pronounced a curse instead of a blessing. His flawed leadership produced depression and gloom among the people and that clouded the victory that God was working among them. One man out of touch with God can ruin a whole work of God when he acts according to his own opinions and fleshly ambitions rather than under divine guidance.

Only the courage of the people rallied by the faith of Jonathan and his armor-bearer kept disaster from falling on the people of God. Saul's curse resulted in men being too tired to fight; so hungry that they ate blood that was forbidden by the law, and even Saul was ready to kill his own son to save himself from embarrassment. Impulsive statements are usually regretted later. When we are in times of tension and pressure, we should be extra careful about what we say and do.

Saul's legalistic bondage kept food from the people when they needed it most. The Lord Jesus by contrast, when He was here, had compassion on the hungry people and "would not send them away fasting lest they be faint..." Saul really had nothing in common with the Lord. All he had was religious form that he wanted to maintain before the eyes of the people. Also, instead of encouraging the people, Saul made them afraid of him and the result of his foolish oath. A leader who fills the hearts of the Lord's people with fear because of his rash statements and actions, is out of his place. We need to provide for their needs and show them grace when they are afraid.

Jonathan could press on in faith and carry out the work of the Lord not bound by rules and regulations imposed by men or their interpretation of religion. Legalistic practices limit the work of God by taking away the liberty we have in Christ. Religious systems have creeds and forms to follow that take the place of the guidance of the Holy Spirit that is practiced in scripturally gathered assemblies. To follow the word of God is not a legalistic practice but is obeying divine authority. Man-made interpretations that are commanded by human habits or will, does result in legalistic practices.

The soldiers of Saul's army were not only forbidden to eat food and made to fear, but they were faint and without the strength needed to complete the God-given victory because Saul had bound them all with his foolish oath. As a result of that oath, the people were in a sense, forced to sin against God by eating blood which was forbidden by law. In desperation they disobeyed God because of the king acting in the flesh. This act took place where years before the sun stood still while Joshua led the vigorous army of the Israelites to a victory that was not bound by human opinion.

A man can hinder the work of all of God's people when he acts impulsively in the flesh. Not even an altar raised up as a form or religious subjection can overcome the wrong done and the bitter results that follow. When we have done something foolish, to not back down and admit to our wrong just makes the problem worse and the error will continue. To save face a man can cause something far worse to happen to other people. It takes courage to admit to having done wrong.

A sacrifice made does not lift the darkness when there is no confession of sin. A guilty conscience isn't removed until there is repentance and turning to the Lord in faith. Sin silences the voice of God to our souls. Saul was ready to kill his own son to uphold his foolish decree rather than admit his wrong. If it hadn't been for the intervention of those people gathered around Saul and Jonathan, Jonathan would have died. The flesh, judges faith and finds it guilty by the law of sin that is more concerned with looking good than being right.

God allowed Saul to continue as king so the people would know what their choice of a king was really like. God allows wrong and evil to continue according to His own timetable for His own sovereign reasons. We can only commit ourselves and our ways to God and then trust Him to bring about the right results. The people of Israel finally woke up to see the spiritual and moral blindness of Saul who they had wanted to lead them. They were also made aware of the faith of Jonathan and the power that faith in God has when it is guided by the Lord. Jonathan's spiritual character was a great contrast to Saul's fleshly, self-centered character. Jonathan admitted to what he had done. Saul wanted to look good before the people even though they could see through his narcissism.

1st Samuel 15

SAMUEL CAME NO MORE

There are times when a person passes the point of no return in their rejection of God and His word. There is hope while there is life if a person is awakened to their sin and need of God, and if they return to Him in

repentance, He is ready and willing to forgive the repentant sinner. But deliberate rejection of God and His truth and the spurning of His grace, will leave a person outside of the blessings of salvation. "Repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," is still the way sinners come to Christ. Saul is an example of a person who willfully refuses to admit his guilt and face the consequences of his sin. In spite of his undeniable refusal to do the will of God, he still wanted to be exalted himself.

The Amalekites were terrorists who lived by attacking other nations or small groups of people like wolves following a weak prey, and taking everything, they could, whether it was goods or people. As long as they existed, Israel could never have peace. Their corrupt idolatry threatened the relationship Israel had with God. The only way Israel could survive was if the Amalekites were destroyed along with all their possessions and idols. The Lord had charged Saul, through Samuel to carry out this work. Saul first action was to number his own people to see if he thought he had enough men to do this task. He didn't rely on God but still acted in the energy of the flesh and with only the insight the flesh gives.

In essence Saul's reign was already finished, but the rest of the narrative exposes the reasons very clearly as to the dangers of acting in the flesh. This whole incident in the life of Israel teaches us the seriousness of acting independently of God. When we act without divine guidance, the outcome of a matter is only as strong as the weakest part of our fleshly nature. Saul is a type of religious flesh positionally, seeming to be near God and serving God. But with all the religious garb and upscale religious forms that are so impressive, it is still the flesh - religious flesh.

The Amalekites were a different type of the flesh. The "flesh" opposes God and God's people, and wants nothing to do with God. Their background began with Esau and after hundreds of years was still contrary to the people of God. Today the aggressive flesh of the world system strongly opposes those who are born of God and live holy and righteous lives. The popular opinion of most today is that we should change our opinions and convictions to accommodate to what the "majority" says is socially acceptable. The Lord was opposed to Amalek "from one generation to another" because then, as now, that which is done in the energy of the flesh gets increasingly worse with each passing generation, and "in the flesh dwelleth no good thing."

The command Saul received was to finish with Amalek once and for all so there could be a lasting peace and the evil of that system would not permeate the cultures and people around them. In this situation there was the testing of the religious flesh in Saul, when confronted with the outright evil flesh on the part of the Amalekites. We may not realize the fact, that often, testing times are allowed by God to bring out what is real in His people and cause them to have to stand up and be counted in front of a watching world. The price to be paid in such times can be social testing, religious testing and personal testing to see whether what we profess is real.

However, Saul and his soldiers disobeyed the command of God and kept the best of that which God hated the most. To break the hold of idolatry, nothing was to remain, not even the animals that were raised for idolatrous purposes. But instead they kept the best of that which was from idolatry and bestiality to use to "sacrifice to the Lord." This would have been the heights of abomination against the Lord. To show disrespect and disregard for God and His commands are often done today when religious men try to sanctify what God hates and has cursed. Such disregard for God's truth, even though people may think it is "selective obedience" is just plain disobedience shown in another way.

Saul obeyed God as far as it pleased him. That is what we do when we choose to do our own will and ignore or disregard God's will. To do this or even have the attitude associated with it, is rebellion. To not fulfill a God-given command completely is the same as not doing it at all. Our flesh must be put to death lest we start judging our own flesh as to what we think is good and what is bad. It is not uncommon to hear one say, "I don't think that is wrong. Look at what other people do, and it makes people feel so good about themselves." God has already condemned the flesh as "no good thing." All of it, religious or otherwise!! Saul later died at the hands of an Amalekite, and later in Israel's history Haman tried to destroy the whole nation of Israel - and he was an Agagite - a relative of the Amalekite king.

If we gloss over sin to protect our reputation or for selfish gain, the flesh will poison our spiritual life to the extent that some believers will deliberately walk away from that which they know is right. The flesh has invaded churches, families and nations to the place where laws are changed to cater to the flesh. Some churches have resorted to "world-like" entertainment to get people to attend church service. They hope if they can "get them to come in" they may come back to our regular church services. Such reasoning is not by the guidance of the Holy Spirit but by committees or those who think the church is more important than the will and word of the Lord.

Samuel was very concerned about Saul and how he was failing in his leadership and prayed in the night for him to the Lord as an intercessor on behalf of the nation. A soft heart touched by the Lord and one who has genuine concern for others is of great value in intercessory prayer. Saul in his arrogance and self-centeredness did not weep for his sin but gloried in that which was to his shame. He never admitted to doing wrong, so consequently God's attitude toward Saul was changed. God did not change His mind about what He allowed. In pride Saul set up a monument to himself to point out to others what he considered he had achieved himself. He followed that with a triumphal march in his own honor from Carmel to Gilgal and planned a celebration there mixing religious practices with feasting as a tribute to himself. He may have thought his lie would not be exposed, or he may even have thought that what he did was not wrong. But that did not excuse him for his failure to carry out the word of the Lord.

The flesh has the tendency to deceive itself. Dishonest people find themselves believing the lies they told and/or cannot tell the difference between truth and lies. When we allow ourselves to believe our own lies we are disconnected from God and will find ourselves cut off from meaningful relationships with people who count. With sanctimonious words Saul greets Samuel who had followed him like a faithful shepherd would follow a wandering sheep. Samuel saw through Saul's boasting because there were other sounds he heard that told a different story. The bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen exposed Saul's lie. Facts give credence to words of truth, and exposes dishonesty. Saul followed the path most liars follow. When they are found out, they try to shift the blame to others. Excuses we make only condemn us further. Honesty will ultimately come out into the open and be the victor.

Samuel had wept through the night for all that was lost through Saul's failed leadership. He had heard God's voice first at night when he was a young boy. Now he still hears the voice of God at night as an old man. There is a time to listen to what people say, and there is a time to stop foolish talk and say, "That is enough of this. Be quiet while I tell you the consequences of your actions." Samuel reminded Saul of his past insignificance and of what he owed God. We do well to remember "the hole of the pit from which we have been digged, and the rock from which we have been hewn." Samuel reminded Saul of the mandate he had been given and exposed his lies and deceit of which he was guilty. Exposure of guilt is the step that leads to repentance in a sincere person.

Samuel challenged Saul's disobedience and sought to make him aware of the seriousness of that sin. When one doesn't fear nor tremble at the word of the Lord, he sets himself up for righteous vengeance to come. He might escape the glancing blow, but the fatal blow is sure to come. No sacrifice a person can make will take away the consequences of disobedience. Submission to the will of God is of far more importance than the costliest gifts we might give. Self-will, stubbornness, is really self-exaltation and in some cases self-worship. It indicates what I want is more important than what God wants. Sacrifice is important but has no value if our relationship with God is broken or has never been in existence. The ritual of sacrifice without obedience is meaningless.

Religion as a practice is of no value when devotion to God and obedience to Him is not there. Rebelliousness and arrogance go beyond being independent and strong-willed. The power of darkness seen in witchcraft and idolatry are defiance against God. Unless there is new birth in an unbeliever or a 180 degree turn in a wandering believer, forgiveness and restoration to God will not happen. Saul was rejected as king and would not ever get the kingdom back. God has entrusted us with a work to do for Him and for which we must give account. There is no excuse for us to not act responsibly in this work.

We are constantly being exhorted to do more and more in our service, but we need to consider if it is being done for the church or is it for the Lord. If it is for religious appearances to look good before the people, it has no real value. When the time for repentance is past and that for which we have been entrusted has not been done in obedience to God, we may be stunned to realize rejection has happened and there is no return to what we had before.

Even at the time when Saul was awakened, he wanted things his own way and made the people the object of blame. God through Samuel allowed Saul to continue as king, but he had only the power of his own will from then on. He wanted things his own way, and he was left on his own. From that day on he ceased to be God's king. It is an awful thing to be left on our own to try and accomplish that which can only be done by the strength of the Lord. Saul was told, "a neighbor of thine," will be the one who would take the kingship - "a man after God's own heart." "The Strength of Israel," the Hope that would continue on in confidence, truth, victory and glory is not a mere man, but the unchanging God.

1st Samuel 15:22. *"And Samuel said, 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 that the fat of rams."*

TO OBEY IS BETTER.

Isn't it of great value to give what was given to you?
The sentimental value is of some worth.
How about gathering to raise our voices too?
Is that not worshiping in spirit and in truth?

As good as those actions and the sincere motivation -
What God has to say has more value than what we do.
Obeying God in deed is the basis of consecration -
He is waiting for our return when self-will is finally through.

Words of thanks when sorrowing have meaning to those who hear.
The sacrifice of thanksgiving has value that is high.
The offering of our temporal goods makes us to draw near -
But to obey is better than any sacrifice we supply.

The things we offer the Lord may be our very best -
We rightly think that God deserves the very best we offer.
Then from the Word of God there comes the promise to be blest -
Obey what God says and asks is better than what we prefer.

Yes, it is important to give to God what all I can -
And by His grace I will present a sacrifice to Him.
But more importantly is listening and obeying as a grateful man,
I join allegiance with those who are obedient men.

“O God who holds the breath of all men in Thy hand: impress on me once again the value of genuine obedience to Thy Word and Thy will. I have recently been in the presence of those who are trying to learn about Thee rather than know Thee. I want to know Thee more so that there will never be a question in my mind about obeying or just sacrificing. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Samuel 16:1-13.

ANOTHER BEGINNING

In our life with God as children in His family, we have privileges that we often take for granted and perhaps forget sometimes that privileges bear responsibilities with them. The fact that God can entrust His people with responsibilities of eternal importance is another great privilege. Consecration indicates we are in a condition of soul and life that we can approach God with clean hands and an honest heart. God wanted a "man after His own heart" to be king over Israel after the moral, spiritual and leadership failures of Saul. A new beginning for a divided, unhappy nation means a leader is needed who is in touch with God and can sense the needs of the people.

Samuel began his life for God as a young boy with a clean new garment of clothes made by the loving hands of his mother each year. This was in contrast with the moral and spiritual darkness that had settled over the priesthood, and consequently over the nation. An old priest who was too blind to see what was needed and a failed priesthood did not stop the sovereign dealings of God with the young boy, Samuel, who brought hope to the nation. David comes on the scene of scriptural history in the freshness of one who knows and loves God in contrast to a self-willed king who has been left alone by God because of his disobedience and disregard of divine authority under which he was intended to lead the people of God.

It may be impossible to not mourn over the loss of a man of great potential who because of his great pride and egocentric life brings dishonor on the people of God and the Lord's name. But to dwell on that is also not right. We do not so much, have to "get over it" when there is failure, as to "get on with it" and find out the mind and will of God in relation to His work and move ahead in spite of setbacks. Samuel mourned over Saul, but that didn't help the situation in which Israel was found. God's people were still needing a king for whom they had asked, and life still had to go on in spite of the "talking head" Saul had become. Even the Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem when He came to the city and looked ahead into the future, but then He moved ahead and did what the Father had sent Him to accomplish.

God Himself provided a king to replace the one the people had asked for out of a desire to be like the nations around. When God wants a man for His work, He will provide the exercise and the means to bring it to pass. We do not have to manipulate or pressure others to get a place of leadership among the Lord's people. We just have to be faithful in doing what we already have in our hands to do, and be satisfied with the fact that God knows who we are and what He wants from us, and can bring it about in His own will and

time. Previously the Lord "sought Him a man," and now He "found David My servant." David had already been set apart, sanctified and "meet for the Master's use." He had been in training out in the fields where no one else could see what was happening. He had been in "training for reigning" for quite some time although he may not have known it himself and certainly others, even his family, didn't know it.

There is always much more to learn from the Lord than we have already experienced. We can be thankful for the on-going education process in the school of God that lasts for our lifetime. David had a lot more to learn from the Lord who filled him for service and was going to use him as a tool for the Holy Spirit to "move" and write down psalms and hymns of praise and worship to testify of God's grace and glory. We are blessed today by the training time of that young man who enjoyed God and loved Him. He had already been learning by experience how to handle rejection, reproach and humiliation before he would be called by God to lead the nation. Training in the things of God is not always easy. As a matter of fact, we learn more, and our character is built, in times of difficulty and problems rather than when life is easy and we complacently move quietly through life without any major concerns. Our Lord Jesus was humiliated and rejected when He was on earth, so it should be no surprise to us if we too experience the same things when we live as servant of the Lord.

David was identified as God's choice by God's sovereign electing will. It is no accidental happening, or merely human choice that leads those who love the Lord to be set apart for Him, and by Him. We cannot see behind the scenes to all the divine purposes of God, but we can rest in confidence that when our desire is to walk in the light with the Lord, He will reveal to us all of His will that we should know. God sets in place who He will and removes who He will by His divine prerogative. Saul's beginning was based on the natural human desire of men and the end of his life with God was because of the fleshly desire of his fallen nature. David was in fellowship with God long before Samuel came to visit the family of Jesse. When one is in the heart of God, the results of that life will be directed by God to His glory and the blessing of His people.

Samuel had his horn filled with oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit's power at his disposal in his work for the Lord. The heifer he took along with him for sacrifice testified to the subjection of natural power to spiritual power as he walked from Ramah to Bethlehem leading this animal to a sacrificial death, and to provide a sacrificial feast. We look on our Lord who was sacrificed for us in all His innocence and perfection, and we keep the feast in fellowship with God and with the One He has anointed, and by whom we are accepted with God.

Jesse's seven sons passed by Samuel and apparently each seemed like he could be a king. Yet in spite of their natural attraction outwardly, they were not chosen by God. We are not "chosen for good in me," but by God's sovereign electing grace. "Man, looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart." God looks on the heart for the qualifications He wants from those involved in divine service. In spite of ourselves we often make judgments only on what we see outwardly in a person. All of the first seven sons were by-passed by God even though Samuel, and perhaps Jesse, favored them. David was forgotten because he was already serving others by caring for the flock.

Religious movements come and go often because of the person who rises to leadership. When people are gathered to the charismatic personality of a man, they fade away when that man dies, moves away or falls into disregard. A religious group that starts by natural choices on the basis of natural principles are acceptable to men but not necessarily to God. God only accepts that which is of the Spirit and owns Jesus Christ as Lord. Those who God accepts into His kingdom have been "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world." It is only the Lord Jesus Christ who can satisfy God or us.

David (beloved) was taken by God to be ruler over "My people Israel." The humiliating process of those seven men passing before Samuel and being rejected was necessary to clarify to everyone the fact that the fleshly rule of men over God's people was over. It was not acceptable to God. The man God chose was first seen as a shepherd, and that characterized him for life. A shepherd loves his helpless sheep and is committed to caring for them and even dying for them if it is necessary. Saul was introduced as a searcher for lost asses which he never found, and in a sense his search in life for gratification of the flesh never ended. To seek satisfaction from the world in the energy of the flesh is a futile search.

David had already risked his life in a battle against a lion and a bear to rescue one sheep or one lamb. Such a pledge to caring for sheep that belonged to his father is an example to us to follow as we care for "the sheep" of our Father's flock. If a man is faithful to that extent for the sake of one life saved, God can entrust him with all of His sheep. He looked upon his vocation and calling with devotion and willingness to sacrifice himself. The Lord Jesus is the True Shepherd of the sheep, who "having loved His own, He loved them unto

the end. That qualification sets the standard high for those to whom God has given the responsibility to care for His people.

It is of great significance that "the Spirit of God was upon David from that day forward." God had found His man, so Samuel could go home and rest after he anointed him as God's choice. No doubt he found he could rest in peace since he knew unmistakably that God had chosen His servant David. We cannot change all the things going on around us that we know are wrong. We can find our rest in the will of the Lord being done even in difficult and crisis times. Saul was bigger than everyone else outwardly, and had become like that in his own eyes even though he was anointed alone. David was anointed "in the midst of his brethren" and apparently returned to his humble occupation as a shepherd with grace and the inward beauty that had set God's heart upon him. The one who was rejected to lowly servitude was sitting at the feast in the attitude of his graceful spirit as the one God had chosen. To be selected for divine service is cause for humility and consecration, not pride and self-exaltation.

1st Samuel 16:7. *"But the Lord said unto Samuel, look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."*

LOOKING ON THE HEART.

We don't have to look shabby, dull or drab,
The whole point of the lesson is this:
The outside can easily be changed using what I have,
To make something different than what it really is.

Opinions of men are formed often by sight.
We say, "What you are is what you get."
What I really am is what God's holy light
Exposes when it reveals the intents of my heart.

What men see changes either for bad or for good;
Every thought is very limited in its scope.
Though eyes can see far or close to where I stood -
Only God can see deep into my soul.

I wonder as I sit here what does my family think -
Do they consider I am putting on a show?
Am I truly consistent, or do they share a wink
Of skepticism over something I don't know?

I really want to show outwardly what I am inside -
God's grace to me is what I want to express.
If they believe I am internally real and outwardly don't hide -
Then I will consider my life lived before them a success.

"Father God, the door to my heart is open. I am not able, nor do I want to hide anything from Thee. I am wondering if perhaps there are things I should keep hid from my family. If there is, give me the wisdom to know what to keep silent about and what to avoid. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 16:14-23

PROVIDE A MAN

There is often more than depression that brings highs and lows to a person who lives by the sudden impulses of the fleshly nature. Such people may be affected more by the circumstances of life than by the guidance of God through them. If everything is favorable to them, they seem happy and positive. When things are difficult, they have a negative, critical attitude and are angry about the events around them and sometimes toward people when there is no cause for that anger. Some of the reactions may be similar to that of Saul who when he had not been willing to act under divine authority, had removed from him by God the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit. In its place God allowed an evil spirit to torment him. Like some people today, when he got upset, he started throwing things.

There is judgment for disobedience and there are consequences to unwillingness to submit to God or to those who do not even believe God is real. There is a darkness in the spirit of those who are dead in trespasses and sins that is not lifted by psychoanalysis or attempts at rehabilitation by human endeavor. The calming influence of music does work temporarily if it is soothing rather than raucous tones that are not much more than organized noise. Noise can agitate and aggravate a dejected person to the place where

they have to flee for solitude to try and find peace. Saul found temporary relief when David played skillfully on his harp and probably sang some of the psalms and spiritual songs he wrote.

Saul was anxious that a man be provided to bring peace to his troubled soul. Even in this extremity of frustration he did not seek for the Lord nor call upon His name. The ending of this king's life and reign is an account of the deterioration of his mind, the despair that settled over his soul and the agitation that came upon his spirit. The downward course of a life is usually impossible to stop unless one faces honestly the problem of their guilt and the sin that causes it. Repentance toward God is where one must start if there is going to be a lasting solution found for the problem. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not just wishful thinking, but a wholehearted trust in Him alone to meet our need.

On the bright side of this historical account there comes into the picture David, the man after God's own heart. Much of what we know of David is very positive. He was a faithful shepherd who could be trusted to care for the sheep of his father. Wherever he was he seemed to be able to make melody in his heart unto the Lord. It seemed like in whatever situation he was found; he could write a meaningful poem. Some of the ones he wrote were up-lifting and some were words of despair. He could put into words the thoughts that were in his heart. Even today people read his writings to find comfort and understanding in the circumstances in which they are found. As a mighty warrior who is most noted for his defeat of Goliath under the strength of the Lord, he made it plain that it was in the Lord alone he had placed his trust. When he became king over Israel after fifteen years of waiting and wandering, he opened up the golden age of Israel's history. All of this is found in the biblical account of David's history.

However, David was not a perfect man. The same Holy Spirit who moved the pen of the writer to give the positive things about David, also moved the pen to write about his failures. He was a betrayer, a liar, an adulterer and even a murderer. All of these failures including being that of father who did not do a good job of parenting, did not change him from one who had unshakable belief in the faithfulness of God. He knew God to be a forgiving God and he was quick to confess his sins.

By nature, we seem to want to avoid the consequences of sin by trying to hide behind dishonesty, or in some other way excuse ourselves from facing sin, rather than confessing our sin to God and experiencing His forgiveness. Wise people learn from their mistakes and failure and the consequences that follow. We learn from Saul the failure of the flesh. We learn from David the remedy for sin. In the life of David, we see the outworking of God's grace. The Holy Spirit left Saul but returned with David. It is the Spirit of God who makes us conscious of sin. We need to be willing to honestly admit to, and confess, our sin. Even though forgiveness does not remove the consequences of sin, it brings us back into fellowship with God who we trust completely and that leads us to worship Him in faith.

A number of people loved David, usually each for different reasons. Saul loved him for what he got from him. Jonathan loved him and would do anything for him, but would not commit himself to following David. Michal would risk her life for David but not her pride of place. The only one who loved him for who he was, was Mephibosheth. He owed everything to David and was willing to surrender all to him.

One of Saul's servants aptly described David. "Cunning in playing" indicates David was not satisfied with being mediocre about even the small things in life. "A mighty valiant man" reveals the fact that he was known for his bravery. "A man of war" is a person who has been trained well and know what needs to be done and how to do it. "Perfect in speech" is a testimony to the fact that he was articulate, could speak well and could say what needed to be said. "A comely person" is one who knows who he is and yet does not take pride in that over which he has no control. Above all of these personal attributes is the fact that it was known to others that "the Lord was with him." These are about the finest descriptions of a person for which one could hope.

Saul wanted him to come to be with him, and he was willing to go, but not without gifts. "A man's gift maketh room for him." He had experienced God in his life personally and secretly. Now he was called upon to go public with all he knew of God, and he did it in a way that could hardly be refused. He testified in "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." Heavenly music rises well above all the noise and clamor of earth and the storms of life. When we find ourselves in times of tumult and tension, we should "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice." To know how to pass on truth effectively and appropriately takes wisdom and discernment on our part. It is always wise to think about what is the best way to approach difficult people and circumstance before we say anything or act in haste.

A MAN

What do we need when we are uncertain about life?

What do we need when all around us is strife?
What do we need when our burdens are hard to bear?
What do we need when in our grief no one is there?
We need the Man who God provides.

When things seem to have gone completely out of control
When there is nothing around that brings peace to our soul
When we're personally "finished" and yet there's more work to be done
When we call but there is no one who is willing to come.
We need the Man who God provides.

When people seek to change truth into convenient lies
And nothing works in spite of everything one tries
When lawlessness seems to daily be winning over grace
And fearfulness invades people in every place
We need the Man who God provides.

When our prayers rise heavenward to the grace-throne on high
And we find that it is only on God's promises we can rely
When the harvest is ripe and more laborers are needed to gather
And the present seems to stretch out forever and ever.
We need the Man who God provides.

"Father, as an intercessor on behalf of Thy people here, and in every place where we know the present need - by Thy grace silence the voices that demands their way ; bring peace to those who are troubled by family strife; give a calm spirit to those who are suffering ; give comfort to those who are grieving. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 17

"YOUR SERVANT WILL GO"

Some enemies we will have to face in life are out-and-out opposed to God and His people. We may be afraid of them if we only see them through the eyes of a natural man. It is important for us to look at people and see them through the perspective of our new nature and then we can see obstacles as the Lord sees them. Goliath's strengths were obvious. He was a huge man, a "giant," covered in armor and he also had an arrogant attitude. He was an example of the flesh in its greatest form. Saul, king of Israel, would have been the one Israelite closest to his size and his armor would have been similar in kind, but not size, to that of Goliath. Flesh is flesh, no matter what size it is and there would be no victory at all if David had gone to meet the giant in Saul's armor. "Making flesh its arm" is failure just waiting to happen. The only way out of the dilemma Israel was in was if there was divine intervention, and that would not come under the weakness of the flesh.

When David came to the camp of Israel there had been a stalemate for forty days, and there he offered himself to fight Goliath. David knew the armor of the flesh would only be a hindrance to him. His weapons were a sling and a stone, and his trust was in God alone. Others saw an opponent, a giant too big and powerful to defeat. David saw Goliath as a target too big to miss. His invisible armor was the same as that which is at our disposal to "withstand the wiles of the devil," and spiritual wickedness, and all associated with the "powers of darkness." We have access to the belt of truth to keep us from getting entangled with the world. The breastplate of righteousness testifies to those who know us that which is important to us. With our feet ready to take us to places where we can declare the Gospel of peace and the shield of faith to keep the attacks of the devil from reaching us, we are ready both offensively and defensively to maintain our stand for the Lord. The helmet of salvation keeps our minds focused on those things that are meaningful and useful for our testimony for the Lord. The sword of the Spirit is the weapon we have to take the battle for truth to the enemy and keep us aware of our need of God at all times. The communication needed in any kind of warfare is available to us through prayer. In this way we are conscious of the leading and guiding of God in every situation in which we find ourselves.

Our own personal strength conceals our weakness but God is not mocked. God is able to make strength weak and weakness into strength. Goliath wanted the Israelites to give him a man. Saul also wanted a man. But God had already found a "man after His own heart." He could, and still can, use a man who knows his own limitations but has his confidence in God. The conflict that was in the valley of Elah is a type of the conflict of sin and righteousness that took place at the cross where our Lord Jesus Christ waged the battle against sin, Satan and death and was victorious.

The property on which the Philistines were camped belonged to Judah, but had been taken over by the powers of the enemy. No matter what or where the flesh is seen, it has to be defeated or we will never be able to possess what God has provided for us. Israel was in the place of strength (oaks) but had no strength because they were being led by the guidance of the flesh and had not learned experimentally that in the valley is spiritually the place of power and salvation. There may be enemies around us that seek to claim our position, but "In vain do earth and hell oppose, for God is stronger than His foes."

The flesh centers all its activities and attention in the energy of evil. Goliath is a picture of Satan who seeks to get God's people to act in the weakness of the flesh. At the cross of Calvary, the enemy seemed to be the winner to the onlookers until our Lord defeated sin by bearing it in His own holy body on the tree. Satan was defeated by the Righteous One not avoiding the "flames of hell" that got hold of Him and "suffering, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." He also defeated death which had no claim on His sinless Person by using His "keys" and laying down His life by His own will, and taking it again.

Against all the outward show of strength, is the trusting man of grace who had "the Lord with him." That was all he wanted and needed. There was no outward show of strength or of self-defense. All those who looked on the scene in the valley of Elah could see, was a man who trusted in God and came prepared with that which seemed so useless to them. God's man came from a place unknown by the busy world. Forty days was a long time for the army of the Lord to be waiting. Even though we may be in the right place, when we trust in man and seek to act in the energy of the flesh, we will be powerless and fearful of going forward.

For four hundred dark years, the time between the Old and New Testaments, there had been no word from the Lord. Even from the time of Adam, the fear of death held men powerless to deal with their own sin. "But in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son." David's father called him to go and see how his brothers were doing, and he was eager to do his father's will. Our Lord came to this sinful world sent by His Father to be the Savior - and He came, delighted to do the Father's will. David left the sheep with an under-shepherd so that none would be lost, and went to the place where he could fulfill the purpose God had for him.

Our Lord Jesus "came unto His own, and His own received Him not." Eliab said some hard things to David, probably revealing a jealousy to cover his own inability or unwillingness to step out in faith and face the giant. The leaders of Israel had a lot of bad things to say to the Lord, and about the Lord, when He was here. But none of that turned Him aside from His purpose to "finish the work" His Father gave Him to do.

Saul and David met again, although Saul apparently didn't recognize him as the one who played the harp to calm his frazzled nerves and troubled mind. One was head and shoulders above the other, but full of doubts and fears. The other, a shepherd who knew his God and had experienced victory over the lion and bear by the power of God. His confidence was in God and he knew Goliath would be like them in defeat. Saul's plaintive words, "The Lord be with thee," seems to have come from a man who knew he had failed God. All he had was his own armor, a smaller copy of the one the giant had, and the energy of sinful flesh. Goliath had his own armor and was also coming in the strength of the devil. The devil can manipulate the flesh until it is under his control. Both the flesh and the devil seem capable of winning victories.

However, David retains his identity as a shepherd with a staff to symbolize the fact he had authority from God, similar to that which Moses had. He had five smooth stones, one each for the giant and his four brothers. They remind us that God has "chosen the weak things to confound the mighty." The bag which carried the stones is a testimony as to his faith, and the sling reminds us of our dependence on God to guide and direct us to the right place by the strength of faith. There was never a question as to whether David would miss the mark. His confidence was that the Lord he trusted would take that one stone to the place the devil could not cover - the place of the mind.

Though "distained," "cursed," and "defied," David met the enemy and defeated him. Our Lord Jesus was "despised and rejected of men," but He met Satan and conquered his power as well as the power of death. The cross-work of our Lord was a great victory over all our enemies - "the world, the flesh and the devil." David "prevailed" and so did our Lord Jesus Christ prevail over all His foes at the cross.

David didn't claim the victory for himself. He took the head of Goliath and brought it to Jerusalem where the foundation of peace was - where God put His name, and where the Anointed One will be seated on the throne of David and will reign in glory as the Prince of Peace when there will be "peace on earth, good will to men." The challenge of the enemy was met, and he was defeated in David's day in the valley of Elah. At the cross all the enemies of the Lord were "trodden down" and God's honor up-help. The whole nation knew that Israel had the One True God with them, and the whole world will know that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Finally, the people of Israel would know that God was the Savior. Today all who come to God are "accepted in the Beloved." The newly anointed king of Israel was ready to be revealed at the time of God's choosing. The King of kings is ready to be revealed to this dark world at the time of God's choosing as well. Then He will establish righteousness and deal with evil. Then He will be upon the "throne of David" and reign in glory. Then there will be a millennium of peace.

1st Samuel 17:47. *"And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands."*

THE BATTLE IS THE LORD'S.

It seems to get worse, the opposition is strong,
And the laborers are getting weary in the field.
We must turn unto the Lord to find out what is wrong;
To the enemy, not a step should we yield.

But again, and again we try hard and we fail
To see results that are effective and last.
It seems like there are times when the enemies prevail,
And our time of bringing in the harvest is past.

Then I read of this scene where fear seemed to reign,
And the strongest and experienced men did halt.
But a young man with trust knows God is the same
As at first when he was chosen out and called.

Whether in the east or west, where're our lot is cast -
I am reminded the battle is the Lord's.
I feel so inadequate, like my productive days are past -
And then, again I am challenged by the Word.

In the work that lies ahead we are going forth again,
To strengthen the hands of those laboring for the Lord.
May my mind be filled with truth that each one may obtain
An understanding of the value of the truths we uphold.

"O God of all power, I rest in Thee and build again my hope and trust in Thee to use me for what pleases Thee. I guess I am "results oriented" and need to be reminded again and again that "the battle is the Lord's." In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 18

LOVE AND HATE

A strong friendship is one of the greatest expressions of love. The bond of friendship and brotherly love between David and Jonathan is one of the greatest and most touching examples of what we should be experiencing as brothers and sister in Christ. True friendship among believers begins with each one being committed to God, not just to each other. It is on that basis we are able to be frank and open with each other realizing that each is aware of God in this special relationship we have. In the case of David and Jonathan this friendship surpassed the problems each had in their families and even their roles as fellow-soldiers in the army of Israel. Their friendship was tested on several occasions but remained strong until Jonathan died in battle.

Even when Jonathan knew that David would be the king of Israel instead of him, their close friendship was not compromised in any way. David was more important to Jonathan than being the king of Israel after his father Saul. Jonathan's love for David was so great that he surrendered everything to him. Their friendship was the kind that separated them from others by the covenant between them, and Jonathan gave David all that was significant to him. When there is real love for our Lord Jesus Christ in God's people, there will be love one for another that is evident to those who know us. That kind of love for Christ is not only the love of a servant for his Master, but now our Lord has called his disciples His friends, and there is no holding back of what we have. We want Him to have everything we would claim for ourselves.

Jonathan gave David his robe that distinguished him from all other people as the son of the king. Even as a royal son in Israel, he believed David was "worthy of honor" and he was willing to give that to his friend. The garments he gave him were probably garments of glory and beauty that identified him as a person of wealth and high standing in the nation. To give David his sword, likely his most prized possession, symbolized the

victories he had won and the energy he expended for the Lord and His people, and his desire to give that high honor to David. His influence surrendered to David is typified when he gave David his bow. A bow sends our personal strength way beyond our present position to area further afield which can be benefitted by that strength. The girdle that bound everything together is like the truth and faith that keeps everything in its proper place in our lives. Everything we are and have should be gladly surrendered to Him who gave everything He had to bless us. We owe our Lord Jesus our life and breath and all we would claim as ours. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

In contrast to Jonathan's love and appreciation of David, is the jealousy and rage of Saul. Jealousy and murder are next-door-neighbors. in the dark soul of a natural man. Saul had easily forgotten David who had opened the way to victory for Israel when he killed Goliath. He seemed to be so self-centered that even when David played the harp or lyre for him, he quickly forgot him. Self-centered people easily set aside the importance of other people and their benefit for all because they are the center of all their thoughts. "I... me... and my" are all that is of value to them. A self-absorbed person has chosen to be ignorant of both God and man.

Not only was Saul selfish, but he was envious of that which belongs to another. He is like many who cannot stand to see another person honored. Envy claims for itself that which another has earned and seeks a way to not only claim it for one's self, but to deny it to another person. Envy shuts out love, mercy and grace by replacing it with jealousy, covetousness and hatred. Envy can strangle a person to such an extent that everything else is shut out until its claims are met. Following hard on the path of envy is hatred that stirs one's soul into acting irrationally and with deep-seated malice.

Not matter how soothing the song or how peaceful the surroundings, hatred when it is in control, treacherously sets about in its attempts to wreak havoc in the lives of others to satisfy its thirst for vengeance. Saul could see his influence, even in his family, slipping away because of his self-centered life. The evil he sought to bring on David was thwarted at every turn. He could recognize that God was for David and had abandoned him. Now he was even losing his family who could see in David that which they knew was missing in their father.

Our Lord was the object of the envy and hatred of the leaders of Israel when He was here. The more grace, mercy and goodness He demonstrated, the greater was their evil intent to kill Him. Even when "He was reviled, He reviled not again. When He suffered He threatened not." Their strategy was to find in Him some fault but Pilate said, "I find in Him no fault at all."

Whether it was Saul's mind of hatred, his eye of jealousy or his javelin of murderous intent, all of his strategies failed because God was with David. And to add even more to his deep-seated anger was the fact that David was loved by the people. All the intrigue in the palace did not turn the gratitude-love of the people away from David because of the victories the Lord was giving on their behalf. He was like a shepherd who wanted to be with the sheep when he was among them. Even in the household servants of Saul the king, there was the love of admiration for David. They appreciated his dignity and humility even as they watched Saul plotting to kill him. It was that admiring love that moved them to suggest that Saul give David his daughter as a wife.

The love of Michal for David was that natural love of one who is married to another. She loved David when he pleased her, but not when he pleased God. The love which gratitude produces is appreciated but may come and go depending on the circumstances of life that are going on. Admiration produces love because it can see the value of a person and the benefits it brings to other people. Natural love, "phileo," may come or go depending on the state of mind a person has at the time. But that may not last because it is based on human emotion.

The love of full-surrender to another person because of the value we see and know to be in that person, is the kind of love God has for us. That love holds nothing back and is willing to see another exalted at our expense. Our greatest joy in relationships comes when we are willing to give all for the blessing of another, and truly expect nothing in return. Of all character traits that are developed and nurtured in a human being, "the greatest of these is love."

Self-occupation is a twisted perception of one's own importance, and when praise and honor is expected by that person, and is not forthcoming, that expectation can turn into jealousy, envy and hatred. One had well written

"He that is down need fear no fall,

*He that is low, not pride.
He that is humble shall every have,
God to be his guide."*

1st Samuel 18:14. *"And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him."*

BEHAVED HIMSELF WISELY.

The pressure is on, the public is watching
To see how you handle your pride.
After all, God has used you, this surely means something,
I wonder what you are like deep inside.

But the proof is there, in each public situation
Consistency was constantly maintained.
Before watching crowds and in every consideration -
His testimony and integrity were sustained.

The Lord was with him in private and public -
He had learned the true value of faith.
When opportunities for pride rise it's easy to mistake
Your strength instead of God's grace.

There will be high points in life when all seems so well
That we can forget God is using our weakness
To bring blessing through us to others who fell -
And show out His grace through our meekness.

Wise behavior entails a genuine walk of humility
So there can be no charges laid against me.
Giving God all the glory and not crediting my ability,
Will allow me God's blessings to see.

Wise behavior in private true living before God
Keeps fellowship with God at the fore.
Other people will only know me as a man of my word -
But God will be able to trust me with more.

"O Faithful God, I thank Thee for Thy ways with me in the past in trusting me with the privilege of having spiritual victories. Now it seems my role is to be to support the strong that are bearing the yoke of the battle. Help me to be as committed to wise behavior at all times. Please keep me from foolishness and senile behavior I pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 19

WITHOUT A CAUSE

The changing, unpredictable actions of men when controlled by the flesh defy description because they are so unreasonable. When we consider the case of Saul and his antagonism and hatred toward David, we learn that his attitude was also known to his servants and his family. Bitterness and hatred reach beyond the depths of one's own soul and can take control of one's life and affect other people. In that way the bitterness in one person can "defile many." By its very nature its polluting influence can change all that is good that has happened, and overpowers it until all those affected are focused on what a bitter person says.

David had "behaved himself wisely" and that behavior established his reputation among the people of Israel as a man who could be trusted. The admiration of the people was resented by Saul to the extent that he wanted him killed. He had seen the victory over Goliath and was glad about that. Other battles had been won and David was now his son-in-law, and was apparently the only one who could soothe Saul's troubled spirit with his music. Still, Saul wanted him dead because he was the object of attention of others that Saul wanted for himself. When our Lord Jesus Christ was here faithfully doing "His Father's business," those motivated by religious flesh, and those "defiled" by their bitterness, wanted to kill "the Lord of glory." People had been blessed by Him in many ways and yet that "root of bitterness defiled many."

Jonathan, like a faithful disciple, was not turned aside from his love for David by the commands and will of his father. We are to "honor our father and mother," but when they want us to do what we know is not right, we are under a higher jurisdiction. A son should be respectful and helpful to his parents, but when they demand our obedience to violate God's laws, "we ought to obey God rather than man." Other servants' love

for David may have cooled or they feared Saul more that they loved David. But Jonathan made it a point to find a place and a way to "communicate" with David in fellowship.

When the time was right, he "confessed" David openly to his father. There are times when it is appropriate to testify openly to other people our association with our "heavenly David." It may be hard when those motivated by the flesh blaspheme the Lord's name and make a mockery of God's truth. But that may be the perfect time to interject "grace" that we have experienced into the conversation. Our testimony to the grace of God may not change the minds of people permanently, but like Jonathan with his father, "a soft answer" may turn away wrath for awhile.

We have to remember the flesh will always be in opposition to God along with its partners, the world and the devil. The flesh is at enmity with the Spirit of God and is not subject to the will of God. It is not in the nature of the flesh to submit to God even through at times it may seem to be subdued to it. That is only a temporary stop until it breaks out like cancer in another way and place.

When David returned to the palace of the king under the king's authority, he was again called upon to go to war against the Philistines, and again God was with him and gave victory in the battle. The bitter jealousy of Saul moved him to try to kill David again even when he was playing his harp to calm Saul. In a similar way the people of Nazareth who knew the Lord Jesus for thirty years when He lived among them, would have been aware of the uniqueness of His Person and His life. Still, when He read the scriptures in the synagogue and explained them publicly, they tried to kill Him. We may think we have finally got the victory over the flesh, but it attacks when we least expect it. As long as we are in the body and are in the world, our three-fold enemies will not stop trying to stop us in our life for God.

David realized that the time for reconciliation for Saul was passed. Reconciliation is impossible when we are dealing with ignorant and unruly men. There comes a time in some situations that arise, when we have to face the fact that there is no accommodation of the Spirit with the flesh, and we cannot reconcile ourselves to those things that please the flesh. Our only recourse in that situation is to leave without further confrontation and move on to do that which God has called us to do.

Even in his own house David was not safe from the effects of jealousy and hatred. He realized, even as he wrote the words of Psalm 59 at that time, that he needed God's deliverance, God's strength, God's mercy and God's power. When we find out those who oppose us are wanting to stop the work to which we have been called, we need to immediately turn to the Lord and get our directions from Him. It is hard on our pride to have to accept that which seems to be a defeat, but is a wise person who will "commit our way unto the Lord" knowing that He will sustain us. Others before us have had to live with infirmity, suffering and disappointment, and they have found the Lord is at their side even though others have forsaken them to please the flesh.

Some had experienced those in their own family and in the home, who would only commit themselves to going a certain distance and then they were left to go farther alone. The Lord experienced that with His family. David experienced that with Michal. She was brave enough to help him escape, but not brave enough to go with him. The idol she had kept in addition to David, now took David's place. It is possible to harbor something secretly in our lives, and when the going gets tough, to allow it to take the place of the Lord in our life. Once that happens, then usually excuses or even lies follow, and our fellowship with the Lord is broken.

Finally, David found the fellowship and safety he needed with the one person who could help and strengthen him in the Lord. Jonathan was devoted to him but was still with Saul. Michal loved him but was still in her home with only an image taking David's place. Samuel was already outside of the mainstream of the things of the world and flesh, and he was waiting to receive David. He knew what was going to happen and what to expect. Our Lord Jesus Christ was in the outside place when He was here. Now we are called to go "outside the camp" unto Him bearing His reproach. There were a few our Lord Jesus knew He could go to when He needed rest and fellowship when He was here. His friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary living in Bethany were there to share what they had with Him.

When David was at Naioth with Samuel, he was with those who were in fellowship with God. Even those who came three times to capture David under the direction of Saul (the flesh), submitted to the power of the Spirit of God who came on those in the "outside place." God's power is irresistible, and the stubborn, willful, rebellious man of the flesh had to bend, bow and strip himself before God who he had rejected. For a day and a night, the fleshly man, Saul, lay exposed in humility instead of pride; in weakness instead of triumph.

God's power can bring down the mighty to where he admits God is there in those of faith who live and practice the truth.

1st Samuel 19:23. *“And he went thither to Naioth in Ramah: and the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on, and prophesied, until he came to Naioth in Ramah.”*

KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD.

It's almost over, this year of full supply of daily grace.
That grace of God that makes our home a sacred place
Where we can experience much of God's mighty plan -
That He allows to be shared by such a simple man.

From north to south and east to west we've traveled -
Kept by the power of God, life unfolds orderly - not unraveled.
Our faith was strengthened, prayers were answered as God tended
To our needs - so as this year began - so by divine power it ended.

Fear could have claimed our attention - it certainly has before,
When those whose sense of the need of power lived in days of yore -
But God was near, allowing things purposed by His divine intention -
To bring us to praise and worship Him because of His holy intervention.

Now sitting here as the shadows that descended before the morning sun -
Now change their course and return up to the mountain peaks as this year's done.
I wonder at the beauty of creation that far excels my scope of mind -
And I wait to see and know the power of God as the days of a new year unwind.

I am caused to worship at the greatness of God's unique creation -
Far beyond the united effort of mankind to make some imitation.
So looking back I am full, as alone, I here adore Him and my Savior praise -
Looking ahead, watching light leave this valley, I anticipate and welcome coming days.

“O Holy God, I am conscious of Thy presence this last day of the year as I was the first day. I am watching the darkness rising to cover those impressive, snow-capped peaks of light, and in the same way as when I saw the light shine on them early this morning, so say I now, ‘O God, my God, how majestic are Thy ways, how marvelous beyond words Thy works, how gracious of Thee, Almighty God, to allow me to call Thee, Father.’ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Samuel 20

A COVENANT IS MADE

When covenants are made, two parties come to an agreement that has binding power on both. The interests of both parties are involved. Mutual agreement is reached and the form of making the covenant is agreed on. In Israel there was a covenant made by giving a shoe. Another was a salt covenant. There were blood covenants. The whole purpose was to establish a consensus in which mutual interests were shared. We are blessed by the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which is the basis of the "New Testament" (covenant).

The interaction of the two close friends, David and Jonathan, was solidified when they were brought into a covenant relationship before the Lord as the witness. To be able to be open and frank with each other is a benefit of a covenant because faults and well as blessings can be recognized and addressed. Openness is a characteristic of a covenant in which fellowship and mutual love is a reality. Words are not just passing thoughts but means whereby we communicate from a sincere heart. David and Jonathan had that when David came from Ramah to Gibeath to talk about the crisis that had come in David's life.

David was open about his concern as to what he had done to incur Saul's envy, jealousy and wrath. Jonathan on the other hand was either naive or blinded by family ties, to not know why his father was so bitter against David. Saul wanted to retain leadership of the kingdom in spite of God having chosen another person to be king, and he wanted to be able to pass the leadership of the kingdom on to Jonathan. Saul never really took God seriously. Jonathan in his guile-less way, realized David was going to be the king, and he was satisfied with that. Saul was not. Jonathan was able to love the man God loved. Saul was not.

In a similar way we can feel the sorrow and wounds of a friend who is going through times of serious difficulty. When we know a person well, we can empathize with them and would like to be able to help our friend bear the burden, or at least to ease the load.

At the beginning of David's public life, he was like "a sparrow alone upon the housetop," and "a pelican in the wilderness." He did not know what he had done wrong. It wasn't what he had done wrong that agitated Saul, but what he had done right. Our Lord, went through the same kind of abandonment, but He had no "lover and friend" to comfort Him. He truly had "done nothing amiss."

David was willing to die at the hand of his friend Jonathan if he had done wrong, because he was assured of the love of his friend who had proven to be true to him. To die for no reason at the hand of Saul made him to be only a victim of jealousy. The love of these two friends was confirmed when they were in the privacy of an open field. Jonathan bound himself to David in a covenant before the Lord. David saw himself as one about to die. Jonathan saw him by faith as one who was going to be the king upon the throne of the nation.

"We see Jesus" who was "despised and rejected of men," " now crowned with glory and honor." People of faith look beyond the cross, the grave and the waiting time, to the future when Jesus shall reign over all the earth. Jonathan got the assurance that when he was gone, David would "show kindness to the house of Saul" for Jonathan's sake. Mephibosheth came into that blessing at a later date. David was a "stranger" in his own country and among his own people, but he would be the one who would reign as the shepherd-king.

We are identified today as Christians, with One who is not accepted by most people as the Supreme Authority over the world. But this is only a temporary situation even though God has full control over all the affairs of men. In the future our Shepherd-King will bring the lasting peace that has been missing since the fall of man. When we stand for that which is right because of our love for the Lord, that will bring conflict from various sources. The flesh will say, "Up with man" and "You can change the world." The world says, "No fear. We have everything under control." The devil says, "No God for me. Do whatever pleases you."

In the face of such conflicts, one will have to stand up and declare themselves, and will have to leave their seat beside the Lord's empty seat at the table of the world, the flesh and the devil. The beginning and ending of the feast of the New Moon was not a happy time. There is no lasting joy at that table. A father, Saul, attempted to kill his son, Jonathan. in a fit of rage and envy. We cannot eat of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. We have to choose who we will follow. Ties will have to be broken. That is inevitable. Our Lord is dishonored now, but He should still "have the preeminence" among those who love Him.

When the time comes to face the fact that we "are not of the world," those who love the Lord supremely will have to walk away from those who want to retain ties to the world. Even though we admire and appreciate them and what they do, and have associated with them and care for them, and even though they are children of God, they have to live with the consequences of their choices and we have to make our choice to follow our Lord to the outside place.

It is not easy to walk alone in a different direction and path from those who have the same desires we have, but seek to do the work of the Lord in the way of their own choosing. David and Jonathan parted because Jonathan had earthly ties that held him. He could not bring himself to follow David into exile and leave his father. Saul was hostile to David, and if Jonathan followed him, Saul, in the power of sinful flesh, would be hostile to him even though he was his own son. Family allegiance is a good thing, but when it goes contrary to the word of God, our choice must be to follow the Lord to wherever He leads us.

The call from God to the outside place challenges us to leave all and follow Him. Jonathan shot his arrow "beyond," but was not willing to follow the direction the arrow pointed. True, the covenant had been made, but there was only so far, he was willing to go. "Let us go therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach."

1Samuel.20:18. *"Thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty."*

THE EMPTY SEAT.

The empty chair stands out above all others at the table; not because we can see all the beauty of its carvings but because someone is missing.

The empty chair seems out of place because it indicates someone should've been there and his place was set, but he is missing.

The empty chair surely reminds us that some kind of troublesome thing is happening, all is not well, because she is missing.

The empty chair draws attention to the empty space above it, because the familiar face, the words of fellowship, the song from the lips is missing.

The empty chair shows with the glare of a spotlight, the absence of the head bowed in worship that usually is there, the audible or inaudible fragrance of prayer is not rising in that spot, because someone is missing.

The empty chair means that the One who is in the midst of His people, looks and sees a blank place where usually there is the solid wall of full fellowship, because someone is missing.

Who is missing? The white-haired saint that sat there for over fifty years is now seated at a different table above, and though we miss that person, we are content that the presence of that person in the Father's house, is far better than here with us, and we are sad, but content.

Who is missing? The busy servant, off on the Master's business in some other area of the full-ripe field, is trying hard to get the harvest in before the judgment falls. We bow our heads and pray for the work in their hands and share in the labor as intercessors and ask for God's blessing on them, and we are glad, and content.

Who is missing? The caring shepherd sitting by the side of one who is hurting because of physical pain, the loss of a loved one, or a deep longing to be in that chair but can't, and we share with that shepherd, and are content.

Who is missing? The wayward soul, that thinks there are things more important, than heavenly manna, the Bread of God, the presence of the Lord, the use of their gift, the missing ingredient in the mixture of the body; and we bow our heads, and as one, are sad, and discontent. And then we pray, we intercede, we supplicate - and we wonder what happened, what can we do, how can we help? Because the chair is empty!

“O Father of all us failing and potentially wayward sheep: Keep us with a sense of who we are and where we belong. Move our conscience if we are at the seaside when we should be filling our seat. Disturb our peace if we are at home with a bitter spirit when we could be warmed at the fire of fellowship. Make us uncomfortable in whatever we are doing if it is possible that we could have been where we should be - in that seat. Help me understand the hurt of others when my seat is empty. Keep me from making a habit of the empty seat. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”

1st Samuel 21

WHEN FAITH SEEMS TO FAIL

In the freshness of youth and when the ways of the Lord with us are new and glorious, our faith is strong and we realize our own weakness and God's strength. At those times we can understand better the fact that God's strength is "made perfect in weakness." However, even the best of men can become preoccupied with themselves, their private lives, their personal difficulties and their ambitions. When that happens, we can make some bad decisions that lead to bad actions and bad consequences.

In David's flight from Saul, he goes to the priest who had moved the sanctuary of the Lord from Shiloh to Nob. Both the prophet and the priest were outside the mainstream of the nation, and now the rejection king is in the outside place as well. In our modern society including the religious systems, our Lord Jesus is outside of the practice of popular opinion that motivates religious groups to adapt to whatever pleases the people. They focus the practices of their organizations on what they think makes mankind better by trying to be as much like the worldly society as possible and still maintaining religious and biblical words. Political society wants to control the minds and actions of the citizens to "the majority rules" opinion. So, they make edicts and change laws to say what can or cannot be done based on the consensus of popular opinion.

David had either to a measure been influenced by the fleshly lifestyle of Saul's court, or had taken his eyes off God and succumbed to "the fear of man [which] bringeth a snare." When one begins to lie in order to get what he wants, or to escape certain consequences, he has started something that increases like a snowball. In the case of David and Ahimelech the priest, David's lies ultimately led to the death of eighty-five priests and tragedy to that small village.

The foreigner, Doeg the Edomite, who was chief herdsman for Saul, was there ready to betray David to the king as David wrote in Psalm 52. There are many in religious leadership taking their place in what they would claim is the house of God, who will readily betray the Lord and deny the truth of God's word for personal and religious advantage. The words they use may be scriptural terms but are not used in the context of scripture and are suited to their own opinions.

The Lord Jesus in when he was challenged because his disciples gathered food to eat from the grain field as they walked on the Sabbath day recalled this event. He said the food that was sanctified for the table of showbread, and a week later was for the use of the priests, was given to David and those who followed him. To do what is right and to save a life is of greater importance than to follow the formal observance of a law.

The rest we find in Christ does not depend on formal laws but on our willingness to take His yoke upon us and learn from Him who is "meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your soul. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." The provision for spiritual food we find in Christ is the "bread which came down from heaven." From Him we find we shall be satisfied and neither hunger nor thirst.

David had defeated Goliath some years earlier when he was young, and he had only a sling and a stone - and his confidence in God. Now he is looking for a sword to give him the power he needs. Once he had relied on the Lord by faith. It seems like he was now acting in the flesh by taking the huge sword that was used by a man of the flesh. Our greatest victories may be followed by our greatest defeats. When we get to the place where we think "we did it," instead of "GIVE GOD ALL THE GLORY," we are in a position where we can have a great downfall. Up until this time where Goliath's sword was kept was of no interest to David. He had won victories since defeating the giant and they were all done by the power of God who was with him. As long as he inquired of God and knew God's mind about a matter, he was safe. In this instance he did not do that.

The only way to avoid the undermining activities of those who oppose the work of God in our hand (like Doeg), or those who want us to fail personally, is to stay true to the word of God and be strong in our faith in Him. God in grace, knows what to do on our behalf in difficult situations and we need to turn to Him in faith and rest in the assurance that His grace is sufficient. There remains an on-going problem that will never leave us when we focus our attention on that which is behind us. There may even be a longing for something we left behind that we shouldn't have had in the first place. There may be fear that someone has instilled in us, and that cause for fear has long been removed but we don't know it. There may be a sense of guilt over what we have done and cannot change. Even though it has been confessed to God and forsaken, it still seeks to claim our attention.

When that happens, it is like we are "fleeing when no man pursueth." If we look ahead and take time to consider the choices we have, we can make a wise decision based on our faith in God and rational thought. We don't know the outcome of a matter but we can avoid the complications that await us if we act in haste without due consideration. David fled to a place he knew Saul would not come, a stronghold of the Philistines, but he did not consider what would happen. Perhaps he thought they would welcome him as a defector or deserter, and would overlook what he had done to them personally previously.

Our enemy, Satan, will take every opportunity to defeat us that he can. He will bring up failures of the past, or even use our victories and change them to his advantage. Our weakness at the moment makes us particularly vulnerable to his subtlety and deception. Fear of the future has been a tool he uses to paralyze us into compromise and inactivity. David even resorted to debasing himself in the eyes of his enemies until he became the object of mockery and derision.

If it weren't for the words of Psalms 34 and 56, we would think David had forgotten who he was and why he was here. Even though outwardly he seemed far away from God, when he came to Ahimelech, he knew "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears are open to their cry." He knew "The Lord delivereth them out of their troubles." Even when he was taken by the Philistines in Gath, his trust was in "The Most-High." "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee."

We learn from David that when our faith is failing and may be temporarily forgotten, when we "Cast (our) burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee..." is a real and precious promise that is as real and good for us as it was for him. In one way we may condemn David for his lies and defection to the enemy. We may think he had abandoned his faith in God. But when we find ourselves in the same kind of situations and resort to lies and half-truths to get out of a difficult dilemma, or even compromise a little to be accepted by friends, we need to do what David did and learn from the words expressed from his heart at that difficult time in his life.

1st Samuel 21:8. *"And David said unto Ahimelech, 'And is there not here under thine hand spear or sword? For I have neither brought my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste.'"*

THE KING'S BUSINESS.

There are some kings whose business is bad -
In arrogance and pride, they forget about God -
Or at best consider God to be somewhat of an equal -
Hoping they'll take His place if in the future there's a sequel.
How pitiful they are when without humility and grace -
They think there's something in them that gave them place.
They either don't think much beyond this day -
Or else don't consider God has the final say.

The King of kings, the One who is over all -
Has business going on to which I am called.
The kingdom consists now of people in every nation -
Some are poor and outcasts - others have situations.
His citizens have a commission they hasten to fulfill -
Often, they are rejected and some are even killed.
But haste is required - the end of earthly kingdoms is in sight
Then the darkness of the world gives way to the King's Holy Light.

What a privilege to be allowed to be in the King's business!
He sends us where He wants, to the rich or the homeless.
He has expansion in His mind that other kings don't have.
His kingdom is one of peace and the flag that waves is Love!
His servants are glad to serve for they are blest in His employ
They tend to His business in haste and serve Him with inner joy.
True servants act in haste for they know earth's kingdoms end.
When the King of kings is seen, all other kings to Him attend.

“Holy and Almighty God, I am made thoughtful this morning regarding the end of this age and the day of His appearing. A lot of things enter my mind about our future service. But then I remember I am to be faithful in what I am to do now, and what I do in the future is still the King's business. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Samuel 22

ADULLAM

David travelled back from Gath into Israel even though he was like a stranger and a foreigner in his own country. He must have known about the cave of Adullam from previous experiences in better days. Now it was of serious concern to his family that Saul would come seeking vengeance on David by attacking them. The insane king was by now openly opposed to David and it was known he would not rest until he killed his own son-in-law who had been a deliverer of Israel.

There may be times when a person who seeks to follow the Lord may find he is despised, forgotten or made an object of derision and jealousy by his own kinfolks. If that ever happens, do not act in haste and seek to retaliate. To argue and try to justify our call and actions to unreasonable people only exacerbates the problem. Just wait, and in God's own time and way, if He so desires, He will bring them to understand what you couldn't. It may be through circumstances in their lives, or yours, they will come to recognize the value of what you do and why you do it.

The coming of David's family may have comforted David somewhat, but he needed a place of safety for them to live where Saul would not reach them. The king of Moab allowed them to dwell at Mizpah where they wouldn't fear the persecution and oppression of Saul. Like our Lord who blessed those of His own who had belittled and overlooked Him, David, in grace brought them into a safe place. To many the outside place is belittled and overlooked as anything of importance, but we need to remember the object of our attraction isn't the place, but the Shepherd-King who is outside the camp, and we gather unto Him. He gathers His flock to Himself, not some great impressive edifice or huge organization. We are, and have been in a continuous sense, gathered together in His name unto Him alone.

According to the words of Psalm 142, David knew his only refuge and portion was the Lord Himself. The Lord heard his complaint, his supplication and knew his desperation, but also knew what David didn't know. We are perfectly within our rights as children of God to pour out our hearts to our Father in honesty and our frustration can be expressed to Him without fear of mockery or anger. But we also need to remember our wise, heavenly Father knows what is best for us and allows the difficulties to come on us that will best shape our character to be like Christ.

The cave of Adullam was for all those who joined David there, a place of separation. Those who were in trouble for one reason or another, and were outcasts of society, knew their only hope for the future was to

associate with David. We do not belong in the world even though we live in it. There is no hope for the people of God in the systems of the world. We need to be where our Lord is and find our rest and joy in Him. For David to make a useful army out of discontented men, called for a special kind of leadership. They would have to trust his judgment, accept him as undisputed leader and yield to his leadership. Those of us who have experienced the blessings of the kingdom of God, are definitely discontented with the self-seeking, godless leadership of the world and the flesh underneath the authority of the god of this world.

Those who follow the Lord will find themselves in a place of reproach where most comments about what we do and who we are will be negative. To respond in a similar negative way is counterproductive. In some of those hard times we will find ourselves in a place where we have sweet fellowship in ways we wouldn't expect. When we are in fellowship with God, usually we will find people with whom we can have fellowship, even if we never knew them before.

*"No matter where on earth we dwell,
On mountaintop or in the vale.
In cottage or in mansion fair,
Where Jesus is 'tis heaven there."*

David may have had to listen to a lot of grievances from those who came to him in the cave. He would be able to say to them, "I know. I've been there. But God comforted me, and strengthened me to go through those difficulties, and 'what He did for me, He'll do for you."

The prophet, Gad, also came to the cave. God brought His word through His servant, right to the right place and at the right time. Saul didn't hear the word of the Lord as he sat under a tree in Gibeah with his spear in his hand and railed against his own son, the priests, and the Benjamite guards. In the outside place, the cave of Adullam, God's word revealed His mind and what His true servant was to do. We can expect God to make plain to us His will when we are willing to do it with our might "as unto the Lord."

Forms and flesh do not give a place for the word of the Lord. In contrast the Spirit of God made references to this very event years later in the book of Isaiah chapter sixteen. David's family could stay in Moab, but by the word of the Lord for His servant, David was led by Him back to the wilderness of Judah. While in that wilderness he wrote the words of Psalm 63. His soul was thirsting for God. His flesh longed for God. His lips praised God. His hands were lifted up to God. His soul was satisfied with God. His mouth praised God. His bed was the place he meditated on God in the night. His help was God. He rejoiced in God.

Sometimes when we are in the place of our hardest physical and emotional stress is when we rise the highest in our spiritual experience. Much blessing has been passed on to God's people through the hard times David experienced.

When Saul called the priests from Nob to come to Gibeah because of the resentful report of Doeg, the Edomite, Saul's mental and emotional state was such that he unleashed a terrible vengeance on the priests, all the people of Nob and even on the animals. He did to the people of God what he was supposed to do to the enemies of God, the Amalekites. They were idolaters of the worse kind and were enemies of God. He cut off the last tie with God the people of Israel had. The absolute evil of this act, reveals what his heart was inwardly like toward God and His people. Sometimes a bit of pressure against those who seem to be quite alright outwardly, reveals what they are inwardly and "the dirt gushes out." Only Abiathar escaped to where David was and he became the priest during the reign of David.

The traitor, Doeg the Edomite, did to the people of God the bidding of one who was under the domination of sin and Satan. A person may hold a position of trust in the world, but if there is no fear of God, and only a desire to cater to and please the flesh, that person should never be trusted, not should their counsel be accepted by those who follow the Lord. When wolves come among the sheep, it is the sheep that die.

God allowed evil to come on His people to teach them that when they get what they want, they have to accept the consequences that go with it. If what they want is not what God wants, evil will flourish. God has not promised to abolish all the evil men have brought on themselves with their willful actions. We have as a nation, removed God from schools, government, our holidays, our homes, our families and in many places, our churches. "Up with man!" is the big momentum now, and lawlessness and evil now prevail. When God's word is thrown out, authority, righteous rule, and spiritual service is destroyed and evil gets worse and worse.

1st Samuel 22:23. *"Abide thou with me, fear not: for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard."*

SAFETY IN TIMES OF DANGER.

Sometimes it's out in the open where everyone can see.
At other times danger is subtle, plotting evil carefully.
The only safeguard is having One who knows what's next.
He who knows the end from beginning is the One who does protect.

Danger comes in different ways - it often wears disguises.
The plan is to seem most friendly before evil then surprises.
Watch out for the smile too big, or words that seem too smooth.
An enemy seeks to destroy and the working of God disprove.

The safeguard that we count on is the Person of our Lord.
He tells us to abide in Him and fear not the god of this world.
To resist evil power does work, under the authority of Jesus' name.
Those who walk righteously with Him, remove all reason to blame.

There are those who seek to destroy the work of God today.
If they can turn aside Christians, there is no telling what they will say.
Abiding in Christ is safety from charges the enemies make.
There is divine protection when following Him and the cross we take.

In times of outward danger, we usually can take our stand -
But when danger comes from within, we dare not look at man
To provide the needed safety that comes from God alone.
Abide closely and safely with the Lord and He'll see you safely home.

"I am thankful Lord God, to Thee for giving assurance of the abiding presence of God with us and our privilege of abiding in Him. May I be fruitful in this place because of what Thou art able to do through me. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 23

INQUIRE OF THE LORD

In the world in which we live there is need on every hand. Billions of people need to hear the Gospel and it is impossible for us to reach them all. Hungry men, women and children in many parts of the world are calling out for food. The medical needs of millions is well documented as well as the plight of refugees from many countries. How can we know where to go and what to do to meet such needs? We can learn a basic lesson from David when he was informed that the Philistines had taken the harvested grain right from the threshing floors of Keilah. Before taking any action, we need to get our guidance from God first.

In spite of the fact that it was Saul's responsibility to come and defend even a distant village on the far edge of Israel, the call for help came to David. He was the one with the heart of a shepherd who truly cared for the people of God. We may be distressed ourselves, and things are not going the way we had hoped, but when we are in touch with God, He enables us to meet the needs of others through divine intervention. Even though others with us may say, "We have enough trouble of our own without getting involved in anything else!" we still need to be ready to act under the guidance of God. Not all believers have the insight of faith to rise above what they see around them. There are times when we need to remember, "My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth."

When God gives us the directions we need and the encouragement to act in faith, we need to go forward at get at the work. Twice God assured David of the fact that he should deliver Keilah. "I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand" was all the guidance David needed. When we know God's will through His word, the counsel of others and the assuring guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can move forward in confidence and do what normally we would not do. The presence and power of God is all we need to defeat the enemy.

"Faith is the victory" that will keep us from being overcome by the pressures of religious systems that want us to accommodate to the desire of the natural man. The enemy would take away the spiritual food we need in order to grow and be strong in the Lord. There are some who would take away what God has given us by His divine provision and leave us with only chaff. When we act in faith and true dependence on God, He will give us the deliverance from the enemy that we need, and will give us power to serve Him as He chooses.

God did give David and his men the victory, and they brought back to the people of Keilah more than they lost. They brought cattle and the Philistines lost many people. God gave the victory, but it is a sad commentary on some unnamed person or persons that they told Saul that David was in the walled city of Keilah. Saul would have been willing to ruin the city and kill its inhabitants like he did in Nob, just to get

David. The bitterness and hatred of jealousy has no limits and is not satisfied with peace. Its demands are so great that nothing less than total vengeance is acceptable.

The implacable enemy of God will stop at nothing to bring down God's people. But God is faithful to His people. David did what we all should do in crisis situations. He talked the matter over with the Lord and submitted as a servant should to the word of the Lord. He placed himself into the keeping of the Lord, trusting Him for deliverance, and gave his praise to God.

Psalms 31 expresses the confidence David had in the Lord and we can expect the same results when we put our trust in Him. He will lead and guide us even as He did David. He will keep us out of the net which the enemy spreads as he seeks to trap us. How important it is that we commit our spirit to Him! The place into which we have been brought is a "large room!" even though we may be "a reproach" to those around who seem to be opposed to us because of our commitment to a literal interpretation of the word of God, and have it only as our source of information as to our conduct and practice.

When our trust is in the Lord our God, we are assured of the fact that our "times are in Thy hand" and He will deliver us from the enemies and persecution that people want to inflict on those who call upon the Lord alone. Saul, on the other hand, didn't know God. He acted first and claimed anything he thought was good as evidence of the blessing of God. Not everything we think is good really is. There are favorable people, things and circumstances that seem good to us at the time, which may be the very thing to stumble us and bring us down. Money has that tendency. So does popular opinion and words of praise from people. It is the Lord we love who preserves the faithful and deserves all the praise and glory. He is the One who gives us courage and strength of heart. Our hope is in Him, not other people nor ourselves.

While Saul was seeking David, Jonathan knew where to find him. True friends know how each other thinks. Jonathan knew where David was in the wilderness of Ziph and went to him to encourage him by "strengthening his hand in God." Jonathan knew God and he could see the future. His comment to David, "Fear not," would be an assurance to David of God's promises and purpose for him in relation to the kingdom. However, Jonathan's confidence and spiritual intelligence was not equal to his devotion to David. It is possible to know what is right and what we should do, but not do it because of the cost of previous relationships and ties to the religious and social world. We are called to "come out from among them and be separate."

The people of Ziph wanted the favor of the sitting king instead of the coming king. According to Psalm 54, "the strangers are risen up against me, and oppressors seek after my soul." When the darkness of Saul's heart cast its shadow, others were fearful, deceived and defiled. Treachery knows no limit when it appeals to the flesh. David found relief in "Thy name" when he was pursued by Saul and his army. He sensed God was his Helper and in God's own way and time, he was delivered. It is always well for us to remember "If God be for us, who can be against us." At those times we should do as David, "I will freely sacrifice unto Thee: I will praise Thy name, O Lord: for it is good."

1Samuel.23:16, 18. *"And Jonathan Saul's son arose and went to David in the wood, and strengthened his hand in God...and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house."*

OH, JONATHAN!

Into the wood Jonathan went, in strength and stealth, to one who was as dear as his life;
The place that he left, the home he that knew, filled with tension and fear and with strife;
And unhappiness, bitterness, intrigue and woe, with hatred and loss and with grief
Into the wood the best friend, to meet and to find, through God there to find sweet relief.

Their talk was of God, the Beginning and End, whose kingdom is sure to endure.
For their God had made known, to them both on their own; that for sure,
Saul's kingship he marred; he forfeited, flaunted and lost by sin's blur
When he inserted himself, nor fully obeyed, directives from God's holy throne.

So, they talked of the past, the future, the hopes, the promises sure from God's word.
They talked of the kingdom, the roles they would fill, the work they would share for the
Lord.

Deep in the dark wood, a covenant made with God as a witness that stood,
Their intention to see, that each one to be, all before God that he knew that he could.

But what's happening here; this surely cannot be, he's turning and walking away.
No Jonathan, No! Do not do this dread thing; be wise, with David do stay.
Surely Jonathan knows, that to turn from his friend, there will be a high price to pay.

As he looks at his back as he's walking away, David maybe to God then did pray.

"O Lord God, he's my friend, on him I depend; can it be that never again;
Will I look on his face, and in fellowship trace a kingdom that never shall end.
For it's from Thy own word, and its truth that I heard; that if I from Thy way will not bend.
Then in blessing, you'll bless from this kingdom you gave, with a kingdom that never shall
end."

"A King on His throne, far greater than mine, and a King far greater than I;
In righteousness reigns, and in holiness true, a kingdom with blood He did buy.
His throne is forever, His scepter is right; this King from Thy home in the sky;
Will finally bring peace to the earth, and with grace, this King will God's fullness supply."

But Jonathan; O, to his home he did go, and there in his home to abide;
Until Saul in his shame, in his sin and his blame, on Gilboa there he did die.
And Jonathan too, Abinadab and Malchishua, died sword in their hands at his side.
Earth's ties are so strong, that even when wrong, we find them so hard to untie.

So, Jonathan's name, we approve just the same as we too, to our children will give.
For his friend's love for him, was so strong that it seemed, that for him there's no end to his
grief.

"Jonathan went to his house", peace, hope and love to espouse, to the family to bring he
believed;

But when he turned away, from God's chosen that day, a line crossed that has no reprieve.

**"O Lord God, whose eternal friendship and joy we shall share: Help me to look
beyond today and tomorrow to the time all those who loved Thee and Thy name here,
will share in the kingdom glories that are yet in the future. "Our God reigns" is the
assurance we have that everything is under control by Thee, and Thy plans will be
accomplished. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."**

1st Samuel 24

GRACE WITHHOLDS - FAITH WAITS

The grace of God toward us is shadowed on occasions by faithful men and women who have shown grace to others in their lives. When mercy is demonstrated toward people who deserve judgment, grace is revealed in all its beauty. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who thou He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." This chapter reveals a wonderful example of grace as David responds with grace toward Saul who was determined to hunt him down and kill him.

The caves in the desert ravines of Engedi have been used by people for homes, tombs and places to keep their sheep in dangerous weather. It was to one of these large caves that can hold a lot of people that David and those following him found shelter and safety from the 3000 men who followed Saul looking for David. Engedi means "fountain of the goat," so in that place was a fountain of water to refresh the thirsty. God provided water from the rock in the wilderness for the children of Israel. He provided a fountain for David. For those who are spiritually thirsty like the woman at Sychar's well, we have water that springs up into everlasting life for us and it refreshes us as much after we are saved as it did when we first "drank of that life-giving stream."

The "rocks of the wild goats" was a place of safety for David and those who followed him to "the outside place." We too follow our Lord, who is "the Rock of our salvation" to where He leads us "outside the camp" unto Himself alone. Even though Christendom has the right words and does many good and helpful things to benefit the people, we still "gather unto Him, for who He is, not for what we do.

There were "sheepcotes" where there were caves that could protect the sheep from animals that would kill them and robbers who would steal them. Our Lord Jesus is "The Good Shepherd" who provides safety and defense for His own "sheep" who He "calls by name." There was "a way" (highway) which passed by the cave where David and his men were hidden, and which Saul must have been traveling when he turned into the cave. It was then the men of David interpreted the event as an opportunity from God to kill Saul. Vineyards were at Engedi according to the Song of Solomon, so there was fruit there for the satisfaction of those who were under the care of the shepherd of Israel who was called out by God "from the sheepcotes."

Little did Saul know that he was at death's door, and it was only that mercy won over judgment that he survived. Nature is always ready to take revenge when provoked. David's men were not ready to show mercy nor extend grace to Saul. The Lord Jesus did not want to call down fire from heaven to destroy those

Samaritans who rejected Him. There are times when our faith is tested and if we are not aware of what the scriptures say, we would act in the flesh even though it seems like God has opened a door. Many of God's people have had their faith tested and have passed with flying colors. A number of them are listed in Hebrews 11. Others have failed and we reap the consequences still today.

When David cut a piece of cloth from Saul's garment, even that act smote his conscience because he knew Saul had been anointed by God. The holy oil, evidence of the Holy Spirit, is what David viewed, not the unworthy person Saul was. Respect for those in authority is still to be shown, "the powers that be are ordained of God," but we are still under the higher authority of the Almighty God. We should never submit to pressures placed on us by men when they violate the laws of God. The sparing of Saul's life, David exposed Saul's heart to himself, as well as to those who were around him. When David bowed before Saul, he still acknowledged him as king. He did not challenge nor reproach Saul. He did not mock Saul nor give any evidence of anger or malice. He simply asked Saul not to believe the words of slander people had made against him, and with affection and respect, stated his innocence making his appeal to the Lord to judge which one was right.

David assured Saul he would not raise his hands against one God had anointed, and took his place as one who is as harmless as a dead dog and as insignificant as a flea. It takes more courage to do what is right than it does to take action against a person who is seeking to do us harm. Our Lord Jesus Christ never threatened those who brought suffering upon Him. He committed Himself to God who judges righteous judgment. This is what we should do as well, rather than seek vengeance or "our rights." Grace extends its kindness to those who do not deserve it, and mercy withholds judgment from those who do deserve it.

The hard heart of Saul may have been broken for a short time, but in spite of his tears of emotion and relief at having his life spared, he was still the same inside. His confession of evil in contrast to David's act of grace, and his vileness to David's righteousness sounded good. The future of David as leader made him conscious of the fact that his family might all die. He pleads for David to preserve his family name. He admitted to his guilt but did not repent of it nor turn from it.

"Saul went home" to Gibeah where he still listened to the evil counsel of the men of Ziph. David wisely went to "the hold" where there was safety from the underhanded deception of those who act in the flesh. There may be times when it seems like opposition and persecution are finally past but wisdom keeps a guard knowing that the flesh will not stop its campaign against the person who is guided by the Spirit. Psalm 7 gives David's response to all that happened there in Engedi. He still put his trust in the Lord, not a temporary peace with Saul. He was still committed to righteousness. He was still confident in the Lord as the One who judges righteously. He prayed for justice as he pictured the Lord as a Mighty Warrior and he sees the wicked fall into the pit they dug. He closes his thoughts about the events at Engedi with praise to the Lord who enabled him to act in righteousness. When we act in grace and the Lord brings events in life to a good conclusion, it is only right that we take time to praise the Lord and give Him thanks for taking control of us as well as those who may oppose.

1st Samuel 24:15. *"The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand."*

RESPONDING WHEN WRONGED.

How can barriers be broken down? How can breaches be mended?
What can be done to resolve problems? How can conflicts be ended?
What should one do when wronged? How can a wrong be made right?
What can be done to bring peace? How solve injustice with no fight?

Remember first, the Lord knows - to Him every cause is so plain.
Second, remember you are human, and normal human reaction restrain.
Third, stop, and pray committing the problem to an all-caring God.
Fourth, take time to consider if a solution is to be found in God's Word.

Don't speak too fast but just listen, to see if the claim has some merit.
If so, then you must face that fact, and if there is some blame, then bear it.
If not state your case very clearly, so if there is doubt then it is removed.
And if the offender is honest, then your case has been biblically solved.

Most often though, someone has an agenda, and you are in the way of his goal.
By integrity and grace in your conduct, you drove a stake in his soul.
So in order to justify himself, an attack will be made against you -
In faith commit the issue to God, He alone is able to take you through.

Many will not stop to reason, but you must act reasonably still.
Often, they will seek out the discontented, and with false charges their ears will fill.
Just go on quietly and trust in the Lord to bring out someday what is true.
That gives offenders no material to build false charges against you.

When asked by the curious for a reason such attacks against you are laid.
Respond simply by asking the source, and get a witness before further talk is made.
Then clarify plainly and briefly what your position in the conflict is -
And tell the questioner you've let the Lord make the solution to the problem His.

"It has happened to me Father God, and I thank Thee for the relief that came to my soul when I turned the matter over to Thee. I really don't know even now, the reasons behind some to these issues. But I know You do so I will leave the outcome with Thee and keep on doing what I believe is Thy will. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 25:1

THE GODLY MAN CEASETH

From childhood to old age Samuel was the spiritual link of the nation of Israel to God. The priesthood had failed and had been the scene of divine judgment on those who thought to do God's things in their own way. By the time of the death of Samuel, only Abiathar remained of the priesthood and he was with David in the place of rejection. Samuel had been rejected by the people who wanted a king like the nations around. He had welcomed Saul as king even though it meant he was replaced by a man of the flesh. He counseled and sought to give guidance to Saul into that which was right even when he realized that Saul was only a man of the people.

The man of God even when young, was established as a prophet of the Lord. He lived to see the deterioration of the nation to the extent that the insane king sought to kill the one who was anointed king after him. The heights of blessing to which Israel should have gone, was now a place of sorrow. Ramah, "the heights," which should have, and could have been the place of blessed fellowship with God for the nation, not just Samuel, now was a place of desolation and loss. As Psalm 12 begins, "Help, Lord: for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men." Perhaps David wrote those words at the death of Samuel when "all the Israelites were gathered together and lamented him." No one can really take the place of another. Samuel was a unique person chosen by God for a particular time in the life of the nation of Israel. Each of us has a role to fill and a work to do which is unique to us. We are not here "to fill the shoes" of one who lived their life for God. God raises up those He chooses to meet needs He alone knows.

There is a special impact on others of a godly life of one who has devoted his or her life to God and His people. The spiritual fragrance of that person's words and testimony is not ignored even by the most carnal of people. Saul may have been "head and shoulders" above the people, but Samuel was higher by far than Saul, when he was down on his knees in intercession for the failing king. Saul was essentially a self-centered, cowardly man who lived in the darkness of his own heart. How absurd it was for him, the king of a nation, to be leading an army of 3000 of his choice warriors in a search for a young patriot who had 600 men with him and was guarding the possessions of the people against marauding bands of those who would steal from them. David had won the hearts of the people as a true shepherd cares for his flock. His courage, his faith in God and his grace even toward the king who pursued him to the death, endeared him to those who knew him.

When there are tears shed at funerals like were shed at Samuel's funeral at Ramah, it is well that we take time to learn the lessons that can be learned best at "the house of mourning." We need to take time to consider the goals and motivation of our lives. We need to look ahead to the time remaining for us to see if there are changes we should make in order to better serve our Lord. We need to consider the needs of others and find out if we can be effective intercessors on their behalf like Samuel was to those of his day. We need to look beyond our death-day to make sure there is nothing we have left undone or of which we might be ashamed. If there are corrections to be made, we need to make them.

A person of faith who lives quietly and consistently in spite of all the turmoil going on in the world, has an influence on others that may not always be acknowledged but cannot be denied. Such a life lived for the Lord is of great value when it is reviewed in the light of the scriptures and history. The real worth of a person's life and labors may not be felt nor understood until after the Lord takes that person home. In the life of Samuel, we are impressed that the urgent prayer of a mother like Hannah, and the support of a father like

Elkanah, establishes a solid foundation for the life of their child. The consecration of a child to God does not mean that child will be perfect, but that that young person will grow up being conscious of God. Hopefully that child will appreciate what that means, and he or she will dedicate their life to the service of the Lord and His people in a way that is suitable to their characteristics and the teaching of the word of God.

There is a spiritual vacuum created when a man of God dies that needs to be filled as soon as possible. Saul was spiritually dead and had no guidance to give the nation that was of any value. Spiritual leadership was missing in Israel until David became the king. I expect David was one who greatly mourned the passing of Samuel, and so penned a psalm like Psalm 12 as a way of remembering the godliness and impact of a life lived for God in his day. From that place of mourning he went to Paran where God in grace met Hagar and Ishmael. It was there the children of Israel stopped when the cloud that guided them by day through the wilderness "rested." From Paran the spies were sent to search out the promised land. Mount Paran was where Moses said the Lord shined forth and came with "ten-thousands of saints." "He loved the people; all the saints are in Thy hand: and they sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words."

It was a good place to which David went because God was able to "shine" there again. It was there he met Abigail, and there she declared to David her faith in God, and in him as the future king. We may not always understand at first the significance of a place and event, but when we find our way to where God has been pleased to bless in the past, it may be, we are where He can bless in the present and in the future.

We mourn their passing, those ancient saints,
And wonder at our own future as we ponder
The worth, the value of those who lived with no complaint,
Even though many of the people of God do wander.
But then it comes to mind that even here and now
Our Gracious God remains eternally just the same.
In faith we take up the task not knowing how,
But trusting Him alone, we press on forward in Jesus' name.

We are not told of each event nor of what will be the end
Of these days of labor through which we presently are passing.
It is not up to us to know the final results, but His who us did send
To do His bidding day by day our tasks in faith compassing.
And when they come to remember us in some future day -
Hopefully they will be able to remember our faith,
And possibly, as they reminisce, they will be able to say,
"He was one who demonstrated daily God's redeeming grace."

I pray Father God, that when death-day comes for me, I will have left a positive legacy of some kind to my family and God's people that will bring glory to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 25:2-44

HOLD IT! HOLD IT!

When events take place in our lives that affect us personally, it isn't uncommon for us to act in haste as a reaction to our first impression. Or in that situation we may say and do things we will regret later because we didn't get counsel from others. It is the nature of the world to demean and despise the prayers of intercession the Lord's people make when an assembly comes together to pray about events taking place in the world. One of our most important obligations is to "pray for kings and those in authority." The general opinion of the world is to get out and campaign for the person or issue of your choice. To those people your vote is what counts, not your prayers.

Let us remember the church of God has our responsibility to the One who sits on the throne already. He is the One who sets up or puts down those who lead the people and the nations. When God's people pray, we go to the Source of Power and accept the outcome as a divine prerogative. Abigail is a beautiful example of an intercessor who with wisdom and grace makes a difference in the outcome of a matter.

The world like her husband Nabal (fool), is self-centered, conceited, impressed with its own importance and success. Its style is to "work hard and play hard." The impression given by Nabal was that he did everything, he was in control of everything that went on in his domain, and all other people and things were under his authority. He was unreasonable with his servants. He took his fine wife for granted as an earthly potentate would a person of his harem, and he must have thought he deserved the protection David and his men had provided for him day and night. Most people never stop to consider the Source of all their blessings. "The earth is the Lords' and the fullness thereof." Every blade of grass a sheep would eat, the remarkable way

every creature has been created by the Lord God, and even the way our bodies function is a testimony to the fact that we owe "all we are, and have, and hope to be," to God.

Nabal and those like him, do not consider their puny limitations, nor do they consider the limitless power and authority of God. Also, it is wise for us to not forget those who make life as we know it possible. Unseen people we will never meet make the social structure of our lives what it is. David and his men were not out in the open and obvious to Nabal and his servants, but their presence nearby was enough of an obstacle to any who would do harm, that his possessions were secure and safe. We should be generous in our support of those who protect us and make it possible for us to prosper and live in peace. The law may not demand us to show kindness to those who enable us to do what we do, and live in peace, and we may think our taxes are all we need to be concerned about. But there is an attitude of appreciation that should be shown toward those who make our lifestyle possible.

Nabal was seen as a "sheep-shearer," not a shepherd. Whenever we read about sheep shearing in the Bible, the scene is dark and evil abounds. The world feasts and "parties" at the "sheep shearing" time because they think they have been successful in themselves and "deserve some relaxation." It is often at the "house of feasting" that the excesses of the flesh take over and normal restraint, respect and dignity is lost under the influence of "wine and spirits." Sheep on the other hand, are seen in scripture as being led to "green pastures" by a caring shepherd. The Lord Jesus was in perfect fellowship with His Father during His life on earth. "I do always those things that please the Father." Also, they are seen as being patient when being sheared by the hands of the sheep-shearer. When He was taken and bound, He was "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened He not His mouth." Sheep are also seen as a sacrifice on the altar. On the cross at Calvary, He was "the Lamb as it had been slain;" "The One sacrifice for sin..." Our Lord Jesus Christ was all of these as well as being the Good Shepherd, who lay down His life for the sheep.

When asked by David's ten men for a portion to meet their needs in payment for the protection they provided, they came in peace and respectfully made the request on behalf of David. Nabal refused to give anything to his protectors and went so far as to insult him and challenge his loyalty to Israel because Saul was hunting him to kill him. The flesh always takes sides with other flesh. The flesh and Spirit are at enmity with each other. There is no way to satisfy both at the same time. The world's way is to maintain the status quo and if any changes are made, they should be changes to please us and give us what we want, not to bring about that which righteous living demands.

The men sent by David came in peace with a reasonable request that was easy to fulfill. However, Nabal did not just refuse their request but "railed on them" and scorned the message of peace they brought. When one "sets his heart" on riches, they are led away to self-satisfaction, rejecting of the grace and goodness of God. When we have been insulted and our good is evil spoken of, or when the attitude of foolish people is such that it makes us out to be fools, we are in danger of acting in the flesh in taking vengeance and retribution. But vengeance is not our right. "Vengeance is Mine," saith the Lord. David's anger at the insults and unfairness of Nabal is understandable from the standpoint of our humanity. But when anger takes control there is serious danger at hand. "Be ye angry and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," is a principle we must adhere to. That is a solemn reminder that anger and sin which go easily together, are nearby. To control anger when it arises is a fundamental response of a child of God whose lives in this evil society in which we are challenged to "stand up and fight for your rights." The sinning part was near when David took matters into his own hands, strapped on his sword and took 400 men with him determined to kill every male who belonged in Nabal's household. No wonder the frightened servants hurried to tell Abigail of the foolish words of her husband.

The work of the church is to act with grace and goodness as an intercessor when wrath seems to be righteously called for. Like Abigail, we know "Our Lord is now rejected, and by the world disowned." But now is not the time to insert our opinions and quick temper into the scene. "God is still on the throne," and He will deal with injustice, unfairness and evil in His own time. Abigail knew David was going to be the king. She knew him to be a man who though homeless, rejected and hated by Saul, was the man God was with and had anointed as the future king. He was "bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." God had securely bound him to live and reign, and his enemies would die.

Abigail was a woman of grace whose name means "The delight of the Father." She is a good Old Testament example of the New Testament church. She was a woman of common sense, good understanding and spiritual discernment. She knew God and knew God was with David. She was looking beyond the present events dealing with Nabal and Saul, and looked into the future. So she assumed responsibility of the "present distress" and took the necessary steps to allay the judgment that would fall on the males of her household, and the rash actions of David. When the danger Nabal and the men were in came to her

attention, she did not linger but quickly acted to meet the immediate need with wisdom, courage and honesty. In faith she did what she could and then trusted God to cause David to do what was right when she warned him of the consequences of his hasty action.

The present she brought was of greater value and power in every way than the swords David and his 400 men had strapped on to themselves. There is very good typical teaching relating to the different offerings to God in the gifts she brought. In these offerings of grace, and in her humble attitude toward the righteous anger of the avenger, she turned what could have been a fleshly act of a moment into an opportunity for God to accomplish His purposes both in her and David. The grace demonstrated by Abigail triumphs over the darkness of that scene as wisdom, faith and understanding of God, sheds light on the real issues that were at stake.

The paralyzing stroke that stopped Nabal and made him as still as a stone for ten days until he died, reminds us that God holds the key in life and death matters. The grace of Abigail brought blessing to her and through her to David. When dealing with difficult issues, especially in a family, patiently wait until the time is right, ask God for wisdom and accept His guidance. Then when the time comes for confrontation regarding sensitive matters, we will have the mind of God.

1st Samuel 25:32-33. *“And David said to Abigail, ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand.’”*

BLESSED BE THY ADVICE.

Without thought or consideration the fool brays like an ass -
Wealthy, sprawling, unkempt, unashamed, drunk -
His fat lips speak condemnation to himself -
Not brought by one he wronged - but the Lord!
Because anger was tempered by blessed advice.

Making charges without proof, challenging what is unknown
Perhaps pressured by someone seeking personal power -
And one takes pen to paper and identifies himself -
But regret is there as years pass, the conscience speaks - and some guilt
Because of refusal of blessed advice.

Contented though falsely charged, condemned but not sad -
Able to continue without wasting time in self-justification -
Not worrying about floating rumors or unfounded words -
Learning that silent lips don't sink a life-time of work -
Because contentment came from blessed advice.

Challenged to advance a cause because of men's opinion -
Determined to promote a personal conviction as a biblical one.
Willing to divide God's people, but called to a full stop.
Some things we must stand up for and some stand against -
Because wisdom comes from blessed advice.

“O God, I thank Thee for giving people ability to see beyond the moment. I thank Thee for wise instruction from my father and mother that I can remember now. I thank Thee for those who mentored me. I thank Thee for the blessing of a wife who has good common sense and who can give sound, spiritual, blessed advice. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Samuel 26

FAITH WAITS

In times when moral darkness is taking the ascendancy among people and nations, those of God's people who live by faith just don't fit in the normal course of society. Separation seems to be to those who love darkness, a indictment of the way they live and what they believe, so they want to eliminate that "thorn" in their sides. The Ziphites were up to their traitorous ways again when they told Saul of the new hiding place of David and those who were following him.

The smoldering resentment of Saul burst out again and he forgot all he had previously said to David and what he had promised. The flesh can never be trusted, no matter how civilized and pleasing it may seem. "Crocodile tears" of remorse do not mean much and are not evidence of repentance. The deep-seated

hatred of Saul for David never went away. He had neither honor, courage nor truth in him, but pursued his one ambition. He wanted to put out the light of faith that was obvious in David.

In faith David trusted God to kill the lion and the bear which had tried to take his sheep. In faith the Lord enabled the stone to strike the one unguarded part of Goliath's head. In faith he had trusted God to give victory over the Philistines on several occasions. Now in faith he waited for God to bring about the promise made in relation to his kingship. A three-year period of waiting and being hunted is a long time for one to be continually on guard. The stress of waiting is hard to endure when one is aware of the outcome ahead of time. We know in an overall sense what God is going to do. We just don't know when He is going to do it.

David did not panic nor was he ignorant of what Saul's intention was. He saw that Saul and the 3000 men with him had come to seek him out as they had before. He sent out spies to keep track of Saul's movements and he understood Saul's motivation. But in spite of all that was against him from men, David rested in faith that he would know what to do when the time came to take action. The waiting times of our Christian experience may be longer than our active times, but that does not mean failure. That is evidence of faith that is being tested, and that is not a bad thing.

When opportunities arise, faith acts in boldness to do that which is right even though it may be different from anything we or others have done before. The unexpected may have a greater impact than the commonplace on all who are involved if we break from an established routine. Some may question what we do and why we do it simply because it is out of the ordinary and doesn't always bring immediate results.

David and Abishai's visit to the center of Saul's camp where they were surrounded by danger, seems to have been an unnecessary action at first because it did not bring a conclusion to the event by killing Saul. When we make moral decisions, we should have a clear path in our mind as to what we are going to do and how far we are going to go before we yield to the temptation to act on what seems sensible to others. Abishai could not understand why David didn't bring the whole three-year ordeal to an end by killing Saul. When a person is led by the Spirit, that person knows what the scriptures say, and are not going to go against the mind of God for any reason. Saul was God's anointed king even though he was a failure because of his fleshly nature and the evil spirit having its way with him.

We should never rush ahead on our own initiative and do what we think is right only in our own minds. We need to adapt our actions to God's timing and His purposes which may be hidden from us at the moment. A civil war was not what God wanted between His people in Israel. Some people may be incompetent and untrustworthy, but some things God has to do Himself without our interference. We cannot ignore sin and wickedness, but we cannot either take matters into our own hands. When our hands are filled with a righteous work, we can expect God to guide us when we are to get involved in another work. When we boldly act in faith in the work in which we are involved, then we can take on another venture.

It is when we take an appropriate position of faith, we can leave the outcome of an issue with God. We may have to wait quite some time, and perhaps be frustrated to some degree, but we need to remember who we are and who we serve. When David took Saul's spear and water bottle, he made his point unmistakably to both Saul and Abner. Saul knew he could have died with his own spear through his heart. Abner knew he should have died for his carelessness, but behind it all was the Lord who caused a deep sleep to fall upon all 3000 men at one time. We don't know how God is going to work His sovereign will, but when we take the position of faith, we leave that to the Lord. There usually is an obvious action that we should take that keeps the ultimate goal in mind.

David's acts of grace and mercy toward Saul had a greater impact on everyone concerned, including the whole nation, than would have been accomplished if he had killed Saul. Saul knew David had been gracious to him. He knew David was popular among the people of the nation. He knew David was going to be the next king. But in spite of all of that he never repented even though he knew he had acted like a fool. He was never humbled before the Lord. He never asked for forgiveness from God nor from David, nor did he indicate in any way he trusted in the Lord. He never asked for David's intercession with God.

The faith of one who waits on the Lord will be vindicated. When we have to make a point to teach a lesson of some kind that seems to be in order, we need to think the whole matter through carefully. Then we need to be sure any action we take is consistent with the revealed will of God. Be creative in seeking a way to make plain what needs to be taught. Wait for an appropriate time and place to act. When we know what to do act boldly and quickly. Do not prolong a matter. Keep within spiritual and scriptural guidelines.

David gave Saul back his spear, and Saul likely understood the message implied that his spear was powerless against David. He had repeatedly tried to kill David with it, but it was really of no use to him because God was with David. The Lord is the "Righteous Judge" so the judgment of men is powerless before divine authority. David gave back the spear but not the water bottle because there would be no refreshment for Saul. A man of the flesh will never find satisfaction and refreshment in life so the water of refreshment was not returned to him.

This last face-to-face connection of Saul and David seems anti-climatic, but Psalm 54 that David wrote is a fitting and touching conclusion to the relationship between David and Saul, so David put his thoughts into words. "I will freely sacrifice unto Thee: I will praise Thy name, O Lord; for it is good. For He hath delivered me out of all trouble: and mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies."

1st Samuel 26:21. *"Then said Saul, 'I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.'"*

PLAYED THE FOOL.

It is not always the other person who does what he knows is wrong
Playing the fool is not always done by the weak, it happens to the strong.
If we have our eyes on the wrong persons or wrong goals -
It becomes quite easy to get careless and fast and loose with souls.

When we underestimate the wisdom and the abilities of others -
It is then temptations arise to act foolishly to cover
Our known inadequacies by trying to appear to others wise -
Perhaps not realizing playing the fool brings one down to size.

To take a dangerous dare that is made to me is very unreasonable.
Something like trying to make a tree bear fruit when it is still unseasonable.
Foolish actions are not always seen, but I know when they are done -
Because the results will sometime show that I was the foolish one.

When we act in haste, we often make a foolish choice.
We have acted without consideration of wisdom's quiet voice.
That is when we need to stop and give needed consideration
To the real issues that are involved and what will be the conclusion.

To avoid playing the fool I must think and pray and read -
Then to the voice of reason and sound advice I must pay heed.
To preen one's own ego before others hoping they will think you wise -
Is not only wishful thinking, but setting yourself up for a big surprise.

Don't listen to fools who pontificate; pay attention to the voice of God.
Never follow the steps of fools they'll lead to the "Slough of Despond."
Do not give place to a foolish thought or you will be a fool too -
Give the wisdom of God supremacy and He'll give wisdom to you.

"This humor problem I have Father, arises from time to time. For some reason I think I should have something to say that will make me more accepted. I pray today, not for a sour spirit or countenance but for a gracious spirit and perhaps some sanctified humor if it can be useful. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 27

FEAR OR FAITH?

None of us is immune from "the sin that doth so easily beset us." If we get to the place where the pressures of life around us and against us are so strong that we start looking at them and being consumed in our minds by them, unbelief is there to claim us. Then we start to look at events and people instead of at God. Then our fears become so real to us that we yield to them instead of looking above and beyond them. It is then we go down into the valley of doubt and the "Slough of Despond." Our feelings take over and our faith loses its power over us to the extent that we only see what is against us rather than what is for us.

For the second time David sought refuge among the enemies of God's people in the area of Israel that was held by the Philistines. He didn't go to Achish as a person who was out of his mind this time. Rather he went in such a way that the Philistine king thought he was abandoning his loyalty to Israel and was going to give his allegiance to the Philistines. Once we allow deception a place in our communication and relationships with others, it is very hard to stop at only a little deception and not go further.

Others of God's people have gone that way and their stories are told to us in the scriptures lest we exalt ourselves and say, "I would never do that." Elijah's boldness with Ahab was followed by his fear of Jezebel. Peter's confident affirmation of loyalty to the Lord in spite of what others might do was followed by his denial of the Lord three times to people just like himself. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." We are not better or stronger people than they were. We just have to be on guard and in control of our thoughts and senses lest we make the same mistakes - or worse.

David further solidified his position with Achish by raiding and totally destroying desert tribes. It would seem that Achish thought David and his men were raiding the Israelites in the areas that bordered Philistia. The downward course began when "David arose" after thinking "in his heart" instead of asking the Lord for guidance. To take action under the direction of the mind of our own sinful flesh, can make it easy for us to leave where the Lord has placed us. "David fled" to Gath from Saul and that path he followed was such that the fleshy enemy, Saul, no longer followed him. When we succumb to the power of our own flesh, the powerful fleshy interests around us no longer consider us a threat to them and will not fasten their attention on us to bring us down. We have already brought ourselves down. David was no longer a threat to Saul he thought, because he had left his place, his country and the place where God dwelt in the midst of His people.

"David dwelt" in that place under foreign domination for a year and four months, doing his own thing in his own way until the people of the world thought he would be totally abhorrent to his own people. He even settled in a place that had belonged to the tribe of Judah, but he was under the control of the Philistine king. It is always harder to get back to where God wants us than it is to leave, and it always takes longer to get back to where we can be trusted.

We might think we would never do what he did by moving away from where the Lord has placed His name, to a place more convenient to us, where we can make more money, but many of the Lord's people do. We try to justify our actions by saying to ourselves, and maybe to others, that God can use us there as witnesses for Him. But David did not inquire of the Lord as to his move before he actually had moved. He made his move because of fear not faith, and there was no good, honest testimony on his part as a result. We also need to remember when we make such a move on our own initiative without God's will taken into consideration, that there are others (he had 600 men beside women and children) who are affected by our choice.

God's people no matter who they are or how serious their need, must have the mind of God made clear to them in the scriptures or unmistakable circumstances or counsel from wise and godly people, before they take an action that will change their path in life. Abraham went to Egypt where there was no altar to worship the Lord, and came back with Hagar. That one act of his when faith was lacking, has affected the world negatively and it still does today. We do not read of David playing his harp in the land of the Philistines probably because he could not sing there. He may have been safe, but he was not happy. We may find a place where there are no problems at the moment and where nothing is expected of us. The living might be easy but the joy of the Lord will be missing if He has not led us there, and we are not conscious of His presence there.

The entanglements of being in the wrong place, and the dishonor and shame of being involved in the wrong things, are far greater dangers to us than any inconveniences we might have in the place of God's choosing. The world's security from perceived danger is a price too high to pay for us to leave God's people.

"What matters where on earth we dwell,
On mountain top or in the dell.
In cottage or in mansion fair,
Where Jesus is, 'tis heaven there."

But the pilgrim life to some of God's people seems to be too long and too insecure. When we get from the world "a place," the strings attached to it may mean all that we thought was important and we had, can be taken away in a moment of time.

Even in Ziklag, the city Achish gave to David and his followers, he had to live a lie in deception and duplicity. He was trying to enjoy the favors of the world and still have a connection with Israel in his heart. The world wants our significance to God and our relationship with Him and His people to be taken away. Half-hearted Christianity is not satisfactory to God, to His people or even to the watching world. We may think by doing some "Christian things" that it will make our profession of faith in Christ attractive. Unbelievers expect true Christians to be different than they are. They are not looking for Christians to see how much they can get

away with. Compromise is not hard to discern by unbelievers and deceitfulness turns people off of those who profess faith in Christ but live the same way as those of the world live.

Let us never lest the pressures of life, the deceitfulness of our own heart, or the conflicts that may arise among us as God's people to ever rob us of our peace, our testimony, or our spiritual power to live for the Lord. Let us never leave the place where God by His grace has placed us for anything that displaces our Lord as the Supreme Love of our life and the Sovereign Lord who we obey. "Faith is the victory that overcomes the world," and "The fear of man bringeth a snare."

1st Samuel 27:1. *"And David said in his heart, 'I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in the coast of Israel: so will I escape out of his hand.'"*

DANGERS OF DISCOURAGEMENT.

To take counsel only with self, can lead me away from God.
It not only affects our families but also those who believe our word.
We may justify a move from fear, or sometimes expediency -
And the place we choose to go is not where God wants us to be.

One thing leads to another when in discouragement choices are made -
Often the outcome of change is much worse than we previously had.
The new associations we make may lead us to act in the flesh -
And what we once knew was wrong, now seems to us the best.

Perhaps you will fall into a trap and you will get used to telling a lie.
Discouragement will pity oneself and wrong actions you justify.
The benefit you gained from leaving turns out to be a false hope -
What you had, you have lost, and now you're at the end of the rope.

When discouragement seems to overcome you, stop quietly for a day or two -
And seriously consider before God, the outcome and its affect on you.
Think also about how it will affect others, those who look for you to lead -
Then think mostly how it affects God, if His guidance you neglect to heed.

Discouragement is really sin; it happens when our eyes are off God.
Actions taken at that time often lead people to go down the wrong road.
There may be serious problems for awhile from which you want to escape -
But look further down the road of choice to see the end of the action you take.

God gives needed grace in the trials if we turn to Him and trust Him alone.
He promises not to forsake you and be with you till the testing is done.
There is always a way to escape discouragement if we give God the right of control.
And even if the difficulties remain, He promises rest to your soul.

"I have to admit Father, there are times when I have allowed discouragement to affect sound judgment. I ask Thee for help even now, as I am preparing for a series on a subject for which I have been criticized for speaking about. Please give me the wisdom to speak scripturally, properly and not be concerned about opinions. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 28

THE SHADOW OF DEATH

When any of us falls into the trap of deception, it is very hard to not go further in duplicity when other situations arise that will reveal our falsehood. One lie leads to others that have to be told to try to covert the first one. Before long we have gone so far down the road of fear that we start believing our own lies. David put himself into a position where he, the one anointed to be king over Israel, was told he had to be "the keeper of mine head" by the leader of one of Israel's greatest enemies. David did a word dance to try not to outwardly express a lie, yet it was said in such a way that Achish believed his allegiance had been given to him.

We should never lose sight of the path of faith on which we have been placed by God. In David's case, the Lord intervened on his behalf and preserved him from fighting against his own people. If we revert to the ways of the world, we may find ourselves opposing what God has established. If we take a false position, there are going to be consequences from which we will not be easily freed. God allows us to feel the pain of unbelief and His strong hand of correction when we act in fear and in the flesh instead of in faith. Losses of

peace, a calm spirit, our reputation, the value of our name, our family and our joy are often the consequences that follow reverting to the ways of the religious and secular world.

Samuel's death had caused the shadow of death to fall on the whole nation of Israel when they realized they had lost their connection with God and His mouthpiece to them because they demanded a king. When a nation or people turn away from the road of faith and the fear of God to their own way and the fear of man, there is a spiritual and moral shadow of darkness that descends upon them and that darkness covers the light in which they once lived. Obvious danger from strong enemies who have made their intention plain, also casts a dark shadow. The death of that nation is imminent if repentance and forsaking of sin doesn't soon happen. Even though Israel had gained great victories right in the place the Philistines had gathered, the past triumphs of faith did not bring about present victories. When we fail in our obedience and faith in the place where God has previously given us spiritual victories, there is a greater condemnation. "If that light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness."

To seek the Lord and for Him not to answer our plea, is a result of the actions of self-will and disobedience. Some people seem to think they can do what they want and ignore God and righteousness, but when they call on God, they think He is obligated to answer them in the way they want. The heart is involved when people finally search for God after their chosen course in life has brought them failure. "Ye shall seek Me and find Me, when ye search for Me with all your heart."

When Saul realized he was going to be attacked by the Philistines, and he knew God was no longer with him, instead of repenting of his sin and turning in humility and contrition to God, he turned to that which God condemned. He did not pray to God nor did he bow his heart in conviction of sin and call on God for mercy. Instead he bowed in fear before an old woman who was a witch. How sad it is to see how far away from God a person can go who was once blessed by God. In Saul's wretched condition of soul, he said, "God is departed from me." How much better it would have been if he had admitted, "I have departed from God." "A broken and contrite heart Thou wilt not despise, O God." Even though Saul knew God was not with him he did not call on the name of the Lord but called on the power of darkness that lurks in the shadows of death. When one has rejected and refused God, when things go wrong, they call on God and blame Him for not getting them out of the awful situation they have brought upon themselves.

Saul went to the wrong place, knocked on the wrong door, came in the wrong way and said the wrong things. We may make a great show of opposing sin like Saul did when he drove the wizards, witches and those who dealt with spirits out of the land. But if one's heart is not right with God, the very sin we denounce may take the place of that which is right in our own lives. Difficulties and obstacles in life are often allowed by God to turn us back to Him when we have strayed away. To turn to anything else for satisfaction and peace is futile. It will take us even farther away. God reveals Himself to us through the Bible, the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is preached in fellowship with Him. God's ways are not confusing, strange or difficult to understand. But what God says, He means. "He will by no means clear the guilty." God does not overlook sin.

In whatever way the message came from Samuel, whether God allowed Saul in some way to hear him, or whether it was some impersonation, the message was clear. Saul was done. He was at the end of the road of disobedience, self-centeredness and self-will. It is understandable that he was terrified and prostrated himself in fear and weakness on the ground. He had put himself ahead of God and that always leads to failure. The message of Samuel had such an effect on him that weakness and fear made him immobile. Instead of strength from the Lord, the food the witch gave him gave him enough strength to get up and go into the valley of the shadow of death where he desperately feared the evil that would come on him. The contrast is for those who know the Lord, they "fear no evil for Thou art with me" when they go through the "valley of the shadow of death."

When Saul was lying in the dirt of earth in fear, the shadows of hell were already on him, and in his soul. He is brought down in terrible fear as coming judgment looms before him from which there is no escape. Another Saul, Saul of Tarsus, also fell to the earth but not because of darkness. Rather there was a light above the brightness of the sun, and he was blinded by the glory of God in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. The first Saul was going down into darkness. The other Saul went into the light that leads to eternal day.

To go our own way and act only in our own interests may seem expedient now, but that path leads to the shadow of darkness now and fear in the future. To go God's way and walk in faith with the "Light of Life," is to walk daily "in the light as He is in the light" and to have sweet fellowship with the people of God who are also walking in the light.

1st Samuel 28:3. *"Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him, and buried him in Ramah, even in his own city."*

SAMUEL WAS DEAD.

He was an answer to prayer at the beginning of life -
He had a mother who prayed with sincere and true faith -
She knew the nation was in seriously deep strait -
Desperately in need of a time of God's grace.,

God answered precisely with a boy she named "Samuel" -
A lifetime reminder that "God heard" and answered prayer.
Judging the nation with faith, he was truly a channel -
Whenever God spoke His servant, Samuel was there.

When that kind of life is over all feel the loss -
Spiritual men have more power than a king.
With prayers of intercession, they willingly pay the cost
Of being hated by others when bad news they must bring.

We dare not be silent when speaking for God -
He has appointed us for this service to do.
People need a voice to speak the truth of God's Word -
They need to remember God takes count of them too.

When such a voice is silenced from among us by death -
May we all be ready personally to hear
What God says to me, I can be sure what is said -
Is His truth when "Thus said the Lord" is there.

"Heavenly Father, looking back over my life, I wonder what really will be remembered and what will have been effective during the years of my life. The best that I can expect is that You will believe my life was worth the living. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 29

THE NET OF INCONSISTENCY

The whole course and bent of a life lived for God can be changed by one act of inconsistency. One's reputation and good name can be lost when we "weave webs" of our own making because of "the fear of man." It is in the times of need and discouragement we need God's guidance and assurance in a special way. If we are not careful and conscious of our own weakness and inability, we sadly take matters into our own hands. In those dangerous times we can make a decision that ruins our Christian testimony, our reputation and our self-respect.

David and his men were following the army of the Philistines right beside Achish the king, as a body-guard. The same man who had delivered Israel from these very people had joined with them, and for over a year had identified himself with them. What would have been his thoughts as he drew near to Aphek and realized that just across there at Jezreel was Saul, the anointed king who he had spared before because of his consciousness of God with him. Jonathan, his closest friend was just over there getting his armor ready to do battle. What would he do if they met on the battlefield? Brothers and kinfolks were in that army they were facing and going to do battle against. Those were the people he had been anointed to lead - and here he was preparing to fight them. One wonders at how far a person can go when they abandon the path of faith and go against their own conscience.

It is possible for us to put ourselves in such a position when we are away from the Lord, that we find ourselves trapped in a web of our own making. Discouragement that comes when we allow ourselves to take our eyes of faith off of God; deceit that follows discouragement creates further strands of ties to the world that entangle us; and lies that we think make things easier for us, form a net of our own making that surrounds us. In such a condition of soul and life we find we are helpless and unable to extricate ourselves from the bondage in which we are found. We cannot escape from the claims of our own inconsistency.

The grace of God worked on David's behalf through the suspicion of other Philistine leaders who wisely asked, "What do these Hebrews here?" The pride and jealousy of others was used by God to cut the bonds of inconsistency David had made for himself and those who followed him. "What are Christians doing in this place?" could well be asked by those who love the world, live in the world and think like the world, rightly ask

when a child of God shows up at some event or place that is inconsistent with the life of a Christian. Those love the world know there is no real connection between real Christianity and those who love God, with them. Our lives are different. Our goals are different. Our words should be different and our attitude is different. What would a Christian be doing in a place where non-Christian activities are going on. As believers in Christ, we should never be found where we would not be content to have our Lord with us.

David was not led by the Lord when he went down to the Philistines and he was not led by the Lord to go with them to do battle with Israel. How gracious it was of God to use his enemies to stop his backsliding and willful actions. He probably had a good conscience for the first time in a year when he was sent back to Ziklag. There may have even been a glimmer of light in his soul when he and those who followed him got an early start to get away from the place where his own snare would have captured him and the consequences of his lack of faith would have been poured out on him.

When we are rescued from the path of our own self-will and are delivered from the effects of our unbelief, we are in a position where we can start over and begin in a humble way to regain lost ground and the "years the locusts have eaten." We can do nothing about the lost fellowship, of no significant communion with God, of no song in our hearts that is a result of going our own way without divine guidance. But we can begin again with our God of recovery. "If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Probably the greatest loss we cause is to dishonor God with our disobedience, doubts and fears because we acted independently. When God in grace brings a stop to our willfulness, even though we may be embarrassed and ashamed, we really are glad that we have been stopped. It is then we are in a condition of soul because of repentance and humility to turn again to the Lord and seek the face of God. There will be consequences we have to accept that cannot be avoided, but sometimes those scars left on us will remind us of a time we never want repeated. Inconsistency may not seem all that important until we have passed through the "Aphek experience," and then we will realize the seriousness of what we have done.

1st Samuel 29: 3. *"Then said the princes of the Philistines, 'What do these Hebrews here?' And Achish said unto the princes of the Philistines, 'Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days, or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day?'"*

WHAT DO THESE HEBREWS HERE? 1st

God called them out from among the nations of men -
He called them to be for Him alone.
The same is for us as it was for them -
He has separated us to be singularly His own.
We don't belong with the warring crowd -
Who oppose God's righteousness and truth.
The cause we serve has already been won -
Our public place is where we show God's glory forth.

What are you doing here with this noisy crowd?
Who have released restraint as they seek for fun?
This is not a place for you it is much too loud
For one who claims to be linked with God's own Son.
You will normally enjoy God in a quiet place -
Not where people live for a momentary pleasure.
A believer's joy comes when living by faith -
The Spirit reveals God, and His grace without measure.

From every persuasion, creeds and opinions men form -
They come together to find some common ground.
Leave a conviction here; forsake what is the biblical norm -
And with a few "feel-good" things they hope you'll come around.
So why are these "Hebrews," these "called-out" ones here?
Has God called us to join what He called us out of before?
No, we are separated, it is to Him we draw near -
And stay with our Lord on the "promised land's" shore.

"There certainly is pressure Father God, to "cross-pollinate" with the warring world, the entertaining world and the religious world. But Thou hast called us to come out from among them and be separate. Give us grace and wisdom to do that very thing. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 30

INQUIRE OF THE LORD

When we have experienced God in our lives and have enjoyed His guidance and fellowship, if we allow anything to come in between us, there is a high price to pay. David's path of disobedience and association with the Philistines brought disaster instead of deliverance to him. It was a good thing that he was able to avoid going with the Philistines to battle against Israel. And it was a good thing to quickly leave the scene early in the morning to start the one hundred-mile three-day journey from Apeh to Ziklag. If we are stopped by our Lord on the path of self-will and disobedience, that is a good thing. But it does not mean we will escape the consequences of our actions of disobedience. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," is not just a verse in the Bible, but it is a principle of life.

Instead of a glad welcome from wives and children, David and his men saw nothing but ashes. The powers of darkness take advantage, when one, even a child of God, pursues their own path of self-interest, self-opinion and self-preservation rather than the path of faith. God allows the wall of defense around His people to be breached in order to teach us needed lessons that we have not been willing to learn by reading His word and being led by the Holy Spirit. Gloom and defeat, disappointment and disaster may be needed to get our attention and bring us to face ourselves.

Often in such times of despair we look for someone to blame for that which has happened to us. If we criticize someone else and use them as a scapegoat for our mistakes instead of taking the blame for our own actions, it will only be a short time when the lesson will have to be learned again. Instead of avoiding our guilt, we should face it, repent of it to God and in faith, look for a solution to the problems we have caused by our willfulness. David's grief-stricken men turned on him to the extent they were willing to kill him. David wisely turned back to God, and finally came in humiliation and grief - but trust, to the only One who could aid him in his despair and bring about a true recovery. The recovery began with him "encouraging himself in the Lord his God." When everything that tied him to earth was gone, all he had was *his* God. The shock of his loss brought his unbelief to an end in which all he could do was "enquire of the Lord." There was no one to whom he could turn; there was nothing he could do by the force of his own will. He had nothing left but God.

How gracious it is of our God to remain within calling distance of a "wayfaring man." In our helplessness God can guide us when all other attractions and opinions have failed and been removed. It is in times like this that specific requests are in order and specific answers can be expected. The true and honest heart that seeks the Lord, will find the way open before us, even though it may lead to and through conflict and pain. Fellowship with others is sure to be a great encouragement even though their involvement in the work may be much different than that to which we are called. It is a principle that those who support the work and what is done by others are as much a part of that work as those who are publicly seen. To quietly bear the burdens and weight of support is as important as engaging in the public acts of leading, teaching and preaching.

In the outreach of the work of the Lord, we need to be careful to consider every person we contact as of equal value. Children are as important as adults. The poor are as important as the rich and should be treated equally. The simple man and the intellectual are both precious to God. The illiterate and the educated are each of value in the kingdom of God. The Egyptian slave of the hard-hearted Amalekite was spared and served to guide David and the four hundred men with him to the place where they could defeat the Amalekites. When we minister with grace and mercy to the needs of others, we will find God ministering with grace and mercy to us.

David had learned from his own servitude to Saul and Achish, both hard kings, how to act in kindness to those who were in a similar condition to the one in which he was found. God is a God of restoration and His grace abounds much more where sin abounds. What joy there was when God gave them the great victory over the Amalekite raiders. David and the four hundred men with him defeated them all and the remaining survivors, four hundred young men, escaped on camels. Everything was recovered that was lost and great plunder as well was taken. God completely reversed the effects of David's unbelief, and David gave God all the glory.

Even more than that, David showed his appreciation to those who had sheltered him in the past when he was being chased by Saul, by giving them part of what had been taken from the Amalekites. When he said to them, "Behold, a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the Lord," he was again acting as a shepherd of God's people. Acts of kindness done to others as a demonstration of our appreciation for who they are or what they have done, is never out of date. All we are and have, we have received from the Lord.

We owe everything to our Lord and we serve Him when we meet the needs of others. Ministering to the needs of the weak brother or needy sister who is in difficult situations, is acting as our Lord Jesus did when He was here on earth among the people. He has left us an example that "we should follow in His steps."

At Ziklag where David's loss of faith and his failure to walk as God's anointed king should have taken place, was also the place of his recovery. Where everything is taken away from us is the place to which we should return and in faith return to our faithful Lord. God's faithfulness to us and His unchanging purposes for us, often is demonstrated there, and we return to living by faith. To inquire of the Lord when we sense a cooling of our interest in spiritual things, and an embarrassment when we are marked out as a servant of the Lord, is a wise first step to stop a downward drift in our lives. When we have called a halt and identified problem areas that we know are potentially damaging to our testimony, then real repentance to God and a real commitment to live by faith is the challenge to which we must give heed.

1st Samuel 30:6. *"And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."*

ENCOURAGED HIMSELF IN THE LORD HIS GOD.

All you had is gone those you love are taken -
Where can one turn for some hope?
Let us never forget nor ever be mistaken
God is near, He hears our cry, rise up - no longer mope -
He knows every reason and arranges every season
To bring about a plan of His own.
We may not understand the purpose or what will please Him
Until His "David" will sit on His throne.

But available to us at any or all times -
Is encouragement to be found in the Lord.
When the sky seems dark and we want sunshine -
We can find needed encouragement in His Word.
God is ready to answer when to Him I call -
He is waiting for me in faith to take a step.
From Him comes the power before which all men fall
And victory is there awaiting us yet.

I can be encouraged when what I pray is specific -
God is faithful to defeat every foe.
His Word also encourages telling how I can get it -
When in myself I hardly know which way to go.
Even though it seems we are near to the rope's end -
Something sent from God comes to us.
And the plans I made I hasten to amend -
Knowing God in Himself wants to bless.

With assurance, I trust, leaving the problem to Him -
He does far more than I could ever ask or think.
What needs to be done - He will deal well with them -
And I am able to turn away from the brink
Of making a mistake so serious and do not look back:
Thank God for dealing with me by His grace
And filling me with the wisdom I lack -
And now bids me move forward with Him in faith.

"Father, I have been greatly encouraged these last four days by observing Thy controlling power even over the storms and weather as we crossed the country. Great is Thy faithfulness and kindness to us. Thanks so much, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Samuel 31

ENDINGS

The beginning of 1st Samuel has a woman praying for a son who would bring the nation back to the Lord their God. The Lord answered her earnest, passionate prayer with Samuel coming into the world by divine sovereignty. As a small boy at the beginning of his life learns what faith is, he prays, "Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth." What a contrast at the ending of this book where Saul the king, standing head and shoulders above the people, is cut down on the side of Mount Gilboa and falls on his own sword and dies in

disgrace. Samuel was dedicated to the Lord. Saul only considered himself. A revival at the beginning of a work doesn't guarantee a victorious ending. It is possible that we will live to see a drift so far away from truth, from God and His word, that we will not be able to survive the opposition that will arise against the people of God. Thankfully the church will be gone before the Tribulation spreads its evil over the whole world that has rejected the authority of God. In a favored nation like ours, we may personally experience the rotten fruit of our own self-indulgence and self-will.

David emerged from the darkness of fear, unbelief and self-absorption, into the light of God again speaking to him and working on his behalf to bring victory over the Amalekites. At the same time Saul went into the moral darkness of communicating with the powers of hell; then into the personal darkness of paralyzing fear; then into the physical darkness of death when he lost the battle and took his own life; and then into eternal darkness of one who does not know God, and even at the end of his life, does not call on God.

In self-will there is a sense in which disobedience has a claim on us that binds us and blinds us to the light of truth. When we are yielded to God's will, even if we have been away from Him for awhile because of a lack of faith, the light and freedom to serve our Lord becomes a joy that again gives meaning and purpose to all we do. One who is big in their own eyes is very small and insignificant in the eyes of God. Such a person cannot be trusted with anything of value nor can they be given a spiritual work to accomplish. To give orders to others and look good on the outside may create a certain amount of fearful obedience in people. But when that is the case, respect and allegiance will be superficial and temporary or perhaps totally missing, and the outcome of such directions will bring disaster. When there is moral decay within, it will not be too long before the effects of that will be seen outwardly.

If a person has the right relationship with the Lord and lives in fellowship with Him, that strength of character and life will produce respect, honor and allegiance that can be counted upon even in the battles of life and service. It was a sad scene on Mount Gilboa, the very place Gideon had defeated the Midianites with three hundred men, where Saul's last battle was the place of his death. Israelite bodies lay on the ground among which were three of Saul's sons. Poor Jonathan's feet would not follow his heart to follow David. If we could look up that hill, we would have seen the tall king struck by an enemy arrow, looking over the battlefield to which his path of disobedience had led. Rather than suffer torture like Samson at the hands of the Philistines, Saul fell on his own sword and died after one last look. What sorrow he must have felt!! What regret!! How much more the sadness when there was no evidence of repentance - only guilt. Guilt is a real thing and is valuable when it leads us to the place of repentance toward God. Without that, to die with a sense of guilt on the soul must be terrible.

Saul died without saying anything about God or calling on His name. At death we have to face what we really are before Him. The actions and attitude of Saul had a disastrous effect on many others. Those who did not die there, fled the area and the Philistines took their cities and moved in. Instead of him leading the people of Israel to overthrow them, they overthrew him and took the land and cities that belonged to Israel. If we allow evil and compromise to continue in our lives, they will become so much a part of us that we will be controlled by them. Saul, the man of the flesh who the Israelites thought would be their ideal king, turned out to be a self-centered man of the world. The people found out that having a king like other nations, and doing things in the way of the world, did not solve their problems, nor did it bring happiness and peace.

No matter how attractive the social world may seem to a child of God, it will never give us satisfaction. No matter how appealing the religious world may seem, that will not bring peace to the heart and mind of one who belongs to the kingdom of God. No matter how much attraction the politics of the world holds for us, a genuine, Christ-exalting Christian realizes the world is getting worse, and the best thing we can do to be a help is to "pray for the powers that be that are ordained of God." "The mighty were fallen" that day, but amidst the darkness that settled over the nation because Saul was dead, there was one believer who had been away from God and had returned in faith to the Lord. From David there was a glimmer of light shining around the far edges of the nation when he returned lost property to the people of Judah and other cities.

The life of faith begins with a consciousness of God in us and then spreads to an awareness of God among His people. Each passing day gives us opportunities to build upon the strength of the day before. Constant, daily obedience and consistent faith provides a basis on which faith can be demonstrated a little here and a little there. When put together with the lives of others of God's people, like candles of light all over the world their testimony shows the way of the path of life that leads to God. When the last "Philistine" has been dealt with, our "David" will sit upon David's throne and bring peace and light that will shine all over the earth.

The ending will be successful even as was the beginning. It is in these interim times that God's people need to lead consistent lives "in all godliness and honesty." Failing people may darken the glory that should have

been, but our God will give the final victory at the end. He is a faithful God who intends us to be faithful to Him and "His dear cause."

1st Samuel 31:6. *"So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together."*

SO, SAUL DIED.

He started out with humility
Standing high above others in his dignity
He was the man God chose in his youth.
Though strong, he led carefully
Trusting God to use him mightily
His leadership began fearing God in truth.

It wasn't many years later when temptation grew strong
He was "the leader" and thought he could do no wrong
Instead of obeying he thought he'd sacrifice.
He didn't hearken but chose to do things his own way
And God, through him, had nothing to say
To disobey God is the end of a useful life.

Now deep in his spirit is darkness, not light
The future got dark where once it was bright
The first king made a terrible choice.
His disobedience affected others, the nation, his sons
They followed him and died, his reign was done
The result of ignoring God's voice.

It is very unwise when God calls us to a work
To in any way at all His commission to shirk
God is serious about what He wants us to do.
Never let it be said, "The work went to his head"
Others are following, be wise for they are led
And take their direction from you.

We do have influence and some may follow
Be careful and considerate in what you allow
Others are watching and learning each day.
Step out in faith, make it know in God you trust
If some drop by the way, to stay faithful you must
Or there will be fateful consequences to pay.

"O gracious God, I thank Thee this morning for all the ways Thou hast led me until now. I pray I will be faithful all the way to the end of life's road. If there are those I influence today, may that influence be able to honor and glorify Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."