

CONFESSION OF SIN, FORGIVENESS, VICTORY

– FEBRUARY 28. – 1 SAMUEL 7:3-17. –

SAMUEL, PROPHET AND JUDGE – HIS INFLUENCE FOR GOOD – ISRAEL BECAME PENITENT – A CONVENTION AT MOUNT MIZPEH – THE WATCH TOWER – FASTING AND PRAYER – GOD'S FAVOR RETURNED – PHILISTINES REBUKED – ISRAEL BLESSED UNDER SAMUEL'S JUDGESHIP – A CIRCUIT JUDGE.

"Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." – 1 Samuel 7:12.

SAMUEL the Prophet might serve Eli the Priest, but he could not become his successor, because not of the priestly family. It is probable therefore that, as he reached maturity, he found other service; but there is a blank in the record of twenty years at least. The intimation, however, is that he was faithful to God and to the interests of his people, and that the people trusted him as a servant of God. We may be sure, therefore, that he was not idle, but engaged in some good work. Quite possibly he engaged himself in instructing the people respecting their wrong conditions, the permission of idolatry amongst them, their neglect of God, etc.

Our lesson introduces him to us as the leader of the hour, when the people had become thoroughly aroused to a sense of their unholiness, their need of God, and their need of mutual help if they would come back into relationship with God. Having brought the people to this proper condition of mind, the Prophet Samuel appointed a general meeting at a small mountain called Mizpeh; that is, Watch Tower. They came in considerable numbers and with hearts bowed down with grief in recognition that they were sinners, and that therefore they had been foreigners – out of Divine favor. They came seeking God, and He was found of them.

A GREAT REFORMATION EFFECTED

The Prophet Samuel put the matter before the people in plain, distinct terms, saying, "If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." Samuel was warranted in telling the people that they would be delivered from the power of the Philistines; because this was God's standing agreement with them by the Covenant He entered into with them; namely, that if they would obey His Laws and be loyal to Him, He would be their **[R5627 : page 44]** God and they would be His people, and He would guide their interests to their highest welfare, both as a nation and as individuals; but if they would not obey His statutes and be loyal to Him, then He would deliver them into the hands of their enemies and punish them Seven Times. God was keeping His part of the Covenant; it was Israel that had failed, and Samuel was properly bringing the matter to their attention and urging repentance.

"Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served Jehovah only." Baalim was the plural name for Baal. The word Baal signifies overseer, caretaker. The Israelites had been distinctly forewarned not to make any kind of idols, and to keep themselves separate from all idols to such an extent that they might not even make an image of their own God, Jehovah. He would not have any symbols before His people, but have them worship Him in spirit and in truth. But all around them were the Canaanites, whom they had not had faith and obedience to drive out of the land. These Canaanites had the Baal idols in all their towns, and some had them in their homes and trusted in them as protective genii.

Ashtaroth is the plural for Ashtoreth, a female deity – the same known to the Babylonians as Ishtar and to the Greeks as

Astarte. She was the goddess of fertility and the sexual relations; and connected with her worship were many licentious services supposed to promote fertility – the propagation of the human species. If Samuel's work of twenty years reached this harvest where the whole people of Israel decided to put away their Ashtaroah of gods and to worship and serve Jehovah only, he certainly accomplished much. We may be sure also that some human agency was connected with so great an outward manifestation. Such reformations do not come by chance, nor are they miraculous.

Samuel prayed for the people of Israel; "and they drew water and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord." The confession of sin was not only creditable to the people as a manifestation of their honesty and sincerity, but it was appropriate that they should do this when asking the God whom they had offended to receive them back again into covenant relationship with Himself. The poet has said that confession is good for the soul, and surely all have proven it so. It served to commit them. The humility which was necessary to the making of such confession would be profitable in respect to their character-building.

The water poured out may be viewed from various angles. One suggestion is that it represented the Truth which they could not gainsay, could not take back, even as water spilled upon the ground cannot be recovered. Another suggestion is that as the water was drawn from the depth of the earth, so their confession came from the depths of their hearts. Another is that it represented their vows of faithfulness to the Lord, which would be as irrevocable as water poured out.

A LESSON FOR SPIRITUAL ISRAEL

"And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh." That is to say, as a judge, a counselor, he gave advice, gave decision in

respect to their affairs, disputes, proper course of conduct, right and wrong on any subject, etc. Thus the nation of Israel was making a new start; and as a people they were more drawn together than at any time in their history from the days of Joshua onward. But, as though it were a trial of their faith, at this very time, while they were resolving on the course of righteousness, their enemies, the Philistines, having heard of the gathering, sought to nip the rebellion in the bud, and came against them with an army of considerable size.

The Israelites had not come together for battle, but for prayer; nevertheless they were probably more or less armed. But they felt themselves quite unprepared to meet the Philistine hosts. And they said unto Samuel, "Cease not to cry unto Jehovah our God for us, that He save us out of the hand of the Philistines." They were learning to look for help in the right direction. This cry coming to the Lord after they had abandoned their idols and had vowed to be loyal to Jehovah, put them in a very different attitude toward Him from that of twenty years previous, when they called for the Ark of God to lead them in battling against the Philistines without any reformation of character, without repentance for sins.

Is there not a lesson here for all of God's people? Is it not as true today as it ever was that it is vain for the Lord's people to call upon the Lord for assistance and blessing while they are living in sin, in violation of their Covenant and its obligations? The first lesson of all, then, for those who realize their being in sin is repentance, and definite vows to the Lord respecting faithfulness in petition to Him for His mercy unto them. Those who thus come to the Lord now, as Christians, under the Headship of our Lord Jesus Christ, are sure to have Divine mercy and "grace to help in every time of need."

Our Philistines that come upon us and enslave us are our passions and weaknesses, and the oppositions of the world and the

Adversary. These are our foes, and against these only Divine Power can enable us to fight a good fight and come off victorious.

In response to the cry of the people, Samuel the Prophet offered to the Lord a sacrifice – a lamb of the first year. He knew it not, but it was a type of "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Beside this typical sacrifice, Samuel cried to the Lord on behalf of his people, and the Lord heard him. So with all that stand beside the great Antitypical Sacrifice, and in the name and merit of that Sacrifice, as people of God in covenant relationship with Him – having put away sins and weaknesses to the best of our ability, we may be sure of Divine help, deliverance.

SIGNAL MANIFESTATION OF DIVINE FAVOR

While yet the offering was upon the altar, the noise of the approaching hosts of the Philistines was heard. How would God assist His people? How could they hope for deliverance against the Philistine hosts? Would they in fear scatter or would God's power to help be manifest? The deliverance came in the shape of a great, violent, sudden storm. Going hastily, it swept down the hill Mizpeh, in the faces of the approaching hosts. They turned their backs against the violent storm; and the Israelites perceiving the opportunity, rushed onward with **[R5628 : page 44]** the storm, pursuing the Philistines and driving them before them, and thus gaining a great victory. The place of the victory was the very spot where, twenty years before, the Ark of the Lord had been captured by the Philistines. Samuel there set a stone as a pillar and monument, and called it Ebenezer, saying, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." – Verse 12.

So with Christians in their victories under the Lord's assistance; when by the Lord's grace they gain victories they should set up memorials or monuments in their minds, in their hearts, and not pass these blessings by or forget that the victories were gained by help from on High. Every Christian, therefore,

should have his Ebenezers, his monuments of victory, as it were, of Divine assistance over his foes, the world, the flesh and the Adversary, and he should rejoice in these. This sentiment [R5628 : page 45] has come down to us in the words of a beautiful hymn, familiar to nearly all who read the English language:

"Here I'll raise my Ebenezer,
Hither by Thy help I'm come;
And I hope by Thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at Home."

PROPER AND IMPROPER JUDGMENTS

The record is that Samuel continued to be a judge, an interpreter of the Divine Law, a counselor to his people, "all the days of his life." The Israelites had accepted God's Law, and had agreed to abide by its decisions. Whoever, therefore, they would have confidence in as an interpreter of the Divine Law, they, in proper condition of heart, would be ready to obey his rulings, his judgments. Spiritual Israelites similarly have come into covenant relationship with God, and have bound themselves to seek to know and to do the will of God and not their own wills. Hence whoever may be the person of opportunity who can show "an Israelite indeed" the mind of the Lord in any manner, he becomes his counselor, the Lord's mouthpiece to him; thus all the people of God assist one another to judge themselves, to build each other up in the most holy faith, to guide each other to know and to do the will of the Lord.

This office is not left to ministers, to priests, but is open to all the Lord's people; for St. Peter declares all the Lord's people are priests – "Ye are a Royal Priesthood." True, these priests have not entered into their royalty, nor yet have they entered fully upon their priestly office. These glorious offices belong especially to the future, when by virtue of the resurrection change, these priests,

who are now sacrificing, will be Priests in glory, reigning with Christ and judging the world – assisting the world, counseling the world, instructing the world regarding God's will and helping them to know and do that will.

The Royal Priesthood are to remember that their judging in the present time is not a judging of the hearts, but merely a judging of the conduct. As respects the hearts, they are informed of the Lord that they are not competent to judge; and hence the words of the Apostle Paul, "Judge nothing before the time." The time for the judging of the hearts, when this work will be committed to the Church, will be after that which is perfect shall have come, after the resurrection change shall have made us like our Redeemer and qualified, therefore, to read the hearts of mankind and to judge a righteous judgment, a merciful judgment, a sympathetic judgment, a helpful one.

The only judging which the people of God may now do for and toward each other, is that which the Lord represented when He said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Men do not gather grapes off thorn bushes or figs off thistles. A good spring will not send forth bitter water. We are, therefore, to judge ourselves as to whether or not our conduct is in harmony with the principles of righteousness; and we may similarly assist in judging one another as respects outward conduct, leaving the judgment of the heart to the individual himself and to the Lord.

The Prophet Samuel established a new order of things, which we see was the outgrowth of his reformation work amongst the people of God, his nation. He did not do as others before him had done – have his place of residence, to which all the people must go to ask his advice, his counsel, his judgment; but he introduced the circuit judge system, and went from place to place holding a court, not so much to condemn anybody, but rather to advise those who desired advice. Thus the nation of Israel began to be cemented as

one people, and to realize that their interests were in common; and that all of their interests were bound up with God, His Law, His Covenant with them, and the interpretation of these through such agents as the Lord might send to them – Samuel the Prophet being one of these.

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