

Samuel's Farewell Address to the Nation of Israel

1 Samuel 12

1 Samuel 12 - *"Now Samuel said to all Israel: "Indeed I have heeded your voice in all that you said to me, and have made a king over you. ² And now here is the king, walking before you; and I am old and grayheaded, and look, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my childhood to this day. ³ Here I am. Witness against me before the LORD and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received any bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you." ⁴ And they said, "You have not cheated us or oppressed us, nor have you taken anything from any man's hand."*

⁵ Then he said to them, "The LORD is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." And they answered, "He is witness." ⁶ Then Samuel said to the people, "It is the LORD who raised up Moses and Aaron, and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt. ⁷ Now therefore, stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous acts of the LORD which He did to you and your fathers: ⁸ When Jacob had gone into Egypt, and your fathers cried out to the LORD, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place. ⁹ And when they forgot the LORD their God, He sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab; and they fought against them. ¹⁰ Then they cried out to the LORD, and said, 'We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD and served the Baals and Ashtoreths; but now deliver us from the hand of our enemies, and we will serve You.' ¹¹ And the LORD sent Jerubbaal, Bedan, Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side; and you dwelt in safety. ¹² And when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' when the LORD your God was your king.

¹³ "Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen and whom you have desired. And take note, the LORD has set a king over you. ¹⁴ If you fear the LORD and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the LORD your God. ¹⁵ However, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers. ¹⁶ "Now therefore, stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes: ¹⁷ Is today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the LORD, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking a king for yourselves."

¹⁸ So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. ¹⁹ And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves." ²⁰ Then Samuel said to the people, "Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. ²¹ And do not turn aside; for then you would go after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they are nothing. ²² For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to

make you His people. ²³ *Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way.* ²⁴ *Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.* ²⁵ *But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.”*

Background Notes

Under the leadership of King Saul, the Lord gave Israel a great victory over the Ammonites (1 Samuel 11). This victory proved to the people that Saul was capable of leading the nation as their king. As a result, Samuel gathered all the people at Gilgal, and there Saul was again recognized and confirmed as the king of all Israel. After all the people affirmed Saul's kingship and committed themselves to his authority, Samuel stepped down from his recognized position as judge in Israel and gave his farewell address. Although Samuel would still carry on his priestly and prophetic duties within Israel, he relinquished his administrative responsibilities as judge. Samuel said, “*Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way*” (v23). In other words, Samuel promised that even though he was stepping down as judge, the people could be sure that he would continue to pray for them, and continue to teach and instruct them in the ways of the Lord.

In verses 1-5, Samuel was not “tooting his own horn” or bragging about his record when he reminded the people how faithful he had been! He had not taken advantage of his position as judge, nor had he oppressed or defrauded anyone, not had he taken any bribes. Samuel was contrasting himself with his own sons, who unfortunately were involved in all these wrong practices. Furthermore, Samuel assured the people that just as he was trusted in the past, so he could be trusted in the future in the new role that he would assume in the kingdom.

Doctrinal Points

1. God's people need to be reminded about the proof of God's faithfulness.

In verses 6-13 Samuel recounted the history of Israel from the Exodus right up to the victory of King Saul over the Ammonites. The point of this part of his farewell address was to emphasize God's faithfulness and righteousness in all His dealings with His people. When Israel was under bondage in Egypt and cried out to the Lord, God sent Moses and Aaron to lead them, and He brought them out of Egypt. During the time of the Judges, when Israel was unfaithful to the Lord, God rightly and righteously disciplined His people. When they cried out to the Lord, He faithfully raised up judges and delivered them from the nations that were oppressing them. Four judges are mentioned in verse 11. The first judge he mentioned was *Jerubbaal* – this is another name for Gideon. *Bedan* was possibly an unknown judge, but most probably a reference to Berak. Now why do we say that? The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) has Berak rather than Bedan. The third judge mentioned was *Jephthah*, and the fourth judge mentioned was *Samuel* himself.

God faithfully raised up judges for the people when they confessed their sins and cried out to God for mercy. Even when they asked for a king against God's will, God was faithful to them. He gave them a king – King Saul, who defeated the Ammonites. So, Samuel reminded the people of God's righteous acts, and faithfulness to His people.

We, too, need to be reminded of God's righteous acts and faithfulness. 1 Corinthians 1:9 says, *"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."* We need to be reminded of how faithful God has been in His fellowship with us over the years. 1 John 1:9 says, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* We need to be reminded of how faithful God has been in forgiving our sins and restoring us to fellowship. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, *"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."* We need to be reminded of how faithful the Lord has been in not letting us be tested or tempted beyond our limits, and providing a way of escape from temptation. God's people need to be reminded of the proof of God's faithfulness.

2. God's people need to be warned about the possibility of their own unfaithfulness.

In verses 14-22 Samuel continued to emphasize God's faithfulness – even though the people wrongly desired a king, and even though the people lacked commitment. God will never abandon His people (v22). The Lord's own reputation is involved in His faithfulness to His people and not abandoning His people. However, there are consequences when God's people are unfaithful, and the people were warned about the possibility of their unfaithfulness. Verse 15: *"However, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you..."*

Then Samuel called on the Lord for the sign of thunder and rain to prove to the people that they had sinned in asking for a human king, when God was to be their King! The strong thunderstorm was not a coincidence of nature, because it happened at the time of the wheat harvest, which is not the rainy season in Israel. This awesome display of God's power was enough to make the people cry out to Samuel: *"Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves."* The people got the message!

God must discipline His people when they're unfaithful – then and today. Hebrews 12:7 says that God disciplines us as sons, and 1 Peter 4:17 says that judgment begins at the household of God. God's people need to be warned about the possibility and the consequences of their own unfaithfulness.

Practical Applications

1. Let's not sin by failing to pray for others.

Did you ever realize that it's a sin not to pray for others? *"Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you..."* (v23). Are we guilty of this sin? Let's face it -- we pray a lot for ourselves! We

pray for our health, our jobs, our security, our future -- but what about others? Do we pray for others, especially for people in need, and for people undergoing persecution?

When Samuel said that he would not cease to pray for *you*, the “you” was the nation of Israel. We too should reach out beyond praying just for ourselves and for our families. We should pray for our nation and its leaders – in fact, our prayers should reach around the world! Let’s not sin by failing to pray for others.

2. Let’s remember to remember!

Samuel concluded his address with a challenge: “*Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.*” Verse 24 is a great Old Testament verse that could be applied to proper Christian living today. It’s a good verse to memorize.

Do you want to live a godly life? Follow the advice of 1 Samuel 12:24. “*Only fear the Lord.*” That’s referential fear and awe. “*And serve him*”: that’s Christian service. “*In truth*”: that’s correct doctrine. “*With all your heart*”: that’s commitment. “*for consider what great things He has done for you*” – that’s thanksgiving. If we don’t remember the great things that the Lord has done for us, we can’t thank Him! So, take some time out to remember the great things the Lord has done for you -- even the things that God used to discipline you. Let’s remember to remember!