

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST SAMUEL 12

In this chapter Samuel, resigning the government to Saul, asserts the integrity with which he had performed his office, and calls upon the people of Israel to attest it, who did, (⁽⁹¹²¹⁾1 Samuel 12:1-5), he then reminds them of the great and good things the Lord had done for them in times past, (⁽⁹¹²⁶⁾1 Samuel 12:6-11) and whereas they had desired a king, and one was given them, it was their interest to fear and serve the Lord; if not, his hand would be against them, (⁽⁹¹²⁰⁾1 Samuel 12:10-15) he terrifies them by calling for thunder in an unusual time, (⁽⁹¹²⁶⁾1 Samuel 12:16-19) and then comforts and encourages them, that in doing their duty God would be with them, and not forsake them, otherwise they might expect nothing but ruin and destruction, (⁽⁹¹²³⁾1 Samuel 12:20-25).

Ver. 1. *And Samuel said unto all Israel,* etc.] When assembled at Gilgal, after they had recognized Saul as their king, and he was established in the kingdom, and while in the midst of their mirth and joy:

behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye have said unto me; respecting the affair of a king, to which it must be limited, as appears by what follows; otherwise it is possible, in some things they might apply to him about, he did not think fit to hearken to them, and grant their request, or speak for them:

and have made a king over you; that is, had by the direction and appointment of God chosen one by lot, anointed and declared him king; for it was the Lord alone, that, properly speaking, made him a king.

Ver. 2. *And now, behold, the king walketh before you,* etc.] He invested with his office, and in the exercise of it, and goes in and out as the captain, commander, and leader of the people; it is expressive of his being in the full possession of regal power and authority, and therefore Samuel might speak the more freely, as he could not be thought to have any hope and expectation of being reinstated in his government, or to have parted with it with any regret; and he wisely took this opportunity of reproving the people for their sin of desiring a king, when Saul was settled and

established in his kingdom, and when they were in the midst of all their mirth and jollity, who might, from the success that had attended this first adventure of their king, conclude that they had done a right and good thing in requesting to have one:

and I am old, and grey headed; and so unfit for government, and very willing to be eased of the burden of it: he must surely be more than fifty two years of age, as the Jews generally say he was, since it is not usual at such an age to be grey headed, (see Gill on “~~1~~ Samuel 8:1”); however, on this account he merited reverence and respect, and demanded attention:

and, behold, my sons are with you; as private persons in the condition of subjects, making no pretension to government; and if they had committed anything criminal, they were open to the law, and might be charged, and tried, and treated according to their deserts; and there they were, and might be asked what questions they thought proper with respect to what they knew of his conduct; and to be hostages or bail for him, if they could prove anything against him; or to be taken to make satisfaction for any injuries committed by him:

and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day; his manner of and conversation from his infancy to this time was well known to them, and he had spent all his days in the service of God, and for the good of Israel.

Ver. 3. *Behold, here I am,* etc.] No longer the supreme governor, but a subject, and accountable for any misdemeanour charged upon me, and to which I am ready to give answer, being now at your bar to be tried and judged before you:

witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed; signifying, that if they had anything to lay to his charge, that they would produce it, and give proof and evidence of it in the presence of God, in whose name they met, and of Saul, anointed king, and supreme judge and ruler of the nation:

whose ox have I taken? by force to employ in his own service in ploughing his ground, or treading out his corn:

or whose ass have I taken? to ride about on in his circuit, or to carry any burden for him:

or whom have I defrauded? of their money or goods, by any artifice circumventing and cheating them:

whom have I oppressed? struck, beaten, broken, or caused to be so used wrongfully; to whose person have I been injurious any more than to their property? Some derive the word from a root which signifies favour and goodwill, and interpret it as some of the Rabbins do, of his not taking money of persons with their goodwill; or rather, that he had done nothing as a judge for favour and affection, but had acted the upright part, without regard to rich or poor, friends or foes:

or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? his meaning is, that he had never taken a gift or present from any person to favour his cause, that was to be brought before him, and give it for him right or wrong; to connive at any injury he had done, or to turn away his eyes from seeing where the justice of the cause lay; or that he had not received money to spare the life of a criminal that deserved to die; for the word used for a bribe signifies a ransom price, (see ^{f169}Deuteronomy 16:19)

and I will restore it to you; the ox or ass, money or goods, gifts and presents, or bribes taken, or make compensation for any injury done to the persons or estates of men. Some render it, “I will answer you”, ^{f227}, or give in an answer to any such charges when exhibited.

Ver. 4. *And they said,* etc.] One in the name of the rest, or they all cried out as one man:

thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us; had done them no wrong, neither privately nor publicly, by fraud or by force:

neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand; as a gift, present, or bribe, to fit your his cause. Some would infer hence that he took nothing of them for his support and maintenance, and that he lived upon his own substance; but that is not likely or reasonable; it was but just that they should support him and his family suitably to his character as a judge, whose whole life was spent in their service.

Ver. 5. *And he said unto them, the Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day,* etc.] Should they hereafter reproach and vilify him, and charge him with any acts of corruption, injustice, and violence:

that ye have not found ought in my hand; that they had nothing to accuse him of and charge him with throughout his whole administration, but had asserted his innocence and integrity, had honourably acquitted him, and given him a fair character: and they answered, he is witness; the omniscient God is a witness against us, should we depart from this testimony, and Saul, the Lord's anointed, is a witness that we have fully cleared thee from any imputations of maladministration. The word is singular, he "said" or answered ^{f228}, that is, Israel said, the whole body of the people, they all replied as one man: the reason why Samuel made such a speech at this time, when he resigned his government to Saul, was not only to secure his own character, but to suggest to Saul how he should rule and govern according to his example; and that having established his own character, he could the more freely, and with the better grace, reprove the people for their sin, as in some following verses.

Ver. 6. *And Samuel said unto the people*, etc.] Having cleared and established his own character, he proceeds to lay before the people some of the great things God had done for them formerly, and quite down to the present time, the more to aggravate their ingratitude in rejecting God as their King:

[it is] the Lord that advanced Moses and Aaron; raised them from a low estate, the one in a foreign country in Midian, the other in bondage in Egypt, to be deliverers, guides, and governors of his people Israel. Kimchi thinks this refers to what goes before, and that the sense is, that God, that raised Moses and Aaron to great honour and dignity, was a witness between him and the people; in which he is followed by some Christian interpreters. Ben Gersom makes mention of the same, but rather approves of the connection of the words with what follows, as does Abarbinel, and is doubtless most correct; the Targum is,

“who hath done mighty things by the hands of Moses and Aaron:”

and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt; when they were in bondage there, and that by the means of Moses and Aaron, by whose hands he wrought signs and wonders and inflicted plagues on the Egyptians, which made them willing at last to let Israel go.

Ver. 7. *Now therefore stand still*, etc.] Keep your place, and do not as yet break up the assembly, but wait a little longer patiently, and with reverence and attention hearken to what I have further to say:

that I may reason with you before the Lord; as in his presence; and which he observes to command the greater awe upon their mind, and the greater regard to the subject of his discourse and resolutions; which would be,

of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your fathers; not only in a way of judgment delivering them into the hands of their enemies, when they sinned against him, but rather in a way of mercy and kindness in delivering them out of their hands.

Ver. 8. *When Jacob was come into Egypt*, etc.] With his family to see his son Joseph, and dwelt there; or rather the posterity of Jacob are meant, who settled in Egypt, and continued there many years, and at length were oppressed by the Egyptians, and brought into hard bondage:

and your fathers cried unto the Lord; by reason of their bondage, for help and deliverance:

then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt; after various messages carried by them from the Lord to Pharaoh king of Egypt, and after many signs and wonders wrought by them, by which the heart of that king was at last brought to consent to their dismissal:

and made them dwell in this place; the land of Canaan; they conducted them through the Red sea, guided them through the wilderness, and accompanied them, especially Moses, to the borders of the land of Canaan; for neither of them went into it, but died before the people's entrance there. Joshua, the successor of Moses, of whom Samuel makes no mention, introduced Israel into it, conquered the land for them, and settled them in it; though Moses and Aaron, as they were the instruments of bringing them out of Egypt, were the cause, by conducting them through the wilderness, and by their prayers, counsels, and instructions, of their entrance into and settlement in it: besides, Moses appointed Joshua in his stead, and ordered him to lead the people there, and directed to the division of the land among them, yea, two tribes and an half were settled by him on the other side Jordan; the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Arabic versions, read in the singular number, "he made them dwell, that is, the Lord".

Ver. 9. *And when they forgat the Lord their God*, etc.] The worship of the Lord their God, as the Targum; that is, they fell into idolatry, which is a

plain instance and proof of forgetfulness of God; for such that neglect his worship, and serve idols, may be truly said to forget him:

he sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor; who was general of the army of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor, (^{<OR1E>}Judges 4:2), where they are said to be sold into the hands of Jabin, here into the hands of Sisera; because it is highly probable he was sent against them by Jabin, and subdued them, as he afterwards was sent by him, when they rebelled against him, and were delivered out of his hand:

and into the hand of the Philistines: as they were in and before the times of Samson, (^{<OR1E>}Judges 13:1)

and into the hand of the king of Moab; as in the times of Ehud, (^{<OR1E>}Judges 3:14,15), the exact order of these things is not observed:

and they fought against them; the king of Moab, Sisera, and the Philistines, and overcame them, and so they fell into their hands.

Ver. 10. *And they cried unto the Lord*, etc.] When in the hands of their enemies, and in bondage to them, and cruelly oppressed by them:

and said, we have sinned; the word for “said” is in the Cetib, or written text, singular, and in the Keri, or marginal reading, plural; and may signify, that everyone of them had a sense of their sin, and made acknowledgment of it; their confession was universal, as their sin was:

because we have forsaken the Lord; the Word of the Lord, as the Targum:

and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth; (see Gill on “^{<OR1E>}Judges 2:11”), (see Gill on “^{<OR1E>}Judges 2:13”).

but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee; they did not ask for a king to go before them, and fight their battles, as they did now, but applied to the Lord for deliverance, promising to serve him as their King and their God.

Ver. 11. *And the Lord sent Jerubbaal*, etc.] Or Gideon, as the Targum, for Jerubbaal was the name given to Gideon, when he first became a judge, (^{<OR1E>}Judges 6:32)

and Bedan; if this was one of the judges, he must have two names, or is one that is not mentioned in the book of Judges; the Targum interprets it of Samson; so Jerom ^{f229}, for the word may be rendered “in Dan”; one in Dan,

who was of the tribe of Dan, as Samson was; and it was in the camp of Dan the Spirit of God first came upon him; and Kimchi observes that it is the same as Bendan, the son of Dan, that is, a Danite; and though he was after Jephthah, yet is set before him, because he was a greater man than he; and this way go the generality of Jewish writers ^{f230}; but a man of this name being among the posterity of Manasseh, (^{<13077>}1 Chronicles 7:17). Junius, and who is followed by others, thinks that Jair is meant, and is so called to distinguish him from a more ancient Jair, the son of Manasseh, and with whom the order of the judges better agrees, (see ^{<0434>}Numbers 32:41 ^{<0704>}Judges 10:3,4) but the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions read Barak; and he may rather be thought to be meant, because he was the instrument of delivering Israel out of the hand of Sisera, the captain of the host of Hazor before mentioned, (^{<0924>}1 Samuel 12:9) and agrees with the words of the apostle, (^{<5813>}Hebrews 11:32), who mentions those judges much in the same order:

and Jephthah, and Samuel; meaning himself, who was the last of the judges, and who speaks of himself as of a third person, as Lamech does, (^{<0023>}Genesis 4:23) and this he did not out of ostentation, but to observe that God had made him an instrument of delivering them out of the hand of the Philistines, which must be fresh in their memory, as he had made use of others before him, when he sent judges, and not kings, and therefore they had no need to ask a king. The Syriac and Arabic versions read Samson instead of Samuel, and which also agrees best with (^{<5813>}Hebrews 11:32)

and delivered you out of the hands of your enemies on every side; not the judges, but the Lord; for the word for “delivered” is of the singular number:

and ye dwelled safe; in the greatest security and confidence, without any fear of enemies, having God their King in the midst of them, and stood in no need of any other king to protect and defend them.

Ver. 12. *And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you*, etc.] Or “but yet” ^{f231}; however, notwithstanding though the Lord had been so kind and gracious to them, as to raise up judges one after another to deliver them, when they cried unto him, yet when they perceived that Nahash the Ammonite was preparing to make war with them, instead of applying to the Lord for his protection, they desired to have a king to go before them, and fight their battles, as follows: nay,

but a king shall reign over us; though Samuel told them they had no need of one:

when the Lord your God was your King; and would protect and defend them, if they applied to him, and would put their trust in him; and he himself Samuel was their judge, and would be their general and commander, and they had experience of success under him to the utter destruction of their enemies, (~~1 Samuel~~ 1 Samuel 7:10) and yet, notwithstanding all this, they insisted upon it to have a king. According to Abarbanel, this preparation of Nahash to war with them was after they had asked for a king, and was a punishment of them for their request; and yet they repented not of it, but in effect said, though Nahash, and all the enemies in the world come against us, we will not go back from our request, but insist on it, that we have a king to reign over us; such was their obstinacy and perverseness.

Ver. 13. *Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired*, etc.] For though God chose their king for them, it was at their request; they chose to have a king, and desired one, and they approved of and consented to, and confirmed the choice he had made, and so it was in effect their own:

and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you; he gratified them in their desires; though he did not suffer them to make themselves a king, he suffered them to have one, and he gave them one; this power he reserved to himself of setting up and pulling down kings at his pleasure.

Ver. 14. *If ye will fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice*, etc.] All worship and service of God, and obedience to his word and ordinances, should spring from fear and reverence of him; and therefore the whole of worship, both external and internal, is sometimes expressed by the fear of the Lord:

and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord; break it, and thereby exasperate him, and provoke him to wrath and bitterness:

then shall both ye, and also the king that reigneth over you, continue following the Lord your God; the Targum is,

“after the worship of the Lord your God;”

which was their duty to do, and is expressed in the preceding clauses; and this therefore is rather a promise of some benefit and privilege to their

duty, and to encourage them to it, since it stands opposed to the threatening of punishment in the next verse; and the words in the original are, “then shall ye etc. be after the Lord your God”^{f232}: that is, though they had in effect rejected the Lord from being their King, by asking and having one; yet notwithstanding, if they and their king were obedient to the commands of the Lord, he would not cast them off; but they should follow him as their guide, leader, and director, and he would protect and defend them as a shepherd does his sheep that follow after him; so Jarchi takes it to be a promise of long life and happiness to them and their king,

“ye shall be established to length of days, both ye and the king.”

Ver. 15. *But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord*, etc.] They and their king, by sinning, disregarding his precepts, both affirmative and negative:

then shall the hand of the Lord be against you; by sending some judgments upon them, as famine, sword, or pestilence, particularly captivity and subjection to their enemies:

as it was against your fathers; who had no king; and it is suggested that their case, who had one, would be no better than theirs; their king would not be able to save them from the hand of God: the words in the original are, “and against your fathers”^{f233}; which is interpreted in the Talmud^{f234} of their fathers dead, and in their graves, and of their enemies digging them up, and taking them out in contempt; but much better, by Kimchi, of their kings, who are, or should be, fathers of their subjects, as Augustus Caesar was called the father of his; and so the Septuagint version renders it, “and upon their king”; signifying that both they and their king should feel the weight of the hand of the Lord, if they rebelled against him.

Ver. 16. *Now therefore stand*, etc.] Which does not so much respect the position of their bodies as the fixed attention of their minds:

and see this great thing which the Lord will do before your eyes; meaning the storm of thunder and rain which presently followed; which coming at a time when such things were not usual, and on a day when there was no appearance or likelihood of anything of this kind, and suddenly, at once, upon the prayer of Samuel, it was no less than a miracle, and might be called a “great thing”, new and unheard of, and the pure effect of almighty power.

Ver. 17. *Is it not wheat harvest today?* etc.] Of the time of wheat harvest, (see Gill on “^{<0063>}1 Samuel 6:13”). Rain usually fell in Judea only twice a year, called the former and the latter rain; and from the seventeenth of Nisan or March, to the sixteenth of Marchesvan or October, it was not usual for rain to fall, and so not in harvest, at that time especially, (see ^{<0061>}Proverbs 26:1 ^{<0067>}Amos 4:7). R. Joseph Kimchi says, in the land of Israel rain never fell all the days of harvest; and this is confirmed by Jerom, who lived long in those parts; who says ^{f235}, at the end of the month of June, and in the month of July, we never saw rain in those provinces, especially in Judea. And Samuel not only by putting this question would have them observe that it was the time of wheat harvest in general, but on that day in particular the men, were at work in the fields reaping the wheat, etc. and so was not cloudy, and inclining to rain, but all serene and clear, or otherwise they would not have been employed in cutting down the corn; all which made the following case the more remarkable:

I will call unto the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain; in a miraculous and preternatural way, there being nothing in nature preparatory thereunto, and this purely at the prayer of Samuel:

that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king; was attended with aggravated circumstances, and highly offensive to God, though he had gratified them in it, of which this violent storm would be an indication, and might serve to convince them of their folly, as well as of their wickedness, and that they had no need of a king, since Samuel their judge could do as much or more by his prayers than a king could do by his sword; and of which they had had sufficient proof before this, and that in the same way, (^{<0070>}1 Samuel 7:10).

Ver. 18. *So Samuel called unto the Lord,* etc.] Not in an authoritative way, or by way of command, but by prayer; so the Targum renders the clause in the preceding verse,

“I will pray before the Lord:”

and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; immediately, though there was no appearance of it; it was harvest time, and a fine harvest day. Josephus says ^{f236} he sent thunder, lightning, and hail, a terrible storm and tempest it was:

and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel; the Lord that sent this tempest, and Samuel who had such power with God in prayer. Clement of Alexandria^{f237} thinks that from hence the Greeks borrowed their fable concerning Aeacus invoking God, when there was a drought in Greece; and as soon as he prayed, immediately there was thunder, and the whole air was covered with clouds; but perhaps they rather framed it from the instance of Elijah praying for rain^{f238}, at whose request it came, (^{<1182>}1 Kings 18:42-45).

Ver. 19. *And all the people said unto Samuel*, During the tempest, and in the midst of it; it was the general cry of the people, they were unanimous in it:

pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not; though they had rejected him as their judge and supreme governor in desiring a king, now they were his humble servants, at least feignedly; and knowing what interest he had with God in prayer, they entreat him to make use of it on their behalf, who having sinned so greatly, had not the assurance to call the Lord their God, though they had no doubt of his being the God of Samuel, whose prayers he had heard, of which this tempest was a full proof; and was so violent, that if it continued, they were afraid they should be destroyed by the thunder and lightning, or they and their cattle, with the fruits of the earth, be washed away with the prodigious rain:

for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king; though Samuel had laid before them the evils and inconveniences of having a king, and had in the name of the Lord charged them with rejecting God as their king; yet nothing convinced them of their evil till this storm came, and then all their sins came fresh to their minds; and this added to the weight of them, and lay heaviest on them, that they had rejected the Lord, and slighted his prophets, and, notwithstanding all remonstrances, resolved on having a king.

Ver. 20. *And Samuel said unto the people, fear not*, etc.] Being destroyed by the tempest:

ye have done all this wickedness; in asking a king; that is, though they were guilty of so heinous a sin, yet there were grace and mercy with God, and they should not despair of it, so be it that they did not depart from him, but cordially served him; the Targum is,

“ye have been the cause of all this evil;”

the storm of thunder and rain; and though they had, he would not have them despond or indulge slavish fear;

yet turn not aside from following the Lord; the worship of the Lord, as the Targum; provided they did not depart from the Lord, and forsake his worship, word, and ordinances, they need not fear utter ruin and destruction, though they had been guilty of this sin:

but serve the Lord with all your heart; if their service of God was kept up, and was hearty and sincere, they might still expect things would go well with them.

Ver. 21. *And turn ye not aside*, etc.] From his worship: for then; if they turned aside from that:

should ye go after vain things; idols, which are vanity, and less than vanity:

which cannot profit nor deliver; neither bestow good things on their votaries, nor deliver them from evils, or from the hands of their enemies

for they are vain; empty, useless, and unprofitable; an idol is nothing in the world, (~~4100~~1 Corinthians 8:4).

Ver. 22. *For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake*.] For the sake of himself, his honour and glory; should he forsake his people, and suffer them to come to ruin, his name would be blasphemed among the Heathens; he would be charged either with want of power to help them, or with want of faithfulness to his promise to them, and with inconstancy to himself, or want of kindness and affection for them; all which would reflect upon his honour and glory:

because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people; it was not owing to any worth or worthiness in them that they became his people, but to his own sovereign good will and pleasure; and therefore, as it was nothing in them that was the cause of their being taken by him for his people, so nothing in them could be the cause of their being rejected by him as such; it was of free grace and favour that they were taken into covenant with him, and by the same would be retained: the Vulgate Latin version is,

“the Lord hath sworn to make you a people for himself;”

so Jarchi interprets it, he swore, and takes it to have the same sense as in (~~0142~~1 Samuel 14:24).

Ver. 23. *Moreover, as for me,* etc.] As he had given them reason to believe that God would forgive their sin, by which they had offended him, rejecting him as their King, so he likewise forgave their offence against him in rejecting him as their governor under him, and so neither need fear the Lord nor him with a servile fear; and as God would still be gracious to them, if they abode by his service, so he, Samuel, would do all the good offices for them that lay in his power:

God forbid that I should sin against the Lord, in ceasing to pray for you; for since they had returned to the Lord, and acknowledged their sin, it would have been an evil in him not to pray for them, that they might share in the pardoning grace and mercy of God, and have all good things bestowed upon them they stood in need of; this he judged to be his duty to do, and therefore abhorred the thought of being indifferent to it, negligent of it, or of dropping it:

but I will teach you the good and the right way; would not only pray for them, but instruct them in the way of their duty; a way that was a good one, agreeable to the will and word of God, and in walking in which good things were enjoyed, and which being a good way, must needs be a right way; though Samuel ceased to be a judge and chief magistrate among them, he should not cease to act the part of a prophet to them, both by his prayers and by his instructions.

Ver. 24. *Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart,* etc.] Fear him not with a servile fear, which is before dehorted from, but with a filial fear, a reverential affection for God; and includes the whole of religious worship, internal and external; explained further by serving him according to the truth of his word, and in a cordial, sincere, and affectionate manner; and if this was wanting in them, he suggests that his prayers and instructions would be of little avail, and not to be depended on:

for consider how great things he hath done for you; in bringing them out of Egypt: settling them in the land of Canaan; giving them his laws, statutes, commands, and ordinances; sending prophets unto them, and raising up judges for them, and bestowing all good things on them, in nature, providence, and grace; though some restrain this to the great thing he had done that day, to convince them of their sin, and by which they were returned to the Lord, namely, the violent storm of thunder; which wonderful instance of the power of God, and token of his displeasure

against them, they were to lay up in their minds, and not forget, that it might be a means of preserving them from sin for the future.

Ver. 25. *But if ye shall still do wickedly*, etc.] Continue to rebel against God, revolt from him, and depart from his worship, and despise his prophets, and serve idols:

ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king; their king would be so far from protecting, that he should perish with them, be killed by the sword, as Saul their first king was, or go into captivity, as others of their kings did.