**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**1 SAMUEL-008. OLD TRUTH FOR A NEW EPOCH by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"13.* *Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over yon. 14. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey His voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord; then shall both ye, and also the king that reigneth over you, continue following the Lord your God: 15. But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord; then shall the hand of the Lord 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 it not wheat-harvest to-day! I will call unto the Lord, and He shall send thunder and rain; 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. 18. So Samuel called unto 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 unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king. 20. And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; 21. And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver, for they are vain. 22. 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. 23. 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: 24. Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things He hath done for you. 25. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.."*

*1 Samuel 12:13-25*

Samuel's office as judge necessarily ended when Saul was made king, but his office of prophet continued. This chapter deals with both the cessation and the continuance, giving at first his dignified, and somewhat pained, vindication of his integrity, and then passing on to show him exercising his prophetic function in exhortation, miracle, and authoritative declaration of Jehovah's will.

**I.** The first point is the sign which Samuel gave. Usually there is no rain in Palestine from about the end of April till October. Samuel was speaking during the wheat harvest, which falls about the beginning of June. We note that he volunteered the sign, and, what is still more remarkable, that he is sure that God will send it in answer to his prayer. Why was he thus certain? Because he recognised that the impulse to proffer the sign came from God. We know little of the mental processes by which a prophet could discriminate between his own thinkings and God's speech, but such discrimination was possible, or there could have been no ring of confidence in the prophet's Thus saith the Lord. Not even a Samuel among them that call upon His name had a right to assume that every asking would certainly have an answer. It is when we ask anything according to His will that we know that He heareth us, and are entitled to predict to others the sure answer.

It seems a long leap logically from hearing the thunder and seeing the rain rushing down on the harvest field, to recognising the sin of asking for a king. But the connecting steps are plain. Samuel announced the storm, he asked God to send it, it came at his word; therefore he was approved of God and was His messenger; therefore his words about the desire for a king were God's words. Again, God sent the tempest; therefore God ruled the elemental powers, and wielded them so as to affect Israel, and therefore it had been folly and sin to wish for another defender. So the result of the thunder-burst was twofold--they feared Jehovah and Samuel, and they confessed their sin in desiring a king. They were but rude and sense-bound men, like children in many respects; their religion was little more than outward worship and a vague awe; they needed signs as children need picture-books. The very slightness and superficiality of their religion made their confession easy and swift, and neither the one nor the other went deep enough to be lasting. The faith that is built on signs and wonders is easily battered down; the repentance that is due to a thunderstorm is over as soon as the sun comes out again. The shallowness of the contrition in this case is shown by two things,--the request to Samuel to pray for them, and the boon which they begged him to ask, that we die not. They had better have prayed for themselves, and they had better have asked for strength to cleave to Jehovah. They were like Simon Magus cowering before Peter, and beseeching him, Pray ye for me to the Lord, that none of the things which ye have spoken may come upon me. That is not the voice of true repentance, the godly sorrow which works healing and life, but that of the sorrow of the world which worketh death. The real penitent will press the closer to the forgiving Father, and his cry will be for purity even more than for pardon.

**II.** Samuel's closing words are tender, wise, and full of great truths. He begins with encouragement blended with reiteration of the people's sin. It is not safe for a forgiven man to forget his sin quickly. The more sure he is that God has forgotten, the more careful he should be to remember it, for gratitude, humility and watchfulness. But it should never loom so large before him as to shut out the sunshine of God's love, for no fruits of goodness will ripen in character without that light. It is a great piece of practical wisdom always to keep one's forgiven sin in mind, and yet not to let it paralyse hopefulness and effort. Ye have indeed done all this evil, ... yet turn not aside from following Jehovah. That is a truly evangelical exhortation. The memory of past failures is never to set the tune for future service. Again, Samuel based the exhortation to whole-hearted service of Jehovah on Jehovah's faithfulness and great benefits (vs. 22-24), It is suicidal folly to turn away from Him who never turns away from us; it is black ingratitude, as well as suicidal folly, to refuse to serve Him whose mercies encompass us. That divine good pleasure, which has no source but in Himself, flows out like an artesian well, unceasing. His nature and property is to love. His past is the prophecy of His future. He will always be what He has been, and always do what He has done. Therefore we need not fear, though we change and are faithless. He cannot deny Himself. His revealed character would be dimmed if He abandoned a soul that clung to Him. So our faith should, in some measure, match His faithfulness, and we should build firmly on the firm foundation.

**III.** Samuel answers the people's request for his prayers with a wise word, full of affection, and also full of dignity and warning, all the more impressive because veiled. He promises his continued intercession, but he puts it as a duty which he owes to God rather than to them only, and he thus sufficiently asserts his God-appointed office. He promises to do more than pray for them; namely, to continue as their ethical and religious guide, which they had not asked him to be. That at once makes his future position in the monarchy clear. He is still the prophet, though no longer the judge, and, as the future was to show, he has to direct monarch as well as people. But it also hints to the people that his prayers for them will be of little avail unless they listen to his teaching. Whether a Samuel prays for us or not, if we do not listen to the voices that bid us serve God, we shall be consumed.