

1 Samuel 12:1-25

A Transfer of Authority

Samuel addresses the people for the last time in his role a judge, passing the government over to the new king, Saul.

1 Samuel 12:1-2 - "And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day."

Samuel mentions his sons "are with you" - meaning his sons, who had been corrupt (**1 Samuel 8:3**), had had been dismissed from serving as judges when their covetousness came to light. Now they were merely "among" the people rather than over them as judges.

Before speaking about the people's sin in demanding a king, he alludes in humility to his own shortcomings in raising and overseeing his own corrupt sons.

"I have walked before you" - He is emphasizing his integrity toward the people. He never hid anything or harbored a hidden agenda. Instead, he was committed to serve them.

1 Samuel 12:3 - "Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you."

Samuel had the right to use public funds to provide oxen for sacrifice and the donkey that he rode on his circuit. But instead he used his own.

Ministers should never gain from those they serve, rather it should cost them.

Compare this with Paul's statements to the Corinthians:

He defends his right as an apostle to require sustenance from those he is ministering to, but has not done so:

- **1 Corinthians 9:12** - "If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ."

- **2 Corinthians 1:12** - "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward."

- **2 Corinthians 4:2** - "But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

- **2 Corinthians 7:2** - "Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man."

- **2 Corinthians 12:14-15** - "I will not be a burden, because I am not seeking your possessions, but you. For children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. And for the sake of your souls, I will most gladly spend my money and myself."

And also Moses' response to Korah's complaints:

- **Number 16:15** - "I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them."

This is extremely important and very relevant. Throughout the history of the church, up to present day, there have always been wolves seeking to take advantage of believers.

"Behold, here I am" - Samuel says he is simply himself, nothing more than what they see. He hides nothing, nor claims to be more than what he is. "What you see is what you get" with Samuel. But also, he was presenting himself in humility before them for them to judge his lifelong service.

1 Samuel 12:4-5 - "And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand. And he said unto them, The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness."

But in the Hebrew it doesn't say "they answered," but "he" answered. This could mean that Israel responded as one man. The Septuagint approaches the right interpretation: "the Lord is witness."

The Talmud has an interesting comment in this verse, asserting that it was the Holy Spirit or a *bath kol* (a heavenly voice) rather than the people who witnessed to Samuel's integrity:

"Rabbi Elazer said, on three occasions did the Holy Spirit manifest Himself in a peculiar manner — in the judicial tribunal instituted by Shem, in that of Samuel the Ramathite, and in that of Solomon. In that of Shem, Judah declared, "She [Tamar] is righteous," [Genesis 38:26]. How could he know it? Might not another man have come to her as well as he did? But an echo of a voice was heard exclaiming: Of me (the word *ימגי* is separated from the preceding word, and taken as a distinct utterance of the Holy Spirit); these things were overruled by me. Samuel said (**1 Samuel 12:3-5**), "Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? . . . And he said unto them, The Lord is witness against you, &c . . . And he said, He is witness" (*וְהוּא אָמַר*). It ought to read, "And they

said." But it was the Holy Spirit that gave that answer. So with Solomon [in his order to 'cut the baby in half'] the words "She is the mother thereof" (**1 Kings 3:27**) were spoken by the Holy Spirit."

- Babylonian Talmud, Treatise Maccoth, fol. 23.

Samuel's emphasis on his integrity here also served as an example to Saul, and would remain as an example with which to evaluate the new king's character.

Samuel's Brief History Lesson (1 Samuel 12:6-11)

1 Samuel 12:6-7 - "And Samuel said unto the people, It is the LORD that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. 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 to your fathers."

To "reason" here is *šāpāṭ* - to submit to discriminating, rational judgment based on evidence and witnesses as in a court of law. To argue a case. To fairly decide a matter.

Samuel will persuade them with irrefutable evidence.

Then Samuel lists a survey of how God had saved them out of many troubles and dangers.

(In vs. 11 Jerubaal is Gideon, and Bedan is Samson - i.e. he came from the tribe of Dan. But the text could also read Barak and Samson, as in the Septuagint. Gideon, Barak, and Samson are similarly listed together in **Hebrews 11:32**)

1 Samuel 12:12-13 - "And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king. Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the LORD hath set a king over you."

This shows that the threat of Nahash was partly behind their desire for a king.

Obedience vs. Rebellion

1 Samuel 12:14-15 - "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: 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."

Thunder from Heaven

1 Samuel 12:16-18 - "Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the LORD will do before your eyes. 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. 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."

Adding to his reasoning and evidence, Samuel adds a shocking natural phenomenon to punctuate his message and confirm what he is saying is approved by God.

The Talmud say that lightening was created to straighten out the human heart and inspire fear of the Lord.

This was wheat harvest - around the time of Pentecost. Rain rarely fell at this time. The unexpected thunder and rain storm served to affirm Samuel's words of rebuke to the people.

Like Israel's demand for a king, a summer rain offers short-term joy and respite from the heat, but damages the harvest and thus results in long-term regret.

1 Samuel 12:19 - "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."

Samuel now becomes a mediator for the people, interceding for them in prayer.

Final Assurances

1 Samuel 12:20-21 - "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; And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain."

Why do we go after vain things? We create idols and serve them. But Paul reminds us they are powerless and insubstantial as air. "We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world, and that there is no God but one." (**1 Corinthians 8:4**)

1 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:"

Note that it is a *sin* for a minister to cease praying for those under his charge and care. His mission is to teach the "good and the right way." i.e. the way of the cross, denial of self and surrender to God's will.

The people had also sinned against Samuel by rejecting his leadership. But the Talmud takes from this verse that a person who refuses to forgive another who had sinned against him but is now seeking forgiveness is himself considered to be a sinner. Not to forgive in that circumstance is a form of cruelty. In addition, he should forgive and then

pray for that person, like Samuel does here.

1 Samuel 12:24 - "Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.

Repentance would bring forgiveness, despite their sin.

The Talmud says if you provide even an opening only as large as the head of a pin, God will charge back into your life, swinging wide the gates of Jerusalem to welcome you.

"My sons, Open the door of Repentance as the 'eye of a needle,' and I will open it for you so that wagons and carriages can pass through." (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 24)

Sincere repentance is equivalent to the rebuilding of the Temple, the restoration of the altar, and the offering of all the sacrifices (Pesiq., ed. Buber, xxv. 158; Lev. R. vii.; Sanh. 43b).

Samuel repeats what he told them in verse 20 - "Fear the Lord and serve him with all your heart."

- **Deuteronomy 6:4-5** - "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Also emphasized by Jesus:

- **Luke 10:27** - "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."

A Final, Solemn Warning

1 Samuel 12:25 - "But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."

Saul in fact was killed by the sword. Later kings went into exile for their rebellion.

Samuel, although giving up his role as judge, would continue as a prophet and teacher for Israel.