

SAMUEL THE PROPHET

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE VICTORY OF FAITH

(I Samuel 7:1-14)

“Oh bring us back once more
The vanished days of yore,
When the world with Faith was filled!
Bring back the fervid zeal,
The hearts of fire and steel,
The hands that believe and build.”

- Longfellow.

AFTER twenty years of quiet and unobtrusive toil, Samuel had led his people to desire both to feel and manifest the old unity, which had made them one before their enemies, and there was a distinct yearning after the Lord. In being drawn to God they were drawn towards each other, as the spokes of a wheel center in the hub. If the Lord Jesus is the center of our heart-life, we must inevitably be drawn into friendship with all those to whom He is also first and best.

In verses 3 and 4 we probably have the substance of innumerable exhortations which Samuel delivered to all the house of Israel. From end to end he traversed the country, urging the people to return to the Lord; to put away the false gods and Ashtaroath, to direct their hearts to the God of their fathers and serve Him only. On every hand idols were cast from their pedestals, and the vicious orgies were brought to an end in the groves and valleys.

I. THE CONVOCATION AT MIZPEH

The movement at last demanded a public demonstration, and Samuel summoned all Israel to Mizpeh. The day was devoted to fasting, as the law enjoined on the great Day of Atonement. The people confessed their sins, afflicted their souls, and humbled themselves before the Lord.

In addition, a somewhat novel rite was introduced. Water was brought from a neighboring well, and solemnly poured out before the Lord, as afterwards at the Feast of Tabernacles. Whenever that great festival had nearly run its course, as it was being celebrated in the Temple, it was the custom for the priests to go forth to the Spring of Siloam, accompanied by the Levite choir, and bring thence water in a golden vessel; this was poured out at the foot of the altar, at the hour of the morning sacrifice, while all around the white-vestured choir chanted Isaiah's words, “**With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.**”

Whether this scene in the life of Samuel was the origin of that solemn procession, it is impossible to say. Such may have been the case, though it is generally assumed that, as used in the Temple service, the pouring out of water was a memorial of the flowing of water from the smitten rock in the wilderness, and the type of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39).

The pouring forth of water may have implied that they poured forth from their full hearts floods of penitence and tears; that they desired by the heaviness of their grief to wash their land free from the accumulated evil of the past years; or that the people realized their utter helplessness, so that they were as water spilt on the ground, which could not be gathered up.

But whatever it may have signified, it must have been a very striking spectacle, when Samuel, as the representative of his countrymen, brought the whole nation back to true loyal allegiance to the God of their fathers. It was a worthy act for his manhood's prime, and we are not surprised to learn that, as by a sudden outburst of acclamation, he was appointed judge (ver. 6).

Oh, who shall induce the professing Church of God to put away the evil things by which her testimony is now impaired! Sometimes in buildings connected with the Church we hear of fancy-fairs, raffles, full-dress soirees, dances, theatricals, comic concerts, and many other such like things, which indicate the corruption of the spiritual life, as certainly as an army of fungi indicate the damp and unwholesome atmosphere in which they thrive.

What would not be the blessed result if the children of God would come to another Mizpeh and confess, as Israel did, **"We have sinned against the Lord"**!

II. THE VICTORY OF FAITH

The tidings of this great convocation reached the Philistines, who looked upon it as an unmistakable sign of the returning spirit of national life, and **"the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel"** (ver. 7).

From every part the contingents of a great army were assembled, and there was every reason to fear that the terrible experiences of Aphek would be renewed. A panic of fear spread through the multitudes of Israel. There appeared but one hope; God must arise to his people's help, or they would be trampled beneath the heel of the conqueror. What could timid sheep do against wolves? What could unarmed peasants do against such soldiers? How could the national life, which was just reviving, after the discouragement and anarchy of years, withstand the onset of these bitter foes?

"Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us," the people said to Samuel, **"that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines."**

Ah, soul! this is the only hope for thee. Thou hast been ground down beneath tyrant sins, which have held thee in subjection as the Philistines did Israel; thou hast groaned in the prison-house, like another Samson shorn of his locks.

There seems no help or hope of deliverance, because thy moral life is impaired by the permission of evils analogous to those which infected the Hebrew nation in the days of the Judges. Only put these away, and stand clear of them; in the name of God pour out all your self-confidence before the Cross where Jesus died; receive the forgiveness which is never withheld from the penitent and believing soul; and then, however many be the obstacles, temptations, and sins that beset thee, know that the Lord will save thee out of the hand of thine enemies.

If only the tempted and overwhelmed would bathe their souls in the purifying waters of the Word of God, and cultivate the spirit of unwavering prayer and faith, the Lord would fight for them, and they might hold their peace.

The power of Samuel's prayers was already known throughout the land, like those of John Knox in the days of Queen Mary. The people had come to believe in them; they felt them to be the palladium of their liberties. If only Samuel would pray, they might count on deliverance. They knew that he had prayed; they now entreated that he would not cease.

But Samuel did more than pray. He took a sucking lamb, and offered it as a whole burnt-offering to the Lord, symbolizing thus the desire of Israel to be wholly yielded to the Divine will. There must be consecration before there can be faith and deliverance. It is not enough simply to put away sin; we must also give ourselves absolutely and entirely to God. There must be a wholeness in the offering, the yielding ourselves spirit, soul, and body to be what ever God would have us be.

Failure in the walk always denotes failure in the heart-life. If you are perpetually overcome by the Philistines, be sure that there is a flaw in your inner consecration.

While the smoke of this offering was rising in the calm air, and the eyes of tens of thousands were fixed upon the figure of Samuel, who, as a prophet of the Lord, was within his rights in superseding the Levitical priests in this solemn function; and while his piercing cries for Divine help were rising to Heaven, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel.

Can you not see them creeping up the mountain slopes, and encircling the defenseless crowd which had no might nor power to resist? But suddenly the voice of God answered the voice of the prophet. **"The Lord thundered with a great thunder (Hebrew, *the voice of God*) on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them."**

The sky was suddenly black with tempest, peal after peal rolled through the mountains. Then at a signal from Samuel, the men of Israel flung themselves upon the flying foe. Down the steep they sped, catching up the arms which were cast away in flight, and stripping the dead of their weapons.

Josephus tells of another circumstance that added to the horrors of that irresistible onslaught.

"God destroyed their ranks with an earthquake; the ground trembled under their feet, so that there was no place whereon to stand in safety. They either fell helpless to the earth, or into some of the chasms that opened beneath them."

The pursuit only stayed when the Philistines came beneath the shadow of their own fortress of Bethcar, *the Well of the Vineyards*, as it is now called.

This is the great message of the whole story for us.

If only the Church of God would put away the evils that grieve his Holy Spirit, if only we would ourselves come out and be separate, not touching the unclean thing, and cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh, the Spirit would interpose for us too. The Lord would deliver us, fighting on our behalf against our foes, so that we should be more than conquerors through Him that loveth us, and have to do nothing more than take the spoil.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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