Synopsis of the Books of the Bible

1 Samuel

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

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Introduction

We have seen that the Book of Ruth occupies, in its purport, an intermediate place between the end of the period in which Israel was governed by God Himself, who interposed from time to time by means of judges, and the setting up of the king whom He selected for them. This period, alas! came to an end through the people's failure, and their inability to make a right use, by faith, of their privileges.

The contents of the books of Samuel

The Books of Samuel contain the account of the cessation of Israel's original relationship with God, founded on their obedience to the terms of the old covenant, and the special prescriptions of the Book of Deuteronomy; the sovereign interference of God in prophecy; and the setting up of the king whom God Himself had prepared, with the circumstances which preceded this event. It is not merely that Israel failed under the government of God: they rejected it.

The ark in the enemy's hands and the failure of the priesthood

Placed under the priesthood, they drew nigh to God in the enjoyment of privileges which were granted them as a people acknowledged by Jehovah. We shall see the ark — which, as it was the nearest and most immediate, so was it the most precious link between Jehovah Elohim and the people — fall into the hands of the enemy. What could a priest do, when that which gave his priesthood all its importance was in the enemy's hands, and when the place where he drew near to Jehovah (the throne of God in the midst of Israel, the place of propitiation by which in mercy Israel's relationship with God, through the sprinkled blood, was maintained) was no more there?

It was no longer mere unfaithfulness in the circumstances in which God had placed them. The circumstances themselves were entirely changed through God's judgment upon Israel. The outward link of God's connection with the people was broken; the ark of the covenant, centre and basis of their relationship with Him, had been given up by the wrath of God into the hands of their enemies. Priesthood was the natural and normal means of maintaining the relationship between God and the people: how could it now be used for this purpose?

God in communication with his people by a prophet

Nevertheless God, acting in sovereignty, could put Himself in communication with His people, by virtue of His grace and immutable faithfulness, according to which His connection with His people existed still on His side, even when all acknowledged relationship between Him and them was broken off by their unfaithfulness. And this He did by raising up a prophet. By his means God still communicated in a direct way with His people, even when they had not maintained their relationship with Him in their normal condition. The office of the priest was connected with the integrity of these relations; the people needed him in their infirmities. Still under the priesthood the people themselves drew nigh to God through the medium of the priest, according to the relationship which God had established and which He recognised. But the prophet acted on the part of God outside this relationship,

or rather above it, when the people were no longer faithful.

The establishment of a kingdom

The setting up of a king went much farther. It was a new order of relationship which involved most important principles. The relationship of God with the people was no longer immediate. An authority was set over Israel. God expected faithfulness from the king. The people's destiny depended upon the conduct of the one who was responsible before Jehovah for the maintenance of this faithfulness.

God's grace and wisdom displayed in our follies and faults

It was God's purpose to establish this principle for the glory of Christ. I speak of His kingdom over the Jews and over the nations, over the whole world. This kingdom has been prefigured in David and in Solomon. To ask for a king, rejecting God's own immediate government, was folly and rebellion in the people. How often are our follies and our faults the opportunity for the display of the grace and wisdom of God and for the fulfilment of His counsels hidden from the world until then! Our sins and faults alone have conduced to the glorious accomplishment of these counsels in Christ.

These are the important subjects treated of in the Books of Samuel, so far at least as the establishment of the kingdom. Its glorious condition and its fall are related in the two Books of Kings.

It is the fall of Israel which puts an end to their first relationship with God. The ark is taken; the priest dies. Prophecy introduces the king — a king despised and rejected, man having set up another, yet a king whom God establishes according to the might of His power. Such are the great principles unfolded in the Books of Samuel.

History shews us here, as everywhere, that there is but One who has remained faithful — an humbling result for us of the trial to which God has subjected us, but one well adapted to keep us humble.

The priesthood and its fall

If we have spoken of the fall of the priesthood, we must not infer from it that priesthood ceased to exist. It was always necessary to a people full of weakness (as it is to ourselves on earth); it interposed in the things of God to maintain individual relationship to Him in them, but it ceased to form the basis of relationship between the whole people and God. The people were no longer capable of enjoying this relationship through this means alone; and the priesthood itself could suffice no longer, having so deeply failed in its standing. We shall do well to dwell a little on this, which is the turning-point of the truths we are considering.

In Israel's primitive state, and in their constitution generally, as established in the land given to them, priesthood was the basis of their relationship with God; it was that which characterised and maintained it (see Heb. 7:11). The high priest was their head and representative before God, as a nation of worshippers; and in this character (I speak here neither of redemption from Egypt nor of conquests, but of a people before God, and in relationship with Him), on the great day of atonement he confessed their

sins over the scape-goat. It was not merely intercession. He stood there as head and representative of the people, who were summed up in him before Jehovah. The people were acknowledged, although faulty. They presented themselves in the person of the high priest, that they might be in connection with a God, who, after all veiled Himself from their eyes. The people presented everything to the priest; the high priest stood before God. This relationship did not imply innocence. An innocent man should have stood himself before God. "Adam, where art thou?" This question brings out his fall.

Still the people were not driven away, though the veil was between them and God; the high priest, who sympathised with the infirmities of the people, being one with them, maintained the relationship with God. They were a very imperfect people, it is true; yet by this means they stood themselves in connection with the Holy One. But Israel was not able to maintain this position; not only was there sin (the high priest could remedy that), but they sinned against Jehovah, they turned away from Him, and that even in their leaders. The priesthood itself, which should have maintained the relationship, wrought for its destruction by dishonouring God and repelling the people from His worship, instead of attracting them to it.

The place and duty of a king

I pass over the preparatory circumstances; they will be considered in detail in their place. God then sets up a king, whose duty it was to preserve order and to secure God's connection with the people by governing them, and by his own faithfulness to God. This is what Christ will accomplish for them in the ages to come; He is the anointed. When the king is established, the priest walks before him (1 Sam. 2:35). It is a new institution, the only one capable of maintaining the relationship of the people with God. Priesthood is no longer here an immediate relationship. It provides indeed, in its own functions, for the wants of the people. The king watches over it, and secures order and blessing.

The difference between Israel and the Church as to priesthood

Now the assembly's position is altogether different. The saint now approaches God directly. Together with the priesthood, which is exercised for the saints on earth, to maintain them in their walk here and in the enjoyment of their privileges, it is united to the Anointed; the veil exists no longer. We sit in the heavenly places in Christ, made accepted in the Beloved. The favour of God rests upon us, members of the body of Christ, as upon Christ Himself. That which has unveiled the holiness of God has disclosed all the sin of man, and has taken it away.* {* I refer here to that of His believing people.

Thus in Christ, members of His body, we are perfect before God, and perfectly accepted. The priest seeks neither to give us this position, nor to maintain relationship with God as to those who are not in this position. The work of Christ has placed us in it. How intercede then for perfection? Can intercession make the Person and the work of Christ more perfect in the sight of God? Certainly not. But we are in Him. In what manner then is this priesthood exercised for us? In maintaining mercy-needing creatures in their walk, and so in the realisation of their relationship with God.* The Christian indeed enters into a still clearer manifestation of God and more absolute relationship with God, that of being in the light as God is in the light. We are seated in the heavenly places, made

accepted in the Beloved, loved as He is loved, the righteousness of God in Him. He is our life; He has given us the glory that was given Him. Now the Holy Ghost, who came down from heaven after that Jesus was glorified, has introduced us consciously into the unveiled presence of God. Nevertheless we, though without excuse in doing it, fail and pick up defilement here below. Through the advocacy of Him who is in the presence of God for us our feet are washed by the Spirit and the word, and we are rendered capable of maintaining a communion (of which darkness knows nothing) with God in that light. Hereafter, in the presence of Jesus the King, priesthood will no doubt sustain the connection of the people with God, whilst He will bear the weight of government and of blessing for the people in every sense. {* There is a shade of difference between the priesthood and the advocacy of Christ. The priesthood is in Christ appearing in the presence of God for us; but this as to our place before God is perfection. It does not therefore refer to sin in its daily exercise, but mercy and grace to help in time of need. We enter boldly into the holiest. Advocacy refers to our sinning, because the question, where it is spoken of (1 John 2:2), is communion, and this is wholly interrupted by sin.}

Chapter 1

Eli and his sons, and Hannah's answered prayer

We find then, in the beginning of this book, priesthood existing before God in the original form we have mentioned. Eli, pious himself, and fearing God, maintained no order in the priestly family. The priesthood, instead of binding the people to God, morally separated them. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, were at Shiloh; but their conduct made the offering of the Lord to be abhorred of the people. Such was the state of things in Israel. At the same time, in the family of Elkanah, Hannah, chosen of Jehovah for blessing, was in trial; the desires of her natural heart were not satisfied, and the adversary tormented her by means of the prosperous Peninnah. But He, whose strength is perfected in weakness, having made manifest (as ever in such a case) the powerlessness of nature, gives blessing according to His own will, against all hope, in order that that which was of Him should be evidently wrought by His own power. Hannah has a son according to her petition, a son devoted to the Lord. His family was of the tribe of Levi (1 Chron. 6).

Chapter 2

Hannah's song a prophecy of God's ways

In the beautiful song of 1 Samuel 2 Hannah recognises this great principle of sovereign grace, and of the power of God; that He brings down the proud and those who trust in the flesh, and exalts the weak and impotent. "For the pillars of the earth are Jehovah's; and he has set the world upon them." This was what Israel, poor and fallen, and a feeble remnant waiting for Jehovah, needed to learn; that is, that everything hung upon God and God alone, who did not seek for power in man, but manifests it in His own dealings by destroying all His enemies, and who will at length "give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed." It is the history of God's interposition in favour of poor fallen Israel; and

that by the manifestation of His power in giving strength to His King, His Christ. It is a prophecy of the ways of God, of the great principles of His government with respect to the position of Israel, from the moment of its utterance until the establishment of the millennial kingdom in the Person of the Lord Jesus.

God's judgment on the priestly family

Immediately after this testimony from God upon which faith might rest, the inward state of the people is revealed, and the iniquity of the priesthood, which should have been the instrument for cleansing this iniquity of the people, but which, on the contrary, brought down judgment upon them. "Ye make Jehovah's people to transgress," said Eli. "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against Jehovah, who shall intreat for him?". Such was the state of things according to Eli himself. "Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because Jehovah would slay them. And the child, Samuel, grew on, and was in favour both with Jehovah, and also with men, happy in sharing (however feeble the copy) the testimony borne to Jesus Himself.

As to the sons of Eli, they are an example of that which but too often happens. How frequently, alas! do we see that, when the judgment of God is on the point of breaking forth, people are unconscious of it (their moral perception being darkened by the evil). The eyes of God are elsewhere, as well as the spiritual discernment which He gives to His own, as was the case here with Samuel. Nevertheless God warns Eli by means of a man of God. His judgment on the priestly family and on the priesthood is pronounced before Jehovah reveals Himself to Samuel.

This judgment announces the change in the order of divine government, which was to take place through the setting up of a king, an anointed one (a Christ), and through the consequent position of the priesthood, as we have already remarked (ver. 35). "And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind; and I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before mine anointed * for ever. Such, I apprehend, will be millennial order. {* Joshua, on the contrary, went in and out under the direction of Eleazar, who inquired of God.}

Chapter 3

God's revelation of Himself to Samuel

In 1 Samuel 3 God reveals Himself to Samuel; and he is known to be a prophet of Jehovah from Dan even to Beersheba.

Eli's failure, but personal piety and submission

Eli, judged for having loved his sons more than Jehovah, comforts our hearts nevertheless by his submission. If he failed in the energy of faithfulness, he was yet true in heart to Jehovah, and his personal piety is the more conspicuous in the devotedness to God's glory which he manifests in these circumstances, finding his death in the Ichabod of His people.

Sad and affecting history of the effect of God's righteous judgment upon one whose heart was set upon His glory in His people, but who had not had firmness enough to prevent the people, and even his own sons, from dishonouring Jehovah Himself in the priestly service!

Here begins the display of the means which God employs in His sovereignty to be in relationship with His people, when the ordinary relations He had established are interrupted.

Chapters 4 to 6

The Philistines and God's overruling providence in judgment

In 1 Samuel 4 the enemies of God and of His people display their strength; the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel. God, in overruling providence, makes all things concur to bring about the purposed result.

We shall do well to pause a moment here; for the Philistines are of considerable importance, on account of the part they take in this history, as the power of the enemy. They appear to me to represent the power of the enemy acting within the circle of God's people. They were in the territory of the Israelites — within the land, and even on this side of the Jordan. They were not, like the Egyptians or Assyrians, enemies from without. Habitually hostile to Israel, to those who by God's appointment should have possessed the land of promise — so much the more dangerous from being always at hand, and claiming possession of the country, the Philistines set before us in type the power of the enemy acting from within. I do not mean the flesh, but the enemy within the pale of the professing church, acting of course through instruments, the oppressor of God's true people to whom the promises belong.

The loss of the ark, Eli's death and the naming of Ichabod

Israel, corrupt in all their ways, and daring in their ways with God, because they had forgotten His majesty and His holiness, seek to identify Jehovah* with them in their unfaithful condition, as He had been in their original state, instead of coming before Him to learn why He had forsaken His people. God will neither acknowledge nor succour them. On the contrary, the ark of the covenant, the sign and the seat of His relationship with the people, is taken. His throne is no longer in the midst of the people; His tabernacle is empty; all ordered relationship is interrupted. Where can they offer sacrifice? where draw nigh to Jehovah their God! Eli, the priest, dies; and his pious daughter-in-law, overwhelmed by these disastrous tidings, pronounces the funeral oration of the unhappy people in the name she bestows on that which could no longer be her joy. The fruit of her womb bears but this impress of her people's calamity; it is only Ichabod in her sight. {* Observe the contrast between this case and that of Achan, although there was sin in the latter. The sin was confessed and judged in detail, although the people were chastised.}

God's power and majesty maintained among the Philistines and His people

What a blessing to have had through grace the song of Hannah already given by the Spirit to sustain the faith and hope of the people! All outward connection is broken; but God upholds His own majesty; and if unfaithful Israel had not been able to withstand the worshippers of idols, the God whom Israel had forsaken vindicates His glory, and proves, even in the heart of their temple, that those idols are but vanity.

The Philistines are obliged to acknowledge the power of the God of Israel, whom Israel could not glorify. His judgments suggested a means to their natural conscience which, while proving that the influence of the almighty power of God is felt even by creatures devoid of intelligence, causing them to act against their strongest instincts, manifests also that it was indeed Jehovah, the Omnipotent God, who had inflicted the chastisement under which they were suffering.

God maintains His majesty even in the midst of Israel. He is no longer among them securing their promised blessings. His ark, exposed through their unfaithfulness to the unworthy treatment of the Philistines and of the inquisitive, becomes (as the token of God's presence) the occasion of judgment inflicted on the temerity of those who dared to look within it, forgetful of His divine majesty who made it His throne and kept His testimony therein.

But how often the absence of God causes His value to be felt, whose presence had not been appreciated!

Israel, still deprived of Jehovah's presence and glory, laments after Him. Let us remark here that God could not remain among the Philistines. Unfaithfulness might subject His people to their enemies, although God was there. But, left (so to say) to Himself, His presence judged the false gods. Association was impossible; the Philistines desire Him not. You cannot glory in a victory over One who, when captured, is your destroyer. The Philistines get rid of Him. Never can the children of Satan endure the presence of the true God.

The ark at Kirjath-jearim

Moreover the heart of God is not alienated from His people. He finds His way back to the people of His choice in a sovereign manner, which proves Him to be the God of all creation. But, as we have seen, He asserts His majesty. More than fifty thousand men pay the penalty of their impious temerity. God returns; but still it needs that He open a way for Himself after His own purposes and dealings, according to which He re-establishes His relationship with the people. Thus Samuel appears again on the scene when, the ark having abode in Kirjath-jearim twenty years (1 Sam. 7), Israel laments after Jehovah. The ark is not put back in its place, nor is the original order restored.

Chapter 7

Samuel the meeting-point of Israel and God

Samuel begins to act, by his testimony, upon the conscience of the people, and to put away that which weakened them by dishonouring God. He tells them that, if they will turn to Jehovah with all their

heart, they must put away the strange gods, and serve Jehovah alone. A mingled worship was intolerable. Then would Jehovah deliver them. The prophet Samuel is now the meeting-point between the people and God. God now acknowledges him alone.

The true place of the ark

The ark is not found again in its place until the king chosen of God is established on the throne; it is only placed entirely in God's order when the son of David rules in peace and in strength at Jerusalem.* It is consulted once (1 Sam. 14:18-19), but its presence is without effect and without power. It exists, but in connection with those in whom faith and integrity were no longer found, so that nothing resulted from it. It the rather proved that God was elsewhere, or at least that He wrought elsewhere. {* Compare Ps. 78:60-61; Ps. 132. The ark is in connection with Sion, the seat of kingly grace. Solomon only, as the man of peace, could build the house.}

Samuel at Mizpeh: his intercession and God's blessing

But we will pursue the history. At Samuel's call the strange gods are put away. The people gather around him, that he may pray for them. They offer no sacrifice; they draw water and pour it out upon the ground in token of repentance (see 2 Sam. 14:14); they fast and confess their sin. Samuel judges them there.

But if Israel assembles, even for humiliation, the enemy at once bestirs himself in opposition; he will tolerate no act which places the people of God in a position which recognises Him as God.

The Israelites are alarmed, and have recourse to Samuel's intercession. Samuel offers a sacrifice,* token of entire surrender of self to the Lord, and of the people's relationship with Him; but it is not before the ark. He entreats Jehovah, his prayer is heard, and the Philistines are smitten before Israel. And it was not an exceptional case, although they lost nothing of their formidable character, or of their hatred for Israel. Samuel brings down God's blessing upon the people, and the hand of Jehovah was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. {* That is to say, a burnt-offering. This is remarkable. It was not sacrifice for sin, but sacrifice which recognised the relationship existing between the people and God. Christ only, as we have seen elsewhere, is the true burnt-offering.}

Samuel the support and upholder of the people

The cities of Israel were restored. There was peace between Israel and the Amorites. Samuel judged Israel at Ramah and built an altar there. All this is an exceptional and extraordinary position for Israel, in which they depended entirely on Samuel, who, while living himself as a patriarch, as though there were no tabernacle, becomes, through his own relationship with God, by faith, the support and upholder of the people, who in fact had no other.

Chapters 8 to 10

The people's demand for a king: Saul the man according to the flesh

But faith is not transmitted by succession. Samuel could not make prophets of his sons. They were no better as judges than Eli's sons had been as priests, and the people had no faith themselves to lean immediately upon God. They ask to be made like unto the nations.

"Make us now a king," said they to Samuel. Where was Jehovah? For Israel, nowhere. But it was evil in the eyes of Samuel, and he prayed unto Jehovah. While acknowledging that the people had, as usual, rejected Him, God commands Samuel to hearken unto their voice. Samuel warns them according to God's testimony, and sets before them all the inexpediency and consequences of such a step; but the people will not hearken unto him. God brings to the prophet, through providential circumstances, the man whom He had chosen to satisfy the carnal wishes of the people. In all this He judges the people and their king. ("He gave them a king in his anger, and took him away in his wrath.") But He remembers His people. He does not forsake them. He acts by Saul on their behalf, while shewing them their unfaithfulness, and afterwards in cutting off the disobedient king. Beauty and height of stature distinguished the son of Kish. But in the signs that Samuel gave him, when he had anointed him, there was a meaning which should have carried his thoughts beyond himself.

How often there is a meaning, a language, perfectly intelligible to one who has ears to hear, but which escapes us, because our gross and hardened heart has no spiritual intelligence or discernment! And yet all our future hangs upon it. God has shewn our incapacity for the blessing it involved. Nevertheless the means were not wanting.

Although the significance of this circumstance was less evident than that of the other signs, yet Rachel's sepulchre should have reminded Saul, the son and heir according to the flesh of the one who was born there, that the son of the mother's sorrow was the son of the father's right hand (Gen. 35:18).

God-given signs

Now God had not abandoned Israel; faith was still there; men were going up to God. There were some in Israel who remembered the God of Bethel, who had revealed Himself to Jacob when he fled,* and who in His faithfulness had brought him back in peace; and God gave Saul favour in their eyes. The servants of the God of Bethel salute him and strengthen him on his way. But the hill of God was possessed by the garrison of the Philistines — another circumstance which, by its significance, should have gone to the heart of a faithful Israelite who desired the glory of God and the good of His people. But the sign which accompanied it made it much more forcible; for the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Saul in this place, and he was turned into another man, called therefore to "do as occasion served him, for God was with him" (1 Sam. 10:7).** {* The God who had said to him in the day of his trouble, when driven out from before his enemy, that He would not forsake him. ** Accordingly it was the Spirit of prophecy, the Spirit which acted in blessing, which indicated the presence of God, and that to which Saul should have recourse, even though (yea, because) the hill of God, the public seat of His authority in Israel, was in the hands of the enemies of the true people of God. This scene pictured the whole state of Israel.}

It often happens, that faith sets forth clearly what should be done, while the heart, waxen fat and unfaithful, does not see it at all.

And what do these signs mean? There are those in Israel who remember the God of Bethel, and who seek Him — upright and prepared hearts, who know Him as the resource of faith. But the hill of God, the public seat of His strength, is in the enemy's hands. Still, if this be so, the Spirit of God is upon the man who takes cognisance of it, and it is at this very hill that the Spirit comes upon him. The name of God is also significative here. It is God abstractedly — God the Creator: God Himself is in question. The Spirit of Jehovah comes upon Saul, because He resumes there the course of His relations with Israel.

Samuel, not Saul, the link between God and the people

But Samuel is still the only one whom God recognises as the link between Himself and the people. It is when Saul has had to do with Samuel, that he is another man. He must wait for Samuel, that he may know what to do, and that blessing may rest upon him. He must thus acknowledge that blessing is connected with the prophet, and not act without him; he must wait for him with perfect patience (seven days), a patience which, submitting to God's testimony, will not seek for blessing apart from His ways.

The Philistine enemies

Here also we see in the Philistines the enemies who put faith to the proof. We have often enemies over whom we gain an easy victory, and on whose account we are considered spiritual, yet they are not such as (on God's part, and it may also be said on their own part) put faith to the proof. With these patience must have her perfect work. And the Philistines held this place with respect to Saul. It was all well that the people should be delivered from their other enemies; but they were not the ones which were a snare to them, and which manifested the power of the enemy in the very midst of Israel and the promises.

Do spiritual powers rule over us in the assembly, in the place where the promises of God should be fulfilled? And what power do we see to overthrow the power of evil and spiritual wickedness within the borders of the professing church?

It was from the Philistines that Saul should have delivered the people of God (see 1 Sam. 9:16). The hill of God was in the Philistines' hands (see also 1 Sam. 14:52). If Saul had waited for Samuel, he would have declared unto him all that he should do. Now we shall see that, two years later, Saul is put to the proof as to this in the presence of the Philistines; and whatever may have been the delay, the thing had not been altered; all the intermediate success should have increased his faith and strengthened him in obedience.

The choice of a king

Samuel calls the people together at Mizpeh. There he sets before them their foolishness in rejecting the God of their salvation. But he proceeds to the choice of a king, according to the command of God. God meets the wishes of the people. If the flesh could have glorified God, nothing was wanting to induce

them to trust in Him. God adapts Himself to them in outward things; and further, as we know, had the people followed Jehovah, Jehovah would not have forsaken them (1 Sam. 12:20-25).

And now that God has set up a king, those who will not own him are "men of Belial." The people however scarcely see God in it at all: they only recognise Him in those things which the flesh can perceive, such as the beauty of the king and the success of his arms, that is to say, the things in which God suits Himself to nature, and in which He grants blessing, in order that He may be known and trusted. In this they rejoice, but they go no farther. Faith is not of nature.

Chapter 11

Saul's early prudence: the Kingdom renewed at Gilgal

As yet all goes well with Saul; he does not take vengeance on those who oppose him. Before his faith is tried, his natural character would gain him favour with men. And now, in those things which have given rise to the carnal movement that led the people to desire a king, all apparently prospers to their wish. The Ammonites are so thoroughly defeated, that two of them are not left together. Here also Saul acts with prudence and generosity. He does not allow the people's desire for vengeance to be carried out. He owns the Lord in the blessing granted to the people. In truth God was with them, granting to the flesh all the means and helps necessary for walking with Him, had the thing been possible. Samuel is there on God's part, and supports by his authority the king whom God has set up. At Samuel's invitation the people assemble at Gilgal (a place memorable for the blessing of the people and their association with Jehovah, the flesh being judged, on entering the land), to renew the kingdom there, and again to recognise a throne whose authority had just been confirmed by successful efforts for the deliverance of God's people. Peace-offerings and great rejoicing make the ceremony more imposing.

Chapter 12

Samuel's faith, love and intercession

Samuel (1 Sam. 12) receives the people's testimony to his fidelity. He sets before them the ways of God towards them, their ingratitude and foolishness in having asked for a king and rejected God. Nevertheless, while giving a sign from God which added the weight of God's own testimony to his words, he declares to the people that, if henceforth they would obey Jehovah, both the king and the people should continue to follow Jehovah (that is, they would walk under His blessing and guidance); but if not, Jehovah would be against them. For Jehovah would not forsake them, and he himself (Samuel) would assuredly not cease to pray for them, and would teach them the good and the right way: that is to say, he places the people, as to their public conduct, in the position they had chosen, and set them under their own responsibility before Jehovah; but at the same time, full of love to them as the people of God, their rejection of himself does not for a moment suggest the thought to him of giving up his intercession or his testimony for their welfare. Beautiful picture of a heart near the Lord, which, in forgetfulness of self, can love His people as its own! To fail in this would have been to sin against the

Lord (compare 2 Cor. 12:15).

Saul established, called to be faithful and obedient

Here then is Saul established in his place, and his authority confirmed by the blessing of God. Samuel retires, confining himself to his prophetic office, and Saul is now called to prove himself faithful and obedient in his present position, surrounded by all the advantages which the blessing of God and the solemn act of His prophet could confer upon him.

Summary of chapters 1 to 12

Let us now recapitulate the history we have been examining.

Israel, unfaithful, no longer maintain their relationship with God under priesthood. The ark is taken, the priest dies, and Ichabod is written on the condition of the people. God raises up a prophet, who becomes the means of communication between Himself and the people; but, threatened by the Ammonites, the people at length demand a king. God grants their request, testifying at the same time His displeasure, since He Himself was their King. The Spirit of prophecy continues nevertheless to be the channel of divine communication to the people. Signs, which indicate the state of the people, are given to Saul, the elected and anointed king: first of all, some faithful ones who own the God of Bethel — that is to say, the faithful God of Jacob, who had promised not to leave him till He had performed all that He had promised him; and, next, the hill of God — the seat of authority among the people — in possession of the Philistines, the power of the enemy in the land of promise.

The Spirit of prophecy comes upon Saul, shewing him where God was amid these circumstances; and Samuel tells him to wait for him at Gilgal. Meantime, as we have seen, he is strengthened by the blessing of God upon his undertakings.

Chapter 13

Saul, the man after the flesh, and Jonathan, a man of faith

Saul reigns two years. He then selects three thousand men: two thousand are with him, and one with Jonathan. Jonathan, a man of faith, acts with energy against the enemies of God's people, and smites the Philistines; but the energy of faith, acting (as it always does) in the very stronghold of the enemy, naturally provokes their hostility. The Philistines hear of it: Saul is roused to action, and calls together, not Israel, but the "Hebrews."

Let us remark here that there is faith in Jonathan. The flesh, placed in the position of leader to God's people, follows indeed the impulse given by faith, but does not possess it; and the word Hebrews, the name by which a Philistine would have called the people, indicates that Saul relied on the gathering of the nation as a constituted body, and understood no better than a Philistine would have done the relation between a chosen people and God. And this is the position set before us in the history of Saul. It is not

premeditated opposition to God, but the flesh set in a place of testimony and used in accomplishing God's work. We see in it a person linked with the interests of God's true people, doing the work of God according to the people's idea of their need — a true idea as to their actual need; but he is one who seeks his resources in the energy of man, an energy to which God does not refuse His aid when there is obedience to His will, for He loves His people; but which in principle, in moral and inward motive, can never of itself go beyond the flesh from which it springs. In the midst of all this faith can act, and act sincerely, and this is Jonathan's case. God will bless this faith, and He always does so, because it owns Him; and in this instance (and it is His gift) because it sincerely seeks the good of God's people.

All this is, in principle, a kind of picture of the professing church, which in this point of view anticipates the true reign of Christ, and in this position even fails in her faithfulness to God. True faith, in the midst of such a system, never rises so high as the glory of the coming One, the true rejected David, but it loves Him and cleaves to Him. If the church is merely professing, she persecutes Christ; but that in her which acts by faith loves and owns Him, even when He is hunted like a partridge on the mountains.

Saul's failure when put to the proof

Jonathan having thus in faith attacked the Philistines, Saul, who ostensibly leads the people before God, is put to the proof. Will he shew himself competent? Will he remember the true principle on which the blessing of the people rests? Will he act as a royal priest, or will he acknowledge the prophet to be the true link of faith between the people and God — a link the importance and necessity of which he ought to have recognised, since he owed to it his present place and power, and it had proved to him its own mission and prophetic authority by establishing his? When the critical moment arrives, Saul fails.

The tokens of the unbelief of the flesh

It is worth while to retrace here the tokens of the unbelief of the flesh.

The Philistines are smitten. The nation, active and energetic, hear of it; nothing could be more natural. Saul has but the same resource — no call upon God, no cry to Jehovah, the God of Israel; Samuel does not occur to his faith, although he remembers what Samuel had told him. If the Philistines have heard, the Hebrews must hear also. Israel fears; God gives no answer to unbelief when the trial of faith is His object. Saul calls the people after him to Gilgal, but they were soon scattered from him at the report of the Philistines having gathered together. Saul is at Gilgal, and Samuel comes again into his mind. It was no longer as when the kingdom had been renewed. The circumstances naturally suggested Samuel as a resource. Saul tarries seven days for him according to his word. He waits for him long enough to satisfy the exigence of conscience. Nature can go a long way on this principle; but it has not that sense of its own weakness, and that all depends on God, which makes it wait on God, as the alone resource and worker. Then, as the people once brought the ark into the camp, he offers the burnt-offering. But, if he had had confidence in God, he would have understood that, whatever might be the result, he should wait for Him; that it was useless to do anything without Him, and that he ran no risk in waiting for Him. A faithful God could not fail him. He had thought of Samuel, and of his having told him to wait, so that

he was without excuse; he remembered that the guidance and blessing of God were found with the prophet. But he looks at circumstances: the people are scattered, and Saul seeks to bring God in by an act of devotion without faith. It was the decisive moment; God would have confirmed his kingdom over Israel, would have established his dynasty. But now He had made choice of another.

The secret of Saul's loss of the throne

Observe here, that it is not through being defeated by the Philistines that Saul loses the throne. The fault was between himself and God. The Philistines do not attack him. It is enough for Satan if he succeeds in frightening us away from the pure and simple path of faith. Samuel departs after having made known to Saul the mind of God. The Philistines pillage the land, which is defenceless. The people moreover had neither sword nor spear.

What a picture of the state of God's people! How often we find that those who profess to be the children of God, to be of the truth, and heirs of the promises, are unarmed before the enemies who despoil them!

Chapter 14

Jonathan's faith in God

But faith in God is always blest; and if God has shewn the effect of unbelief, He also shews its folly, since wherever faith is found, there all His strength is displayed; and then it is the enemy who is defenceless. Jonathan makes up his mind to attack the Philistines in the energy which he derives from faith in God; and if unbelief is manifest in Saul, the beauty of faith is exhibited in his son.

The difficulties are not lessened. The Philistines are in garrison, and their camp situated in a place of unusually difficult access, a narrow pathway up perpendicular rocks being the only means of approach. The Philistines were there in great number, and well armed. But it is hard for faith to endure the oppression of God's people by the enemy, and the dishonour thus done to God Himself. Jonathan endures it not. Where does he seek for strength? His thoughts are simple. The Philistines are uncircumcised; they have not the help of the God of Israel. "There is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few"; and this is the thought of Jonathan's faith, that fair flower which God caused to blossom in the wilderness of Israel at this sorrowful moment. He does not think about himself. Jehovah, says he, has delivered them up to Israel. He trusts in God, and in His unfailing faithfulness towards His people: his heart rests in this,* and he does not imagine for an instant that God is not with His people, whatever their condition may be. This characterises faith. It not only acknowledges that God is great, but it recognises the indissoluble bond (indissoluble because it is of God) between God and His people. The consequence is, that faith forgets circumstances, or rather nullifies them. God is with His people. He is not with their enemies. All the rest is but an opportunity of proving the real dependence of faith. Thus, there is no boasting in Jonathan; his expectation is from God. He goes out and meets the Philistines. He is there a witness for God. If they are bold enough to come down, he will wait for them and not create difficulties for himself, but he will not turn away from those which meet him in his path. The indolent and at the same time foolish and imprudent confidence of the enemy is but a sign to

Jonathan that Jehovah has delivered them up. Had they come down, they would have lost their advantage; in bidding him come up, they set aside the insurmountable difficulty of access to the camp. Happy in having a faithful companion in his work of faith, Jonathan seeks no other assistance. He does not talk of the Hebrews; but he says, "Jehovah has delivered them up into the hand of Israel." He climbs the rock with his armour-bearer. And in truth Jehovah was with him; the Philistines fall before Jonathan, and his armour-bearer slays after him. But while honouring the arm which faith had strengthened, God manifests Himself. The dread of God took hold of the Philistines, and everything trembles before the man whom faith (God's precious gift) had led into action. {* See the same proofs of faith in David, when he went out against Goliath.}

Saul's unbelief and ignorance

Faith acts of itself. Saul is obliged to number the people to find out who is absent. Alas! we are entering into the sad history of unbelief. Saul endeavours to obtain some directions from the ark, whilst elsewhere God was triumphing over the enemy without Israel. The tumult of their defeat continues to increase; and unbelief, which never knows what to do, tells then the priest to withdraw his hand. The king and the priest were not the link between God and the people. There was neither the people's faith in God without a king, nor the king whom God Himself had given.

Here again, instead of Israel (whom Jonathan alone recognised), we find those whom even the Spirit of God calls Hebrews* who, although they were "of the fountain of Jacob," are among the Philistines, content to be at ease among the enemies of God. {*This is the more remarkable, because the Spirit calls those who were with Saul and Jonathan Israelites. This gives special force to the word "Hebrews," wherever it is found. God does not refuse the name of Israelite to the most timorous of the people (chap. 13:6), but He refuses it to those who join the Philistines. The idea was lost of the connection between the people and God. It was a nation like any other.}

Now that the victory is gained, all are glad to share the triumph and pursue the Philistines.

The work of faith spoiled and hindered by unbelief

And poor Saul, what does he do? Never can unbelief — however good its intentions in joining the work of faith — do anything except spoil it. Saul speaks of avenging himself on his enemies. Jehovah is not in his thoughts; he thinks of himself, and hinders the pursuit by his carnal and selfish zeal. May God preserve us from the guidance and help of unbelief in the work of faith! God Himself can succour us through every means; but when man mixes himself up with the work, he does but spoil it, even when seeking to bring in strength.

Saul, at the moment of such blessing, is zealous to maintain the idea of honouring Jehovah's ordinances, as he sought to do previously in asking His counsel at the ark, making much of His name, as though the victory had been due to him, and it was only some hidden sin which prevented his obtaining an answer from God. He had nearly put Jonathan to death, through whom God had wrought. He would discover the sin by bringing in God, who acts indeed, but only to make manifest the folly of the poor king.

Observe that faith in full energy can thankfully avail itself of the refreshment which God sets before it in its toilsome course, whilst the carnal zeal of that which is but an imitation of faith, and which never acts with God, makes a duty of refusing it. All that Saul can do, when he takes the lead, is to prevent their reaping the entire fruit of the victory. His intervention could only spoil the work of others; he has no faith to perform one himself.

Nevertheless God has pity on Israel, and keeps their enemies in check by means of Saul; for although unbelieving, he had not yet turned his hatred against God's elect. He was not yet forsaken of Jehovah.

The contrast between Saul and Jonathan

But this painful and solemn moment is at hand. Meanwhile he strengthens himself. There was constant war with the Philistines; but Saul, warlike as he was, could not overcome them, as David or even Samuel did. He sought carnal means amongst his fellows to attain his object.

Observe here with what frightful rapidity, and how even at once, the enemy gains the upper hand when we are not walking in the ways of God (compare 1 Sam. 7:12-14, and 1 Sam. 13:16-23).

Observe also that all the forms of piety and of Jewish religion are with Saul; "Jehovah's priest in Shiloh (1 Sam. 14:3), wearing an ephod," and the ark (ver. 18). He consults with the priest. He prevents their eating flesh with blood. He builds an altar. The priest consults God; and, God giving no answer, Saul is ready to slay Jonathan as guilty, because he had eaten in spite of the oath.

Observe, at the same time, that it is the first altar Saul had built; that the priest is of the family which God had condemned. He builds his altar when rejected, and after the outward blessing which God had given, and which he attributes to himself, although he had only spoilt it.

On the other hand Jonathan's faith acts without taking counsel of flesh and blood: as the people said (1 Sam. 14:45), he wrought with God. The people did not know that he was absent. Happy Jonathan! faith had led him so far in advance that he did not even hear the senseless curse which his father invoked on whoever tasted food. The folly of another's unbelief did not reach him. He was at liberty, as he went along, to avail himself of the kindness of his God with joy and thanksgiving, and he pursued his course refreshed and encouraged — happy walk of simplicity which acts with God!

The consideration of these two chapters is very instructive, as setting before us the contrast between the walk of faith and that of the flesh, in the position which the latter takes, by virtue of its profession, in the work of God. It was the first time that Saul had faced the enemy on whose account God raised him up.

Chapter 15

Saul sent to smite Amalek in fulfilment of God's command

Nevertheless Saul is put to a final proof. Jehovah, by the mouth of Samuel, sends him to smite Amalek, and utterly destroy them and all that belonged to them. They were the cruel and determined enemies of God's people (Deut. 25:17-19). They had been chief among the nations, their name and their pride were everywhere known (Num. 24:7, 20); but it was a nation doomed of God.

Saul's disobedience and rejection

God now entrusts Saul with the fulfilment of Deuteronomy 25: 19. In this case all Israel accompanied him without fear. These were not the enemies from within who were daily wearing away their strength and courage. The victory is complete. The only question now is that of faithfulness to God, and of preferring His glory to self-interest. But Saul fears the people. The Spirit of God says "Saul and the people"; Saul says "the people"; and that it was for God they spared. But our excuses, even when true, only condemn us. Saul, not having faith, not looking to God, fears the people more than God. What a slave is the unbeliever! If not the slave of the enemy, he is that of the people whom he appears to govern. Saul, unfaithful to God in the midst of the people, and surrounded by blessings from Jehovah, is at length deprived of the kingdom.

No humiliation, no brokenness of heart — he confesses his sin, hoping to avoid its punishment; but, unable to escape it, he entreats Samuel to honour him in spite of it. Samuel does so and then forsakes him. Everything changes now, and David appears on the scene. It is well to remark that the connected history of Saul's reign closes with the end of 1 Samuel 14.

1 Samuel 15 is given as a separate history on account of the importance of its contents — the definite rejection of Saul, a rejection which introduces David.

Chapter 16

David anointed as God's chosen king

In 1 Samuel 16 Samuel is sent of Jehovah to anoint this His chosen one. All glorying in the flesh and its birthright are here set aside; and the youngest, despised and forgotten of all, who kept the sheep, is chosen of God; "for Jehovah sees not as man sees." Samuel, taught of God, hesitates not in his decision, and can accept none of the seven who are at home. "Are here all thy children?" At length he anoints David, brought in from the field.

David in trial a type of Christ and His suffering people

But God does not set David at once in the height of power, as He did in the case of Saul. He must make his way by grace and faith through all kinds of difficulties; and, although filled with the Holy Spirit, he must act in the presence of a power devoid of the Spirit, and which God has not yet set aside. He must be subject and be humbled, he must feel his entire dependence on God, that God is sufficient in all circumstances; and his faith must be developed by trial in which God is felt to be all. Beautiful type of One who, without sin, journeyed through far more painful circumstances! and not only a type, but at the

same time a vessel prepared by God for the Holy Spirit, who could fill him with sentiments which, while describing so touchingly the sufferings of Christ Himself and His sympathy with His people, exhibit, to those who were to tread in weakness the same path as Himself, their resource in God. For one cannot doubt that the trials of David gave rise to the greater part of those beautiful psalms, which, depicting the circumstances, the trials, and the complaints of the remnant of Israel in the last days, as well as of Christ Himself (who, in Spirit, has identified Himself with them, and has undertaken their cause), have thus furnished so many other burdened souls with the expression and the relief of their sorrows; and although their interpretation of these psalms may have been incorrect, yet their hearts were not mistaken.*

David and Saul: their outward and inward difference

We will return to our history.

The Spirit of Jehovah came upon David and forsook Saul, who, at the same time, is troubled by an evil spirit. The providence of God brings in David by means of one of Saul's servants who knew him, and presents him to Saul. Saul loves him, and keeps him in his presence; he becomes his armour-bearer, and he plays on a harp when the evil spirit troubles Saul. David, in God's sight, is the anointed king, but he must suffer before he reigns, however great his energy may be.

Chapter 17

The Philistine champion, Goliath, and David

The Philistines, that type of the enemy's power, present themselves again with their champion at their head, against whom no one dares to fight. David had returned home, and was living in the simplicity of his usual life.

Although that which precedes gives the general idea of the position in which he had been placed, it appears that David had not remained long with the king (1 Sam. 17:15). His father sends him to see his brothers, who are in Saul's army. There he sees the Philistine who defied the armies of Israel. Jonathan does not appear here. There is but one who can destroy this champion, who centres in his own person all the energy of evil. David's faith sees no difficulty in it because he sees God, and in the enemy an enemy of God without strength. He was but one of the "uncircumcised"; the rest matters little. In the performance of his ordinary duties David had already met with difficulties too great for a full-grown man; yet, although a mere youth, he had overcome them for a very simple reason — "Jehovah delivered." He had not boasted of this (it was the fulfilment of his duty); but he had learnt in it the strength and faithfulness of Jehovah. And this experience is now repeated. Man's armour is rejected; faith knows it not. God will perform the work by the most simple means.

David's strength in the simplicity of faith

David declares wherein his strength consists. "I come to thee in the name of Jehovah of hosts." He then identifies himself with the people of God. "All the earth shall know that there is a God in Israel." Remark how the simplicity of faith rises to the consciousness of power and its effects in the hands of God (1 Sam. 17:46). So ever when God leads the heart.

The stone which sinks into the forehead of Goliath deprives him of strength and of life. David cuts off the head of Goliath with his own sword, like Him who by death destroyed him that had the power of death.

David's triumph: Saul's forgetfulness

The whole army of Israel profits by David's triumph. Saul, who had forgotten him, will not suffer him to go away. Alas! the flesh, and even the flesh in rebellion, can love Jehovah's elect on account of his kindness and the relief he ministers; but it knows him not. When he is doing Jehovah's work, he is as much a stranger to Saul as if they had never met.

Chapters 18 and 19

Jonathan representing the remnant

But when Christ makes Himself known, the remnant (which Jonathan represented) loves Him as his own soul, and this beloved one becomes the object of his whole affection. This does not however, in its bearing, go beyond the personal reign of Christ. Jonathan represents the remnant which has loved Him in humiliation. As to this world, it is so always; there is a remnant who love Christ, and desire His kingdom, although it will put an end to the economy in which they stand. Of the assembly, properly so called, there is nothing here. It is a remnant who desire the coming of Christ. Saul, who sought his own glory and endeavoured to uphold his house by carnal means, seeks the death of him who is to come and establish the kingdom. So the Jews with Christ.

The faith of David and that of Jonathan

The faith of David had rather a different character from that of Jonathan, although both conquered the Philistines. Jonathan is not deterred by difficulties: he sees the God of Israel and does the work of God which Saul neglects. It is the true and energetic faith of God's people. But David, the king — secretly so indeed, but chosen and anointed — meets face to face the great enemy of his people in all his might, the mere sight of whom dismayed the people, who fled before him.

That which distinguishes the faith of Jonathan most touchingly is his attachment to one who (to judge after the manner of men, as Saul did) eclipses his glory. But Jonathan is absorbed by his affection for the one whom God has chosen. He sees in him the true head of Israel — worthy to be so — who, however despised at the present moment, must prosper and reign as of God. It was also David's qualities which gained his affection. It was a personal attachment. He could appreciate David, and he forgot his own interests in thinking of him. The voice and the words of David sink deep into his heart,

and bind him to the king whom God has chosen, while unknown, and in spite of everything. Saul, the professed head of the people, jealous of any one who might displace either himself or his descendants, is at enmity with David and forsaken of God; he is the instrument of the enemy against Jehovah's anointed. At length he falls by the more direct and open power of the enemy of God's people. Sorrowful end of that which had been a vessel of blessing and an instrument in the work of God, although but in a carnal way.

Saul's jealousy and David's true glory

God causes David's true glory to outshine the official importance of Saul. The victories of the former are sung in such a manner as to excite the king's jealousy.

We will now briefly trace the features of David's faith in these new circumstances. Never does he lift his hand against Saul; he serves him obediently, he does his duty, and patiently bears the jealousy and malice which pursue him.

Poor Saul! troubled by the evil spirit, David plays on the harp to soothe him, and Saul seeks to slay him. David escapes. Saul fears him; for the God by whom he is himself forsaken is with David. He employs him at a distance from himself, but where he is more than ever in the view of the people. God always carries out His purposes in spite of all the carnal precautions of man. David is prudent. He has the wisdom of God, who is with him in all his ways. Energetic and unpretending, always successful, he is beloved by all Israel and Judah, before whom he goes in and out with all the strength and superiority of faith.

Saul's continued hatred: Jonathan's intercession

Saul seeks to turn all this to his own account; apparently he honours David, but he only does so in order to expose him to the enemy and get rid of him. David abides in his lowliness, and Merab is given to another. Michal affords Saul a more specious opportunity. As he was only required to destroy the power of the enemies of God's people, David accepts Saul's proposal and succeeds. Saul perceives more and more that Jehovah is with David, and becomes still more afraid of him: sad development of a sad state of soul! Yet Saul was not deficient in fine points of natural character, which manifested themselves at times in better feelings. But God was not in them (1 Sam. 19). Jonathan's intercession has power over his father, and for a time all is well. But Saul, being forsaken of God, cannot bear that He should be with David. War breaks out; and David, God's own instrument in what He does for His people, defeats the Philistines and drives them away.

It will be observed here, that it is the Philistines who are there, through whom the power of faith is in question. It is with them that the battle of God and of faith is fought, that David always succeeded, and that Saul failed.

David taking refuge with Samuel

Saul is again troubled; and David, who seeks to refresh him, narrowly avoids being slain. He makes his escape and goes away to Samuel. Remark here how the grief, which egotism and self-love produce, makes room for the action of the evil spirit on the soul.

The power reappears here, which, hidden as it was, still governed the fate of Israel. David recognises it, and, when he can no longer remain with Saul, he does not seek in anywise to magnify himself by rising up against the outward form which God had inwardly judged but not destroyed. Instead of opposing it, he contents himself with acknowledging that manifestation of the power of God which had placed Saul in his royal position, and from which he had himself received the testimony and the communication of the strength and of the will of God; he takes refuge with Samuel. He is pursued thither by Saul and by his messengers, who, with their master, are subjected to this same power — a power which does not influence their hearts or guide their conduct, a power of which Saul had forfeited the blessing. What a picture of a useless, ruined vessel! sometimes prostrate under the energy of Satan, sometimes prophesying in that of God, from whom his heart is far away, by whom he is forsaken. His outward conduct is not disorderly; he does no harm except when Jehovah's anointed excites his jealousy and his hatred.

Chapter 20

David a wanderer in the earth

David is now driven away from the presence of Saul, and becomes a wanderer in the earth. It is no longer entire submission to Saul, whilst himself the vessel of the energy of God. Driven away by Saul, David had returned to the source of God's testimony; and Saul had again dared to seek his life, even when he was with Samuel. He has completely thrown off the last restraint, and forgotten all that should have reminded him of God, and stayed his hand. Seeking his own glory, and taking advantage of his acquired position, the presence of Samuel has no longer any hold upon his conscience. It is even no longer "Honour me before the elders of my people"; he does not value the prophet at all; he comes, in spite of himself, under an influence which he has despised. David is thus shielded from his malice. He could not now return to Saul. It would have been to unite himself with the despisal of God's testimony. For, what can be done when a man prophesies, and yet runs counter to the power which he cannot deny? David takes flight. But Saul's state is again tested by this state of things. Jonathan can scarcely credit his father's ill-will. But, before putting it to the proof, his devotion to David is very plainly manifested. His faith and his heart acknowledge that which the blinded Saul cannot receive (1 Sam. 20:13-17).

Jonathan's love for David

Even when David is driven away, Jonathan's faith is not shaken; his heart is not separated from the one whom his soul loved, when, radiant with youth and the glory of his victory over Goliath, David replied to Saul with a modesty that heightened its lustre. He loves him when dishonoured and a fugitive. He acknowledges him as God's elect, and links the hopes of his house with the glory of his beloved.* {*

See 1 Sam. 23:16-17. But what Jonathan proposed there could not be; that is, connection between the old system in the flesh and God's grace and purpose. Jonathan, though loving David, walked with the old, which God was going to judge.}

But Jonathan does not follow David, and he falls with Saul. Whatever opinion we may entertain with respect to the typical meaning of this part of his history, we see in him that whatever is allied to the carnal system, which is outwardly connected with the interests of the people and name of God, falls, as regards this world, with the system that perishes entirely.

David, informed by Jonathan of Saul's state of mind, departs; and Jonathan returns into the city.

Chapter 21

The elect king rejected a type of the Lord Jesus

The elect king is now rejected. He repairs to the priest, who gives him the hallowed bread, according to the sovereign grace of God, who rises above the ordinances that are connected with blessing, when that blessing is rejected — when He Himself is rejected in His chosen one, and in the power of His testimony. When this is the case, He sets faith above ordinances in His sovereign grace. Since God Himself and His testimony are rejected, the shewbread was considered common. God in fact was ordering all anew.

It was precisely the case of the Lord Jesus. The Person of the rejected One is above all the carnal ordinances, which have lost their signification where He is. Christ submitted indeed to all the ordinances and authorities; but the rejection of God's testimony in Him caused it to be perceived by degrees that He was One greater than the ordinances — One who set them aside, and replaced them by the manifestation of the effectual and eternal grace of God. It was much more important to give David food than to keep that which had grown old. God cared more for him than for the bread of the tabernacle.

The sword of Goliath in a new arsenal

David then takes the sword of Goliath. It was by the power of death that the Lord destroyed all his strength who had the power of death. Death is the best weapon in the arsenal of God, when it is wielded by the power of life.

Refuge sought among the Philistines but driven forth by God

David, his mind full of Saul's enmity, seeks refuge among the Philistines. What business had he there? This time God drives him thence without chastisement, but abundantly proving to him at the same time that he was out of place there. We escape from the wisdom which leads us into the midst of God's enemies, by the shame of that folly which causes us to be driven out again.

Chapter 22

Saul's relentless pursuit

David now takes his place fully with the excellent of the earth (Heb. 11:38). There the prophet Gad joins him; he is guided in a direct manner by the plain testimony of God, and soon after he is joined by the priest also; so that, rejected as he is, all that belonged to the testimony and the dealings of God gathers around him. He was the king; the prophet was there; the priest was there also. The outward forms were elsewhere. Saul, on the contrary, as he had shewn his contempt for Samuel by pursuing David even into his presence, without pity as without fear of God, and without remorse, rids himself of the priests by the hand of a stranger, an Edomite, a merciless enemy of the people, when the consciences of the latter would have withheld his hand. It is on this occasion that the priest is brought by God to David, in like manner as we find the prophet there after Saul had manifested his contempt of him. Thus a hostile king, he is a despiser of the prophet, an enemy of the priest of God.

What a sad history of the gradual but progressive fall of one who, having the form of good, has not faith in God, and whom God has forsaken! How sure are the ways of God, whatever appearances may be!

Chapter 23

David, victor over the Philistines, accompanied by prophet and priest

David, despised as he may be, is the king and saviour of the people; he puts the Philistines to flight with great slaughter. He finds nothing but treachery in Israel, of which Saul makes use in the hope of seizing David. But as the wisdom of the prophet is with David, so has he also God's answer by the ephod of the priest which is with him.

Saul's real position before God

Let us observe in passing, that Saul has greatly aggrandised himself to outward view. He is no longer with his six hundred men who followed him trembling; he can speak of his captains of thousands and captains of hundreds; he can bestow fields and vineyards; he has his Doeg, the head over his herdsmen. Before God, inwardly, he makes frightful progress in evil; he is not only forsaken of God, but he breaks through all the restraints of conscience, and of the testimony and ordinances of God. For the prophet Samuel and the priests ought to have been a restraint to one who professed to be identified with the interests of God's people.

Outward progress in prosperity, joined to actual progress in evil inwardly, is a very solemn thing. It is at once a snare to the flesh and a trial to faith. David, on the contrary, is apparently — and in fact, as to circumstances — driven out from the people. He has neither home nor refuge. But the testimony of God, in the person of the prophet Gad, and communion with God by the priest's ephod, are his portion in his exile. Cast out by man, he is where the resources of God are realised according to the need of His

people.

David acting as priest, a type of Christ

Remark also that David himself acts as priest, to obtain the expression of God's mind. He takes the ephod to seek counsel of God; he eats the shewbread, a remarkable type of Christ teaching us that, when all is ruined, blessing is made over to those who by faith walk in obedience, understanding the duty of the believer who discerns the moral place of faith, what it owes to God, and how it may rely on Him.

David's discernment of what pleases God

Remark, also, that that which here distinguishes David is not shining deeds, the fruit of the power of faith, but the instinct and intelligence of that which is suitable to his position a moral discernment of that which is pleasing to God, and of the line of conduct which His servant should pursue as the vessel of His spiritual energy, while the power which belongs to him is in the hands of another. It is the walk of one who has apprehended that which is suitable to this difficult position, in all the circumstances it brings him into; who respects that which God respects, and does the work of God without fear when God calls him: a remarkable type of Jesus in all this, and example for us.

Besides this spiritual perception, these moral suitabilities; the greater part of this history sets before us the way in which God makes everything tend towards the accomplishment of His purposes (in spite of all the motives and intentions of men) in order to place David, through patience and the energy of faith, in the position He had prepared for him.

God's intervention and safeguard

Nevertheless David needs the intervention and the safeguard of God. Having quitted Keilah (1 Sam. 23), in consequence of God's warning, he goes into the wilderness. There he is surrounded by Saul's men. But at the moment when Saul would have taken him, the Philistines invade the land, and Saul is obliged to return.

Chapter 24

Saul's life spared

"And David went up and dwelt in the strongholds of En-gedi." Saul pursues him thither, after following the Philistines, more occupied with his jealousy of the king whom God had chosen than with the enemies of his people. But this expedition is not to his honour. An opportunity to kill his persecutor presents itself to David; but the fear of God rules him, and even Saul's heart is touched for the moment by a preservation which proved that David respected him in a way he had not imagined. He sees clearly what the result will be, and engages David to protect his posterity; but David does not return to Saul.

The relationship was broken.

Chapter 25

Samuel's death

At length Samuel dies. This forms an epoch, because he who was the true link between the people and God was gone. Israel acknowledged him when dead, although they had despised him while living.

Abigail's faith compared with that of Jonathan: her acknowledgment of David in rejection

And now David's position changes, and Abigail is brought in. Jonathan never separated from the system in which he stood, never united himself to David, although loving him, and never shared his sufferings. But Abigail identifies herself with him; existing relationships do not prevent her acknowledging David; and she is united to him after her husband's death. Jonathan prefigures the remnant in the character of the remnant of Israel, who acknowledge the future king, and adhere to him, but go no farther. As regards old Israel they come to nothing with it; they will be blessed as reigned over in the kingdom, but not be associated with Christ on the throne. Jonathan does not suffer with David, and does not reign with him. He remains with Saul, and, as to that position, his career ends with Saul. Abigail, and even the malcontents who joined David, shared his sufferings. Abigail separates herself completely from the spirit of her husband; and it is on account of her faith and wisdom that David spares Nabal's life. God judges the latter, and then Abigail becomes the wife of David.

Historically David had nearly failed in his high standing. In fact it is on account of the faithful remnant, the Abigail of the foolish nation, that Israel itself has been spared; and the Lord's connection with the assembly is in the character of pure grace, not in that of the avenger (as hereafter with Israel). At this time it is that David, during his rejection, surrounds himself with those who will be the companions and the retinue of his glory in the kingdom. But he also takes a wife.

Abigail speaks of Saul as a man. Jehovah, she says, will make a sure house to David. This is the intelligence of faith.* It is the truth of God's counsels (2 Sam. 7:11), and in its fulness, as to this. She was forming for herself, without knowing it, the position of the assembly, in the future she was preparing for herself.** {* In fact, when the priesthood had been judged, nothing remained for faith, which apprehended the mind of God, except the prophet Samuel and the king given by God, David. Abigail understands this. The assembly should think as God Himself thinks, in spite of existing circumstances. Abigail thinks nothing of Saul. Samuel is dead; David is now everything to her. "The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of heaven is preached, and every man presses into it." Where were the high priests and all their company? Nevertheless the Lord submitted to them as to an ordinance, as David did to Saul. ** She takes a much more humble place than Jonathan did, and one which, even at the time, acknowledged David much more fully. It is not a friend like Jonathan; it is a submissive soul which, in spirit, gives David his place according to God,

taking her own place before him. It is exactly that which distinguishes the spirit of the assembly — of the true Christian. In Jonathan we see the remnant under the Jewish aspect. But Abigail enters into the spirit of God's purposes respecting David, although he was now in distress; and David, who, while thoroughly submissive, can act according to the faith that owns him, hears her voice, and accepts her person. Let us mark the features of Abigail's faith. All rests upon her appreciation of David (it is this which forms a Christian's judgment — in every respect he appreciates Christ); his title as owned of God; his personal perfection; and that which belonged to him according to the counsels of God. She thinks of him according to all the good which God has spoken of him; she sees him fighting God's battles, where others only see a rebel against Saul; and all this from her heart. She judges Nabal, and looks upon him as already judged of God on account of this, for with her everything is judged according to its connection with David (v. 26); a judgment which God accomplishes ten days later, although Nabal was at peace in his own house, and David an exile and outcast. Nevertheless the relation of Abigail to Nabal is recognised until God executes judgment. She judges Saul. He is but a man, because, to her faith, David is king. All her desire is that David may remember her Jonathan says, when he goes out to David, "I shall be next unto thee" and David abides in the wood, while Jonathan returns to his house In the order of things which God had judged (a judgment that faith recognised) he remains with his family and shares its ruin. This is important to a Christian. For instance, he respects, in so far as based on God's authority, official Christianity — which, in the world, is the religion of God while God bears with it — and does not stand up against it. As to faith and personal walk, this Christianity is nothing at all just as Saul was only a man to Abigail's faith.}

Chapter 26

Saul's life again spared: David's appeal to God

Alas! Saul is unchanged; instigated by the Ziphites, he seeks David anew, but it is only to fall again, and more publicly, into David's hands. Observe that David now appeals more directly to the Lord to judge between him and Saul. The separation is more complete. Saul was incorrigible. This appeal to God was becoming. It is not becoming, it is not according to the way of the Spirit, to accustom ourselves to evil. "Righteous Father," said the Lord at length, "the world has not known thee: but I have known thee; and these have known that thou hast sent me."

That which characterised David in everything is, that he puts himself entirely into Jehovah's hands; it is the spirit of Christ in the Psalms.

Chapter 27

David's faith fails

But David, after all, is only a man; and immediately after this testimony that God was with him (a testimony that even Saul acknowledged), his faith fails, and he passes over into the midst of the enemies of God's people. God, no doubt, makes use of this means to remove David from peril. But at

the same time, he is tried and chastened, and is exposed to the dreadful necessity of appearing ready to fight against Israel. There is but One whose perfection and wisdom were His safeguard in every trial.

We may remark that it was immediately after an evident interposition of God (1 Sam. 26:12) that David's faith fails. It is the same with Elijah (1 Kings 19). One would say that, in our hearts, faith exhausts itself by an unusual effort. Faith may carry us through the crisis; but the heart, which was the vessel of faith, is terrified by it; whilst in Jesus we find an equability of perfection altogether divine.

With the Philistines, in a false position

David removes to a distance from the royal city. In the land of the Philistines he gains their king's favour, not by faith, but by a prudence inconsistent with truth. It is an unhappy position; nevertheless, God does not forsake him. He chastises him, and in a painful manner, but He spares and preserves him. We have seen similar ways of the Lord in the case of the fugitive Jacob.

Achish, who knows David, wishes to employ him in his service, and David cannot refuse; for when he who possesses the energy which the Spirit of God imparts by faith, has placed himself in a false position through unfaithfulness, he has no power against the one under whose authority he has placed himself; and if he does not use the energy with which he is endowed in favour of his protector, he very naturally excites his jealousy. He would have avoided all this by going to Ziklag, but he could not. God in His mercy preserved David, but he was now in a sad and false position.

Chapter 28

Saul turns to witchcraft: God's solemn judgment

Saul, as well as Israel at present, was in a still worse position, having succour neither from God nor from the enemy. Saul is forsaken of God. Samuel is dead; so that Israel is no longer in connection with God through him.

David, who at least made head against the Philistines, was, through Saul's own doings, in their midst. The outward zeal of the king had put down all those who had the spirit of witchcraft. He seeks direction from God, but obtains no answer. He has now neither conscience nor faith. The case is urgent; and he throws himself, not into outward service to God, as formerly (he has the sad and solemn conviction that it belongs to him no more), but into those things which he had condemned and cut off as evil when he maintained a religious character — things which he still knew were evil. But the Philistines were there, and his heart greatly trembles. He seeks out a woman who had a familiar spirit. God meets him here. Samuel ascends, but in such a manner as to terrify the woman. She recognises the presence of a power superior to her enchantments. Samuel declares to Saul, without reserve and without any sympathy (for this was no longer possible), the solemn judgment of God.

Chapters 29 and 30

David's fall at Ziklag and God's grace

In 1 Samuel 29 God, in His loving-kindness, brings David out of his difficulty by means of the jealousy of the lords of the Philistines. Nevertheless, to maintain his credit with Achish, David falls still lower, it seems to me, and protests that he is quite ready to fight against the enemies of the Philistine king, that is to say, against the people of God. This appears to me the most wretched part of David's life — at any rate, before he was king. God makes him sensible of it; for while he is there, the Amalekites strip him of everything and burn Ziklag, and his followers are ready to stone him.

All this is grievous; but the grace of God raises him up again, and the effect of this chastisement is to bring him back to God, for he was ever true to Him in heart. David encouraged himself in Jehovah his God, and inquires of Him what he shall do. What patience, what kindness in God! What care He takes of His people, even while they are turning away from Him!

God's preparation and purification

David is truly brought back to God, and rescued from his false position, and he walks and acts with God. God was, unknown to him, preparing a very different position for him, and was purifying and preparing him for it. How dreadful would it have been, had David been with the Philistines, and taken part in the defeat of God's people, and in the death of him whose life he had often spared so touchingly! How far the child of God may go astray when he puts himself under the protection of unbelievers, instead of relying on the help of God in all the difficulties which beset the path of faith! It is through these very difficulties that every grace is developed.

And observe the danger the believer is in — if his faith be not simple, but fails ever so little — of being thrown into the arms of God's enemies through the persecution of professors. Nature grows weary, and seeks comfort afar from the narrow path which leads through the briars. This happens whenever the people of God, following their own will, confide their interests to those who seek nothing but their own advantage in a less difficult position, which is neither that of God nor that of faith. And the more glorious a work there is for faith, the more nature grows weary, if faith becomes weak. Ziklag is taken during David's absence, but he pursues the spoilers, and recovers all the booty.

David, upright and generous, found, in the difficulty which arose from the selfishness of his people, an opportunity to institute that which was conformable to the will of God; and instead of seeking to enrich himself through his share of the spoil, he uses it to maintain kindly relations with the elders of his people, and to prove to them that Jehovah is still with him.

Chapter 31

The solemn deaths of Saul and Jonathan

1 Samuel 31 recounts the solemn death of Saul and of Jonathan also, closing, with the total discomfiture of Israel, this touching history. The whole account of Saul and his family, as raised up to

withstand the Philistines, is ended: Saul and his sons fall into their hands; they are beheaded, their armour sent in triumph to the house of the Philistines' idols, and their bodies hung upon the walls of Beth-shan. Sad end, as that of the flesh will ever be in the battle of Jehovah!

David's history retraced: his simplicity of faith

Let us briefly retrace the history of David. Simplicity of faith keeps him in the place of duty, and contented there, without desire to leave it, because the approbation of God suffices him. Consequently he can there reckon upon the help of God, as thoroughly secured to him; he acts in the strength of God. The lion and the bear fall under his youthful hand. Why not, if God was with him? He follows Saul with equal simplicity, and then returns to the care of his sheep with the same satisfaction. There, in secret, he had understood by faith that Jehovah was with Israel; he had understood the nature and force of this relationship. He sees, in the condition of Israel, something which does not answer to this; but, as for himself, his faith rests upon the faithfulness of God. An uncircumcised Philistine falls like the lion. He serves Saul as musician with the same simplicity as before; and, whether with him, or when Saul sends him out as captain of a thousand, gives proof of his valour. He obeys the king's commands.

At length the king drives him away; but he is still in the place of faith. There is little now of military achievement, but there is the discernment of that which became him, when the spiritual power was in him, but the outward divine authority was in other hands. It was the same position as that of Jesus in Israel. David does not fail in this position, its difficulties only the better bringing out all the beauty of God's grace and the fruits of the Spirit's work, while very peculiarly developing spiritual affections and intimate relationship with God, his only refuge. It is especially this which gave rise to the Psalms. Faith suffices to bring him through all the difficulties of his position, in which it displays all its beauty and all its grace. The nobleness of character which faith imparts to man, and which is the reflection of God's character, produces in the most hardened hearts, even in those who, having forsaken God, are forsaken of Him (a state in which sin, selfishness, and despair, combine to harden), feelings of natural affection, the remorse of a nature which awakens under the influence of something superior to its malice — something which sheds its light (painful, because momentary and powerless) upon the darkness which encompasses the unhappy sinner who rejects God. It is because faith dwells so near God as to be above evil, that it withdraws nature itself from the power of evil, although nature has no power of self-mastery. But God is with faith; and faith respects that which God respects, and invests one who bears something from God with the honour due to that which belongs to God, and which recalls God to the heart with all the affection that faith entertains for Him, and all that pertains to Him. This is always seen in Jesus, and wherever His Spirit is; and it is this that gives such beauty, such elevation, to faith, which ennobles itself with the nobility of God, by recognising that which is noble in His sight, and on account of its relationship to Him, in spite of the iniquity or abasement of those who are invested with it. Faith acts on God's behalf, and reveals Him in the midst of circumstances, instead of being governed by them. Its superiority over that which surrounds it is evident. What repose, to witness this amid the mire of this poor world!

Nature and faith

But, although faith, in the place it gives us in this world, suffices for all that we meet with in it, yet alas! communion with God is not perfect in us. Instead of doing our duty whatever it be without weariness, because God is with us, and when we have slain the lion, being ready to slay the bear, and through this, more ready still to slay Goliath — instead of faith being strengthened by victory, nature grows weary of the conflict; we lose the normal position of faith, we debase and dishonour ourselves. What a difference between David, who, by the fruit of grace, draws tears from the heart of Saul, re-opening (at least for the moment) the channel of his affections, and David, unable to raise his hand against the Philistines whom he had so often defeated, and boasting himself ready to fight against Israel and the king whose life he had spared!

My brethren, let us abide in the place of faith, apparently a more difficult one, yet the place where God is found, and where grace — the only precious thing in this world — flourishes, and binds the heart to God by a thousand links of affection and gratitude, as to One who has known us, and who has stooped to meet our need and the desires of our hearts. Faith gives energy; faith gives patience; and it is often thus that the most precious affections are developed — affections which, if the energy of faith makes us servants on earth, render heaven itself happy, because He who is the object of faith is there, and fills it in the presence of the Father.

God's grace above all failure

Nature makes us impatient with circumstances, because we do not sufficiently realise God, and draws us into situations where it is impossible to glorify Him. On the other hand, it is well to observe, that it is when man had thoroughly failed, when even David's faith had been found wanting, and — departing from Israel — he had thrown himself among the Philistines, it was then that God gave him the kingdom. Grace is above all failure: God must glorify Himself in His people.