

The Message of 1 Samuel

by G. Campbell Morgan

The book of 1 Samuel reveals God's sovereignty and providence in the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David, and teaches that man cooperates with God by failure and by loyalty.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:6-8, 1 Samuel 8:7, 1 Samuel 10:1, 1 Samuel 15:22, 1 Samuel 16:7, Psalm 47:8, Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 55:8-9, Romans 8:28, 1 Peter 5:6-7

Topics: "God's Sovereignty", "Human Response to God"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan explores the profound themes in 1 Samuel, emphasizing God's sovereignty and the human response to His reign. He illustrates how God adapts His methods through the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David, showcasing the transition from theocracy to monarchy and the consequences of disobedience versus loyalty. Morgan highlights Hannah's faith as a pivotal starting point, the tragic downfall of Saul due to his rejection of God, and the preparation of David as a man after God's own heart. Ultimately, he conveys that while God's victory is assured, individual destinies hinge on one's attitude towards Him, urging obedience as the path to fulfillment in God's plan.

Transcript

A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

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A Woman's Song His Interpretation.

b. The New Order. The Prophet.

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Call

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iii. David.

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B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. The Absolutism of God

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No Event escaping His Overruling

ii. Interpreted.

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II. The Relation of Man

i. The ultimate Victory of God is independent of the Attitudes of Individuals or Peoples towards Him.

ii. The place of Individuals or Peoples in that ultimate. Victory is dependent upon their Attitude towards Him.

The two books of Samuel constitute one story. The first gives the history of the transition from Theocracy to Monarchy. The inwardness of that transition is revealed by a paragraph in the eighth chapter "Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah: and they said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not be King over them." Two brief statements from that passage, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations," and "They have rejected Me, that I should not be King over them," tell the story of the transition, as to the human desire which produced it, and as to the Divine attitude towards it. The nation asked for "a king to judge us like all the nations." The reason for their existence as a nation was that they should be unlike the nations. The unlikeness consisted in the fact that this nation had as its only King JEHOVAH, the Lord. The real meaning of their request is therefore interpreted by the language of the Lord to Samuel, "They have rejected Me, that I should not be King over them." The days of the judges were days of religious apostasy, political disorganization, and social chaos; and religious apostasy in the case of these people meant that they refused to obey the King eternal, immortal, invisible. This attitude expressed itself in the request they brought to Samuel, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations." Sin ever issues in an attempt to substitute the false for the true. That is the history of idolatry. Every idol is witness to man's need of God. The lack of God creates the necessity for putting something in His place. These men, turning from God as King, desired a king like the nations. The first book of Samuel tells the story of the immediate issues of this desire.

The permanent values of the book may be exclusively expressed in two statements. Its supreme revelation is that of the Lord reigning by adaptation, in order to advance. Its second value is that it reveals the fact that, under the government of God, men cooperate with Him towards the final issues, either by failure or loyalty. It would appear as though the first of these statements -namely, that the Lord reigns by adaptation in order to advance contradicts His declaration concerning the people, "They have rejected Me, that I should not be King over them," and yet it is by no means a contradiction. It is one thing to reject the Lord, but is quite another to dethrone Him. The first is possible. The second is impossible. This is the supreme lesson of the book. The people, chosen to exhibit the breadth, the beauty, and the beneficence of His government, rejected Him from being King, but they did not dethrone Him. As I watch the movement of this story, gathering around the three central figures, Samuel, Saul and David, the supreme revelation is not of these men, but of the Lord reigning by the adaptation of His method to the requirements of the hour, and so through disobedience or obedience through success or failure, through men loyal or rebellious, moving quietly, steadily, and surely on. As our analysis of the book suggests, the whole movement

gathers round three personalities, and centering our attention upon them for the purpose of this study, we must yet keep in mind the prevailing conditions.

The story of Samuel is introduced by that of Hannah. Hannah was a woman whose faith became the Lord's foothold, and whose song became the Lord's interpretation. While it is the glad thanksgiving of a woman whose prayer has been heard and answered, it is infinitely more. All the values of the book are gathered up into this song of the God who reigns, and concerning whom she affirms:

"The Lord killeth, and maketh alive:

He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.

The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich:

He bringeth low, He also lifteth up.

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,

He lifteth up the needy from the dunghill,

To make them sit with princes,

And inherit the throne of glory."

The song moves on:

"The adversaries of the LORD Shall be broken to pieces;

Against them shall he thunder in heaven:

The LORD shall judge the ends of the earth;

And he shall give strength unto his king,

And exalt the horn of his anointed."

Samuel was a prophet. Peter, speaking the presence of the assembled multitude in Jerusalem, said, "The prophets from Samuel and them that followed after." In that reference he included the whole of the Hebrew prophets, beginning with Samuel. There is a sense in which there had been prophets before him; indeed, Moses himself was a prophet of whom it is said there never arose another like him. Yet, in one particular respect, Samuel was the first of the prophetic order. The kings were never mediators between God and man. The people rejected the Lord from being King, and so passed out close communion and intimate relationship with Him; and He consented in order to the fulfilling of His purpose, but He never recognized the king as standing between Himself and them. He chose their kings for them, He allowed the lust for a king to work itself out in the ultimate disaster of the centuries, but He never spoke to men through the king, but always through the prophets.

With Samuel, then, the prophet emerges as the authoritative representative of the Lord. Samuel as prophet, became the king-maker, finding Saul and anointing him; finding David, and anointing him; and henceforward, when a Divine message had to be delivered to the people, it did not come directly from God to the king, but to the king and all the people, through the prophets. In the economy of God, the prophet's

office was always superior to that of the king. Thus, when the Lord was rejected by the will of the people, and they clamored for a king like the other nations, He took this man, the child of a woman's simple faith, trained him through quiet days in the temple courts, called him while yet a boy, and gave him a strange message to deliver, and made him at last the one to anoint Saul a king after the people's own heart, and David a king after God's own heart. The prophets became the mediators, the messengers, the interpreters of the law. They stood between God and the people. Thus the Lord reigned; and adapting His methods, found Samuel, equipped him for his work, and delivered His message through him.

The history of Saul is one of the most tragic recorded in the Bible, full of fascination and of tremendous power in its appeal to individual life. In placing this man upon the throne, God answered the prayer of the people's rebellion. "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations." Consequently, in the economy of God, Saul became a revelation, an interpretation, and a discipline. The meaning of the Psalmist's Word is revealed in the method,

"He gave them their request;

But sent leanness into their soul."

Saul stands out upon the page of Israel's history, an object lesson in the real meaning of the choice. He was a man of enormous physical strength, yet fitful and failing from first to last, a man of undoubted mental acumen, yet a man of moods, who presently became a madman; a man as to spiritual life characterized from the very beginning by torpor and slowness, and at last, so devoid of spiritual illumination and power that he turned his back upon the Lord, and consulted a witch who muttered and worked incantations. He was a revelation to the people of what the possession of a king like the nations really meant.

Then look at the kingdom under Saul. After he was chosen, for a time they were practically without a king. He manifested his weakness by hiding among the stuff when he ought immediately to have taken hold of the scepter. I am perfectly well aware that others interpret that story differently. They affirm that Saul was a man of such extreme modesty that after he was appointed he went back to work in quietness, without taking the kingdom. Such modesty is sin. It is as great a sin to urge modesty, and keep in the background when God calls to the foreground as it is to go to the front, when God's appointment is in the rear. Then came the period of the wars -wars ending ultimately in the most terrible disaster. Under Saul's reign the kingdom became disorganized.

When we come to David again we see adaptation and advance. Once again God gave His people a king, but this time a man after His own heart. The king of God's choosing was a shepherd, whose youthful days had been spent in the fields; a courtier who, passing from the fields to the palace, became Saul's son-in-law; an outlaw for long years, to use his own graphic description, hunted like "a partridge in the mountains." Through all these processes God was preparing him for a kingdom, not merely to reign over it, but to realize it. As a shepherd, he loved the sheep under his care, and rescued them from the paw of the lion and the bear. In the king's palace he became accustomed to courtly ways. As an outlaw he was prepared through discipline, and created a new type for the future strength of the kingdom. Thus God was remaking the kingdom in a cave, while the nation was going to pieces round the king after their own heart. The kingdom itself was thus being prepared for renewal through disaster. The special note in all this is that of the Lord reigning, moving definitely forward, pressing into the service of His own progress, towards the fulfillment of His purpose, Samuel, Saul, David; governing by adaptation; taking hold of the child of faith

and making him a prophet; taking hold of physical magnificence, and by its failures making it a revelation of the sin that had been committed; taking hold of the shepherd lad, and by processes making him king. Thus God ever sits high enthroned, and moves in victory across disaster towards ultimate purpose.

The second value of this book is but the obverse side of the first, teaching that man cooperates with God by failure, and by loyalty. Again our examination centers round the three personalities, and its purpose is not so much to show the result of their attitude as the process of God.

Samuel found his opportunity in his parentage, his call, his appointment. He responded to his opportunity by loyalty. The issues were that the messages of God were delivered to the people, and the work of God was advanced.

Saul found his opportunity in his call and anointing, in Samuel's friendship for him, and in his popularity and personal equipment. He responded by vacillation, by self-will, by disobedience. The issues were the revelation of his failure and the warning of his death.

David's opportunities were his call and anointing, his long waiting and suffering, and finally the crisis of the battle with Amalek in the hour of Saul's death. He responded by obedience and patience, and at the decisive moment by definite action. The issues were that he became the instrument of the Lord's progress, a man through whom God moved forward towards ultimate realization.

That rapid survey shows that each man had his opportunity; each man made his response thereto; two of them the response of obedience, one that of disobedience: but whether by failure or by loyalty, men cooperate with God towards the final winning of His victory. If a man does not cooperate with God loyally, he is compelled by the supremacy of His throne, by the sovereignty of His government, to cooperate even through his own disaster and defeat.

I may quite briefly state the living message of this book. The permanent values constitute that living message. Let me state them in other terms. In this book I see the absolutism of God, and the relation of man to that absolutism. It first reveals the absolutism of God. There is no territory outside His jurisdiction; no person beyond His control, or who finally escapes His government; no event outside His consciousness, or beyond His overruling. This book not only reveals these things, it interprets them. It shows that this absolutism of God is operating towards accomplishment, includes in its operation all adverse facts and forces, and creates its own agents whenever it is necessary so to do. It is this living message that we need supremely today.

What, then, is the relation of man to this absolutism of God? The ultimate victory is independent of the attitudes of individuals or peoples towards Him. Through Samuel, Saul and David, He moved right on towards the Anointed and the ultimate Kingdom. The ultimate destiny of individuals is dependent upon their attitude towards Him. -Samuel was obedient, and was used and saved. Saul was disobedient, and was used and destroyed. David was obedient, and was used and saved. It does not at all matter what my attitude towards God is, as to His ultimate victory. It matters everything as to my ultimate destiny. Everything depends upon me as to my own destiny. Nothing depends upon me ultimately as to His victory. He will press into His service for His final victory all souls who are loyal to Him, and they will share in the rapture of His victory. He will press into the service of His ultimate victory all souls in rebellion, and they will share in the wrath of His victory. So my responsibility must be, so far as my own destiny is concerned, the responsibility of obedience. This book inspires a great song, which can best be uttered in the words of the Psalmist, "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice."

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