

Thoughts on 1 Samuel

by John Nelson Darby

The book of 1 Samuel highlights the failure of the priesthood and the need for a new order of things, as well as the contrast between Saul's rejection of God and David's dependence on Him.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:10, 1 Samuel 3:19, 1 Samuel 8:7, 1 Samuel 10:1, 1 Samuel 15:23, 1 Samuel 17:45, 1 Samuel 24:6, 1 Samuel 30:6, 1 Samuel 31:6, Psalm 78:67-70

Topics: "God's Sovereignty", "Faithfulness vs. Disobedience"

Description

John Nelson Darby reflects on the Book of 1 Samuel, emphasizing God's sovereignty and grace in the face of Israel's failures. He discusses how God provided Samuel as a prophet when the priesthood failed, and how the introduction of kingship marked a shift in Israel's relationship with God. The sermon highlights the contrast between Saul's disobedience and David's faithfulness, illustrating the consequences of rejecting God's authority. Darby notes that despite Israel's desolation, God's grace remains evident in His plans for David and the future of His people.

Transcript

The first Book of Samuel commences with the promise of the king.

1 Samuel 2:10. The people had walked badly, and God presents Christ when all else failed down here. That which man was not able to accomplish, God perfectly accomplished in Christ, but always going far beyond. In Adam, rule; in Noah, the sword; in Sinai, the law; in Aaron, the priesthood (already before Eli). Prophecy does not imply responsibility, because it is a question of the power and of the sovereignty of God in grace; in Israel, royalty; and finally, the church.

Verse 18. In a certain sense, Samuel has as it were taken the place of the priesthood. The priesthood was the means by which man drew nigh to God; but when the priesthood had failed, God can work in sovereignty, and that is what He is doing here; He gives Samuel, or prophecy, by means of which God draws nigh to man, in His sovereign grace.

Verse 32. God forsakes His own dwelling-place, and in the land which God gave to Israel for their good, the enemies would take possession of it. It is not a question, however, in this verse of the tabernacle of the congregation; it is the tabernacle, in the general sense, to signify habitation, or dwelling-place.

Verse 35. It is no longer a question for the priesthood to walk before God, but before His anointed one, royalty being introduced. The king forms the link between God and the people, and the priesthood takes the second place.

1 Samuel 3. Having determined to judge the house of Eli, God reveals it by the mouth of Samuel. Sincerity is worth nothing, if there is not also light and faithfulness. Nevertheless, there was piety with Eli, for when he learns the death of his sons, this affects him little, but the taking of the ark causes his death.

1 Samuel 4. Samuel is prophet.

Judgment is executed. For the present moment, that which takes the place of the ark in Israel is the Philistine. God takes care Himself of His glory, when His people can no longer take care of it. Yet it was a sad capture for the Philistines. They carry the emblem of power into the very midst of their idolatry. When the ark is taken, in the main all is over with Israel. All their history from Sinai closes here. That is why the ark was never brought back to the tabernacle, but placed in Sion, which commences an entirely new order of things.

370 Read Psalm 78: -

Verse 59. God in great wrath rejects all.

Verse 65. He awakes in David.

Verse 67. As to Joseph, who has the double portion of the inheritance according to nature, God refuses him.

Verse 68. All is now on the ground of election according to grace.

1 Samuel 6. Good sense in the priests. They sent back the ark with the thought that the God of the ark was more powerful than the affection of the cows for their calves. God could overrule nature; otherwise that which had happened to them was mere chance. When David brought back the ark, he had not the good sense of the priests of the Philistines.

Verse 19. Much the same happens to the people of God when they are not faithful. When one has lost God, one laments after Him; then, when He is there, they forsake Him.

1 Samuel 7. The sovereignty of God in grace acting by prophecy - Samuel, the centre of all this system.

371 1 Samuel 8. Although God had already interposed in grace several times, they reject Him as king; they will have Him no longer.

1 Samuel 9. Saul, wretched man! He ignored the man by whom God had done so many things, and God who had wrought them.

1 Samuel 10. Nevertheless he is anointed.* What was the state of Israel at this moment? Very sad. Still there remained the God of Bethel, who had promised to Jacob never to forsake him. If Saul had been honest, he would have said, This is what we want.

{*Up to Eli all depended on the priesthood; but royalty having come in, all depended on the king. If the king fails, the people go to Babylon; under the priesthood all the people were given up to the Philistines, as was

the ark. The king is sovereign, he organizes the priests; he is responsible. Instead of having recourse to the priesthood in order to know the will of God, royalty was with prophecy, which was the sovereign gift and the sovereign power of God, when everything had failed. Before royalty it was the priest who was the anointed one.}

Then Saul is recognized by Israel.

The hill of God is the seat of the sovereignty and power of God in grace, where the Philistines (Satan's power) were. We see nevertheless a company of prophets (the Spirit acts in power in spite of the Philistines), a small remnant who praised the God of Bethel, so that if there had been ever so little faith, Saul could have known the thoughts of God, and, being His anointed to be the leader and deliverer of the people (1 Samuel 9:16), he might well have driven away the Philistines who were in the land of God. There are the signs; but we must listen to the word. Whatever may be the signs that we may have, one must await the direction in order to act. The Philistines are always the enemies in the land; the others are outside; these are in the land of God. The worst enemies of the church are those who are within.

Verse 8. Saul remains two years before going down to Gilgal.

1 Samuel 11. It was all well to deal with the Ammonites; but the Philistines were then the true test: Saul was feeble as to these.

1 Samuel 12. Samuel retires, leaving the people in the position they had chosen under the king, responsible before the Lord, but not without his own intercessions.

1 Samuel 13. The iniquity penetrates very deep. Although the people had their king, there were no arms in the land.

Saul is put to the test. He causes the trumpet to be sounded, not in order that God should hear in Israel the elect of God, but the Hebrews - a heathen name. He seems not to have had one single thought of God. If the Philistines have any strength, it is also needful that the Hebrews should listen. It was nation against nation - no intelligence, no link with God. Gilgal ought to have recalled something to Saul's mind, but he has neither faith nor intelligence. Saul may here represent some one who desires good, but it is only the flesh. He nevertheless follows the word of God outwardly, but he proves at the same time that he has never depended upon God for one single instant, and that the flesh cannot sustain itself in the path of faith. If he had known the need he had of God, he would have waited, whatever might have come. The faith of Jonathan begins, and the flesh cannot follow. When faith begins all flesh is routed.

1 Samuel 14. Jonathan did not look for the honey, but God gave him some to refresh his heart in the midst of the energy of his faith.

Verse 47. Saul was troubling everything. There is relief, and not deliverance, for soon we find the Philistines and Goliath. He did not destroy the enemies, but He plucked Israel out of their hands. God had not yet anointed David, for He does not work until the people have entirely failed.

372 1 Samuel 15. Saul is here a second Achan. God has in His heart what Amalek did. He will destroy him. Saul ought to have understood that, but he is not identified with the feelings of God. He avails himself of the power which God gives him to rob God.

1 Samuel 17. When David was alone, it was a trial; but he was infinitely worse in Saul's court, surrounded by unbelief. After having been in the court, he could again mind the sheep. Self-denial of David! It is needful, that after having worked with God, he should still wait on God for the reward. In order for faith to be something, it must go through every difficulty - family difficulties, etc. The "uncircumcised" - man who has not God - Goliath had committed himself by challenging God's army. This was the strength of David.

Verse 58. Faith has no pretensions; it returns to its own insignificance, because, after all, faith is nothing save what it draws from God.

1 Samuel 18. Jonathan recalls to my mind the remnant of Israel. He loves David with all his heart; but he had not followed him. Chapter 23:16-18 tells us what Jonathan was. Abigail represents much more the faith of the church. In the tribulation of Jesus the remnant does not take part with Him, whereas Abigail follows him everywhere. Although he is rejected, she calls him Lord, whilst Saul is to her only a man. She has intelligence. She judges Nabal, although the judgment was not yet executed. She becomes the wife of David in the desert; thus it is with the church. When David was with Achish, he was in a sad state - a servant of God, who said he had done evil to the people of God, in order to be well with the world!

They said of David, the Lord is with him. They expected much from him, but nothing came. One must follow for a long time the path of faith.

Verse 14. Here is the intelligence of David: when it is a question of enemies David is always ready.

1 Samuel 19:20-22. Saul loses all conscience. The thought that David was with Samuel ought to have stopped him - Samuel by whom he had been anointed. God put all things in his way to stop him, but he was hardened. In prophesying himself, he ought to have understood that the power which caused him to act at this moment, and which rested on David, was greater than himself; but he despises these signs, as he had despised the first. The career of David then became very painful, because it was a question of not killing Saul, of doing nothing.

373 1 Samuel 21. The sword of Goliath - the power of death. David carried it with him, but certainly did not shew it to Achish.

1 Samuel 22. Here he is in his place. All was there - royalty, prophecy, and priesthood. Saul, after having despised prophecy, turns against the priesthood. Yet David is not discouraged; he will protect Abiathar.

1 Samuel 23. One of the characteristics in David is always to consult God.

1 Samuel 24. For the present David was doing nothing. It is difficult to do nothing when one feels that God is with us. David has much more regard for Saul than Saul had for himself. Excellent spirit!

1 Samuel 25. Prophecy, properly so called, disappears. Nabal (Israel) is set aside, he who rejected David; and Abigail becomes the wife of the despised one, while he is in the wilderness. It is not properly the church, but she is on the principle of the church. Abigail goes to meet David before the death of Nabal: thus it is with the church before the nation is judged. The faith of this woman is very remarkable.

Jesus, after all, was taking care of the sheep, although He was not owned.

Verse 26. Abigail, as it were, sentences her husband to death. She sees in Saul a man, and in David the anointed and the servant of Jehovah.

1 Samuel 26. God again gives to David the opportunity of killing Saul, and that which David says to him this time is much more severe. David never surrenders himself to Saul. He is a hero. He never lets go his object, and his persevering faith is a beautiful thing. Verses 10, 11. He has a profound respect for all that belongs to God.

1 Samuel 27. His faith here fails completely. He seeks the favour of God's enemies in boasting of having done evil to His people.

1 Samuel 29. Poor David! God permitted all this to shew that in bringing him to the throne all was grace. He is set aside for a certain time, like Saul.

374 1 Samuel 30. David burns through the fire which he himself has kindled. But he always lays hold of God's actings.

1 Samuel 31. The Philistines are in full possession of all, in order to be completely beaten. What grace that God prevented David from going with Achish! If he had put his hand on Saul, he could not have uttered the lamentation which he composed on the subject of his death.

The progress of evil in Saul deserves attention. After disobedience, after jealousy and hatred against David, he despises the prophet in the very circumstances which ought to have reminded him of his authority, then the priesthood, and lastly, he is totally forsaken, and seeks for help in the power of Satan. It is well also to notice that when he falls Israel is deprived of everything. David was among the Philistines - Samuel was dead - the priesthood was judged, and even Abiathar was far off. There remained nothing, the state of Israel was complete desolation. Mark well that (David, by his unbelief, having been obliged to hide himself among the Philistines) all depended on God in pure grace. Mark also that, when David leaves Saul, which is the beginning of his typical history, in contrast with Saul, he takes with him the shewbread and the sword of Goliath. When once he is in his normal position, we have with David that which Saul had despised - the prophet, the priest - David himself being king. This history is perhaps the most sad in the scriptures. It is the history of that which had the position of faith, without the faith which would have had the reality. All he does turns to judgment. On the contrary, in the same measure as that, Saul rejects all that is of God. It is found again with David. Thus the prophet, the priest, only is suffering; but the wisdom of God there.

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