

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF I SAMUEL FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY

- PART TWO - CHAPTERS 7-12

In the first section of this book we were introduced to the family of Elkanah, their child Samuel, and his early life and call by God to leadership. We had a glimpse of how spiritually bankrupt the country of Israel was at that time, still superstitiously hanging on to their 'Bible' but being almost entirely ignorant of its contents and therefore of a real relationship with God. The result was defeat and despair for Israel but discomfort for their enemies, as the 'Bible' demonstrated its power among them. People were now ready to listen to Samuel.

CHAPTER SEVEN describes Samuel teaching Israel how to know the Lord in daily life. The ark containing the word of God is welcomed by at least one family who are greatly blessed by its presence among them. Samuel first emphasises that trust in God leaves no room for any other god. Israel respond wholeheartedly. This is the starting point for their repentance. Immediately the enemy becomes active against them again, as he does with us. Samuel teaches them that knowing we are forgiven begins at the cross, pictured here, as all the way through the Old Testament, by animal sacrifice. The result is victory which they would always remember as a starting point for their new life. Peace follows as it still does. Samuel then begins a regular ministry to the whole country in which he teaches them how to apply the word of God to their personal problems. At his home is an altar, a reminder that all Christian experience begins at the cross.

CHAPTER EIGHT jumps many years ahead to Samuel as an old man. We assume the years between were fruitful years of faithful service. There is one serious flaw in his ministry. His sons are working with him as priests and judges without having a relationship with God. Consequently they are abusing their privileged position for money. We may assume that father had taught them well but for whatever reason they had ignored his message. His mistake is to put them in key roles in God's service without a personal faith. In this he had copied Eli, his teacher. We can do the same with tragic consequences. The elders of Israel understandably are apprehensive about the future after Samuel. Their mistake is to assume that another earthly leader is the answer. They had not learned that dependence on God not man is the real solution to the problem of human weakness. Samuel takes their request as a personal insult. God shows him the true issue. Samuel warns the people exactly what the result of depending on a king instead of God would be like. They still insist on a king. The Lord chooses, as He does with us at times, to let them learn the hard way.

CHAPTER NINE gives us our first glimpse of the future king, Saul. He seems very attractive in his physical good looks and obedience to and concern for his father. He is modest and respectful towards Samuel, their spiritual leader. There is one hint of problems to come when he assumes that help from God through Samuel needs paying for, a mistake we still commonly make today. Samuel recognises the man God has sent and gives him a hint of the blessing God has for him.

CHAPTER TEN describes Samuel revealing first to Saul and then to the people what God has planned. Saul is anointed with oil as a sign of God's calling and empowering him to be king, as Jesus would one day be anointed with the Holy Spirit for His ministry.(Acts 10:38) Three special events then take place; Saul's mission to look for the missing donkeys for his father is over; God sends men to provide his food and drink, as He had done for Abram many centuries earlier;(Gen.14:18) and Saul becomes a prophetic mouthpiece for God. Saul is now under God's direction and provision rather than his father's. Finally Samuel draws Israel together and lots are drawn which identify Saul as God's choice. Most, but not all, are impressed and accept him. He certainly looked impressive!

CHAPTER ELEVEN provides Saul's first test as the chosen king. An enemy threatens Israel and the situation seems hopeless. Saul trusts God, leads the people to victory and gives God the glory. He graciously refuses to take revenge on the minority who did not want to have him as king. It is a great start! His appointment as king meets with warm approval. The place Samuel chooses is Gilgal which would act as a healthy reminder of the secret of God's continuing blessing on Saul's reign. There in Joshua 4 Israel had erected a pile of stones as a reminder of the miraculous way God had brought them into the promised land, by 'death and resurrection' through the river Jordan. Again Samuel offers sacrifice as one more reminder that every worthwhile work begins at the cross.

CHAPTER TWELVE is Samuel's retirement sermon to Israel as he assumes, wrongly as it turns out, that with the appointment of a king his own work is over. He asks them to acknowledge that he has been faithful in his ministry, which they readily do. He had been absolutely fair and honest. Then he reminds them of the ways God has worked in the past and the enormous blessing that comes from trusting Him rather than ourselves. God confirms Samuel's words and the people make a covenant with God. For the moment all looks well.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR FURTHER STUDY

1. What have you learned from this section about the secret of an effective ministry in terms both of our relationship with God and how to establish others in the faith? What is still the greatest threat to continuing spiritual effectiveness? How does God today enable us to overcome such threats?(chap.7)
2. What went wrong in Samuel's management of his family? How we can learn from this today?(I Tim.3:4,5) What is the danger to those we lead spiritually if we make the same mistakes? Why do people still seem to want an earthly leader who will give them the answers to life? How should we respond if Christians demand a leader they can look up to?(chap.8)
3. What qualities did Saul have which made him an attractive leader of men? What more on the other hand does God seek in those who are to be truly effective in leadership?(Tit.1:5-9) What was the condition of Saul's heart? How might he have been more effectively prepared to be a future man of God?(chap.9)
4. What was the significance of oil being poured on a king's head in those days? Should we do the same now?(Acts 10:38; I Jn.2:20,27) How did Saul's response to his call to leadership seem spiritually promising? What hint was there of the future difficulties Saul would get into? Again how can we better help young Christians at this stage in their growth?(chap.10)
5. How according to this chapter are we to respond when we are threatened by the Devil? And what can we expect to be able to offer when others are under threat? What can we learn from Saul's response to his former enemies?(chap.11)
6. What danger did Samuel foresee when the people no longer had him as God's mouthpiece? How did he attempt to prepare them to avoid future problems? What can we learn from Samuel's message about what God expects of His leaders? What happens to those we lead when we fall short? How can this be prevented?(chap.12)