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# The Prophet's Farewell

## 1 Samuel 12<sup>11</sup>

*Russ Kennedy*

Farewell addresses have been interesting things down through the years. One of the most moving is General Robert E Lee's farewell to the Army of Virginia. Listen to his words on that day.

*After four years of arduous service, marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude, the Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources.*

*I need not tell the survivors of so many hard-fought battles who have remained steadfast to the last that I have consented to this result from no distrust of them; but feeling that valor and devotion could accomplish nothing that could compensate for the loss that would have attended the continuance of the contest, I determined to avoid the useless sacrifice of those whose past services have endeared them to their countrymen. By the terms of the agreement, officers and men can return to their homes and remain until exchanged.*

*You may take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty faithfully performed, and I earnestly pray that a merciful God will extend to you his blessing and protection.*

*With an unceasing admiration of your constancy and devotion to your country, and a grateful remembrance of your kind and generous consideration of myself, I bid you all an affectionate farewell.*

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What we have before us is Samuel's farewell address to the nation. He does not know that God will call him out of retirement at least 3 more times. But this is the transition message as the monarchy will now begin.

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## The Exoneration of Samuel

(v.1-5)

<sup>1</sup> And Samuel said to all Israel, "Behold, I have obeyed your voice in all that you have said to me and have made a king over you. <sup>2</sup> And now, behold, the king walks before you, and I am old and gray; and behold, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my youth until this day. <sup>3</sup> Here I am; testify against me before the Lord and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you." <sup>4</sup> They said, "You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand." <sup>5</sup> And he said to them, "The Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." And they said, "He is witness."

### Samuel's History

(v.1-2)

Samuel opens by reminding them of what has brought them here. With a certain irony he speaks of his doing what they demanded. Yet the words he uses are exactly the words that God spoke 1 Samuel 8:7 where God said, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you." Samuel's act of heeding the people's voice was also obeying God. The people demanded a king out of fear and concern for the future. But their being given a king was an act of obedience by Samuel. Saul is the king they have craved for themselves and he is the king God has chosen for them.

So, they have their kind. Samuel is old and ready to retire. Samuel's sons are not going to take his place. Samuel has lived in the public eye from his early childhood when he was brought to the Temple by his parents.

### Samuel's Purity

(v.3)

Samuel affirms his personal and ministry purity. He has never sinned against the Lord or the people. His sons may have been wicked, but he was not. His integrity is clear and unchallenged. Furthermore, if anyone has a complaint, bring it to him and he will make it right.

### Samuel's Endorsement

(v.4-5)

The people agree. He has been a godly and model prophet. No one has any charge to bring against him. And they are standing in the court of God who is hearing and witnessing to Samuel's affirmed integrity.

## The Vindication of God

(v.6-19)

Samuel now shows how God is vindicated in what He has done for them and what He requires from them.

### The History of God's Deliverances

(v.6-11)

God is a witness. Through His prophet, His preacher, He testifies of all the good that He has done for His people.

<sup>6</sup> And Samuel said to the people, "The Lord is witness, who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. <sup>7</sup> Now therefore stand still that I may plead with you before the Lord concerning all the righteous deeds of the Lord that he performed for you and for your fathers. <sup>8</sup> When Jacob went into Egypt, and the Egyptians oppressed them, then your fathers cried out to the Lord and the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place. <sup>9</sup> But they forgot the Lord their God. And he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab. And they fought against them. <sup>10</sup> And they cried out to the Lord and said, 'We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. But now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we may serve you.' <sup>11</sup> And the Lord sent Jerubbaal and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety.

Samuel is calling the people to listen to what God has to say. Moses and Aaron were the voice of God when God delivered Israel from Egypt. No, Samuel stands as the voice God in this moment of national transition. Samuel will *plead* with them on God's behalf. The Lord's deeds have been righteous. Samuel's integrity has been authenticated. And the Lord now is justified in all His mighty deeds for Israel.

What Samuel rehearses is a cycle of sin, slavery, crying out to God and God sending a deliverer. They rebel against God by following the gods of power (Baal) and sex (Ash-toreth). God sends an enemy against them to chasten them for their sins. They wilt under the heavy hand of their enemies. They cry out for deliverance with promises to reject their sin, overturn their idols and serve the Lord. The Lord then raises up a deliverer who speaks for God and defeats the enemies.

And Samuel is the last of these deliverers. Because of the last two judged and the prophet Samuel, they were dwelling in safety. Until...

### The Challenge to God's People

(v.12-15)

<sup>12</sup> And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' when the Lord your God was your king. <sup>13</sup> And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the Lord has set a king over you. <sup>14</sup> If you will fear the Lord and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well. <sup>15</sup> But if you will not obey the voice

of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king.

Until Nahash the Ammonite shows up and threatens to enslave Israel.

### **In the Demand for a King**

**(v. 12-13)**

Their response? It was to demand a king. They wanted a human king when they had a Divine Sovereign. So God gave them a human king. And look, there he is. Saul, the "asked for". Tall, handsome, rugged, powerful and ruthless. This is your king. You wanted a king over you more than you wanted God over you. Now God who is actually still over you, has appointed a sub-regent to rule over you. So the kingdom under God's rule develops through the monarchy under Saul.

### **In the Future of the Kingdom**

**(v. 14-15)**

Two paths are now set out before them.

Fear, serve, obey and not rebel against the true King and all will be well for you and your king.

Do not fear the true King and rebel against Him and God will go to war against you and your king.

It does not take much to imagine at this point what is going to happen. Yes, the people think they are going to fear and obey God the King and all will be well. But we know that they will not and do not. Their King Asked-For will actually lead in disobeying, dishonoring and rebelling against the King of Heaven.

### **The Authentication of God's Message**

**(v.16-18)**

In the tradition of Moses and Aaron whose revelation from God was accompanied by signs and miracles, Samuel will also have a sign and a miracle.

<sup>16</sup> Now therefore stand still and see this great thing that the Lord will do before your eyes. <sup>17</sup> Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the Lord, that he may send thunder and rain. And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking for yourselves a king." <sup>18</sup> So Samuel called upon the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel.

### **The Prophet's Prayer**

**(v.16-17)**

This was the harvest time. It was the wheat harvest season. Normally in that part of the world, there is no rain during this time. It is a long dry season ideal for gathering and threshing the grain. So what Samuel is about to call for will be a miracle. He will pray and God will act. And the people will know they have sinned. And Samuel will once again be their deliverer.

This scene is a mini-drama of the large cycle Israel has experienced. Sin, destruction, crying out and a deliverer. Israel's history is the history of redemption: sin, slavery, destruction, crying out, a deliverer, repentance and freedom.

## **The Destructive Rain**

**(v.18)**

So he does and so it does. In answer to Samuel's prayer, God sends a great thunderstorm. It rolls across the land, powerful, threatening, destructive. God is in the thunderstorm. God is on the march.

## **The People's Fear**

**(v.18)**

Here is the right response in the face of the wrath of God: holy fear. The great Sovereign of the universe is not to be trifled with. You reject Him. You bow to someone or something else, you erect an idol in your heart and life and God will be fearsome. His deeds of love may come wrapped in clouds of wrath. He may even kill His Son for your sins. May fear turn to awe and then to exhilarated love.

## **The Intercession of Samuel**

**(v.19-25)**

Samuel's prophetic ministry takes a priestly turn. He is going to preach and to pray for God's people.

<sup>19</sup> And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king." <sup>20</sup> And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. <sup>21</sup> And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. <sup>22</sup> For the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. <sup>23</sup> Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. <sup>24</sup> Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. <sup>25</sup> But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

## **The Repentance of God's People**

**(v.19)**

It would be easy to be cynical with their response. But we must be very careful. This is recorded as the repentance of God's people. They want prayer. They recognize their history of sins and their many previous transgressions. They acknowledge this specific sin and how it is the fruit of their history of sinning. They do not want to suffer God's judgment. They want to live. They accept God's message to them and the truth of the threat against them. They turn to the man God has placed among them to be their intercessor.

There is a long history of Israel sinning, repenting and being forgiven. It seems dreadful to us. It puts their repentance in question in our mind. But not in God's mind. Why? Because repentance, like faith, is not a natural thing a person can do on their own. It is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 2:24-26). Even genuine repentance does not guarantee future perfection. It only guarantees past forgiveness. Let us be very, very careful of being cynical about the repentance of God's people who seem to keep failing. Do you want God to treat you that way? Do you ever repent and then go back to the

same sin? May the mercy we have received in Christ be the mercy we extend to others who are in Christ.

### **The Comfort by God's Prophet**

**(v.20-23)**

And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. <sup>21</sup> And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. <sup>22</sup> For the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. <sup>23</sup> Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.

Do you hear the comfort Samuel gives the people of God? Interestingly two are stated as commands.

Do not be afraid because of your sins...

Do not turn aside after the vain and empty pursuits...

Two of the comforts are promises by God.

The Lord will not forsake His people...

The Lord will make a people for His Name...

Two of the comforts are promises by Samuel.

Samuel offers the promise of his continued prayers. He may be stepping aside from the public life of ministering before Israel. He is not stepping down from the private life of praying in God's Presence.

Samuel offers the promise of his continued teaching. He will continue to instruct them. They may have a king; but they are still under the Word of God. They will its teaching.

### **The Exhortation to God's People**

**(v.24-25)**

Samuel closes his address much as he opened it.

<sup>24</sup> Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. <sup>25</sup> But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

What more is there to say? Sadly, Israel and their king did not fear the Lord and serve Him from the heart. They did wickedly. And they were swept away. But that's the rest of the story.

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## Reflect and Respond

Christ has come as our true King. Yet we often bow to lesser things. And oh, how often we have ascended to the throne in self-elevation! Bow to the true King every day.

Christ is the faithful prophet and priest. He has revealed God in and through Himself. He has declared all the Father told Him to. He has lived righteously and without sin in the world. Though righteous and pure, He was slaughtered for our sin and raised from the dead for our justification. Hear His message. Embrace His mercy. Cry out to Jesus.

Christ has given us faithful men who will preach His Word. So elders, we must be faithful to shepherd, to pray and to teach God's people. Lean hard into the yoke. Carry it well. Finish the work. Till be very end, shepherd, pray and proclaim.

May I echo Samuel's call to Israel. It is the same call to all God's people through the ages. It comes clearly to us today.

Fear the Lord...

Serve the Lord faithfully...

Reflect often and much on all that God has done for you...

But thank God, if you are God's child, you will never be swept away. For the true King, the Lord Jesus, was swept away under the wrath of God. He emerged three days later alive, resurrected. That is not an excuse to keep on sinning, but rather, the power to live a life pleasing to God.

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## Notes