

Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 12:1-25

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1 Samuel 12:1-25

(This is Samuel's "farewell speech" to the people of Israel. He will no longer be Israel's judge as the people have desired a king to lead them. He will continue to act in a priestly and prophetic office, but he will no longer be the political/military leader of the nation. Though he will be among the people in this way, his role will be different than it was before.)

Verses 1-5

¹ Samuel said to all Israel, "I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you. ² Now you have a king as your leader. As for me, I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day. ³ Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the LORD and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these things, I will make it right."

⁴ "You have not cheated or oppressed us," they replied. "You have not taken anything from anyone's hand."

⁵ Samuel said to them, "The LORD is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand."

"He is witness," they said.

- Samuel declares that he has done as the people requested and as God instructed him. He has anointed Saul as their king.
- He calls upon the people of Israel to testify against him if he has misused his office for personal gain or been otherwise dishonest in the fulfillment of his duties. Frankly, the tone of this part of his message seems almost bitter, as if there are people who question his personal integrity. He calls upon these people to bring their charges against him before YHWH. He calls them to lay their charges out openly. He offers to make right anything that he has done wrong.

- The people bring no charges against him. He calls upon them to acknowledge that no one brings any charge against him, to acknowledge before God that no charges have been brought against him, and binds them by oath that this is so.
- This seems an awkward way to begin a farewell speech, but perhaps Samuel remembers the tendency of God's people to accuse their leaders unfairly as they had done since the time of Moses.

Verses 6-11

⁶ Then Samuel said to the people, "It is the LORD who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors up out of Egypt. ⁷ Now then, stand here, because I am going to confront you with evidence before the LORD as to all the righteous acts performed by the LORD for you and your ancestors.

⁸ "After Jacob entered Egypt, they cried to the LORD for help, and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your ancestors out of Egypt and settled them in this place.

⁹ "But they forgot the LORD their God; so he sold them into the hand of Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hands of the Philistines and the king of Moab, who fought against them. ¹⁰ They cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned; we have forsaken the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. But now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve you.' ¹¹ Then the LORD sent Jerub-Baal, Barak, Jephthah and Samuel, and he delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around you, so that you lived in safety.

- Samuel does a historical recital which outlines the behavior of the nation of Israel during the time of the Theocracy. They are blessed by God. They turn away from God. They are afflicted by God. They call out to God. God sends a leader to rescue them. They are blessed by God, but then they wander away from God. This has been Israel's behavioral pattern since Moses' time.

Verses 12-15

¹² "But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, 'No, we want a king to rule over us'—even though the LORD your God was your king. ¹³ Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the LORD has set a king over you. ¹⁴ If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands,

and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God—good! ¹⁵ But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors.

- Samuel reminds Israel that they requested a human king. They now have a king, Saul. He points to Saul and says, “Here is your king.”
- But he tells them that having a king changes nothing. God will bless the nation if the people and the king follow the commands of YHWH. However, if the king and the people do not “fear/respect” the word of YHWH, if they rebel against the commands of God and do what seems right in their own eyes, God will punish them as He did their ancestors.

Verses 16-19

¹⁶ “Now then, stand still and see this great thing the LORD is about to do before your eyes! ¹⁷ Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call on the LORD to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king.”

¹⁸ Then Samuel called on the LORD, and that same day the LORD sent thunder and rain. So all the people stood in awe of the LORD and of Samuel.

¹⁹ The people all said to Samuel, “Pray to the LORD your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king.”

- It is the time of year when Israel harvested wheat. Dry weather was required to successfully gather wheat. To show the people that they had turned away from God and deserved to be punished, Samuel called upon God to send a great storm upon the land. The purpose of the storm was to threaten the harvest and show the people the necessity to depend upon God not the king.
- The people asked Samuel to intercede for them with YHWH. They acknowledged that asking for a king was rejecting God.

Verses 20-25

²⁰ “Do not be afraid,” Samuel replied. “You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. ²¹ Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. ²² For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own. ²³ As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.

And I will teach you the way that is good and right. ²⁴ But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. ²⁵ Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will perish.

- Samuel tells the people that they should not fear God but that they should respect Him by following His commands.
- He assures them that YHWH has chosen them as His people. Because He is faithful, He will not forsake them as they forsake Him. God will not reject the people He has chosen!
- He warns Israel not to turn away from YHWH to follow idols. (Israel will forget this warning.)
- He assures Israel, that he, Samuel, will not forsake his priestly/prophetic office. He will continue to guide them spiritually. He will teach them “the way of YHWH.”
- He reminds them, that if they follow YHWH, they will receive YHWH’s blessing. However, if they do evil, that which ignores YHWH and His commands, the nation and their king will perish.

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