

# 1 Samuel 12 • Facing the Truth of Failure

## Introduction

What do you do when faced with the indisputable fact that you have failed God, that you have **NOT** obeyed Him as you know you should? Sometimes it leads to repentance and putting into practice lessons learned so as not to repeat those mistakes; other times it might be so discouraging as to cause us to believe we simply can't live according to God's ways and therefore want to give up. The first alternative is to face and embrace the truth of the situation, the second is to run and hide from it. There are even times when we avoid putting the truth into practice in our own life by remaining close enough to observe it in someone else. But "truth by association" does not work and itself leads to further and ultimate failure. God's grace provides extended opportunities to overcome if we'll fully face the truth of failure and where it should properly lead.

<sup>1</sup>Then Samuel said to all Israel, "Behold, I have listened to your voice in all that you said to me and I have appointed a king over you. <sup>2</sup>Now, here is the king walking before you, but I am old and gray, and behold my sons are with you. And I have walked before you from my youth even to this day. <sup>3</sup>Here I am; bear witness against me before the LORD and 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? 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>He said to them, "The LORD is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day that you have found nothing in my hand."

And they said, "He is witness."

<sup>6</sup>Then Samuel said to the people, "It is the LORD who appointed Moses and Aaron and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt. <sup>7</sup>So now, take your stand, that I may plead with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous acts of the LORD which He did for you and your fathers.

<sup>8</sup>"When Jacob went into Egypt and your fathers cried out to the Lord, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron who brought your fathers out of Egypt and settled them in this place. <sup>9</sup>But they forgot the LORD their God, so He sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the army of Habor, and into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. <sup>10</sup>They cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned

### [Read v.1-5]

**Q: What is implied in Samuel's statement, "I have listened to your voice"?**

A: The request for a king did not originate with Samuel but the people. In fact, Samuel didn't personally approve of their request, and so this opening statement serves to put some distance between Samuel and the people as a prelude to the cold, hard truth he is about to impart on this subject.

**Q: Why do you suppose that Samuel makes such a big issue out of his personal integrity? What's the purpose?**

A: Samuel is about to speak the very plain, hard truth concerning the people's sin in seeking an earthly ruler. He is removing the possibility that anything about his person can be used or get in the way of anyone accepting the message of God's truth that he is about to speak.

**Point:** Samuel isn't building up himself as much as the truth of God's Word to be given through him. By eliminating himself as an object of argument, every ear is now tuned to the message, not the personality.

**Application:** Have you ever believed you didn't have to follow someone's advice, even though biblically grounded, because the person giving it had no personal credibility for one reason or another? Does another person's spiritual walk ultimately release us from our own obligations of obedience? How about when we're the one attempting to instruct or inform another?

### [Read v.6-13]

**Q: What is the common characteristic about God's calling of Moses, Aaron, Jerubbaal, Bedan (Barak), Jephthah and Samuel?**

A: They are all types of redeemers or saviors. In each case, the people needed to be redeemed from service to foreign and false gods. Each of these examples not only led Israel to physical freedom, but spiritual freedom. Along with the defeat of those enslaving Israel on earth, these "redeemers" facilitated spiritual revival and a return to the One True God.

**Q: So until this time, what was the role of leaders appointed and sent by God?**

A: They were actually a spiritual response that effected physical freedom in parallel with spiritual freedom. They were called in response to Israel's recognition that they had forsaken God and desired to return to Him.

[Continued on the next page.]

because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth; but now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve You.’<sup>11</sup> Then the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around, so that you lived in security.

<sup>12</sup>“When you saw that Nahash the king of the sons of Ammon came against you, you said to me, ‘No, but a king shall reign over us,’ although the LORD your God was your king.<sup>13</sup> Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for, and behold, the LORD has set a king over you.

<sup>14</sup>“If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God.<sup>15</sup> If you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the command of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers.

<sup>16</sup>“Even now, take your stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes.<sup>17</sup> Is it not the wheat harvest today? I will call to the LORD, that He may send thunder and rain. Then you will know and see that your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the LORD by asking for yourselves a king.”

<sup>18</sup>So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.

**Q: So how are these examples different from the current reason that Israel wants a leader as described in v.12-13?**

A: There has already been earthly release through Samuel in the defeat of the Philistines accompanied by great spiritual revival in all of Israel (1 Samuel 8). The people’s cry for a leader was not the same as in times past when they sought to return to God because they had already done so. This time they are overwhelmed at the specter and rise to power of Nahash the king of the Ammonites.

**Q: But what’s wrong with being proactive? Aren’t they just anticipating what will be needed to not repeat past mistakes?**

A: In Ammon they are facing an external threat just as they have repeatedly experienced from Pharaoh and all the nations listed until now. But in those cases, **GOD** was the King who fought for them and rescued and protected them. The problem now is that they’re not placing their trust in the King of Heaven, but in an earthly king.

**Application:** Does living under even the greatest of spiritual leaders relieve you of your personal obligations to follow all of God’s ways? How is trusting in someone of greater faith actually replacing God? How do people use leaders or organizations or even movements as substitutes for God?

**[Read v.14-18]**

**Q: What is never erased no matter how strong a spiritual leader we might be following?**

A: Our personal obligation to obedience.

- “fear the LORD”
- “serve Him”
- “listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD”

**Q: What is the DUAL requirement for both leaders and followers?**

A: **BOTH** have to be obedient. One side’s obedience does not make up for the lack of same in the other.

**Point:** The health of the body of Christ is affected by variations of individual obedience. Our own spiritual walk not only affects our personal relationship with Christ, but affects the corporate church as a whole. In reality, the quality of our walk is an obligation of sorts to the overall church.

**Q: What is the purpose of this “sign” confirming God’s judgment that the people have sinned?**

A: It is to get them to recognize their sin, to confront God’s truth.

<sup>19</sup>Then all the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil by asking for ourselves a king.”

<sup>20</sup>Samuel said to the people, “Do not fear. You have committed all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. <sup>21</sup>You must not turn aside, for then you would go after futile things which can not profit or deliver, because they are futile. <sup>22</sup>For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased 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; but I will instruct you in the good and right way. <sup>24</sup>Only fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. <sup>25</sup>But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away.”

**[Read v.19-25]**

**Q: What is actually wrong with the people’s first response in recognition of their sin by asking Samuel to pray for them?**

A: Yet again they’re seeking someone else to intervene for them.

**Q: How would you characterize the first part of Samuel’s response?**

A: It’s reassuring—“*Do not fear*” prepares them for a message that all is not yet lost—but at the same time it’s 100% truthful—“*You have committed all this evil*”.

**Point:** *This is an example of “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). The hope of reconciliation is not diminished by the communication of absolute truth.*

**Q: What is Samuel’s recommended action for those that have sinned?**

A: “*You must not turn aside*”. (v.21) The correct course of action is not to give up but to stick to God’s path.

**Q: What occurs if one turns aside at the point of realizing their sin?**

A: “*...for then you would go after futile things which can not profit or deliver*”. In other words, one substitutes something else in God’s place and begins seeking those things instead.

**Q: What is implied in Samuel’s statement in v.22 that “the LORD will not abandon His people”?**

A: Connecting the thought to the previous verse, he is saying that turning aside in pursuit of an alternative, futile substitute is tantamount to a person abandoning God, something God Himself will not do if the person stays the right, spiritual course.

**Q: How does Samuel ultimately address their request for him to pray on their behalf?**

A: He affirms that his prayerful, spiritual support for them will not change, but reinforces that what they really need is obedience to God’s Word. This is why he offers in v.23 that he “*will instruct you in the good and right way*”. It’s a polite but affirming way of reinforcing that no one can provide a substitute for their own personal obedience.

**Q: To what standard does Samuel call the Israelites in their service to God?**

A: “*...serve Him in truth with all your heart*”. (v.24) The measure of a right heart serving God is defined by the truth.

**Point:** *When faced with spiritual failure, the tendency is to withdraw from God because one thinks they’re not capable of keeping His commandments. They don’t realize that failure to adhere to His Word is what led to the failure in the first place, and is therefore the only remedy for success going forward.*

## Overall Application

- *Is there anyone at all that we cling to in the hopes that their teaching or works or prayers for us will make up for weaknesses in our own walk and life? How well do we recognize the mutual responsibility of all members of the body of Christ for obedience both for their personal walk and as it contributes to the whole?*
- *How realistic is it to expect someone (or ourselves) to deal with sin if the truth of the situation is not plainly communicated? How does Samuel's example serve to remind us that our responsibility does not end at merely stating the truth? (Hint: He offers to disciple and pray for them.)*
- *Have you ever given up trying to maintain your Christianity because you failed at keeping some of its points? How well do you recognize that the only cure for disobedience is obedience? Is that really an unrealistic expectation?*