

FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 12

Samuel's Farewell Address

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. 2 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. 3 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.” 4 They said, “You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand.” 5 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.” 6 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. 7 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. 8 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. 9 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. 10 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 Ashtaroath. But now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we may serve you.’ 11 And the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Barak[e] and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety. 12 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. 13 And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the LORD has set a king over you. 14 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. 15 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. 16 Now therefore stand still and see this great thing that the LORD will do before your eyes. 17 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.” 18 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. 19 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.” 20 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. 21 And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. 22 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. 23 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. 24 Only fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. 25 But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.”

Ch 12 Though Samuel acknowledges he has gone along with the request of the people of Israel, we know that it was the Lord who was behind the whole event (cf 9:15–17; 15:26). (TLSB)

12:1 Samuel gathers Israel as did Moses (Dt 29:10–15) and Joshua (Jsh 23–24). Now he rehearses Israel’s history, reminding them of the Lord’s care and gracious presence. The terms of the Lord’s covenant relationship with Israel remained the same, notwithstanding change in administrative leadership and style. (TLSB)

12:3 *Testify against me.* When Samuel presents the newly inaugurated king to the people, he seeks to establish publicly his own past faithfulness to the covenant as leader of the nation. His purpose is to exonerate himself and provide an example for Saul in his new responsibilities. (CSB)

Samuel exonerates himself before the people, showing that, regardless of his sons’ misuse of power (see note, 8:3), he received no personal gain from his service as judge over Israel—in contrast to the king who “will take” (8:11–18). (TLSB)

His anointed. Refers to Saul, yet an inference to Christ cannot be eliminated. (TLSB)

12:5 Poetic, providing repetition and comparison between “The LORD” and “His anointed,” both serving as witness for Samuel. Samuel accuses the people before their real Judge, the Lord (Jgs 11:27). They had fallen away from the Lord’s ways, yet the Lord had remained faithful to them. (TLSB)

12:6 *Samuel said to the people.* Samuel turns from consideration of his previous leadership to the matter of the people’s request for a king, which he views as a covenant-breaking act and a serious apostasy. (CSB)

the LORD. Samuel emphasizes that in the past the Lord had provided the necessary leadership for the nation. (CSB)

12:7 *confront you with evidence.* The terminology is that of a legal proceeding, as in vv. 2–5, but now the relationship of the parties is reversed. This time Samuel is the accuser, the people are the defendants, and the Lord is the Judge. (CSB)

righteous deeds of the LORD. These righteous acts (see vv. 8–11) demonstrate the constancy of the Lord’s covenant faithfulness toward his people in the past and, by way of contrast, serve as an indictment of their present apostasy. (CSB)

12:8–15 Samuel rehearses a creedlike historical account of the Lord’s continuing care, recalling the cycle of sin, servitude, supplication, salvation, and silence. The basic sin was that Israel “forgot the LORD,” yet He never forgot them. (TLSB)

12:11 *he delivered you.* The Lord repeatedly delivered Israel from her enemies right up to Samuel’s own lifetime (see 7:3, 8, 10, 12), demonstrating again the people’s apostasy in desiring a king. (CSB)

Order of judges is not chronological but clearly reflects their prominence, which culminated in Samuel. (TLSB)

Jerubbaal. Gideon’s nickname, emphasizing his rejection of the Canaanite Baal worship. (TLSB)

Samuel. Refers to himself objectively in this indictment, using a recognized legal technique to convict people of their sin. (TLSB)

12:12 *when you saw that Nahash ... was moving against you*. In the face of the combined threat from the Philistines in the west (9:16) and the Ammonites in the east (11:1–13), the Israelites sought to find security in the person of a human king. (CSB)

the LORD your God was your king. The Israelite desire for and trust in a human leader constituted a rejection of the kingship of the Lord and betrayed a loss of confidence in his care, in spite of his faithfulness during the time of the exodus, conquest and judges. (CSB)

Hus: “The spiritual power, which is [priestly], excels the royal in age, dignity, and usefulness.... The spiritual power is in and of itself sufficient for the ruling of the people, as appears from the history of Israel.... Earthly power ... is of no avail independent of the spiritual power which is the chief regulative force” (*The Church*, p 93). (TLSB)

12:13 *the LORD has set a king over you*. In spite of the sinfulness of the people’s request, the Lord had chosen to incorporate kingship into the structure of the theocracy (his kingdom). Kingship was given by the Lord to his people and was to function as an instrument of his rule over them. (CSB)

12:14 *If you fear the LORD*. Samuel relates the old covenant condition (see Ex 19:5–6; Dt 8:19; 11:13–15, 22–28; 28; 30:17–18; Jos 24:20) to the new era Israel is entering with the establishment of the monarchy. (CSB)

if both you and the king ... follow the LORD your God—good! Israel and her king are to demonstrate that although human kingship has been established, they will continue to recognize the Lord as their true King. In this new era where potential for divided loyalty between the Lord and the human king arises, Israel’s loyalty to the Lord must remain inviolate. For similar use of the expression “to follow” see 2Sa 2:10; 15:13; 1Ki 12:20; 16:21. (CSB)

Samuel repeats the traditional covenant relationship that God had established with His people, beginning with Abraham and continuing through Moses and Joshua and now Samuel himself (Ex 19:5–6; Dt 28; Jsh 24:20). The same alternatives Moses and Joshua had presented to the people, Samuel presents to them—either the Lord or not (Dt 30:15–20; Jsh 24). The First Commandment is always at the heart of Israel’s history. (TLSB)

obey. Lit, “to hear” Him, which implies that the one hearing will obey. (TLSB)

12:15 *But if you do not obey*. Samuel confronts Israel with the same alternatives Moses had expressed centuries earlier (see Dt 28; 30:15–20). The introduction of kingship into Israel’s socio-political structure has not changed the fundamental nature of Israel’s relationship to the Lord. (CSB)

12:16 *see this great thing*. Samuel calls the people to observe as the Lord himself demonstrates his existence and power and authenticates the truthfulness and seriousness of Samuel’s words. (CSB)

12:17 *wheat harvest*. Late spring, when rain was extremely rare. (TLSB)

wickedness ... a king. Samuel underscores the great wickedness of Israel in asking for a king without the Lord’s express order. (TLSB)

12:18 *thunder and rain.* Samuel's predicted and unusual thunder and rain confirms his judgment of the people. Disaster will harm the wheat harvest by creating conditions for mold (Pr 26:1). Such an unusual occurrence in May or June brings fear upon the people, reminiscent of the exodus, when the Lord displayed His power. Samuel also demonstrates his own prophetic power, illustrating his ability to communicate with the Lord. (TLSB)

12:19–21 See Israelites' earlier request of Moses (Ex 9:28). (TLSB)

12:19 *Pray for... the LORD your God.* Samuel's indictment (vv. 6–15) combined with the awesome sign of thunder and rain in the dry season (vv. 16–18) prompted the people to confess their sin and request Samuel's intercession for them. (CSB)

12:20 *yet do not turn aside from following the LORD.* Samuel again brings into focus the central issue in the controversy surrounding the establishment of kingship in Israel. (CSB)

12:21 *empty things.* No rivals to the Lord can deliver or guarantee security. (CSB)

12:22 Samuel points out the graciousness of God's continuing presence among them. After advising them not to follow other (empty) ways (cf Is 41:29), he reaffirms that the Lord's hand and instruction will continue to guide the people (as He had under Moses). (TLSB)

12:23 *I will instruct you in the good and right.* Samuel is not retiring from his prophetic role when he presents the people with their king. He will continue to intercede for the people (see v. 19; 7:8–9) and will instruct them in their covenant obligations (see Dt 6:18; 12:28). Saul and all future kings are to be subject to instruction and correction by the Lord's prophets. (CSB)

Samuel's role as judge will cease, but he will continue to be the voice of God in his prophetic role—interceding for them and instructing them in the ways of the Lord. Luth: "Here we read that it is a sin against God if we preachers do not rightly instruct the people and pray for them. Also that instructs them through us, his ministers" (AE 43:230). (TLSB)

12:24 *fear the LORD.* Samuel summarizes Israel's obligation of loyalty to the Lord as an expression of gratitude for the great things he has done for them. (CSB)

12:25 *you and your king shall be swept away.* Should the nation persist in covenant-breaking conduct, it will bring upon itself its own destruction. (CSB)

Ch 12 By words and a miraculous sign, Samuel powerfully proclaims a message of judgment and promise. When you look back over your life, see that you have been less than wholly faithful to the Lord. Yet, "consider what great things He has done for you" (v 24). God remains faithful to His promises, especially His promise of forgiveness! • Lord, gracious Father, thank You for the blessings I have received from You, particularly the forgiveness of sins. Bless all those who stand as Your representative in my life that they may be faithful too. In Jesus' name. Amen. (TLSB)