

• Israel had rejected God as their king but God gave hope for recovery

God's steps for a fresh start

1. Realise that they have had their own way

2. Realise the seriousness of their rejection of God

3. Realise that God had remained entirely faithful

• Past sin had brought calamity

• Repentance had brought deliverance

4. Be assured that God is willing to allow a fresh start

Samuel sets out God's essential condition

• Recognise and confess their sin

Have you ever done something which you then bitterly regretted? Israel had rejected God as their king. It might seem that they had stepped out of the purpose of God for ever.

But even when the people of God have badly fallen there is the possibility of recovery.

If they are to experience a fresh start they must be convinced that what they did was wicked. Samuel points out (1) **that they got their own way**. Having a king was not God's idea, it was not Samuel's idea, it was their own idea. They have exactly what they wanted. They now have a king¹.

He moves on to emphasize (2) **the seriousness of their having rejected him**. When God's people drift from him they treat his servants badly. Although it was God rather than Samuel whose kingship they had rejected, nevertheless they had not appreciated the fact that God had given them a good leader in Samuel. He had been their leader for a long time¹. During that long time he had never exploited them². Both the LORD and his representative, his anointed king, Saul, are witnesses to his integrity³. They will not be able to say that they chose a king because of the failure of the one God had given them, Samuel himself.

Next Samuel proceeds to point out (3) **that God has been entirely faithful to them**. Their sin was a failure of faith in him. He had worked many 'righteous acts' to bring the nation into being¹ and then continued to perform righteous acts throughout their history². They had cried for help in Egypt³ but then sinned⁴. They cried for help again⁵. The same event happened again and again. Sin brought calamity; repentance brought deliverance. Each time they cried for help God sent them deliverers⁶. Then came the time when instead of turning to the LORD they wanted a king instead. When Nahash of the Ammonites was threatening them, they broke the pattern of what they had done before and instead of calling upon the LORD, they asked for a deliverer like the ones the nations had, an earthly king⁷. That, says Samuel, is what they now have⁸.

Samuel regards the recent history as part of the sinfulness and rebelliousness of Israel. But, says the prophet, (4) **God is willing to allow the people to start from afresh** as though their rebellion had not taken place at all. This is often what God does when we sin. He forgives us and then can pick up with us no matter what we have done. Again and again he gives us fresh opportunities. We sooner or later learn the folly of getting out of God's will.

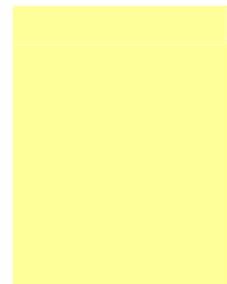
Samuel says that if from that time they will 'fear the LORD and serve and obey him', if they will not rebel further against his commands, all will be well and their relationship with the LORD will pick up as if their sin had never taken place. If they sin, they will experience God's hostility. But there is one condition to all of this: they must see the sinfulness of what they had done. If they will confess that what they did in rejecting God's kingship was sinful, God will forgive their sin and will pick up with them again.



¹ 12:1-2a

¹ 12:2b
² 12:3-4
³ 12:5

¹ 12:6-7
² 12:8
³ 12:9
⁴ 12:10
⁵ 12:11
⁶ 12:10-11
⁷ 12:12
⁸ 12:13



• Samuel asks God for a sign

Samuel is eager that they should truly and thoroughly admit how wrongly they have behaved. He proposes to ask God to do something that will convince them. It is harvest time^{□1}, a dry time of the year. Samuel prays that it will rain^{□2}, and God dramatically answers^{□3}.

□1 12:16-17a
□2 12:17b
□3 12:18

The people's response

• Confession

• They ask Samuel to continue to be their intercessor

As a result the people are convinced by what Samuel has been saying and confess their sins. They request Samuel to continue to be an intercessor^{□1}. Samuel now presses home the message he had put to them before. If they will obey the Lord from this point, all will be well^{□2}. There is another reason why God is reluctant to ever reject his people. He has chosen them and his reputation is bound up with what happens to them. If he rejects them, his power to keep and to restore is slandered and despised. The LORD will therefore not reject them^{□3}. Samuel will continue to be their intercessor^{□4}. But God is asking them to serve him faithfully, in gratitude towards him^{□5}. If they persist in rebellion, further disaster will yet come upon them and their king^{□6}.

□1 12:19
□2 12:20-21
□3 12:22
□4 12:23
□5 12:24
□6 12:25

God's generous provision in the gospel for them and us

• The cross of Jesus brought forgiveness even of 'Old Testament' sins

• God says 'I will be merciful to their iniquities'

• Sometimes God chooses to 'use' our sin for His purposes

God can be generous to us in this way because Jesus died for us. And this was true even of Old Testament believers. The death of Jesus works backwards and forwards in time. Even Old Testament believers were forgiven in the light of what God would do upon the cross. This is the point of Romans 3:25 ('because of the passing over of sins committed in the past').

The promise of the gospel is: I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will no more remember their sins. Amazingly, God can even accommodate himself to what you did and somehow those sins are turned around and they even may be taken up into the purpose of God. The sin of Jonah led to some pagan sailors being blessed^{□1}, although what he did was wicked and he was severely chastised for it. The wicked acts of men in crucifying Jesus were God's way of bringing salvation to the world. God often says to us: acknowledge what you did. I will forgive it. I will overrule it and incorporate it into my present will for your life. Jesus died for those sins. Hand yourself over to me and let me lead you from this time. But, says God, if you exploit my grace again, I can sweep you away. God is free. He does not have to give another chance in this way. But he often does. He has done it for me; he will do it for you. Only acknowledge what you did and he will start again with you.

□1 Jonah 1:16



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