

### “The Hand of the LORD”

Following their earthly salvation at the hands of their future king, Saul, the Israelites were jubilant. This was, amongst other things, a fine stamp of approval on their decision to have a king just like all the other (pagan!) nations. Or, so they thought. When Samuel urged them all to go to Gilgal, he had other matters in mind, beside that of praising God for his merciful intervention in this latest war. He had called them all together to remind them they had sinned, yet the Lord was still their God. (This is a good fact to remember – we cannot lose our salvation).

Whilst He had certainly provided a champion in the figure of Saul, He nevertheless wanted to remind them of their great sin, and of the consequences of ignoring His demands. The ‘hand of the Lord’ saved them from their mortal enemies, and the same hand of the Lord would punish them for their spiritual evils, if they continued on their chosen path of selfishness and human pride.

As with all of scripture, God’s word, these texts are alive with instructions for our own lives. When we reject and ignore God’s way, specifically as found in scripture, we open ourselves up not only to the natural consequences of our sin, but we also attract the censure of our most Holy God. As has been shown before, God will and does punish His people even during their earthly lifetimes. It is this fearful reminder that Samuel brought to the people, who were still buzzing with joy at being victorious against their enemies.

I have observed throughout my life the way Christian living in the West has declined almost to the point of collapse. All manner of things have contributed to this sad state of affairs, including relative financial security, provision of nearly everything by the State, lack of opposition\* to the Christian ethos and a generalised slackness of application of God’s requirements to our lives. But, the onus is on each and every one of us to reverse this slide in to obscurity. Whatever the contribution made by external elements to our decline, we cannot blame them, for we are all held accountable before Almighty God for our individual lives. Sin is charged to us on a moment-by-moment individual basis! (\*2018 note: Opposition has now come upon us with great vengeance – via homosexuals and Islamists – because of spiritual laxity).

It is about time that we, as elected representatives of the Kingdom of God, began to show our position in Christ. We must throw off the mantle of sloth and put on the mantle of holiness. Otherwise the hand of the Lord will be raised against us in wrath. We are His people – but that

## 1 Samuel 12

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 13 February 2018 21:23

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does not stop His anger against sin. Do not wait until He gives us a sign, for by then it could be close to earthly punishment. Rather, do what is right and good *now*, as time permits. Then, the same hand of the Lord will provide us with earthly delights such as peace, love and communion with Him, and even all that we need to live on this earth (as promised in Matthew). Now let us examine the chapter before us:

### Verses 1&2

1.

“And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you.

2.

And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and gray-headed; and, behold, my sons (are) with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day.”

Though Samuel says that he listened to the people in their desire to have an earthly king, we should note something – as a called man of God the people had no right to insist that he should comply with their wishes. This is important. By a man of God, I mean a man chosen by God to fulfil a particular function. Samuel was chosen, under God, to be the judge, ruler and high priest over Israel. He was given his tasks and role by God Himself and no man could over-ride that.

Similarly, a man of God today cannot be diverted from the role and task given him by the Father. A pastor, for example, must shepherd the local flock according to scripture and the daily guidance given to his spirit by the Holy Spirit. Whilst his work and ministry abide in this Holy union, no man should deign to remove him from them. Yet, we have the unholy activities witnessed many times over in our reformed churches, that go against this godly path. An example is the appointment and removal of pastors by deacons when there are no proper reasons for doing so.

What do I mean? A pastor should ideally arise ‘out of the ranks’. He should be one of the congregation, who shows his aptitude and calling by his words and actions over time. Thus, the people will ‘naturally’ look to him as one who provides guidance. Part of this is found in his being ‘apt to teach’ the word of God properly and without personalised interpretations. That man should then be known amongst the local church as their pastor, whether or not he receives

## 1 Samuel 12

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 13 February 2018 21:23

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financial support. And whether or not he has completed Bible college training! The man himself must know he has been called and must display the gifts appropriate to his calling. The people around him must acknowledge his calling and gifts, for they have no choice. There is no quota system, either – there can be multiple pastors... as many as the Lord provides. (Read my book: 'Will The Real Pastor Please Stand Up!').

If no man appears to arise, then certainly a man may be 'imported'... but not in the way we are used to. Such a man will arise in his own congregation, as shown above, but God will lay upon his heart a tremendous burden to be a part of a different local church. That other church will have the same burden, for the same man. Thus, both the chosen and the adopting church coincide. I remember being 'called' to the pastorate of a local church I had preached in. Just before I was 'invited' to attend a meeting of the deacons, I had preached very powerfully in that church. It was not my own power – as I preached, the Holy Spirit came upon the place in obvious and great presence... even the windows and doors shook! The Holy power that day shook hearts as well as the building, and many of the congregation cried openly in their seats.

The power was not there when I began speaking, though I knew I had honestly prepared the message from scripture. But, the moment God took over, I knew it in body and mind and I was overcome by the awe of it all. From that moment I knew God was truly speaking through me, and this was validated by a subsequent show of God's presence amongst the people, with accompanying physical signs. I knew what it meant to be in the Presence of God! So did the people. Then, just before I was to finish, the Presence 'lifted' and I knew my only task was to stop, which I did. Both I and the people were silent, dumbstruck by such mighty power. After that, I was asked to become the pastor. I do not know if I should have accepted, but I declined the offer. I was given too many man-made restrictions, so I could not comply. At the time I did not feel called. Perhaps, if the people had learned from what they themselves experienced that Sunday, they might have humbly accepted me as one whose tasks were determined by God, not by them. But, God passed them by.

In the same way today, in my publishing ministry, I will not tolerate impositions placed on me by others, not even those who support the ministry. Only a scriptural injunction, properly applied, would cause me to change my mind over a matter of ministry. Neither anger nor attacks would cause me to divert what I know I have to do, because I have to face God, not Man, in the final day. Therefore, I cannot tolerate what God does not tolerate. A man who has been called to a holy task must complete that task as given and must not entertain interference. Samuel was in this position.

Secondly, though He did not want an earthly king over His chosen people, God nevertheless

## 1 Samuel 12

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 13 February 2018 21:23

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gave them one. He did not 'give in' – He gave them their hearts' desire as a sign of His dismay and as a continuous form of punishment. The king would be their thorn in the flesh. Note how even the best of kings often tended to degenerate into sin and how this affected all the people? In His goodness and mercy, God often gives us what we want, so that when these desired things go wrong, we may turn back to Him in repentance. When counselling a Christian who has committed wrong and who feels too bad to go on with Christ, I advise what scripture advises – that we all do wrong; what matters is how we deal with the matter when we come to our senses! God expects (and encourages) us to turn away from our sin, and back to Him, in repentance. When we do this, no matter how badly we have sinned, He will forgive and give us peace. It is this message that Samuel is about to give the people, after his introductory words.

Samuel starts to reason with the Israelites. Obviously, the elders and the rulers of each tribe are in the front of the crowd, probably in the tabernacle forecourt, or on the hill where the tabernacle was. These leaders would have conveyed Samuel's words to their tribes – the men of fighting age were already nearby in Gilgal anyway. As he spoke, those nearest would pass on the message to those behind. Very quickly, then, all of Israel would have known the edicts of Samuel from God.

Samuel told them what they already knew – that he was now old and could not go on for much longer. His grown up sons were amongst them as priests, so this was another indication of Samuel's advanced age. Furthermore, Samuel's life was public property. Whatever he had ever said and done was before the entire nation. Oh that our politicians and other 'leaders' would remember this! Like Paul in the New Testament, here Samuel asks the Israelites to recall his whole life as a witness to the truth of his words...

### Verses 3-5

1.

"Behold, here I (am): witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded: whom have I oppressed? Or of whose hand have I received (any) bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? And I will restore it you.

2.

And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand.

3.

## 1 Samuel 12

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 13 February 2018 21:23

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And he said unto them, the LORD (is) witness against you, and his anointed (is) witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, (He is) witness.”

Samuel is declaring his uprightness and righteousness before the people and invites them to tell him if he is wrong. This is not a proud boast, but a fact. He is not telling them these things because he wants to be applauded, but because it is essential they believe his words. Paul used the same way of convincing his hearers. It is not a good idea for a thief to tell others to trust him!

It is essential that any preacher or teacher retains his integrity. Nothing destroys a man's work more than secret sins discovered, as many have found out to their cost! A man may sin and repent – but pity help him if he sins and is discovered, for this tells everyone that but for the discovery he would have continued in his sin.

Samuel has something to say that is very important, so it is vital that people listen and take note. But, they are not likely to listen to a man whose life is riddled with sin and flaws. That is why Samuel must now make the Israelites recall his past and present life. Had he stolen anything? Had he lied and gained from it? Had he lorded it over anyone to their suffering? Had he let others divert him from his tasks by giving him payment or promises? If he had done any of those things, then let him know and he will repay. Just like Zacheus, whose tax frauds were repaid many times over.

But, the people could not recall one single example of any of these things. He was upright, honourable and God-fearing (as modern pastors must be). His word could be trusted. So, Samuel was able to remind them, and the new king, of the fact. Few men can be so bold! Can I do this? Can you? I hope so, for upon such foundations are built my ministry. Without a good name I am useless and no-one will listen, and rightly so.

I would remind readers, especially those who are pastors and teachers, that many reformed men, even those who are genuinely called by God, fall at the hurdle of 'bribe'. A 'bribe' need not be money. It can be anything that detracts one from a proper course of action, in order to gain personally. As a pastor, teacher – or even as an ordinary Christian – have you been, or are you being, taken away from what God has called you to do, by some promise of personal gain? Think not?

## 1 Samuel 12

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 13 February 2018 21:23

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Do you conveniently not speak on this or that subject because the host church will not like it? Then you have been bribed! By what? By the trap of respectability, or human credibility, or human friendship, or your future as a local speaker. You refuse to speak the whole counsel of God in order to pacify others. This meaning for 'bribe' is contained in a Hebrew root word for 'bribe'... to pacify or to 'cover over'. Many preachers do this – I have done it in my past, because I wanted to be retained as a speaker by particular churches. But, then I stopped, because I recognised my sin.

An alternative to this is to do things because they are expected of you – with the same ulterior motives. The task of pastors is just one example. Though, say, scripture tells a pastor that deacons ought to visit the sick and others to leave him free for his spiritual task, how many of you continue to visit the sick routinely? You do it because it is your 'contract' with your local church, not because God says so. Thus, the 'contract' becomes your bribe. The pastor's contract is a human device used for control, when scripture is the only control that is required. Most paid pastors make themselves subject to these contracts, to their detriment and credibility. These are their 'bribes' today. So are acceptance by their peers, appointment to various committees, invitations to engagements and conference speaking, and so on. Look carefully at your bribes, friends, and see them off! Do not become subject to them again. God is your only ruler!

### Verses 6-8

1.

“And Samuel said unto the people, (It is) the LORD that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt.

2.

Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD of all the righteous acts of the LORD, which he did to you and to your fathers.

3.

When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the LORD, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place.”

## 1 Samuel 12

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 13 February 2018 21:23

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Samuel's claim to integrity was followed by a reminder of what God had done. It was God Who had 'advanced' Moses and Aaron to their massive task of rescuing the nation from slavery. That is, it was God Who accomplished what they did after making them do it. None of it was of themselves. Indeed, you might remember how reticent Moses was to do God's bidding. I can sympathise with that – how often I have dragged my feet when God has called me to do this or that! Yet, I have known, and continue to know, His good hand upon what I say and do.

It was God, not Moses or Aaron, Who gave life and freedom back to the nation. Samuel again told them of God's exploits, so that they would gain in strength and trust. At times I fail to go back to what God has done in and by me, and fall into woefulness! Despite the great things done in my own lifetime by God, I let human circumstances drag me down. Even months earlier God might have done this or that, to my amazement! I know what He can do, yet I let sin cause me to forget. It is good to bring to remembrance what God has done.

Whatever good we have is from God. Remember it! 'Stand still' and remember. Is God truly real to you? Is His plan for your life real to you? Or, do you accept these things because others expect you to believe them? If these are not real in your own life, then you are living a lie.

### Verse 9

1.

"And when they forgot the LORD their God, he sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them."

The reasoning is quite clear – forget God and He will leave you to your own devices, leading to ruin. When we forget to live godly lives we imbibe and practice what is worldly. We sin and reap the harvest of evil. Do not be fooled by any earthly gains you might gather around you, for they will rot and stink. The richest Christian in the world cannot make up for righteousness with his money goods.

Sisera (his name means 'battle array') fought for king Jabin of Hazor. Though a brave and mighty general, he was brought down by Jael, a woman who lived in a tent, the wife of Heber a

## 1 Samuel 12

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 13 February 2018 21:23

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Kenite (see Judges 4 for the full and sobering story). He fled there because his king and her tribe agreed. She gave him a place to sleep and, after a while, she killed him by hammering a nail through his skull. God led her to do this thing, that Israel would be safe once again. A man like Sisera, or a circumstance, will arise time and again in our lives, if we disobey or live without God.

See in the text, that God 'sold them into the hands' of their enemies. Read scripture and you will find this happening many times to the Israelites. Forget God and He will bring an enemy to your door to remind you of your shame and laxity. The enemy will persist until you remember God and repent.

### Verse 11

1.

"And they cried unto the LORD, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee.

2.

And the LORD sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe."

God sent the Israelites earthly saviours: Jerubbaal, Bedan, Jephthah and Samuel. Jerubbaal (meaning 'let Baal contend') is the name given to Gideon by his father, after he destroyed Baal's altar. Bedan was the judge or ruler of Israel who succeeded Gideon. Jephthah (meaning 'he opens') was son of Gilead by a concubine, the judge who defeated the Ammonites. Because he vowed it in return for victory, he sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering.

God, then, always provides a means of escape in times of trial. But, this demands our fullest attention – we must repent. And beware of any vow you make to God in your haste to get out of your circumstance, for God will demand repayment!

### Verses 12&13

## 1 Samuel 12

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 13 February 2018 21:23

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1.

“And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God (was) your king.

2.

Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, (and) whom ye have desired! and, behold, the LORD hath set a king over you.”

So, Samuel told the people – ‘You wanted a king and now you have one. Here he is. Though in your history you know that God always sent an earthly saviour to get you out of trouble, you still demanded a king, though God was, and is, your rightful king. Here is your desire - your king!’ This was a reprimand. Note the people did not once say they changed their mind, even though they repented of wanting a king! We all do that – we repent of this or that, but continue on our chosen path anyway. This is like a Roman Catholic who seeks priestly absolution yet continues in the very same sin.

### Verses 14&15

1.

“If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God:

2.

But if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as (it was) against your fathers.”

Even as God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, He provided for their lives. He is our Lord and Maker, and knows our frame. That is why, though we sin and our sin can send us to hell, He provided a Saviour, and an earthly means of regaining His favour – repentance. Thus, Samuel tells the people that though they have sinned, by wanting an earthly king, and they must now live with the consequences, they could still know God’s Presence and goodness,

## 1 Samuel 12

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 13 February 2018 21:23

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by fearing the Lord. That is, to revere Him, to stand in awe of Him, even to be afraid of what He can do to them.

There is an heresy abroad, particularly amongst charismatics, that makes us see God as a benign Father Who only wishes to love us. This is to sell God short. Yes, He wants to love us. But, He is also a God of wrath Who MUST judge our sins. Today, we do not know the fear that God ought to engender in our minds and hearts. For the believer this means remembering that but for His grace, we would be lost, and He will, and does, bring disaster on the heads of those who disobey, whether His or not. The God Who brought the hosts of enemies upon the Israelites will bring hosts of evil on our heads, too. (2018 note: This has now happened).

Jesus Christ said the proof we love Him is, simply, that we do what He commands. To disobey His word is to rebel. That is, to be contentious and to always do the opposite of what He says. So many of us are like this today. Why? Because we do not understand the nature of God, nor of ourselves. We sin because we do not know the reality of God, His wrath or His nearness in our lives. His 'hand', or, power/strength, is always around us, the nucleus of everything good in our lives, but the stumbling block or devastating ruin of us if we disobey. The history of the Israelites is sufficient to prove that.

### Verses 16-18

1.

“Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the LORD will do before your eyes.

2.

(Is it) not wheat harvest to day? I will call unto the LORD, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness (is) great, which ye have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking you a king.

3.

So Samuel called unto the LORD; and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.”

## 1 Samuel 12

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 13 February 2018 21:23

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Samuel has reminded the people of his own credentials, as one who could be trusted. He reminded them of the power of the Lord. Now, he was to give them a sign that would secure the fact in their minds and hearts... thunder and rain right in the middle of their hot, clear summer's day. Samuel called on God to send thunder and rain – and He did. Because it happened, the people knew their demand for a king was sinful. When it happened they were terrified of God and of Samuel, whose prayer was confirmed by such a mighty wonder. Samuel was shown to be God's man.

The same kind of miraculous signs can be seen today. Not as charismatics would have it, because their signs are false or demonic. God is active in our world, and He still produces miraculous signs and wonders. Some time ago, I was sitting in my living room reading my Bible, when a friend of my wife's arrived. She went into the kitchen and they chatted for a while. As the woman walked back toward the front door, she noticed I was reading the Bible and said something pertinent.

We quickly came to a point where she said odd things were happening in her home... her mother practiced witchcraft and her brother, who was currently living with her, was somehow doing similar things. I witnessed to her with the Gospel and advised her that she was experiencing demonic activity in her home. She laughed and refused to acknowledge it. As my wife chatted to her on the doorstep, I quickly went to our bedroom and prayed for guidance, because I had the strong prompting to do so. What should I say to the woman before she left? I did not seem to have an answer, so I went back downstairs to say goodbye.

But, then, as if out of the blue, I found myself saying something I had not even thought of saying; I told her the proof of demonic activity in her home would be given to her when she returned home, including a drastic drop in temperature, pictures falling off the walls, items suddenly shifting on her mantelpiece, doors slamming, the presence of evil, and so on. As I said these things, I did not know why they were said, and thought how foolish I would look if they did not happen! But, they did – everything I said came about. God was talking to her, the Gospel had been preached to her and signs were given. That lady, to my knowledge, never responded to the call, and her home was a hotbed of demonic activity afterwards.

As the rest of the texts show, the people repented of asking for a king – but they did not then ask God to ignore their plea. They still continued to have their king, even though they were told it was wickedness! When the signs occurred, the people 'greatly feared' both God and Samuel. That is, they held both in reverence and honour, with awe and terror. Today, few men of God bring such awe to the people. The people ought to look upon a preacher with this fear, if he indeed brings them the truth. He should not be feared in his own right, but as a representative of

## 1 Samuel 12

Written by K B Napier  
Tuesday, 13 February 2018 21:23

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the Lord and a reminder of what God can do.

### Verses 19-21

1.

“And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins (this) evil, to ask us a king.

2.

And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart;

3.

And turn ye not aside: for (then should ye go) after vain (things), which cannot profit nor deliver; for they (are) vain.”

The people realised their sin and admitted to it. Though God was displeased, His grace and mercy were uppermost. Samuel told them that as long as they obeyed the Lord, He would show them His favour, even though they had chosen an earthly king. The proviso was given – they must turn toward God and His commands, they must do whatever He commands, and they must do so willingly, as from the heart. Of course, they need not be open about it – for God knew the state of their hearts. That is why He told the Israelites at one juncture He loathed their sacrifices because they were done out of a sense of duty and not from their heart's desire to be holy.

They were told that the things of this world were vain, did not profit, and did not deliver. Something that is 'vain' is formless, unreal, empty, only offering confusion. There is the suggestion of chaos and waste. So, vanity is worthlessness. If there is no profit, then there is no gain or advantage to the person who follows it; it is a pointless exercise. And, above all, vain things cannot save a man from destruction, or snatch him away from the brink of hell.

### Verses 22-25

1.

## 1 Samuel 12

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 13 February 2018 21:23

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“For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people.

2.

Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way:

3.

Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great (things) he hath done for you.

4.

But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.”

Samuel shows the people why God should be feared – because He does not cast aside those whom He has chosen for His own. He cannot cast them aside, because His own name demands it. In scripture, His name refers to everything that God is. So, “for His name’s sake” means, He cannot go against everything He stands for and is. This cannot stop Him punishing His chosen people, though, because He is also a God of judgement.

As a good pastor, Samuel says he must not sin by casting them aside, but must constantly hold them before the throne of grace in prayer. I think of so many pastors I know of, who say good riddance to folk who dare to leave their church, or who do not hold to their brand of ‘leadership’! They certainly would not pray for their well-being once they had gone! And what of members who stray and will not listen? They will be shunned. But, to Samuel this would be sin.

There comes a time when a pastor has to shun or cast out a member, but such times must be rare. If they are not, then the pastor has not acted in time in the first place. Like Samuel, he should teach the ‘good and the right way’. That is, what scripture teaches. The difference between a pastor and other Christians is that he is gifted by God to discern the times and to interpret scripture for the flock’s good and benefit. He must teach these things and the flock must listen and act accordingly. If they do not, yet remain within the bounds of local church

## 1 Samuel 12

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 13 February 2018 21:23

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fellowship, it is not up to the pastor to get rid of them. It is his love and duty to pray for them and to continue to teach what is good and true. This is, to teach what scripture says, not what tradition or denomination say.

Part of this activity is to remind the people of God's great exploits, not only in the past, but also in the present. So many Christians are so familiar with what they see as modern life, they fail to notice God working at all. They will attribute healing and changes for the better, to society or to doctors, or to some human intervention, when, all along, it was God. Pastors must themselves learn to see God where He is, and to lead others along the same path, for this is God's world, always changing because He has acted.

The people were warned that if they strayed constantly into sinful ways, then God would act against them – both king and people would be 'consumed'. That is, they would be 'snatched away', or destroyed. I have been asked what this 'really' means. My friends, why do you think Samuel told the people to be afraid of God? It was because they would otherwise be 'consumed' - destroyed! The meaning is self-explanatory. It means God would punish them whilst they were on this earth. In Isaiah we find this happening time and again – God unleashing horrific men of war against the Israelites as a warning and punishment. The notorious king of the north (of Syria) – synonymous with Satan, destroyed the entire land and was stopped just short of Jerusalem itself. All but a few of the nation were saved.

God is Almighty and He does punish even His own. Do not be duped by talk of 'God is love' when such talk excludes His terrible acts against men who do wickedly! Obey and live – that is the maxim taught by Samuel in this text.

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