

H. L. Rossier

**Comments on
the 1st book of Samuel**

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Introduction

The Book of Samuel is the continuation of the Book of Judges and the Book of Ruth. As it opens, the period of the Judges is not yet over: Eli the priest was one of these judges (1 Sam. 4:18), and Samuel, the first prophet (Acts 3:24; Acts 13:20), was also a judge over Israel (1 Sam. 7:6). He thought he could establish his sons as judges after himself (1 Sam. 8:1), but their unfaithfulness put an end to this dispensation. Moreover, the period of the judges had a rather transitory character: the judges brought temporary relief to the wretchedness of the guilty people of Israel who, instead of exterminating the enemies of the Lord, had allowed them to live. Drawn away into iniquity and idolatry by these nations, Israel, as chastening for her disobedience, was obliged to bear their yoke. Under this tyranny, the people groaned and cried out to the Lord. Full of pity, He sent them deliverers who gave them respite by delivering them from the the hand of their spoilers. Alas! this did not change their heart. “And it came to pass when the judge died,

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that they turned back and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down to them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way” (Judges 2:19).

During the period of the judges, the priesthood remained the immediate and recognized link, the point of contact, between the people and God. It represented the people in their relations with God who was Himself the King of Israel. Sometimes in those days when “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25), the role of the priesthood might appear to have been eclipsed, but the link subsisted nonetheless.

The Book of Ruth is inserted, as it were, toward the end of the history of the Judges, in order to reveal God's secret thought concerning a new dispensation, that of kingship or the kingdom. There we see God preparing a king according to His own heart; like Shiloh in Jacob's prophecy, he must proceed from Judah. Therefore this book begins with Elimelech, a man of

Judah, and in closing it proclaims the name of King David, showing us beforehand who will be the Lord's anointed.

Let us note here that the relationship with the Lord differs under the priesthood and under the kingdom. Under the priesthood, this relation was immediate, for the priest represented the people before God, whereas the kingdom is an authority established over the people. The people were subjected to the king who was to govern according to the mind of God. It was the king whom God expected to be faithful; he it was who was responsible before God for Israel's unfaithfulness, and the destiny of the people depended on his conduct.

Until the final establishment of the king, we have in the First Book of Samuel a period of transition. The first great fact noted in this book is that the priesthood had proven unfaithful and could no longer serve as the foundation of a relationship between the people and God. Without doubt, the priesthood was still necessary and could not be abolished, but it ceased to have the first place. A new basis of relationship was established

in the kingship. God was about to raise up “a faithful priest, who [should] walk before [His] anointed continually, instead of being, as in the past, the link between the people and God (1 Sam. 2:35).

All this explains why the First Book of Samuel begins with the tribe of Levi and the priesthood, and not, as the Book of Ruth, with Judah and the kingdom.

Elkanah was a Levite.* Eli was the high priest;** thus we are on the ground of the priesthood. Had the priesthood remained faithful, there would have been no occasion for a change of dispensation; therefore it was necessary, first of all, to ascertain that it was ruined before the true king should enter the scene, for God could not remain in relationship to the people through the medium of a corrupted priesthood.

- * Elkana (1 Sam. 1:1) was a Levite descended from Kohath of the tribe of Levi (1 Chr. 6:27-28). The Levites were arranged under three leaders: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, thus forming three distinct families to whom was appointed "all the service of the tabernacle of the house of God" (1 Chr. 6:48). Each one had his

special office: The Gershonites were to carry all the curtains of the tabernacle; the Merarites were to carry its boards and pillars. The Kohathites were highly favored and therefore especially responsible; their service was a particularly intimate one; they carried all the vessels of the tabernacle, including the ark and the vail. Elkanah was a Kohathite. From Kohath came Moses and Aaron. Moses's sons Gershom and Eliezer together with their descendants were reckoned with this family. Under the reign of David when it was a question of building the house of God, the service of the Levites differed considerably from their service while crossing the desert (1 Chr. 23:28-32).

** The high priesthood of that time was represented by Eli. Besides Nadab and Abihu, who died without leaving posterity (1 Chr. 24:2), Aaron had two sons: Eleazar and Ithamar. From these two men were to issue all who would exercise the priesthood. Their functions were: firstly, to offer "upon the altar of the burnt-offering, and on the altar of incense, for all the work of the most holy place," and secondly, "to make atonement for Israel" (1 Chr. 6:49).

Eleazar, the elder of Aaron's two sons, was the father of Phinehas who was "jealous with [the Lord's] jealousy among [the

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children of Israel],” and on account of his zeal God gave him “and his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood” (Num 25:10-13). Thus the line of descent from Eleazar is the faithful line to which the promise pertains. This line continues through Zadok who exercised the priesthood under David and under Solomon (2 Sam. 8:17; 1 Ki. 2:35), and through Azariah: “He it is that exercised the priesthood in the house that Solomon built in Jerusalem” (1 Chr. 6:10).

Ithamar's descendant was Eli who appears in the first chapter of our book. At that time the high priesthood belonged to the family of Ithamar. Then came Ahimelech whom Saul slew together with all those who exercised the priesthood at that time. Abiathar alone escaped and took refuge with David. And so Ithamar's descendants were much less numerous than his older brother's (1 Chr. 24:4). Later Abiathar exercised the priesthood together with Zadok at the time of Absalom (2 Sam. 17:15), but he had previously been useful to David, “[having] been afflicted in all wherein [the king] was afflicted” (1 Kings 2:26). Later, this same Abiathar, when David was very old, made a league with Joab to substitute Adonijah as king in place of Solomon (1 Kings 1:7), whereas Zadok remained faithful (1 Kings 1:8.) Fi-

nally, Solomon thrust out Abiathar from the high priesthood, for he was worthy of death because he had conspired against him, and also "to fulfill the word of Jehovah, which He had spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh" (1 Kings 2:27).

But, on the other hand, it was necessary to show, now that God was introducing His king as the intermediary between Israel and Himself, that this relationship could not be established on the basis of the flesh. This is the reason for Saul's entire history from 1 Samuel 9 to the end of the book. God could, without doubt, use a king according to the flesh to deliver His people, but this function did not qualify him morally to be the leader of Israel. The Book of Judges presents the same truth in the history of Samson. The gift and the moral state of a man are two very different things. Saul, who was later reproved, might be "among the prophets"; Balaam might bless Israel; Judas might do works of power together with the other disciples and all the while be an instrument of the enemy to betray the Lord, his Master.

Chapters 1 to 3

Eli, or the Ruin of the Priesthood

Chapter 1

Hannah has a remarkable trait: her character is that of the believer in all ages. Hannah means “grace”; but before answering to her name, she represents the flesh incapable of bearing fruit for God. We must always begin there. The Word of God teaches us that the natural man has two characteristics: wickedness and incapacity, and the law has no other purpose than to convince us of this. But it is easier to confess that we are guilty than to admit our incapacity, for to admit the powerlessness of our flesh is deeply humiliating. Hannah felt this, but her trial was not limited to this alone. Like Sarah of old, she was the object of the hatred and disdain of the wife according to the flesh. This wife was prospering fully, for Peninnah “had children” when Hannah had none. But the hatred of the first wife was all the greater as the love of their husband turned toward Hannah, the wife who was miserable and barren.

Poor Hannah was full of bitterness and wept abundantly. One resource remained to her: to present her affliction before the Lord. Only God's heart could give her an answer in grace; therefore she presents herself before Him at Shiloh. A new trial awaits her there. She encounters the lack of intelligence in the spiritual leader of her people who, confusing the activity of the Spirit of God with the activity of the flesh, believes that she is drunken when she is in fact anguished. What suffering! She has no resource within herself; the world is hostile to her; those who bear the Lord's name judge her and do not understand her! How can she eat and drink and rejoice, when her soul's only desire has found no response. She does not desire this son for herself; she is entirely disposed to "give him to Jehovah all the days of his life," to make of him a Nazarite for God; but what she needs is a sign of God's favor; what she needs is "grace!" Did God give her, the barren wife, this name in vain? Grace alone remains for her, and this is the point to which she must come.

Eli has conscience sufficient, for after all he is a true servant of God, that the language of truth brings its weight to bear on him and causes him to reverse his first impression. He blesses Hannah on behalf of God: “Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition which thou hast asked of Him” (v. 17).

Hannah's faith at once lays hold of grace even before receiving its effects. “And the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more as before” (v. 18). This assurance of faith is enough to strengthen her heart and fill her with a joy that is visible to all.

Now she is full of thanksgiving. It is not enough for her that she has found joy and rest after anguish. What will she return to God for such a great blessing? She will render what she promised Him in verse 11: the complete consecration of her son, a true separation for Him. When her request is answered by the gift of Samuel, she does not withdraw her offer: “that he may appear before Jehovah, and there abide forever.” This humble wife of Elkanah the Levite brings a costly sacrifice to

the Lord — ”three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a flask of wine” — but one that is nothing in comparison to the gift of Samuel. She parts with her only son, given her by God Himself, from him whom she had “asked of God,” thus showing that for her God was more precious than this son whom she had so desired.

May we have such faith! In order to manifest it, God puts our hearts to the test. Just as with Hannah, this trial will not be an occasion of joy at the beginning, but rather of bitterness and sorrow, but then it will bear the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised by it.

Chapter 2:1-11

Consciousness of her irremediable condition, brokenness, and humiliation had prepared Hannah to receive the grace that God was granting her in giving her Samuel. But hardly was she holding him in her motherly arms, than she must part with him in order to consecrate him to God. Her life was to be more solitary than ever, and this at a time when the people's condition

was increasing the ruin all around her. Nevertheless Hannah is full of a joy which overflows in a song of triumph: “My heart exults in Jehovah ... for I rejoice in Thy salvation” (v. 1). This is because God had revealed Himself to her in grace; because He had revealed Himself again to his faithful servant who, having received everything from Him, had kept back nothing for herself and had returned everything to Him. Having deprived herself of her son, she better understands all that God is in Himself; she appreciates all the more all that He is for her. Abraham, having sacrificed Isaac at the Lord's command, had made a similar experience. It was then that God had revealed to him the full extent of the promises that he had received and that God was confirming to his seed (Gen. 22:15-18; Gal. 3:15-16).

Along with joy, Hannah found strength: “My horn is lifted up in Jehovah” (v. 1). This power “is perfected in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9); after she has repudiated all that is elevated, everything of renown in Israel, God shares this strength with a weak woman, humiliated and despised. Hannah's beautiful song therefore begins with her painful personal experiences, al-

though it goes much further. In the course of this book we shall see the same thing produced in David. The inspired psalms are the fruit of his experiences, but the bearing that the Spirit gives them goes far beyond that, concentrating prophetically on the sufferings and the glories of Christ, on the person of Him who is the fulfillment of all the promises, of all the ways, and of all the counsels of God.

This is how we must interpret Hannah's song. Her personal circumstances serve as an introduction to things still unrevealed, reserved till then in God's counsels.

The main theme of Hannah's song, the great principle presented in it, is the sovereign grace and power of God, who abases the proud and the one who puts his confidence in the flesh, and who lifts up the weak and powerless, "for the pillars of the earth are Jehovah's, and He has set the world upon them." On His grace and power He has established the entire order of created things. Israel, miserable and fallen, and a faithful remnant that was poor and weak, needed to know these things and to

learn that everything depended on Him alone, that He alone could keep the feet of His saints, silence the wicked, bring all man's strength to nothing, break all His adversaries and, lastly, give strength to His King and raise up the horn of His Anointed,* for He intervenes in Israel's favor by giving strength to His Christ. He does not give strength to His people, but to His Anointed. He raises up the King on whom everything depends, the pivot of all things, the only means of sustaining a relationship between Himself and His people.

- * Mary's song (Luke 1:45-56) presents the same characteristics. This humble woman, hidden among those of low degree, although she was of the family of David, celebrates the grace and power of the Saviour God who abases the proud, raises up those of low degree, and takes Israel's cause in hand.

Let us take up again one or two details of this song. Verse 1 celebrates the salvation of the Lord. All is pure grace on His part, for it is “grace ... which carries with it salvation.” Verse 2 celebrates Jehovah's holiness. The believer cannot separate these two traits one from the other; one who has found God as

Savior understands that He is “holy ... for there is none beside [Him].” But it is necessary to be holy in order to belong to Him; this is why He has sanctified us for Himself. All our conduct should henceforth display this characteristic.

This great truth was brought to light at the Passover. The Israelites had been sheltered by the blood of the Lamb, which had been delivered up to judgment instead of themselves. The people appropriated this sacrifice by eating the lamb together with unleavened bread which typically represents Christ's holy humanity. From this moment on, they were enjoined to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days. As He who had called them was holy, they also were to be holy in all their manner of behavior (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Verse 3 is a warning to the wicked, typified by Penninah. They are placed in the presence of God who knows all and who weighs men's actions.

In verses 4 to 8, we find the reason for the discipline which had come upon the faithful. This was so that the character of grace

might be brought to light by lifting them up to glory, and so that the character of righteousness might be brought to light in granting them vengeance on the wicked. This grace goes so far as to give seven children to the barren woman — the perfect number, which Hannah never reached (v. 21), for she had only six children. The promised blessings will not reach their fullness until the glory that is in store for the restored remnant of Israel.

Verse 10 predicts, as we have seen, the coming of Messiah, the true King. God will exalt the horn of His Anointed. Direct association with Him is the power granted to Hannah in verse 1: “My horn is lifted up in Jehovah.”

Chapter 2:12-36

The continuation of this chapter shows us the ruined state into which the priesthood had fallen. “Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial”: a terrible pronouncement, when it concerned those in Israel who were the closest to God! The sin of these men had two characteristics: they disregarded the rights of

those who came to worship the Lord by confiscating their portions (vv. 13-14); they disregarded the rights of the Lord, laying profane hands on the Lord's portion, seeing to it that they themselves were served before He was, thus taking precedence over God Himself (vv. 15-16). They made themselves fat with the Lord's offerings and caused men to abhor them.

Are not these the principles of any clerical system, whether pagan, Jewish, or Christian — no doubt, more or less coarse and despicable according to the case — but, in the final account, the principles of every class of men who appropriate to themselves authority or privileges over other men in religious matters? (Matt. 24:48-49). They pretend to have rights over simple believers, they see that they themselves are served at the expense of these same believers, and in their opinion even the priest's servant has more authority than the worshippers themselves. They usurp, in a measure, God's prerogatives and, in sum, cause Him to be despised, in order that they themselves may be honored instead of Him.* They did not know the Lord (v. 12); “There [was] no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom.

3:18). Without this fear, there is no hatred of evil. Is it surprising that they displayed the most shocking corruption? (v. 22).

* This was the case, in the highest degree, with Eli's wicked sons.

In the midst of all this ruin, was the high priest's function at least being maintained? Alas no! Eli, godly Eli, lacked spiritual discernment. Nevertheless he showed himself to be capable of teaching God's mind and ways to young Samuel. Furthermore, he formed a righteous judgment of the evil, and his heart bled at the sight of the dissolute life of his sons. He did not hide it from them. Doubtless no one had expressed his disapproval as plainly as their father had: "Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil deeds from all this people. No, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make Jehovah's people transgress. If one man sin against another, God will judge him; but if a man sin against Jehovah, who shall intreat for him?" (vv. 23-25).

You ask, What was this man of God lacking? Just this: He judged the evil, but he did not separate himself from it. It is a sad and humiliating thing to state: this is the situation of the

majority of God's children in Christendom. Their bonds, their relationships, their affections, and their customs to which they are more attached than to the Lord's glory prevent them from recognizing that one is liable for an evil which one judges but from which one does not separate oneself.

This is what the man of God is charged to declare to Eli. In no way was Eli personally following the ungodly and disorderly behavior of his sons, but nevertheless these solemn words are addressed to him: “Wherefore do ye trample upon My sacrifice and upon Mine oblation which I have commanded in My habitation? And thou honorest thy sons above Me, to make yourselves fat with the primest of all the oblations of Israel My people” (v. 29). “Thou honorest thy sons above Me!” Poor Eli! despite all his piety, there were men, his sons — his behavior proved this — whom he was honoring more than the Lord. God had been patient with him, but now he was about to reap the bitter fruit of the lack of holiness in his walk, for holiness is nothing other than separation from evil in view of God's service. The house of Eli, the descendant of Ithamar, was about to

come to an end; it could not, in the condition in which it was found, “walk before [God] forever” (v. 30). “For them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” (v. 30). Did this righteous man, Eli, then despise the Lord? Yes, for “no servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and will love the other, or he will cleave to the one and despise the other” (Luke 16:13). And so a terrible judgment is pronounced on the house of Eli (vv. 31-34). But God, the God of grace, takes no pleasure in judgment; He uses it in order to establish before Himself a priesthood once for all. He entrusts the priesthood to Eleazar's descendants: “And I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind; and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before Mine Anointed continually” (v. 35). Simultaneously with the establishment of a priesthood according to His heart, the Lord makes known the change of dispensation which is to follow, but prophetically, this reaches far beyond the priesthood of the sons of Eleazar under David and under Solomon. The Anointed is Christ, and when

He shall be on high as king and high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, on earth there will be, during the Millennium, a faithful priesthood of the family of Zadok whose functions will all tend to glorify the chosen king, the Man at God's right hand (Ezek. 44:13-15).

May we profit from Eli's example. We are living in times characterized by a certain activity in service. This activity often presses itself upon ourselves and others, for it has the appearance of great zeal for the Lord and for His work. It may even be accompanied by eminent gifts, but the gifts and activity are of little significance, if there is not the corresponding moral character. This moral character was grievously flawed in Eli's case; and without this character there can be no true service according to God.

Samuel offers a striking contrast to this state of things in every detail. In his case, we may trace the uninterrupted development of a life of holiness, despite more than one weakness, for perfection is found only in Christ.

When he was still only a small child, it is said of him, in 1 Samuel 1:28: “And he worshipped Jehovah there.”* Just so, a “newborn babe” in Christ must immediately take his place as a worshipper before Him. In 1 Samuel 2:11 his second act is: “And the boy ministered to Jehovah in the presence of Eli the priest.” This attitude will characterize Samuel’s entire life, but here he serves under Eli’s direction, for being still very young, he needed to learn before becoming capable of teaching others.

* Some translate: “they worshipped”, perhaps without sufficient reason.

In his third act (v. 18), Samuel does not serve before Eli, but rather more directly, “before Jehovah, a boy girded with a linen ephod,” that is to say, in a priestly character, for the linen ephod was the special clothing of the priesthood (1 Sam. 2:18). Now that the priesthood had fallen, the Lord clothes this young Levite with it, provisionally, so to speak. The scene is the same later on in the case of David, who wore the ephod before the ark (2 Sam. 6:14) However, the Christians’ situation is differ-

ent: they are perpetually kings and priests before God the Father.

In his fourth act (v. 21), “the boy Samuel grew before Jehovah.” The point here is his intimacy with God, without which service cannot be effective.

In his fifth act (v. 26), “the boy Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with Jehovah and also with men.” I call this the intimacy of favor. The relationship of affection between Samuel and the Lord caused his walk to draw the attention of men, who took note of it as a walk pleasing to the Lord. Intimacy with God was reflected in the face of this young boy. This is what is told us of John the Baptist (Luke 1:80), and for how much greater reason, of Jesus: “Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). All the power of our Christian testimony depends on a secret life spent in the Lord's presence.

May God grant us to resemble young Samuel in our conduct more than Eli, instructed as he was in the knowledge of the Lord's mind through his age and his public functions!

Chapter 3

Let us pursue the parallel in this chapter between Eli and Samuel. Eli continues in his downward path, whereas Samuel grows until all Israel knows that the Lord has established him as a prophet.

In verse 1, Samuel is depicted in the same way as at the beginning of his career: “The boy Samuel ministered to Jehovah before Eli” (cf. 1 Sam. 2:11). There is no progression in this passage: the Spirit of God once again lays the basis of what is to follow.

In 1 Samuel 2, the consequence of Samuel's service was to ascribe to him certain attributes of the priesthood which was soon to be removed from Eli. In a time of ruin, the functions of the house of God are not as clearly defined as in a time of spir-

itual prosperity. Such is the case today too with regard to gifts in the Church. As all the members of Christ are not fulfilling the functions which have been apportioned to them, the Lord often confides to a single member capacities which, in a normal state of things, He would have distributed among many members. In no way am I here speaking of the principle of the clergy which pretends to amass on one man's head gifts acquired by study and confirmed by examinations.

In our chapter, Samuel's service leads him to prophecy. Through service one acquires a good degree (cf. 1 Tim. 3:13). If we do as Samuel who did not go out of the sanctuary, so to speak, God will entrust other services to us. When, like Samuel, one serves the Lord from his youth, and when one grows in His presence, one may then be usefully employed for the benefit of His people.

Nevertheless two things were still lacking in Samuel's spiritual development, without which there can be no public testimony: "Samuel did not yet know Jehovah, neither had the word of Je-

hovah yet been revealed unto him” (v. 7). The point here is personal knowledge of the Lord, for Samuel belonged to Him, served Him, and worshipped Him from his infancy, but he had not yet met the Lord face to face. It may happen in our Christian career that we joy in the finished work of the cross on our behalf without knowing the Lord personally. Knowing salvation and knowing the Author of salvation are two different things. Now, there is no power for testimony in one who does not know the person of Christ. The secret that would allow the Corinthians to be the epistle of Christ, known and read by all men, lay in the contemplation of the glory of the Lord with unveiled face.

“Neither had the word of Jehovah yet been revealed to him.” Often in times of ruin the revelation of the mind of God is hindered by the enemy. Just so it is said in verse 1: “The word of Jehovah was rare in those days; a vision was not frequent.” But although hindered, the word had not been stopped, for grace provides for the needs of each era, and most consolingly, it is often in the darkest days of decline that God gives the most

new light in order to guide and encourage His own. In a time when the vision was not widespread, God raises up the first prophet, properly speaking, in Israel. Through the priesthood's unfaithfulness the ordinary means established by God for approaching Himself were at the point of being lost, but the grace of God could not leave His people without help and without a means of communicating with Himself. He gives Samuel, that is to say prophecy, through which in sovereign grace He approaches man and communicates His mind. Samuel is the first of this long line of prophets who transmit God's word to a people whose unfaithfulness, without this provision, would have left them without resource (Acts 3:24; 2 Chr. 35:18; Jer. 15:1).

Thus God reveals Himself personally to Samuel and makes him the depository of His word. This young boy is raised to the dignity of a friend of God and, like the man of experience and of faith which Abraham was, God hides nothing from him of what He was about to do. Until that moment Eli's teaching had instructed Samuel concerning the way to enter into communic-

ation with God (v. 9); now he is in direct relationship with the Lord who is entrusting His secrets to him. Samuel proves himself faithful respecting this trust and, like Paul with the Ephesians later (Acts 20:20), he kept back from Eli nothing that was profitable to him. Poor Eli — set aside and obliged to receive God's thoughts from the mouth of a young boy! What a humiliation for this aged man, whose path is sinking lower and lower, whereas the path of his pupil is rising and reaching regions that the feet of the high priest never attained!

In 1 Samuel 1, Eli lacked discernment; in 1 Samuel 2, he lacked the moral courage to separate himself from evil; here, his eyes are dim and he cannot see, and nevertheless the lamp of God had not yet gone out — a striking image of his moral condition. And what is more, this leader of the simple proves himself to be dull of understanding. It is not until the third call that “Eli perceived that Jehovah was calling the boy.” Yes, “dull of hearing”: that is exactly what he had become. Samuel was simply ignorant, which is a thousand times better. When there is godliness, God remedies ignorance. If the new-born

babe desires “the pure mental milk of the word,” he will not be refused. Here on earth we know only in part and we will never know otherwise than only in part. That we are not responsible for; but it is a question of growth: “That by it ye may grow” (1 Peter 2:2), and our responsibility is to seek, to this end, spiritual food.

Here we find a feature of Eli's spiritual weakening that is not mentioned in the first two chapters: “For the iniquity which he has known, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not” (v. 13). Eli knew the evil, and he had authority to repress it in his sons, but he did not use it.* What profit was it to him that this authority had been entrusted to him by God? How often the spiritual weakening of the head of a family stems from his slackness when he should have maintained order and discipline in the sphere where his authority was meant to function? This is a great cause of ruin. Without doubt, like Lot, Eli was “distressed with the abandoned conversation [manner of life] of the godless,” but like him, he displayed a sad forgetfulness of what was due to the Lord's holiness.

* For this subject compare Deut. 21:18, etc.

Samuel was holy in all his conduct. God entrusts a revelation to him; he administers this trust faithfully; and this is the means by which he receives a new revelation. So, we are told: Samuel grew; he continued to grow (1 Sam. 2:21; 1 Sam. 3:19). His spiritual development followed a walk which was gradually rising. “And Jehovah was with him, and let none of his words fall to the ground.” Thus, all Samuel's words were preserved by Him who witnessed his speech. And so Samuel was God's organ to express His mind, and he spoke “as oracles of God” because God was with him to preserve him. Thus he acquired the reputation of prophet in the presence of all Israel. One revelation leads to another: the Lord continued to appear to him at Shiloh and revealed Himself to him by His word (v. 21). So, Samuel grew both in personal knowledge of the Lord and in the knowledge of His revealed word.

As for Eli, how comforting it is to see at our chapter's close, the humble submission of this aged man to the judgment which he

had merited. “It is Jehovah: let Him do what is good in His sight” (v. 18). God's will is good and his soul bows to it. May God grant us Eli's spirit in the presence of His discipline: the humility which precedes recovery, a broken heart which does not rise up against the will of God in an effort to resist it, but which accepts His will with all its consequences, because it is indeed “that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Chapters 4 to 8

Samuel, Judge and Prophet

Chapter 4

This chapter presents, not only the ruin of the priesthood, but also the ruin of the entire people; therefore judgment comes upon the one as well as upon the other. “And what Samuel had said happened to all Israel” (v. 1). Samuel's word, the prophetic word, had an infallible character. The judgment it pronounced would certainly come to pass.

“And Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and encamped beside Eben-ezer” (v. 1). Eben-ezer is mentioned here only in order to indicate to us the place where Israel pitched their camp, for it did not receive this name until later (1 Sam. 7:12). This place was at Mizpah (1 Sam. 7:6), a fact which is of great importance for appreciating the moral condition of the people. For Israel, the place of meeting before God was Gilgal under Joshua and Mizpah under the judges. At this time the name of Mizpah meant nothing to the affections of the people and was not even pronounced (cf. Judges 11:11; Judges 20:1; Judges 21:1, 5). The natural consequence of forgetting God's presence is that the people do not consult Him. The immediate result of this is that “Israel was smitten before the Philistines” (v. 2).

They ask: “Why has Jehovah smitten us today before the Philistines?” They do not understand the cause of their defeat, having no conscience of their condition. In order to rise again after the blow that had leveled them, they attempt to associate the ark, God's throne, with their ruined state, as it had been associ-

ated with them at the beginning of their history. They do not dream of presenting themselves before God in order to learn from Him the reason why He had abandoned His people. They pull God to themselves, so to speak. The same thing may be seen today. Two Christianized nations fight against one another and each side says: God must be with us.

The God who sits between the cherubim allows Himself to be led by Israel, but as Judge rather than Deliverer. He judges everything; first the priesthood, then the people, and finally their adversaries after His glory has departed from Israel.

The people appear to highly acknowledge God's power; when the ark comes into the camp they raise such a great shout that “the earth shook.” In the same way Christendom uses Christ's name in order to exalt itself in the midst of unjudged iniquity. The outward sign of God's presence is sufficient for this system which boasts: We have the ark. Israel thinks that God cannot abandon them without exposing Himself to shame. But God does exactly this: He exposes Himself to shame; He allows the

world seemingly to become His conqueror. In reality, this scene is the accomplishment of God's word through Samuel, but God, delivered into the hands of enemies, is the One who judges. As it was with the ark, so it is with Christ. He who is rejected, despised, He to whom men did all that they would, is established by God as Judge of the living and of the dead.

What became of the triumphal shout in verse 5? A “noise of ... tumult” replaces it. Israel is smitten, the priesthood is destroyed, shame and powerlessness are evident, and God's glory is delivered into the hands of the enemy!

The piety of poor, guilty Eli shines out in this disaster. The end of his career speaks to us of something yet besides God's judgment, however real and terrible His judgment may have been. With a self-judged heart he had humbly accepted God's judgment on himself and his sons (1 Sam. 3:18); now his thought is only for the ark of the Lord. “His heart trembled for the ark of God.” (v. 13). When the messenger speaks of it, Eli falls from his seat and dies (v. 18). It is not the judgment on his family

that leads to his death, but the dishonor inflicted on the Lord and His departure from the midst of His people.

Phinehas's wife's last moments also shine with a similar consoling light! The catastrophe brings her pregnancy to a premature end and causes her death, but in dying she calls her son Ichabod: "The glory is departed." In the person of her own son, she proclaims Israel's ruin and its consequences. The witnesses of the times of the end may be recognized by this feature. The dishonor done to God through our own unfaithfulness humbles us, and, instead of attempting to remedy the state of things this has provoked, we bow our heads under the judgment, for there we perceive the holiness of the Lord.

Chapters 5 & 6 v.13

On this account the ark, "the glory of God," is now captive in His people's enemies' hands; but they cannot boast themselves in this. God is about to prove to them that nothing is more glorious than His glory humbled and captive. In this way, the humi-

liation of the cross glorified the Son of Man and God in Him (John 13:31).

In the hands of Gentiles God is about to lay claim to His holiness in judgment. This judgment will be complete, falling on false gods, on men, and on the land of the Philistines.

The ark, God's testimony, which cannot be associated with the people's unfaithfulness, can no more be submitted to idols. In fact, it can rest only where it is pleased to dwell in grace. God leaves Israel in judgment, but only in order to return to Israel on the entirely new footing of grace, as we shall see in what follows. This is not yet rest, for “the ark of [His] strength” would not enter into this rest until the reign of Solomon, type of the reign of Christ.

We have said that the glory of God cannot be submitted to idols. Indeed, set this humiliated glory beside Dagon, as the men of Ashdod did, and the world's idol will be overturned and broken. But this changes nothing about the worship that the world offers to its idol. It prefers its mutilated false gods, ob-

jects of disdain and derision, to the glory of God that makes it uncomfortable. “Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any that come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day” (v. 5). Their superstitious practice itself remains as a permanent testimony to the degradation of their idol, and also proves that its judgment could bring them to God.

The presence of the ark also draws judgment down on the men who had thought to prevail over God, as we have said. For the Philistines there is misery and death. Anguish, secret pain, a shameful sore, the result of divine wrath (cf. Deut. 28:27) fall on them — “the cry of the city went up to heaven.” It went up to a heaven which was empty for them, while God was in their midst without their realizing it, judging them on earth. The result is, not that they turn to God, but that they send Him away, hoping to rid themselves of Him. At the same time we see here the egoism that characterizes the world. As long as Ashdod is undisturbed, what does it matter that Gath be tormented? As long as Gath is undisturbed, what does it matter that Ekron be

tormented? They do not want to die, but that does not prevent death, accompanied by deadly dismay, from coming (vv. 11-12).

The counsel of the princes of the Philistines to the people's question "What shall we do?" (v. 8) is therefore without result. The people then question the priests and the diviners "What shall we do with the ark of Jehovah?" (1 Sam. 6:2). They do not know what to do with the throne of God, the mercy-seat, the vessel of the mind of God! Animated by the same spirit, the Gadarenes prayed the Lord to withdraw from their borders. It makes them uncomfortable because it judges them. For them the question is how they shall send this disturbing guest away, not whether they ought to send it away. It does not occur to them to address themselves to Him, but their clergy must surely know the way of being rid of God. This clergy, at least, despite their extreme ignorance is candid. Acknowledging God's hand in these plagues, they try to determine how to "give glory to the God of Israel." They tell the people not to harden their hearts against Him; they recall His exploits in Egypt; and, fi-

nally, they suggest a means of knowing whether it is really He who has caused this great evil or whether the thing was only accidental. All this denotes conscience in the absence of the light brought by revealed truth. God always takes account of conscience, even of an obscured conscience, and gives a clear answer.

The men had been stricken with haemorrhoids, and the land itself devastated by mice (v. 5). Judgment was complete, as we have seen. At the counsel of the priests and diviners, they offer up golden haemorrhoids and golden mice as a trespass offering. A trespass offering — when they had made war against the people of God! when they had esteemed Dagon to be the master over the Sovereign God, the Creator of heaven and earth! An offering without the shedding of blood when atonement for sin was necessary! - But God takes account of the very least cry of conscience. He gives a clear answer, we have said. “The kine went straight forward on the way to Beth-shemesh; they went by the one highway, lowing as they went; and they turned

not aside to the right hand or to the left” (v. 12). Such are the Lord's ways, always right! (Hosea 14:9).

God, the Judge, now in grace returns to His people. Only He is expecting them to acknowledge Him with humiliation.

Chapters 6 v.13 to 7 v.1

God's public ways may be in judgment, as we have just seen, but His secret ways always bring Him back into the midst of His people in grace. The ark returned to Beth-shemesh without Israel feeling the need of it, or expressing any desire for it.

What a marvelous thing is this ark of the Lord! First of all, the ark is God's throne, His governmental presence in the midst of His people. Next, it is characterized by the mercy seat, symbol of Christ's work, the place of approach for a sinner received in grace and justified. Lastly, considered as a whole and considered in detail, it is the image of the person of Christ Himself. As the ark contained the tables of the law, so Christ said: “Thy law is within My heart.” Like the ark of testimony, the Lord

here on earth was the witness and the expression of all God's thoughts. As in the golden pot that contained the manna, in Him we find the union of perfect humanity — the bread come down from heaven in the wilderness — with divine glory. He was the mercy seat toward which the faces of the cherubim of glory were turned so that they might contemplate it, overshadowing it with their wings. Thus the ark was, above all, the image of Christ Himself, the Son of God and the Son of Man in a single person.

The people of Beth-shemesh “rejoiced to see [the ark]” (v. 13). How could there fail to be joy, when, after having lost sight of His perfections, one is once again found in the presence of Him whose presence brings security, salvation, the feeling of God's presence, a moral beauty before which angels bow in worship? Thus, hardly had the ark come, but burnt offerings are offered once again and the Levites resume their service anew. The princes of the Philistines see this scene and return; a spectacle of this sort is interesting to them, but does not touch their heart and their conscience.

But the joy elicited by the contemplation of grace is not everything. It is combined with respect and fear, if one is aware of being in God's presence. The God of grace judges according to the work of each one; the God of grace is holy. This is what the people of Beth-shemesh had forgotten. "They had looked into the ark of Jehovah" (v. 19). They abused the intimacy in which God desired, in grace, to present Himself to them. This is important to note. Because Jesus came down to us, our fleshly spirit is tempted to treat Him as a companion with whom we may do as we wish. Today people boast of familiarity with Jesus, and write books to show that spirituality consists in this. We do not have the right to call Him our Brother, but "He is not ashamed to call [us] brethren." This shows the difference clearly. What will my feelings be if a person of high degree condescends to associate me, an insignificant person, with Himself and is not ashamed of me in public when he would have every right to despise me? If I understand this condescension, my feelings will be deep and humble thankfulness, attachment, limitless devotion, and infinite respect for Him

who does not fear to compromise His dignity by lifting me up to His level.

This absence of respect and fear led the people of Beth-shemesh to look into the ark. There is little that better characterizes the spirit of the present time than this profane spirit. Men think themselves capable of distinguishing that which is proper to the human nature and that which is proper to the divine nature of the Savior and to fathom this mystery. This amounts to the same thing as looking into the ark which contained a secret known to God alone, for, “no one knows the Son but the Father.” This attitude inevitably leads to lowering His humanity to the level of our sinful humanity. Men discuss the child Jesus's education, the schools available to Him for learning the Scriptures, His scientific education and opinions, more or less conformed to those of His time, the reality of His temptation and His capacity to sin, etc. Remember, you profane Christians, that the Lord struck the people of Beth-shemesh. If you are not concerned about the Lord's glory, God will show His concern for it and will not allow anyone to touch His ark

with impunity. Soon, instead of the blessings of His presence, you will have to learn under His blows of judgment that He cannot tolerate anyone who fails to remove his shoes in order to approach Him.

The men of Beth-shemesh said: “Who is able to stand before Jehovah, this holy God?” (v. 20). To their own detriment they knew this holiness which they had despised. Alas! instead of humbling themselves, they had only the thought, previously formulated by the Philistines, of removing this disturbing guest far from themselves: “To whom shall He go up from us?” “Come down,” they say to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim, “fetch it up to you” (v. 21); thus they lose all the blessings connected with the Lord's presence. Others profit and understand that someone must be sanctified to keep watch over the ark: “The men of Kirjath-jearim ... hallowed Eleazar, [Abinadab's] son, to keep the ark of the Lord” (1 Sam. 7:1). This trust was faithfully kept in the “fields of the wood” (Ps. 132:6). May we be faithful keepers of the ark of our God!

Chapter 7

If it pleases the Lord for His ark to return in grace into the midst of Israel, the moral state of this people must be brought into accordance with such a favor. “And it came to pass, from the day that the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years.” Thus the ark was within Israel's territory, in a sanctified place, but God's communications with His people were not re-established. Twenty years passed by in waiting, whereas judgment had lasted only seven months (1 Sam. 6:1). The state that could re-establish the people's communion with God could not be produced except through repentance. How long does it take for this repentance to be manifested? Strange gods and Ashtaroth still remained in the midst of Israel while the ark was staying temporarily at Kirjath-jearim. Could the ark associate with the idols of Israel when it could not do so in Philistia? It takes thirty-four times as long as the duration of the judgment to bring Israel to reject such an outrageous sin. There must be a work of conscience corresponding to grace, as we see in the history of the prodigal son. It

is a solemn thing, seen every day, that it takes a believer much longer to be restored than to deliver himself up to do evil.

Israel began to “[lament] after Jehovah” (v. 2) — this is already a favorable sign. They were lacking something, then; the Lord's presence had become necessary to them — the first symptom of a work of God in the soul of the people. Here Samuel serves as the Lord's mouthpiece (v. 3) to call the people to repentance: “Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, If ye return to Jehovah with all your heart, put away the strange gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and apply your hearts unto Jehovah, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines” (v. 3). The believer's return to the Lord is similar to his initial conversion. The soul begins by separating from idols or evil: “Ye turned to God from idols,” it is said to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:9); then the soul cleaves to the Lord and serves Him: “to serve a living and true God.” The result is deliverance; God is no longer obliged to discipline the believer.

In this work the activity of Samuel, this faithful servant of God, is particularly remarkable and blessed. After having spoken to the people, he adds (v. 5): “Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray Jehovah for you.” Gathering the people of God is the function of every servant of the Lord who understands his ministry. But beyond this, Samuel is an intercessor; prayer, the fruit of his intimacy with the Lord, characterizes him. Is it not said of him: “Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His name: they called unto Jehovah, and He answered them” (Ps. 99:6)?

Israel must be gathered at Mizpah. As Gilgal was the place of gathering under Joshua, the place of circumcision, of the judgment of the flesh, in order to obtain victory, so Mizpah is under the judges the usual place of gathering after the angel went up from Gilgal to Bochim, the place of weeping, where conclusive ruin is undeniably established. Mizpah is the place of repentance without which there is no victory. At Mizpah (1 Sam. 4:2) Israel under Eli had met only defeat, for they went there without a work of conscience which could have raised them up

again. In ruin, we must remember that Mizpah is just as precious as Gilgal, although much more humiliating; there we learn anew to put our confidence in nothing of man, but only in the Lord's strength.

“And they gathered together to Mizpah, and drew water, and poured it out before Jehovah, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against Jehovah.” These things could take place only after what is reported in verse 4: “And the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and served Jehovah only.” The fruits of repentance are different from the fruits of conversion; here we have three of them: “water poured out, that is to say, affliction combined with the realization of irremediable weakness before God (2 Sam. 14:14; Ps. 22:14); fasting, for in mourning one does not feed the flesh; and lastly, a true confession of evil: “We have sinned against the Lord.”

These fruits are the result of Samuel's intercession for the people. Such too was the case with Peter when he fell: “I have

prayed for thee,” Jesus told him. On this basis the people can be restored: “Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpah.”

“And the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together at Mizpah; and the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel” (v. 7). The gathering of the people cannot suit the enemy. The enemy doubtless does not understand the work of conscience which has produced the gathering, and does not see in this gathering anything but a power opposed to his own power, one which must be suppressed at any price. “And the children of Israel heard it, and were afraid of the Philistines.” In 1 Samuel 4:7, when their conscience was yet unreached, Israel was unafraid, and it was the Philistines who were full of fear. Now, having experienced their weakness, the people are terrified, for they do not yet have the assurance that God is for them. In one sense, this fear is no doubt wretched, but it is good to see it on the path of restoration. Isn't this better than the “great shout” which Israel had raised previously that had made the earth tremble (1 Sam. 4:5)?

“And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry to Jehovah our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines” (v. 8). They sense that their future and their salvation are dependent on Samuel's intercession. Samuel, their mediator, “took a sucking-lamb, and offered it as a whole burnt-offering to Jehovah”; for his office could not be effective except by virtue of an accepted sacrifice. On this basis, he could be the advocate of God's people. We, too, have an Advocate with the Father, and He is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:1-2). “Samuel cried to Jehovah for Israel, and Jehovah answered him” (v. 9). God hears Samuel's request, which is based upon the burnt offering. God is for us and has given us all things, He who spared not His own Son but gave Him up for us. In verses 10-11 the Lord strikes the enemies of His people and drives them out, so that His people need do nothing more than pursue a beaten adversary. Though it is true that help comes entirely from God, yet victory cannot be complete without the deployment of the energy of faith.

Samuel takes account of this divine intervention. “Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, and said, Hitherto Jehovah has helped us” (v. 12). Eben-ezer, already mentioned in 1 Samuel 4:1, does not receive its name until after this victory. “Hitherto”: this basis having been established, the enemy no longer attempts to raise his head. (v. 13). Restoration, for the moment at least, is complete.

We have seen Samuel as prophet, priest, intercessor, and judge: precious qualities in this man of God. His activity for the Lord and His people does not slacken: “Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpah” (places which characterized his activity according to God), “and judged Israel in all those places.” Even at Ramah where his house was, he was occupied only with the well-being of the Lord's people. The Word adds: “And there he built an altar unto the Lord” (v. 17). The first expression of his service had been to worship before the Lord (1 Sam. 1:28); the worshipper's altar is the last expression of his

service. Is not this life of faith fittingly framed by these two acts?

Chapter 8

“And it came to pass when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. And the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abijah; they judged in Beer-sheba. And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted justice” (vv. 1-3).

The history of the judges, like that of the priesthood, ends in complete ruin. Samuel himself is lacking in spiritual discernment here. He makes his sons judges without any direction from the Lord, as though the function that God had entrusted to him could be transmitted to others, for there is no transmission of gifts or even of charges by succession.

The elders of Israel with reason disapprove of Samuel's sons' conduct (v. 4), but they make this the occasion to ask for a king (v. 5): “Appoint us a king to judge us, like all the nations.” The

evil they were complaining of does not push them toward the Lord, but toward the Gentiles; they seek human assistance to remedy man's ruin, thinking that they can in this way escape their own misery as God's people.

Their desire for a king was, in reality, giving up the Lord, the denial of His direct government through the judges, but their capital sin was the request for a king like the nations. Was it not God's counsel to give them a king according to His own heart, an Anointed whom He would have chosen for them Himself (1 Sam. 2:35; 1 Sam. 13:14)? Their desire for a king like all the nations was a renouncing of their title as God's people and involved assimilation to the world. Due to their unfaithfulness, a system established by God was being jeopardized in their hands. Christendom on its path of apostasy has acted no differently when, instead of humbling itself and mourning, it has sought the world's support in order to maintain itself.

Samuel, reproachable as he had been in the matter of his sons, had not, like Eli, honored them more than the Lord. The elders'

request: “Give us a king to judge us” (v. 6), displeased him. The despising of God's direct government and of His glory affects him. In his affliction he has recourse to prayer (v. 6). May we follow this example daily in every circumstance!

And the Lord says to Samuel: “Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the deeds that they have done since the day that I brought them out of Egypt even unto this day, in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods, so do they also unto thee” (vv. 7-8). Precious encouragement given by God to His servant at the very moment when he was personally undergoing a discipline of which the elders of Israel had become the instruments. Nothing could be more consoling to his heart than the assurance of being, after all, on the Lord's side, and now that the Lord had been rejected, the necessity of being rejected himself as well. Is it not an honor to share the shame that the world casts on our Lord in spurning Him? Is it astonishing that the world acts in the same way toward us? Even while He is

disciplining him, God identifies Samuel with Himself, whereas the people, under an appearance of judging evil, were identifying themselves with the nations. It is better to be a humbled Samuel, disregarded, alone with a rejected God, than an Israel, armed with a powerful outward organization which gives them the illusion of being able to do without God and act according to their own will, whereas they were in fact the slaves of the world and of Satan.

“And now hearken unto their voice; only, testify solemnly unto them, and declare unto them the manner of the king that shall reign over them” (v. 9). Samuel's rejection qualifies him for a new office: he gives a very clear testimony to what would happen to the people. The king according to man's heart would make them his instruments to accomplish his plans, an unbearable yoke, but one that they would be unable to shake off (vv. 10-18). In the same way, the world entirely disowns Christians who seek its help and gives them nothing in exchange except a feeling of their wretchedness without any compensation whatsoever. The world does not grant its help unless one consents to

serve it. This is not the easy yoke and the light burden of the bondservant of Christ, but the anguish of cruel slavery.

The people who have been warned refuse to listen to Samuel's voice and prefer to follow their own pathway; Samuel has the Lord alone as his resource, and he rehearses all the people's words in His ears (v. 21).

Thus God has used discipline in order to strengthen His servant of whom He wishes to make an instrument of new blessings in that which follows. Having received this divine instruction, Samuel, who had established his sons without consulting the Lord, waits until God has told him: “Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king” (v. 22).

Chapters 9 to 15

Saul, or the King according to the Flesh

Chapter 9

Saul enters the scene. In these new circumstances Samuel's character shines with incomparable brilliance. God had said to him: "Make them a king"; Samuel still waits to establish this king until God points him out. This is the true character of a servant: dependence in obedience, such as was seen in the Lord at the death of Lazarus (John 11:6). This is all the more striking here as Samuel is rendering service in a matter which is repugnant to him, but if God is dealing in this way, how could Samuel do otherwise? God puts Himself at His people's service in order to choose a king according to man's principles for them. Indeed He says in Hosea 13:11: "I gave thee a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath," but if God so acts in judgment on His people, it is no less true that He also has a purpose of grace. "And he will save My people out of the

hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon My people, because their cry is come unto Me” (v. 16).

On the other hand, this choice put Israel to the test. In the flesh they had asked for a king according to the flesh; neither God nor Samuel raised an obstacle to this request; on the contrary, God chooses the most excellent person that the flesh could desire, and Samuel acknowledges him as such: “On whom is all the desire of Israel set? Is it not on thee?” (v. 20).

Saul possesses all the natural qualities of a leader of the people. He is strong and valiant, handsome, tall, a choice man. (vv. 1-2). His moral qualities are no less remarkable: he is subject and affectionate toward his father (v. 5), disposed to listen to the counsel of his inferiors (v. 10), little in his own eyes, whether it be in his tribe or in his family (v. 21). If the trial that God is about to make does not succeed with such a man, it is definitely because man's condition in general leaves no hope.

Let us add that without this trial of the king according to the flesh the ways of God toward David, His anointed, would not

have been complete. What would have become of David's sufferings and affliction, the necessary prelude to his glory, if Saul had not been raised up?

Let us now return to Samuel's lovely character. In the preceding chapters he prays, he intercedes, he consults the Lord; here we see him in a relationship of even greater intimacy with God. In him, God realizes what we find in Psalm 32:8: "I will instruct thee and teach thee the way in which thou shalt go; I will counsel thee with Mine eye upon thee." Whereas Saul is only a blind instrument in God's designs, Samuel is conscious of them, and is the confidant of His secret. "Now Jehovah had apprised Samuel one day before Saul came, saying, Tomorrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him prince over My people Israel" (v. 15). This communication is given to him without his request. Nothing comes from him; he receives the thoughts of God directly, without any intermediary: "Behold the man of whom I spoke to thee! this man shall rule over My people" (v. 17). Samuel is conscious of his gift (v. 19), but it is in order to

communicate the mind of God to Saul. Before Saul met him, Samuel had already appointed his portion beforehand (v. 23). There was no jealousy, when he might have resented the elders setting him aside; God's will is enough for him, and he rejoices in it. The establishment of a king according to the flesh is an evil, but Samuel had learned in communion with the Lord not to oppose evil when God Himself did not oppose it: something that is certainly difficult to learn.

Notice again in this chapter how even the most insignificant events work together toward the establishment of God's designs, of the goal He has in mind: the loss of the asses, Saul's useless efforts in the land of Israel, the thought that came to his servant, the maidens at the well, Samuel's presence in the city on that day, the peace offering — indeed, every step, every decision, every word of the prophet acting in communion with His God.

Chapter 10

Samuel anoints Saul as prince over God's inheritance and foretells the signs that will happen to him in the way in connection with his anointing as king. These signs were of great importance: Saul's entire future depended on how he would understand them. He needed only to meditate on them. Their meaning escapes his heart which is lacking in intelligence and spiritual discernment. In this regard, this passage is often a touchstone for our state. Notice that in this scene Saul is not left to himself — leaving him without excuse. Samuel tells him: “God is with thee” (v. 7), and later it says: “The Spirit of God came upon him” (v. 10).

Three signs are given to Saul; they occur in a God-given order.

First, there is Rachel's sepulcher in the border of Benjamin. Benjamin, the head of Saul's tribe, was born the day his mother died. In order to correspond to God's thoughts, Saul's history must start there. It was up to him to become the son of Jacob's right hand, the Benjamin of God, if man according to the flesh

could attain to this place. Rachel's sepulcher could be the beginning of his kingship. Death, separating him from his entire past, could make way for a new life for him, a life issuing out of death in which he would walk freely as the Lord's anointed.

Passing onward, Saul would meet three men going up to God at Bethel. Bethel was the first stage of Jacob's journey, the place where God had promised the banished patriarch never to leave him. In the midst of Israel's ruin, God's faithfulness to His promises was thus manifested to the future king, so that he might govern his conduct according to that faithfulness. Saul should have seen that Bethel was assured to him, and that he could count on divine protection. Amid the sad circumstances in which the people found themselves, Saul meets worshippers of God, be they but three, going up where Jacob had worshipped Him, where He would be worshipped forever. At this time Bethel was the place of grace where God had revealed Himself, the center of Israel's religious life, the beginning and the end of the wanderings of its founder. Saul could and should have entered into relationship with those going to this place of

blessing and, although so few in number, giving complete testimony (indicated by the number three) to the reality of the faith still remaining in Israel. They inquire of him; he who had nothing to give the prophet was to receive the necessary nourishment from them. Having found grace in their eyes, he ought to have joined these men of faith.

Finally, Saul would come to the hill of God, to the seat of His power, in actual fact in the hands of the Philistines, that is to say, invaded and dominated by the enemy. After meeting those in Israel who remained faithful to God at Bethel, Saul ought here to have taken account of the true state of the people, and that should have spoken to his conscience. But, in this same place, God was entering into relationship with Israel through the prophets. Divine resources were not lacking and, despite the Philistines, the Spirit could act in power and in grace. The troop of prophets and the little remnant worshipping God at Bethel ought to have opened his eyes and indicated the path to the Lord's anointed, who could thus become the leader and deliverer of the people. It was due to the Spirit of God that Saul,

joining these men, became His instrument for Israel, and that “God gave him another heart” (vv. 6-9).

The sign takes place; the Spirit of God comes upon Saul (v. 10). Through him God could once again have taken up the course of His relationship with Israel, but faith was not active, and the witnesses to this scene are not misled. Although Saul, changed into another man, prophecies, those who knew him beforehand have no confidence in him. “Is Saul also among the prophets?” And one of the same place answers: “But who is their father?” Does Saul have the same father as God's servants?

The signs completed, Saul receives a new direction for action, for signs are not everything; the Word is also needed. He is directed to go down to Gilgal and to wait seven days until Samuel should come to him to show him what he is to do. Later on, we shall see the result of this order when, after two years, the king decides to go down to Gilgal (1 Sam. 13:1).

Samuel calls the people together before the Lord at Mizpah, but already the fair days of 1 Samuel 7 are over, for since the people had been unfaithful once again their relationship with the Lord was spoiled anew. In asking for a king they had rejected their God (v. 19). Alas! this seems to weigh less upon their conscience than when they were under the Philistines' yoke. Now their circumstances were outwardly happy and easy, but God was rejected. The people had demanded a king; far from hindering them, God had helped them in every way, in making the best choice possible for them according to man. What would the result be?

When the office of king is instituted (vv. 20-27), Saul demonstrates his humility and modesty (v. 23); he knows how to overlook an injury — lovely natural qualities which must be acknowledged but which in no way qualify him for accomplishing the work of God. When the ceremony is over, Saul goes to Gibeah. “And with him went the band, whose hearts God had touched. But the children of Belial said, How should this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no gifts.”

This is a good picture of the world: these children of Belial who had rejected God in order to demand a king despise that king when God sends him to them; but the true believers in the company of Samuel and later in the company of David, knowing the mind of God, accept as coming from Him the authority of a man who will manifest himself to be the most implacable enemy of the Lord's anointed. This is still our place in the world today; we recognize even the most ungodly authorities and obey them (except in case of conflict with the obedience due to God), because we accept the authority of God who has instituted them.

Chapter 11

Hardly has the office of king been established than Nahash the Ammonite comes on the scene, Israel's dreaded enemy, but not their great internal enemy like the Philistine encamped at the hill of God, about whom God had said, "And he will save My people out of the hand of the Philistines" (1 Sam. 9:16). In order to avoid combat, the men of Jabesh-Gilead propose an alli-

ance with the enemy in exchange for their servitude. Nahash responds to this proposal only with scorn; such is all we can gain from our weak concessions to the world and from our lack of faith! The men of Jabesh do not even think of the deliverer whom God had just given them, for the people had not acknowledged Saul except in respect to those qualities which the flesh accepts: outward beauty and natural qualities.

Messengers from Jabesh announce to all the tribes the extremity to which their city is reduced; Saul, by chance, is present. “The Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those words, and his anger was kindled greatly” (v. 6). This is a very serious thing to consider: without a work of the conscience, the Spirit of God, acting in power, does not save man. Saul under the influence of the Spirit had “another heart,” was “turned into another man,”* and is later found reproved when he manifests the true depths of his natural heart. All these qualities of nature, and even the gift of prophecy conferred by the Spirit of God, have not made him a man of God! Balaam and Judas are dreadful examples of this; Samson, although his con-

dition is somewhat doubtful, gives occasion for the same remarks; as does the unprofitable servant of the parable (Matt. 25:30).

* Let us note that this is not the new man of the New Testament.

Thus the Spirit of God comes on Saul, but I am inclined to believe that the ardent wrath of the flesh reveals his personal state; he threatens, instead of gaining confidence and appealing to faith: “Whoever comes not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!” (v. 7).

Be that as it may, “The fear of Jehovah fell on the people.” Jabesh is delivered; Samuel renews the kingdom that had already been established in 1 Samuel 10, but which had now been proven. This renewing must take place at Gilgal (v. 14), the place of circumcision, where the flesh is cut off. Morally, Saul does not count for anything in this action. According to Samuel's injunction in 1 Samuel 10:8 his faith would later be put to the test at Gilgal. Saul shows his generosity, even acknowledging the Lord's hand in the deliverance granted to the

people (v. 13). Thus God in His condescension toward the natural man is with him and grants the flesh the means and the help necessary in order to walk in His presence.

In this chapter, we find the people (1 Sam. 11:11-12) distinguished from the true believers whose hearts God had touched (1 Sam. 10:26) and the children of Belial (1 Sam. 10:27). “The people” belong to neither the one nor the other. They disappear in the day when the heart is put to the test, but they speak openly in favor of Saul and against the children of Belial (v. 12) when they find it advantageous to be associated with the king. The whole nation is never on the side of a despised Saul (1 Sam. 10:27), or of a rejected David, as we shall see later. Today things are no different, and even during the Millennium the unconverted nations will submit themselves to Christ only to attain some advantage.

Chapter 12

By renewing the kingdom Samuel's career as judge naturally comes to an end. 1 Samuel 12 is, so to speak, the testament of

all his activity as Israel's leader. "I have hearkened," he says, "to your voice in all that ye said to me, and have made a king over you. And now behold, the king walks before you; and I am old and gray-headed; and behold, my sons are with you; and I have walked before you from my youth up to this day" (vv. 1-2). Samuel had not been two-faced in his ways; in listening to the people, he had simply followed the Lord's commandment; therefore he could say a bit later: "Jehovah has set a king over you" (v. 13). In this we also see the lovely impartiality of a man who is in communion with God; he had forgotten the wrongs and the injustice of the people and the elders against himself personally and had renounced his official functions without a murmur, transferring them to a king who certainly was of less worth morally than himself. He says: "My sons are with you," thus putting in their rightful place those whom he had wrongfully set up in the past. This act, so natural in appearance, but one which had brought him a measure of discipline from his God, seems to me to be properly judged by this little phrase: "with you." His sons were false judges, whereas he

himself, the true judge, had walked “before” the people. And now the king was walking before them.

The last of the judges goes on to give his evaluation of the people's behavior and of God's ways toward them. “And now stand still, that I may plead with you before Jehovah of all the righteous acts of Jehovah which He did to you and to your fathers” (v. 7). But in order to speak thus, a man must be above reproach, and this fact is of the greatest practical importance for us. We can have no authority with regard to God's people if our actions are not in accord with our gifts and our words. But it is not only a question of conferred authority that counts; one cannot reach consciences without moral authority.

The people are obliged to bear witness about Samuel that his life afforded no ground for reproach or criticism. Like the apostle Paul later on, he was manifested to the consciences of God's people. His moral authority was a thousand times more important than his official authority. Saul had the latter, and

this did not prevent him from being reproved, even though this authority was established by God.

“It is Jehovah who appointed Moses and Aaron” (v. 6). To his own loss, Samuel had forgotten this for a moment when he appointed his sons on his own initiative. In the Church at present — and it is certainly appropriate to take note of this — there is no official appointment, but the gifts that are necessary remain in spite of the ruin, just as does the moral authority based on the practical holiness of the one exercising it.

Samuel's speech (vv. 6-17) goes back to the deliverance from Egypt which had brought the people into Canaan, for this was the purpose in God's powerful intervention on their behalf. But in Canaan they had forgotten God and, instead of serving Him, they had worshipped idols. Oppressed by the enemy, they had cried out to the Lord who had delivered them by the judges, from Jerubbaal to Samuel, and had made them “[dwell] in safety” (v. 11).

But now that Nahash, king of the children of Ammon, was threatening them, they had said to Samuel: “Nay, but a king shall reign over us; when Jehovah your God was your king” (v. 12).

Here the Spirit uncovers their hidden motives for asking for a king. At the bottom, it was not the reason which they had given to Samuel in 1 Samuel 8:5: “Behold, thou art become old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways.” Man often colors his motives in the eyes of his fellow man in this way, but he cannot hide them from God or from His prophet. Fear of Nahash, and simply that, reigned in the depths of Israel's heart, coupled with an absolute lack of faith and of confidence in God. The Lord was their king, but they preferred the help of a king such as the nations had and the security that he could afford them to the “wings of Jehovah,” in whose shadow they should have sought refuge, rejoicing.

Despite all this God condescends to their request, and thus their history in responsibility continues under another form of gov-

ernment: “Jehovah has set a king over you” (v. 13). Would Israel's heart change under this new dispensation? That which follows reveals the answer. For the moment, it was a question of convicting them that “[their] wickedness [was] great, which [they had] done in the sight of Jehovah in asking for [them]selves a king” (v. 17). Samuel gives them signs of this in thunder and rain falling from heaven out of season; but at the same time he cries out and intercedes for them. Never throughout his whole career did this man of prayer slacken in his supplications.

Once again the conscience of the people is reached, but how many times had this not happened already? Witness the lovely stir at Mizpah in 1 Samuel 7. Here they say to Samuel: “Pray to Jehovah thy God for thy servants, that we die not; for we have added to all our sins the wickedness to ask for ourselves a king” (v. 19). The intercession of the man of God is their only resource; this is true, but the evil has been done and subsists; it is not according to God's ways to re-plaster a cracked wall, to give a house in ruin an attractive appearance. One thing re-

mains to them, our resource as well in the circumstances in which we live: there is the possibility of walking in the midst of ruin in a way that glorifies God. “Fear not,” Samuel tells the people, “ye have done all this wickedness; yet turn not aside from following Jehovah, and serve Jehovah with all your heart” (v. 20). If there are souls in the present day whose only purpose is to honor God and serve Him, their path will truly be light in the midst of the darkness that surrounds them. Moreover, these souls, depending on three things that ever abide, will find resources that ruin cannot exhaust nor diminish: “For Jehovah will not cast away His people for His great name's sake; because it has pleased Jehovah to make you His people. Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against Jehovah in ceasing to pray for you; and I will teach you the good and right way” (vv. 22-23). These things are the three pillars of the Christian life. Ruin does not change the grace of God which remains our assurance forever. The intercession of Christ, of which Samuel's intercession is but a weak type, is able to bring us through all difficulties. Lastly, the Word, of

which the prophet was the mouthpiece to the people, “[teaches] us that, having denied impiety and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and justly, and piously in the present course of things ... ” (Titus 2:12).

In closing, Samuel says to the people: “Only fear Jehovah, and serve Him in truth, with all your heart; for see how great things He has done for you” (v. 24). May we not forget that the knowledge of His “great salvation” is the true means of fearing Him as He desires to be feared, and of serving Him as He desires to be served. May we also remember that the knowledge of the grace of God in no way weakens the responsibility of His people. “But if ye do wickedly, ye shall perish, both ye and your king.”

Chapter 13

Samuel's activity as judge having come to its close, the first verse of our chapter begins a new subject.

It is important to notice at the beginning of this new division of the book that Saul does not represent the flesh's premeditated opposition to the work of God, but much rather the efforts of the flesh to accomplish this work — the flesh introduced into a position of testimony. This makes Saul infinitely more responsible and his activity more guilty than if he entered the scene as an enemy of God and of His anointed. Christendom, of which we are part, occupies the same position, with the consequence that the teachings of these chapters are of solemn bearing in the present day.

This chapter could be entitled: The foolishness and the weakness of the flesh. After a first victory, won by Jonathan (v. 3), a victory which we will consider once again in the next chapter in order to present a well-rounded picture of this man of God, the Philistines are moved. “Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear. And all Israel heard say, Saul has smitten the garrison of the Philistines, and Israel also has become odious to the Philistines. And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal.”

Addressing the Lord's people, the king calls them Hebrews. The Philistines or the enemy nations surrounding Israel spoke no differently (cf. 1 Sam. 14:11), and this title proves that Saul was trusting in the gathering of the nation as being equal to the Gentiles, and that he understood little better than the latter the people's relation with their God. It is more or less the same in our day, where men fail to apprehend the true relationship of the people of God, of the Church, to Christ. How can it be otherwise? Can the flesh understand the relationship of intimacy and affection that the Spirit has established between the Bridegroom and the bride? From this ignorance have issued all the so-called religious systems that constitute Christendom and that replace living relationships which the flesh cannot know.

Saul attributes Jonathan's victory, faith's victory, to himself (v. 4). When God acts through His instruments at the beginning of a revival, as was seen during the Reformation, and gains the victory over the enemy, all those who profit by this victory not belonging to the family of faith do not fail to attribute the victory to their own merit and vaunt themselves in it.

Never does the flesh seek to gather souls around Christ: it makes itself the center. This is how Saul acted in seeking to frighten the people by these words: “Israel also has become odious to the Philistines.” In 1 Samuel 11:7 he had constrained the tribes to follow him by threats, here through fear. The result of this way of acting is to gather Israel after himself (v. 4), but the moral consequences are not long in following. Those who put themselves under the flesh's leadership in order to find some measure of security soon feel that they have no security at all. Their distress is undiminished; they follow Saul “trembling” (v. 7), Seeking shelter, they go over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead (v. 7), leaving the land properly called Canaan in order to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the enemy. This lack of faith causes them to forget the only thing which was important: it was not Saul who dwelt in the midst of the people, and their cause was not resting in his hands.

Finally Saul came down to Gilgal, where Samuel had previously made an appointment with him in these terms: “Thou

shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer up burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou wait, until I come to thee and inform thee what thou shalt do” (1 Sam. 10:8).

The difficult circumstances he was passing through remind Saul of the necessity of following Samuel's directions. At the end of two years he remembers the prophet's injunction. Saul, we are told, “waited seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed.” The flesh can imitate faith up to a certain point, but no further; the flesh draws back from the consequences of its own inactivity; nothing is more difficult or more impossible for the flesh than to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. Its patience is often impressive and may even impress Christians, but it ends at the moment when faith is required, the faith that does not reckon with difficulties or impossibilities, for faith cleaves to God who is above all these things. The natural man can walk a long time in a path of patience and in appearance act according to this principle, but he

does not realize his own weakness and incapacity and, lacking a relationship with God, he cannot seek resources other than in himself when he is really put to the test.

After the seven days Samuel had not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattered from Saul (v. 8). The people did not find sufficient authority to guard them and defend them in the man who had gathered them through tactics of fear. Then Saul loses patience; he does not know the patience of faith which is “strengthened with all power according to the might of His glory.” His patience stops where faith should begin. When the people scatter, when man's support fails him, everything fails this poor king. His flesh, driven to action, immediately usurps the place which belongs to the prophet, reversing and trampling under foot the order established by God. Saul says: “Bring hither to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings. And he offered up the burnt offering. And it came to pass, as soon as he had ended offering up the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came” (vv. 9-10).

God's help arrives at the moment when the flesh has just attempted to come to its own rescue. What use is this help to him therefore? Saul is not an unbeliever and does not openly despise Israel's God; he knows that a sacrifice is necessary in order to approach Him; far from despising the prophet, he "went out to meet him, that he might salute him" (v. 10). But being a man according to the flesh, he was absolutely unable to act otherwise than he had done. Nevertheless, he is extremely responsible. "What hast thou done?" Samuel asks him — the same question that God had addressed to Cain! As always, the flesh has excellent reasons for acting, and consequently for disobeying: "Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou didst not come not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines were assembled at Michmash" (v. 11). The flesh has an excuse, even a pious excuse, for its disobedience; "The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to Jehovah" (v. 12).

And Samuel tells Saul: "Thou hast done foolishly." Man's wisdom, reasonings, counsels, and decisions are foolishness to

God, because they are disobedience. “Thou hast not kept the commandment of Jehovah thy God, which He commanded thee” (v. 13). Obedience is the first, the only characteristic of faith. Without it there is no faith. It is allied to dependence. Who could offer a sacrifice well-pleasing to God but Samuel, here a type of Christ?

This is why God responds to Saul's sacrifice by rejecting him as king! Kingship according to the flesh, responsible although established by God, has just proven not only that it is incapable of maintaining itself, but also that man has no other resource but grace. This is what God wanted to demonstrate. Then, He establishes kingship according to grace, after His own heart. “Jehovah has sought Him a man after His own heart, and Jehovah has appointed him ruler over His people” (v. 14).

Gilgal, the place where the flesh is judged, had become through Saul's unfaithfulness the place where the flesh was affirmed. Samuel leaves it and goes to Gibeah of Benjamin, the only

place where, in the person of Jonathan (cf. v. 2), faith is still maintained in Israel.

Saul appears insensible to the seriousness of his deed; he continues in the same path by numbering the people who are with him (v. 15). Ravagers out of the camp of the Philistines were invading the entire land of Israel, and the people had no weapons: “For the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears.” And all Israel went down to the Philistines to sharpen their farming tools or to sharpen an ox goad. If we depend on the world to furnish our weapons, we will find ourselves resourceless for combatting it. Our weapon is the Word. How can we use it against the world, if we consent to give the world the right to teach the Word to us and to dispense the Word to us? In this way the world has the means in its hands to bring us into bondage, and it will not leave us any portion of this Word except that which poses no threat to itself. And just so, children of God are all too often found without arms in the face of enemies who attack their faith.

Chapter 14

This chapter is in absolute contrast with the preceding one. In Saul we have seen the foolishness and the weakness of the flesh; in Jonathan we find the wisdom and power of faith.

Jonathan's career (1 Sam. 13:2-3) had begun with a victory, but at that time he was still associated with Saul's military system; a thousand men were with him and two thousand with his father. Jonathan had overcome, but instead of being to the Lord's glory his victory had been advantageous to Saul. It is always so when it comes to our association with the religious world; it takes advantage of this association to attribute the results of our struggles to itself; thus the victory of faith is annulled and the combat must be entered into anew.

In effect, this combat begins anew in 1 Samuel 14, but the first experience has not been lost on Jonathan. He says to his armor-bearer: "Come and let us go over to the Philistines' garrison which is on the other side. But he did not tell his father," for faith does not expect any help from the world. By his indi-

vidual action he separates himself from the political and religious world; from the religious world, for the priest, the ark, the ephod, and the altar were with Saul. But faith possesses God's secret, which neither Saul, nor the priest, nor the people possess. Jonathan keeps his secret to himself; he cannot depend on any man, whoever he may be. On the other hand, he associates himself in thought and in all his actions, with Israel. Saul appealed to the "Hebrews" (1 Sam. 13:3); Jonathan says: "Jehovah has delivered them into the hand of Israel" (v. 12). Jonathan makes great progress in this chapter. His confidence is in God alone, in no way in himself. This is great faith, but we must seek the secret of his strength in his individual separation.

The sharp rocks of Bozez and Seneh, raising their insurmountable peaks opposite Michmash and Gibeah, are nothing to faith. Faith, moreover, has a clear, distinct view of this world: "Come, and let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised" (v. 6); it has just as clear a view of what God is, that is to say, a Savior: "There is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few."

Jonathan acts contrary to all the wisdom of the world; he waits for the Lord's direction; he is in no wise uncertain; he knows that on the path of faith we may be called to advance or to stand still: "If they say thus to us, Stand still until we come to you, than we will stay in our place, and we will not go up to them. And if they say thus, Come up to us, then we will go up; for Jehovah has given them into our hand; and this shall be the sign to us" (vv. 9-10).

Jonathan fights without human weapons, obliged as he is to use his hands and feet in order to climb up before the Philistines (v. 13), and in this condition he wins God's victory.

As for Saul, in appearance he lacked nothing, but in reality he was lacking everything. God was not with him. The priesthood which seemed to support him had previously been judged (1 Sam. 2:31; 1 Sam. 3:13); he himself had been rejected as king (1 Sam. 13:14). With him he had the army, that is to say, strength, but it was a strength that dissolved when the Philistines approached (1 Sam. 13:8), thus proving his weakness.

Jonathan was conscious of the judgment that the people deserved. “Perhaps,” he says to his young man, “Jehovah will work for us”; but when he adds: “There is no restraint to Jehovah to save,” he shows that he knows God's power and mercy as to this judgment.

Let us not forget Jonathan's companion. His faith is united with that of his leader, whose affection for the Lord and for His people he knows. His master's devotion is sufficient for this single-hearted man and replaces all reasoning for him. Are not his words lovely: “Do all that is in thy heart; turn thee; behold, I am with thee according to thy heart” (v. 7)?

Faith does not dissemble, does not fear to show itself, to expose its designs: “Behold, we will pass over to the men, and we will shew ourselves to them.” While displaying a boldness which in the eyes of the world is pure recklessness, Jonathan is wary of a path of self-will and seeks a sign to indicate the will of God. “This shall be the sign to us” (v. 10).

How could the Philistines be anything but blind to the true character of men of faith? “Behold,” they say, “the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves.” The world despises and mocks believers.

Thus Jonathan climbs up unarmed: in his mind, he is but the representative of the true Israel against the world. (v. 12). The weapons that his young man carries behind him only serve to affirm the Lord's victory. The enemies are terrified: the result of this victory — in appearance a victory over twenty men, but in reality over an entire people. It is often thus; we have only to enter into the conflict immediately before us, whether it be against one or against a thousand enemies, it matters little. God directs the results; they will go beyond all man's expectation and thoughts. “The watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked; and behold, the multitude melted away, and they went on slaying one another” (v. 16).

In the presence of this extraordinary phenomenon Saul (vv. 17-19), void of faith, nevertheless thinks of inquiring of the Lord,

but he gives up this idea in face of the increasing tumult. Poor Saul! He was sacrificing to the Lord when he ought to have waited for the prophet to do so (1 Sam. 13:9), and now he esteems it useless to consult or seek the Lord when victory is at the door. In truth, in spite of all appearances he has not the least spark of faith. And whereas Jonathan's victory gathers the deserters of Israel (v. 21), separating them from the world which had brought them into bondage, and making of them soldiers in God's cause; whereas Jonathan's victory encourages the timid whose hearts have been reassured to pursue the enemy (v. 22), their king, who lacks even the elements of religion, does not know how to do anything but establish a carnal ordinance which deprives the people of God of a good portion of their strength. Ordinances established by the world of necessity weaken those who submit to them, for they always have a legal character: "Cursed be the man that eats food until evening, and until I am avenged on mine enemies" (v. 24). "Cursed": isn't that the law? "That I may be avenged": isn't that the flesh and

man? What a contrast to Jonathan who sees only the salvation of the Lord for His people in the victory!

The result of Jonathan's faith is that the Lord saves and works a great salvation in Israel (v. 45). The result of Saul's ordinance is that the people were distressed and very faint (vv. 24, 28, 31). The carnal ordinance is not long in bearing its consequences: the fast and weariness imposed on the people lead them to transgress the first principles of the Word of God; they slay sheep, and oxen, and calves on the ground and eat them with the blood (v. 32). Saul does not want things to go so far and does not want Israel to act contrary to the divine ordinance. "Ye have acted perversely," he says (v. 33); "Sin not against Jehovah in eating with the blood" (v. 34). But can he by seeking to palliate it remedy the evil that he had incited? Then in the very place of this profanation Saul builds his first altar to Jehovah (v. 35), choosing to worship in the place where the Lord had been dishonored!

Jonathan had not heard the oath that Saul had forced the people to swear; faith is equally foreign to carnal ordinances as to the world's entire religious system, and so faith continues its work in the liberty of the Spirit, and benefitting from the encouragements that God gives, it drinks of the brook in the way" (Ps. 110:7).

How could Jonathan, who receives the help prepared by God for the weariness of the battle and avails himself of it, fail to censure that which is paralyzing the people, this disastrous ordinance, even if it has proceeded from his father's mouth? "My father has troubled the land." Yes, the intervention of the flesh is only a source of trouble and a hindrance to victory.

Saul begins by ordering the pursuit of the Philistines during the night in order to destroy them utterly. The priest who earlier had withdrawn his hand (v. 19) nevertheless has the courage to say: "Let us come near hither to God" (v. 36). Saul inquires of the Lord who does not answer him. God allows everything in this adventure to have extreme consequences and to lead to

Saul's humiliation. He asks for “a perfect testimony” (v. 41); finally he receives it, but the response condemns all the king's actions. Saul himself sees nothing but Jonathan's condemnation! This is how the flesh interprets the Word of God. The Lord protects His faithful servant, whereas the king according to the flesh is judged. The people deliver Jonathan because they recognize that he had wrought with God (vv. 44-46).

The carnal man is capable of a certain heroism so as to maintain his religion and the ordinances that he has established. One may perhaps see him, as here, not sparing those closest to him, but at the bottom it is only an effort of Satan to destroy the servants of God. God watches over His own and saves them, causing that witness be borne to them even by the mouth of the assembly of Israel, whose authority asserts itself here against the pretensions of the flesh.

Despite all this, God acts by means of Saul without wearying, according to the promise that He had made (1 Sam. 9:16), and this does not prevent Saul from continuing to rely on the flesh

in order to fight the Philistines: “When Saul saw any mighty man, or any valiant man, he took him to himself.”

Thus this entire chapter teaches us that the flesh and faith, far from helping and assisting one another, can only enter into conflict and opposition one against the other.

Chapter 15

The concise depiction of Saul's reign ends with the last verse of 1 Samuel 14. The chapter we shall now speak of gives a sort of separate history because of its contents' importance. Here we find the reason for Saul's final rejection, a rejection making necessary the introduction of David — the king according to God.

We have seen that Saul represents the flesh professing to serve God, and, as such, engaged in His work. In order to prove its incapacity in these conditions, God has been putting it to the test in many ways ever since 1 Samuel 9. One final trial re-

mains. What will the flesh, which pretends to act for God, do in the conflict with Amalek?

It was written: “Remember what Amalek did unto thee on the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; how he met thee on the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, all the feeble that lagged behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary, and he feared not God. And it shall be, when Jehovah thy God shall have given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land that Jehovah thy God gives thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens; thou shalt not forget it” (Deut. 25:17-19).

Now God had seen to it, in spite of all Saul's faults, that Israel had “rest ... round about.” The hour had struck for Amalek, that cruel and cowardly enemy who had massacred those of Israel who straggled behind. The Lord had sworn that there would be war between Himself and Amalek from generation to generation (Ex. 17:16). Therefore whoever had God's glory and that of His people Israel at heart must, when the time was

come, completely destroy and not spare Amalek who had lain in wait for the people of Israel when they had come up from Egypt (vv. 2-3). “His latter end,” according to the prophecy Balaam had been forced to utter, “shall be for destruction” (Num. 24:20). Doubtless God had been able to use him as a rod to chasten His disobedient people (Num. 14:39-45), but for all that, he remained the pre-eminent enemy, a type of Satan who from the beginning of the wilderness journey seeks to oppose the people of God. There is no truce in the Christian's conflict against him: the Christian is called upon to stand fast against the wiles of the devil and to fight against the spiritual powers of wickedness in the heavenlies (Eph. 6:11-12). In this conflict Israel had once been the victor, after they had drunk the water from the rock — that is, after in figure they had tasted the presence of the Holy Spirit following the death of Christ. Led by Joshua, who represents Christ in the power of the Spirit, they had then been called upon to face this great enemy. Would the flesh be able to fill this role now, or would it prove that it was incapable of so doing?

At the beginning, in appearance, the flesh displays its capacity to do so. At God's command Saul rises up, places himself at the head of the people, separates the Kenites who had shown themselves to be friends of God's people (Judges 4:11), and smites Amalek and all his people. Only he does not thoroughly execute God's command. This the flesh will never do. The flesh cannot remain inactive to the end when God bids it do so: we have the witness of this fact in the seven days at Gilgal (1 Sam. 13:8); nor can it be active to the end, as our chapter's account witnesses. To fail to execute His commandment thoroughly, for the Lord is to fail to execute it at all. God declares: "It repents Me that I have set up Saul to be king; for he is turned away from following Me, and has not fulfilled My words" (v. 11).

What deep sorrow for Samuel! Though knowing this man to be rejected, he intercedes for him all night long. Samuel, as we have often noticed, is always praying and interceding — for the disobedient, for the wicked, and for everyone. He mourns, he prays, but he obeys; this is peculiar to faith — the most absolute contrast with Saul's behavior. It says: Samuel "cried to Je-

hovah all night. And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning.” The latter had in the meantime set up a monument, attributing his victory to himself, for the flesh, even when engaged in the work of God, cannot do this work for Him.

As Samuel comes to meet him, Saul says: “Blessed art thou of Jehovah: I have fulfilled the word of Jehovah.” How prompt he is to vaunt himself! In verse 20 we shall see him excusing himself, and in verse 24, accusing himself with the same quickness. This quickness is stamped on everything. But God is not to be bought off by words: “What means then,” says Samuel, “this bleating of sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of oxen which I hear?” (v. 14). Saul, who had just said, “I have fulfilled the word of Jehovah,” now acquits himself of the fault and transfers it to the people although he and the people (v. 9) had acted in accord. “They have brought them from the Amalekites, because the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto Jehovah thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed” (v. 15). In these few words we see Saul vaunting himself, accusing his accomplices, and coloring his

disobedience with the name of service to the Lord. What blindness! Samuel will convict him of this; but first he reminds Saul that at the beginning he had been modest, little in his own eyes; that was his natural character, and God had blessed it. Why had he now rebelled against Jehovah's commandment? Saul answers: "I have indeed hearkened to the voice of Jehovah, and [I] have gone the way which Jehovah sent me, and [I] have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and [I] have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the devoted things, to sacrifice to Jehovah thy God in Gilgal" (vv. 20-21)

For Saul, sacrifice is better than obedience; but, "Has Jehovah delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in hearkening to the voice of Jehovah? Behold, obedience is better than sacrifice, attention than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and selfwill is as iniquity and idolatry" (vv. 22-23). Sacrifice without obedience — solemn truth — is no better than idol worship. The first attribute of faith is obedience. Paul had received his apostleship "for obedience of faith among all

the nations” (Rom. 1:5). Moreover, there are many things that God prefers to sacrifice. “I delight in loving-kindness,” He says, “and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6). “Go and learn,” the Lord said to the Pharisees, “what that is — I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.” (Matt. 9:13)

Obedience is what characterizes all the men of faith, from Abraham onward, the father of the faithful, who “obeyed; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.”

Here are the results that Saul's disobedience brought upon him: “Because thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah, He has also rejected thee from being king” (v. 23). In times past at Gilgal, the Lord had said to him through Samuel: “Thy kingdom shall not continue” (1 Sam. 13:14). Now the final blow has been struck: “God has rejected thee.”

How does Saul receive this sentence? He confesses his sin, but without humiliation, without contrition, still hoping to be able to avoid the consequences. “I have sinned, for I have trans-

gressed the commandment of Jehovah, and thy words, for I feared the people, and hearkened to their voice.” Always some excuse, but an astonishing quickness to confess the evil he had denied a few moments earlier. In all this there is no exercise of conscience. Saul prefers to plead his cowardice before the people as a mitigating circumstance than to take full responsibility for the sin. What a contrast to the exclamation: “I have sinned against Jehovah” out of David’s mouth after his fall! Saul hopes thus to obtain pardon and be restored. It is too late; the sentence is conclusive, for God is God, and “the Hope of Israel will not lie nor repent.” “I have sinned,” says the poor king a second time; “honor me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel” (v. 30). To the end he has himself and his own reputation in view. Samuel does, in fact, honor him, but then leaves him. As long as God has not executed His sentence on the powers established by Himself, we are to acknowledge them.

“Saul worshipped Jehovah” without benefit to God or to himself. From now on God’s sentence against Amalek is confided

to Samuel's hands; it is he who hews Agag in pieces at Gilgal. Then he goes to Ramah, his father's house, but for him it is the place of weeping and mourning. Saul goes to his own house and from this point onward there is a complete separation between him and the prophet.

Chapters 16 to 31

David, the King according to Grace

Chapter 16

Here the history of the true king according to God begins, the history of the king according to the flesh having been virtually terminated by his conclusive rejection.

This chapter, as we shall see, gives us a general idea of David's position before coming to the throne. But first of all, we will consider certain details which are very important for us of Samuel's character.

When it is a question of human thoughts, even those of a judge and prophet, we find that they are no better than those of any other man. The Word affords us many examples of this. Here the question is not one of positive failures, but by his manner of thinking Samuel betrays a state that is not one of true communion with God. After Saul has been rejected Samuel continues to mourn for him to the point that God must reprove him: “How long wilt thou mourn for Saul?” (v. 1). Then instead of rejoicing that God has “provided [Himself] a king,” he responds: “How shall I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me” (v. 2). How shall I go? — when it is God Himself telling him to go! Was it not likewise with God's servant Moses (Ex. 4) who, faced with the Lord's commands, raised objections based in appearance on humility (Ex. 3:11), on distrust of men (1 Sam. 4:1) and of himself (1 Sam. 4:10), but which, in short, beneath an admirable outward appearance hid unbelief and the mistrust of the natural heart?

Finally in verse 6, seeing Eliab, Jesse's first-born, he says: “Surely Jehovah's anointed is before Him” (v. 6). Even this

man of God is judging according to outward appearance, and God is obliged to reprove him, saying: “For it is not as man sees; for man looks upon the outward appearance, but Jehovah looks upon the heart” (v. 7). Samuel thus was here judging as a man, and his discernment was given over to the same outward qualities that Saul had possessed. With touching grace God condescends to reprove and instruct His servant on all these points.

And so in the end faith predominates: “Samuel did what Jehovah said,” and went ahead, counting on God's word to direct him. Once he had learned that the Lord looks at the heart, he proves himself faithful and his communion with the Lord is manifest, for he immediately judges that “Neither has Jehovah chosen” the other sons whom Jesse, their father, made to pass before the prophet. At last he anoints the only one of them whom the Lord had chosen. Once in the path of God, Samuel no longer fears. Whereas the elders of Bethlehem “trembled at his coming,” he who beforehand had trembled now reassures them.

David appears on the scene. His character is remarkable from the beginning of his career. Forgotten of his father, who does not remember him except at Samuel's pressing request; despised of his brothers, of whom the eldest even taxes him with "pride" and "naughtiness of heart" when the Spirit of God is stirring him to action (1 Sam. 17:28); and lastly, unknown to Saul, to whom his qualities are revealed (1 Sam. 16:18), who loves him greatly (v. 21) because of his goodness and because of the care with which he surrounds Saul, but who forgets his origin so completely that he later asks Abner whose son he is (1 Sam. 17:55). Such was David's character in terms of his relationships. In appearance outwardly he "was ruddy, and of a lovely countenance and beautiful" (v. 12).

This world offers different types of beauty. Saul was "choice and comely; and there was not among the children of Israel a comelier person than he."* Eliab also had a handsome appearance that captivated Samuel's eyes, but such beauty alone is of no value except in men's eyes. There is another kind of beauty that may be joined with outward beauty in men of faith, but

that God esteems as being the reflection of character: the beauty of a pure soul or of simple faith, the outshining of a heart from which evil and sin are excluded, of a guileless heart. This is the beauty of the little child Moses of whom the Word says: He “was exceedingly lovely,” literally, “fair to God” (Acts 7:20). This is the beauty of Joseph, “of a beautiful form and of a beautiful countenance,” but a Nazarite among his brothers (Gen. 39:6); this is the beauty of Daniel (Dan 1:4), humbly cleaving to his God in order to guard himself from the world's defilement; and lastly, this is the beauty of David developed in the wilderness by the pastures for the sheep where in secret he experienced the strength and the glory of His God.

* Absalom was handsome and "in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty" (2 Sam. 14:25).

But what is this moral beauty added to physical beauty, and yet always incomplete, in the presence of Christ's beauty? He had no form nor comeliness, His visage was marred more than any man, but all the moral glory that filled Him shone upon His face and shed light all about Him. Grace was poured into His

lips, and so it is said of Him: “Thou art fairer than the sons of men ... therefore God has blessed Thee for ever” (Ps. 45:2).

In all these men of faith, as in their perfect Model, true beauty is in reality nothing other than the shining forth of grace. David is the king according to grace and his name means “Beloved.” This character necessarily makes him a suffering man, an afflicted man here on earth, a true type of the Savior.

But the one who knows Jesus finds in Him not only the perfection of the Humble Man and of the Man of Sorrows, but also other character traits, and primarily the beauty of strength. Like David, to his friends “a valiant man” (1 Sam. 16:18), the Lord is for His own the One who calms the sea and the storm, before whose majesty His enemies recoil and fall backward; who says, “I will,” and the thing is done; who binds the strong man and through His miracles spoils him of his goods.

Like David, He is “a man of war,” and if it is true that He will come to Zion, lowly as in former days and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass (Zech. 9:9), it is just as true

that He will gird His sword upon His thigh, a valiant Man, in His majesty and splendor, and that His right hand shall teach Him terrible things (Ps. 45:3-4), that He will sit as Overcomer on a white horse, followed by the armies of heaven, smiting the nations with the two-edged sword going forth from His mouth (Rev. 19:11-16).

Like David again, He is “prudent in matters” (v. 18 KJV), for “God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:38), and “the Spirit of Jehovah rest[s] upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah” (Isa. 11:2).

Lastly, as “Jehovah [was] with him,” with how much more reason is He with Christ. Yes, indeed, “God was with Him” (Acts 10:38).

God's providence brings David to the king's court, but before he reigns his faith must be put to the test by all manner of sufferings. He must be the dependent man, the humbled man, despised, hated, persecuted; in the midst of this life of renounce-

ments and strife he will experience that his God is sufficient for everything. Thus the Lord's anointed will be tried for many long years in order to manifest to the eyes of the people all the qualities of grace that constitute, according to God's mind, David's rights to Israel's throne and to glory. This grace triumphs in his feelings toward Saul, his relentless enemy.

Hardly is David called to the throne but what Saul's moral condition changes completely. Until that day the Spirit of God had been with the king according to the flesh, and this explains each of Saul's successes against the enemies of Israel. Now the Spirit of the Lord comes upon David (v. 13) and departs from Saul, who is left in the power of "an evil spirit from Jehovah" (v. 14). This is a judgment from God, a chastisement upon the king who becomes henceforth in this history that which he had not been previously: a type of the Antichrist. At the same time God demonstrates that His Spirit alone is capable of raising and dispelling the evil spirit, when David takes a harp and plays with his hand before Saul.

Chapter 17

1 Samuel 16 has provided us with a general description of David's character in his position as the Lord's anointed and, in a special manner, in his relationship with Saul. 1 Samuel 17 takes up, so to say, the description of his history from another point of view. This is why we have the seemingly superfluous repetition of his family relationship that we find in verses 12 and 13.

We have before us now no longer the character but the career and activity of David, a type of Christ, from its beginning to its final and conclusive result, the complete victory over Goliath. In a word, the entire history of Christ, the Victor over Satan, is summarized in this period of David's activity. The Philistines had already been conquered many times, but not their leader, the giant Goliath. Sure of his strength, he presents himself before the assembled people and challenges them; and when he has succeeded in inspiring terror in those whom he wishes to subjugate, he cries out: "I have defied the ranks of Israel this day!" He does not know that it is not with Israel that he has to

do, but with God, and that he is defying God Himself in defying His people. This is his downfall.

As for David, he presents himself here (v. 17) as the one sent by his father to his brothers; his service begins with them. But God's purpose is a deliverance extending far beyond this limited circle. Joseph had done likewise (Gen. 37:14) and had become not only the savior of his brothers, but also the savior and master of Egypt.

David sets out on his mission, having already exercised a secret ministry in the wilderness where he kept the sheep. That is where he had smitten the lion and the bear, a type of Christ when He bound the strong man. Before entering into combat with the Philistine he had delivered his father's sheep when the enemy sought to snatch them away and devour them.* Christ did the same during His lifetime; not one of the sheep that His Father had given Him had been lost. He bound the strong man so as to set at liberty those who had been bruised and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19). He stood alone

in the breach, saying: “Let these go away.” But He had much more to do than that, for He must abolish the power of the enemy himself.

* Concerning the lion and the bear, see Prov. 28:15; Lam. 3:10; Amos 5:19.

Like Christ, David is here a true servant. He “[rises] up early in the morning” (v. 20) and takes his charge, so as to accomplish his father's will. Already anointed, he is the Spirit's man for this service, while at the same time maintaining his character of humility in the pastures of the sheep.

He comes into the camp, where his brothers accuse his confidence in God and his faith of being pride and naughtiness of heart (v. 28). We too can ever expect the same treatment ourselves in following the simple path of faith. Our relatives can no more understand our motives than the Lord's brothers could understand His. David answers Eliab: “What have I now done? Was it not laid upon me?” (v. 29). What had he done to deserve being insulted? Did he not have a reason for going

down to his brothers, when the God of Israel was daily being insulted by the enemy?

David asks what will be done for the man who kills the Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel (v. 26). He learns that the king will enrich him with great riches, will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free. But it is not to obtain this reward that he enters the campaign; it is for God, for Israel's deliverance, to make the Lord known in all the earth, and that all the congregation should know how the Lord saves (vv. 46-47). Doubtless his victory gives him, like Christ, great riches, a bride, and the liberation of his father's house, but this is the result rather than the purpose of his work.

David announces to Saul what he is going to accomplish (v. 32). The king, who can think of nothing but human methods, wants to provide him with his own armor; but David cannot go with weapons belonging to the flesh, and he has never even tried them. He wants no other weapons than those a shepherd uses to defend or regather his sheep. As for us, the Word is that

weapon that faith alone can use; it overthrows Satan. Human labor can have no part in such a conflict.

When he presents himself before the Philistine, although David is “a valiant man and a man of war” (1 Sam. 16:18), he does not look like a warrior. Even his beauty, the reflection of the Lord's grace, is disdained by Goliath (v. 42). He is here the representative of God whom the Philistine had defied. To glorify this God whom Satan had dishonored: such was David's purpose, and such was Christ's purpose. Their strength consisted of fighting in His name: “I come to thee in the name of Jehovah of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied” (v. 45). In David's spirit there was not a doubt about the results of the contest. “This day will Jehovah deliver thee up into my hand” (v. 46). Often when engaged in conflict we doubt; even a Jonathan is not sure of the result and says: “It may be” (1 Sam. 14:6); here, there is nothing of the kind; rather, there is absolute faith which has the secret of the Lord and counts upon great things. Here David is the true type of Christ, for he represents God before the enemy.

With his first blow his sling strikes Goliath on the forehead; he falls, and David kills him with his own weapons (v. 51). Through death Christ overcame him who had the power of death, that is to say, the devil. Then the victor withdraws to his own tent (v. 54), carrying off the trophies of his victory, like Christ who has gone up to His own dwelling place, leading “captivity captive.”

Goliath's defeat is also the Philistines' defeat; the world, like its leader, is now a conquered enemy; we may well take courage in facing it, even though, on the other hand, trouble and tribulation are our necessary portion.

Although he was relieved by Jesse's son, Saul does not know David's origin. “Whose son is this young man?” he asks Abner. Does this not recall the Jews' ignorance in John 7 about the origin of Christ and the place from which He had come? Saul does not know him any better when he presents himself, holding in his hands the sure earnest of victory.

Chapter 18

Here we enter the third period of Jonathan's history.

In 1 Samuel 13, he had won a victory that was without profit for God's people. In 1 Samuel 14, a great deliverance was wrought by the energy of his faith, displayed in the fight against the enemy. Here Jonathan enters into a personal relationship with David, Goliath's conqueror. In type he is one who knows Christ as the One who has conquered Satan through death but who is nevertheless rejected by the world. This knowledge corresponds to the knowledge Christians have today, although Jonathan properly is the type of the remnant of Israel to whom the Lord will make Himself known before taking the kingdom, and who love Christ even though He is still rejected by the people.

Up to this point Jonathan had the character of a young man, strong in faith, who had fought with the enemy; now he goes further: his soul is bound up with David's soul when he hears him speak. He appreciates the moral beauty with which his

words are impressed more than his own outward advantages; he finds in David a soul to whom his own soul answers; suddenly a special bond of love and fellowship develops between them, produced by the charm of David's words.

The power of God having helped Jonathan, he might have been led to attribute some measure of strength to himself; he sees and hears David and immediately he realizes that he is nothing. Whatever he possesses is good only to present to the conqueror; he strips himself of that which he possesses in order to give it to David, the only one worthy in his estimation. Jonathan's robe and garments, tokens of his royal dignity, belong to David; his sword, the instrument of his victories, belongs to David; his bow and the belt of his strength belong to David, for all strength belongs to the son of Jesse (v. 4)!

Not only does Jonathan give him everything, but he “loved him as his own soul” (v. 1). No longer are strength and energy at work in him, but rather the affections drawn forth by this all-powerful attractiveness, the perfect character of the Lord's

anointed. To Jonathan's love the love of his friend responds. "Very pleasant wast thou unto me," David later cries out in his grief of heart on the dark day when his brother is taken away from him (2 Sam. 1:26).

Saul believes he has rights over David; he "would not let him return to his father's house" (v. 2), whereas Jonathan who has the intelligence of faith makes a covenant with David (v. 3), seeks his protection, and recognizes that there is no security except with him. Faith is the basis of Jonathan's love; he shows this clearly by saluting David as the true king.

The continuation of this chapter presents the progress of David and of Saul; progress for good in the one, and progress for evil in the other. A feeling of animosity produced by Satan of necessity leads to other expressions of ill-will; it is enough that the tares are sown by the enemy in the wicked heart of the man for them to grow all by themselves and finally invade his entire being. "Saul was very wroth ... and he said, They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed the thou-

sands; and what is there more for him but the kingdom?” (v. 8). This is not yet irritation against David, but rather irritation against men's opinion which was elevating David and lowering the king at the very moment when Jonathan's faith was sacrificing everything for the beloved. This is because the flesh can never bear being nothing in Christ's presence.

From this day onward Saul eyed David (v. 9). The next day the depth of his heart is revealed; the evil spirit comes upon him. When he was among the prophets he had been able to give the impression that he was dependent on the Spirit of God; delivered up to Satan, the fruits of his wicked heart are immediately seen, and this man who “prophesied in the midst of the house” casts his spear in order to “transfix David to the wall” (vv. 10-11).

In verse 12, Saul was afraid of David and, being unable to endure his presence he “removed him from him” while giving him an apparent honor, for he made him “captain over a thousand.” This honor — and this is what he desired — removes

David from his sight, but delivers up the poor king to every suggestion of pride and hatred when he no longer has in his presence his servant, the model of humility and grace. Poor Saul! he deliberately deprives himself of the only person able to soothe him and serve him as a bulwark against the attacks of Satan.

Soon the king, who is already a murderer in his heart, becomes that in reality (v. 11), seeking in an insidious way to rid himself of the object of his hatred. He promises his daughter Merab to David, but this is only a sham. “Fight Jehovah's battles,” Saul tells him, full of outward respect, while in the depths of his heart hatred is boiling and the desire to see “the hand of the Philistines ... upon him” (vv. 17-19).

Michal, Saul's second daughter, loves David. Saul tells himself: “I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be upon him” (v. 21). In his thoughts this union is a new means of getting rid of his future son-in-law. He dissimulates and orders his servants to speak to

David secretly, saying: “Behold, the king has delight in thee, and all his servants love thee” (v. 22). He pretends to feel affection toward him in order to push the son of Jesse to his destruction all the more surely.

David's great humility in face of the king's proposals only moves Saul further along in his wicked plan. Man's hatred and pride never could comprehend the humility and the love of Christ.

The wiles of the adversary are finally foiled when David wins the victory and receives the king's daughter as his wife, because the destruction of the Lord's enemies is required of him in exchange for her.

The result for Saul is that his fear increases and his hatred becomes continual enmity: “Saul was yet the more afraid of David; and Saul was David's enemy continually” (v. 29).

During this period we observe David's progress in every sphere and in every direction: “David went forth; whithersoever Saul

sent him he prospered ... and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants" (v. 5). "Jehovah was with him ... and he went out and came in before the people. And David prospered in all his ways, and Jehovah was with him ... all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them" (vv. 12-16). All these qualities of necessity made David esteemed; but we must not forget that human love has many different traits and that only one of these traits has value in the sight of God.

The daughters of Israel, the people, and Saul's servants love David for his deliverances. Even Saul, at a given moment (1 Sam. 16:21), "loved [David] greatly," because of the relief that he brings him in his sufferings. Michal loves David according to nature — which does not hinder her from despising him later on (2 Sam. 6:16). Lastly, Jonathan loves him with the only love which is true, good, and enduring; he loves him as his own soul; he cherishes him for what David is in himself.

Thus David succeeds better than all Saul's servants, and his name was much esteemed (v. 30); a lovely picture of the Lord at the beginning of His career (Luke 4:15)!

Chapter 19

In the preceding chapter Saul had used roundabout ways to rid himself of the Lord's anointed; here he contrives a genuine conspiracy against him: "Saul spoke to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should slay David" (v. 1). Jonathan preaches grace to his father by presenting to him what David was, what David had done for him at the risk of his own life, and by reminding him that he himself, Saul, had at first rejoiced after he had witnessed these things: "Thou didst see it, and didst rejoice" (v. 5). How far superior was David's activity to all that Jonathan could do for him (and Jonathan was conscious of this), even though he loved David as his own soul!

Saul listens to Jonathan and swears: "As Jehovah lives, he shall not be put to death!" (v. 6). By presenting grace to the heart of the natural man God allows his wickedness to be momentarily

arrested in its development, but this is not conversion. Saul's murderous intention is changed, yet nevertheless he does not repent. He retracts his decision, makes a new resolution when faced with the exhortations of a man of faith, but hardly is this resolution made than he shows himself to be in no way free from his impulses and by his behavior proves that he is a miserable slave of Satan.

As for David, he does not change. "He was in his presence as previously" (v. 7). The grace that has led him up to now remains impressed upon his person and upon his behavior.

A fresh triumph of David's re-awakens the evil spirit that had taken control of Saul. As long as the believer does not trouble Satan by victories won over his followers his hostility remains asleep, as it were, but his mortal hatred soon awakens. We see this hatred against David at the very moment when the evil spirit seems to be subdued by the gracious relief which David procures for the king. A moment comes, then, when the only thing the believer can do is to flee, to escape like a bird out of

the fowler's net. Now David's death is irrevocably decreed. Michal, motivated by her natural affection for David, comes to his help in her own way, God using here the human feelings that animated her (vv. 11-17).

This passage also reveals to us the fact that there was an image (a teraphim) in David's house. Certainly, David did not worship it, but its presence allows us to conclude that he put up with it. The teraphim was not an idol, properly speaking, and the Word is careful to distinguish the one from the other. (See Hosea 3:4; Zech. 10:2; 1 Sam. 15:22-23; 2 Kings 23:24; Ezek. 21:21; Gen. 31:19, 30, 32-35; Judges 17:3-5; Judges 18:17-18, 20) The image (teraphim) is somewhat inferior to the idol; it is a sort of demi-god whose domain is the household; it is clothed with a certain importance, and is even consulted on occasion. Such superstitions quickly lead to true idols; this is exactly how Jacob judged the matter, when he told Laban to take back his gods (Gen. 31:32). Often the believer lacks the energy to banish these occasions of stumbling from his family, and each one of us must be earnestly mindful of this even though, like Jacob

et David, we may not personally attribute to them any influence over our life. The image had evidently been introduced into David's household by Michal, Saul's daughter, who was thus a snare to the man of God.

Michal avoids her father's wrath by acting before him as though she were one of David's enemies, constrained by his threats to allow him to escape: "He said to me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?" (v. 17). How different her heart is from Jonathan's who openly, at his own risk and peril, took up the defense of the one whom he tenderly loved.

"David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth" (v. 18). David tells everything to Samuel, God's representative and prophet. He becomes his companion, and the two of them dwell together. Such is, for David, the result of this trial.

This leads us to consider the Psalms that speak of David's afflictions. We assume that none of our readers are ignoring the

fact that the Psalms are prophetical songs, describing the moral circumstances the remnant of Israel will pass through in the last days. This remnant will be sustained during the tribulation by the Spirit of Christ, of the One who has in grace passed through analogous circumstances, although much more terrible, because His walk of obedience, dependence, integrity, holiness, and love resulted but in death, and He could only be delivered “from the horns of the buffaloes.” It is therefore natural to see David used as the principal organ to express prophetically the feelings of the remnant and of Christ. Is not his life, as we have already observed many times, a striking type of the life of the Messiah who was to come, and as such had David not passed through all the phases of rejection, humiliation, and persecution which except for death represent the Savior's sufferings? We are not saying this with the intention of entering more deeply into this subject, so often treated in detail by others, but to underscore the fact that the Psalms of David which carry us so high and so far into the prophetical future are in first line drawn from his personal experiences. In them, too, we can find a

faithful expression of his heart's condition in the midst of trial, the results produced by God's discipline with regard to him, and the resources that were his when tribulation overtook him. From this restricted point of view only, as events progressively unfold we will consider the Psalms that are related to them.

The account in this chapter has its counterpart in Psalm 59, inspired “when Saul sent, and they watched the house [of David] to kill him.” While Saul's messengers, men of blood who were gathered against him, went round about the city during the night, David was raising his heart in supplication to the Lord. He was looking to Him for deliverance (vv. 1-2), assured that He would be gracious toward him (v. 10), for they sought his life not “for [his] transgression, nor for [his] sin,” but rather because he belonged to the Lord. For the moment he is not asking the Lord to slay his enemies (v. 11), to kill Saul, in order that David's people may not forget these things. The profane king must remain alive until the patience of the Lord's anointed shall have had its perfect work. Later God will consume the enemy in order to establish his reign.

Isn't it touching to see this man of God at the very moment when he is so closely pressed and when his life could be cut off entirely occupied with the Lord, with His designs, and with His deliverance. Indeed, he does not question either the love of God nor His will to deliver him. “But as for me, I will sing of Thy strength; yea, I will sing aloud of Thy loving-kindness in the morning” (v. 16). In the morning? when his enemies “howl like a dog” during the night of anguish, as they watch his house and go round about the city! Thus he was sure of deliverance because he counted on God, and he can add in this extreme peril in anticipation of this deliverance: “Thou hast been to me a high fortress and a refuge in the day of my trouble!” (v. 16).

Let us return to our chapter. In verses 19-24, all Saul's efforts against David fail, and yet he has his messengers follow him, even when he finds refuge under his protector Samuel. Against their own will these instruments of the enemy experience the influence of the Spirit of God in whose power they prophesy, a serious warning which neither converts them nor saves them. Even Saul — and this not for the first time in his life — is here

forced to prophesy by the Spirit of God. In 1 Samuel 18:10 he had done so by the evil spirit which had come upon him. God is able to speak through the mouth of a Saul who at other times is the mouthpiece of Satan; He can do the same through the mouth of a Balaam or of a Caiaphas. This only proves that God uses someone as an instrument if it suits Him; but it is necessary to distinguish between the quickening activity of the Holy Spirit and His various operations in power. Power may communicate a great knowledge of the Word and perhaps also the energy that uses this knowledge on behalf of others, but it never leads us to self-judgment and appropriation of Christ as the One answering to our needs. It gives neither repentance nor faith; there must be a work of the Spirit in the heart in order to reach the conscience, to give an awareness of sin, to lead a soul to God. Without this, there is no new life. The hearts of Saul and of his messengers were not changed, but God had come upon their spirits through prophecy in order to expose their foolishness and in order to save David, His beloved.

Chapter 20

“David fled from Naioth by Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity, and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeks my life?” (v. 1). Whereas the natural man remains under the terrible “What hast thou done?” once addressed to Cain (Gen. 4:10), the man who is justified by faith, persecuted without cause, can say like David: “What have I done?” But David could speak like this only at this point in his career. Later, when persecuted by his son Absalom, he could no longer say, “What have I done?” Still later, when he had committed the serious sin of numbering the people, he is obliged to confess to God while under His judgment: “I have sinned greatly in what I have done” (2 Sam. 24:10). Yet nevertheless, at the very moment when he was under discipline he is presented to us as a type of Christ standing in the breach in order to save his people, when he says: “Behold, it is I that have sinned, and it is I that have committed iniquity; but these sheep, what have they done?” (v. 17).

But only One could say: “I do always the things that are pleasing to Him [that has sent Me]”; only One at the last moment of His career could receive the testimony from the mouth of the converted robber: “This man has done nothing amiss” (Luke 23:41).

David, who is such a precious type of Christ, also receives this public testimony before Saul through Jonathan's mouth: “Why should he be put to death? what has he done?” (v. 32). What a privilege it is for the believer to have through the Holy Spirit the possibility of copying the Lord in this, as in every other thing. Only, in order to produce this fruit of righteousness the Lord never needed discipline as David did or as we do. All His afflictions were on the one hand the fruit and the witness of His grace toward us. They brought out on the other hand the absolute perfection in Him, whether in His life or in His death. In Him the meal offering, just as the burnt offering, caused an un-mixed “sweet savor to the Lord” to rise.

We shall see more than once, even during this period of his life when David could say: “What have I done? that certain details of his behavior necessitate God's intervention in discipline. Thus we find even here in verse 6 a lack of truth which, although understandable, is no less to be condemned. In David the truth was below grace: it was reserved for the Word become flesh to bring into this world unmingled grace united to perfect truth. (John 1).

Whereas David, the man of faith, knows perfectly well the danger to which his faithfulness exposed him and, seeing only a step between himself and death (v. 3), knows that his only resource is in God, Jonathan is still counting on the assistance that he believes he can give his friend (v. 2). He has a certain confidence in his father's character; he wishes that the Lord might be with David as He had been with Saul (v. 13). He really does not reach a high level of spiritual intelligence nor of appreciation of the human heart. It is always so for the believer when he is associated with the world by any links whatsoever. Jonathan has still not understood that God has rejected Saul,

even when on the other hand all his confidence is in David. Is he not assured of his power in the future and of his goodwill? “Thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house forever, no, not when Jehovah cuts off the enemies of David, every one from the face of the earth” (v. 15). He continues to forget himself here in proclaiming that the kingdom belongs to his friend. And when is it that Jonathan chooses to commend himself to David's protection? At the moment when David is fleeing, his life exposed at every instant! Is it not the same for us? Have we not found our protector, our refuge, and all our hope in a rejected Christ?

It is beautiful to see this absence of egoism in Jonathan in presence of the one who would inherit all the rights that birth would appear to have conferred on Saul's son. Ah! this is because he loved David as his own soul; because from the beginning he had given power, authority, the kingdom — in a word, everything — to the son of Jesse. Saul cried out: “As long as the son of Jesse lives upon earth, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom” (v. 31), for to him his son's being established

was more than all of David's glories. To him it was a shame to company with the true king: "Thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own shame and to the shame of thy mother's nakedness" (v. 30). Such words deeply wound Jonathan's heart; he leaps up at this insult, but he is grieved, not on account of the insult to himself and his mother, but "for David, because his father had done him shame" (v. 34). He loves David, dishonored and cursed by Saul, with the same ardor with which he had once loved him in the splendor of his youth and victory.

Jonathan comes to David's assistance in this extremity. In a last touching interview "they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded" (v. 41). How Jonathan's lovable and sympathetic character endears him to us; yet nevertheless he lacked one thing, one thing only; he did not have enough faith to follow the rejected king. His position, it is true, made such a step very difficult, but for faith difficulties ought not to count. Jonathan should have shared David's afflictions more fully than with his heart alone, and because he did not do so he was later obliged to share his father's defeat and ruin.

Chapter 21

In the preceding chapter David had shown himself to be somewhat below his usual quality of character. Here it is likewise, for he lies to Ahimelech and uses a ruse that is not to his honor in the presence of Achish. Yet nevertheless at Nob (vv. 1-6) he presents us with one of the most important features of the rejected Messiah. This incident is noted in Matthew 12:1-8, Mark 2:23-28, and Luke 6:1-5.

In the first of these passages the Lord having proclaimed that true rest is found in Himself (Matt. 11:28-30), leaves his disciples free to carry out an act permitted by the law (Deut. 23:25), but which in the eyes of the Pharisees violated and profaned the Sabbath. The situation had been the same for David at Nob, for it was on a Sabbath day, the day when the shewbread was replaced (cf. Lev. 24:8), that he presented himself before the priest. Now why did the Lord act in this way? It was because like David He Himself, the Beloved, had been rejected by the people whom the legal system ordained by God had proved unable to lead to recognize their Messiah. The Sabbath,

sign of the covenant between God and His people, was thus being violated by the fact that the people were rejecting their God. There was no more rest under the old legal system. Henceforth the Father was obliged to work anew, and the Son Himself was working with Him. Man's Sabbath had ended, and the rejection of God in the person of His Son had as consequence the abandoning of the legal system of the Jews, the right of the Son of man to use the Sabbath as He saw fit, and the introduction of a new system in which He associated His disciples and companions with Himself. Christ having been rejected, as David had been, there was no more rest for the creature in this world, but rather a rest outside of this world based upon the work of redemption and which could be possessed through the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

A second fact accompanied David's rejection. He had Ahimelech give him the shewbread which only the priests were allowed to eat once it had been removed from the table. This bread taken from before God's presence was "in a manner common" (v. 5). In the presence of the rejection of His king, what

value could the shewbread, which presented the true Israel in Christ to God, have in God's sight. So David could consider this bread profane. Sovereign grace rose above legal ordinances, for it was more important to feed David and his followers than to preserve that which had become old.

David asks for a weapon. Ahimelech has no arms other than Goliath's sword. This instrument of David's victory was kept behind the ephod wrapped in a cloth, looked after and set in a place of honor under the very eyes of God. Likewise the testimony of Christ's victory, death, by which He conquered the prince of death, has been carried as a memorial into the most holy place where Jesus has entered in by His own blood.

David said: "There is none like that" (v. 9). Let us not forget that, if David is a type of Christ, he is often also at the same time a type of believers. Like David, we go weaponless to meet the enemy, but one weapon alone is sufficient for us: the death of Christ and our death with Him. We find this in the sanctuary.

There is none like it and Satan can do nothing against this weapon which has vanquished him.

Armed in this manner, David goes to Achish, the king of Gath (vv. 10-15). Why then is he struck with fear as he presents himself before this king? It is because he was led there by his natural wisdom and not by the Lord. No more than Egypt for Abraham ought Philistia to be a refuge for David. Thinking to escape Saul in this way, he merely exchanges one enemy for another and finds dishonor and contempt.

But it is very comforting to consider in the two psalms that are attributed to this point of his history the experiences that David had of which the historical account tells us nothing.

Psalm 56 was composed “when the Philistines took him in Gath.”* The weakness of his faith had caused him to seek refuge with Israel’s enemies. What does he find there? Man, who instead of helping him oppresses him and would swallow him up (v. 1). He whom carnal fear had led to flee from Saul now learns what the flesh is. He whom confidence in man had

made to go down to Achish now finds what man is. He finds only danger and threats. His enemies gather together, they hide themselves, marking his steps and lying in wait for his soul, wresting his words all day long, formulating their thoughts against him for evil; but he still has God. He has learned to trust completely in God: “In the day that I am afraid, I will confide in Thee” (Ps. 56:3). This is the great lesson that God had taught him. If God is for him, what can the flesh do to him? “In God I put my confidence: I will not fear; what can flesh do unto me?” (Ps. 56:4). What will man do to him? “In God have I put my confidence: I will not fear; what can man do unto me?” (Ps. 56:11). Now, delivered from death, he desires to be kept from falling in the future. Nothing makes our walk steady like trial, discipline, and the experiences that are related thereto: “For Thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt thou not keep my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?” (Ps. 56:13).

- * It should not be thought that only the psalms of David which have a heading are drawn from the experiences of the king-

prophet during the various events of his life. Far from that; but we will stay with the facts that the inspired Word expressly points out. Often in other Psalms we can distinguish certain circumstances in David's life as having been the point of departure for the inspired song.

Psalm 34 was composed “when [David] changed his behavior before Abimelech,* who drove him away, and he departed.” This psalm celebrates the Lord's tender care of the believer under trial and expresses David's confidence, flowing out of the fact that in his affliction, God had taken his cause in hand. This man of God in seeking help from Achish had had only a broken reed in hand. Now, instructed by God, he can say: “I sought Jehovah, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears” (v. 4). “This afflicted one called, and Jehovah heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles” (v. 6). He had learned the lesson that God was teaching him through His discipline. The experience he had just had enabled him to encourage others: “Taste and see that Jehovah is good: blessed is the man that trusts in him!” (v. 8).

* Title of the king of the Philistines (cf. Gen. 20:2).

Moreover he learned from experience that deception and lying could not procure good: “What man is he that desires life, and loves days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile” (vv. 12-13).

David's experience at the court of Achish had been deeply humiliating, for the dignity which God had conferred upon him had been compromised by his behavior. His heart was broken and his spirit overwhelmed because of this, but under this discipline he had learned to know himself and to know the Lord in a more intimate way, and what more could he desire? “Jehovah is nigh to those that are of a broken heart, and saves them that are of a contrite spirit” (v. 18).

Thus in his prophetic songs the soul of this man of God expresses what he had learned personally through the afflictions and the discipline which were necessary for him.

Chapter 22

“And David departed thence, and escaped to the cave of Adullam” (v. 1). That is where he composed the beautiful 142nd Psalm which expresses the feelings filling his soul in his solitude. “There is no man that knows me: refuge has failed me; no man cares for my soul” (v. 4). “In the way wherein I walked have they hidden a snare for me” (v. 3), This is written when — what mockery — Saul had the audacity to accuse him, saying: “My son has stirred up my servant as a liar-in-wait against me” (1 Sam. 22:8). But David found, precisely because all human refuge failed him, a sure refuge for his soul: “I cried unto Thee, Jehovah, I said, Thou art my refuge” (Ps. 142:5). He could count on the God of Israel for deliverance from his persecutors, for they were stronger than he (v. 6). Could David ever regret being found at such an extremity, abandoned by all, since there it was that his soul knew and appreciated the sovereign refuge that is found in God? Thus the psalm ends with the assurance that filled his soul, for his time of solitude and of

being forsaken would come to an end. “The righteous,” he says, “shall surround me” (v. 7).

After this pouring out of his soul, in that same cave of Adullam David receives the Lord's answer as the firstfruits of his confidence. He is no longer alone. “And his brethren and all his father's house heard it, and they went down thither to him” (1 Sam. 22:1). David, a type of the rejected Christ, becomes a center of attraction for his brothers. His family, all his relatives, gather themselves around him. They were for David, as for Christ, “the excellent of the earth.” They recognized the Lord's anointed in him, the one through whom the Lord would save His people, the instrument of grace in Israel. They knew that they, even as the head of their family, could expect nothing from the world but contempt and and persecution; so their only resource was to seek refuge in the one who from the human point of view was himself without resource.

But another class of people also sought refuge with David in the cave of Adullam: “And every one in distress, and every one

that was in debt, and every one of embittered spirit collected round him; and he became a captain over them” (v. 2). Not only those related to him because they shared a common origin, but also such who had no such bond, joined David. Their common characteristic was that they had lost everything. Some were “in distress,” not knowing which way to turn; others were “in debt,” unable to pay; and finally, others were “of embittered spirit,” having sorrows for which there was no remedy, created by the state of things in Israel.

All these found a sure refuge with David as is found today with a rejected Christ. But they found much more. David is able to create, to form, the most wretched beings in his own image. The reflection of his moral beauty falls on those who have nothing to bring him but their misery. In the dark cave of Adullam the light shining forth from David shines on these four hundred men who surround him, and that which grace made of them in the day of tribulation will be recognized by all eyes, acclaimed by every mouth in the day of glory which is

already approaching. All these outlaws will surround the king's throne and will be called "David's mighty men" (2 Sam. 23:8).

But that was not the full extent of the resources included in the cave of Adullam for the companions of the son of Jesse: Gad the prophet (v. 5), God's mouthpiece and the one who bore His testimony, was there with David. The revelation of God's mind, absent from Saul's court and from his people, found refuge there. Lastly, the king's murderous act against Nob drives Abiathar the priest to David (v. 20). Later he comes to him with the ephod in his hand (1 Sam. 23:6). The means of approaching God, of consulting Him at all times, of entering into fellowship with Him, is the happy privilege of these vagabond people whom the world dishonors and despises.

Dear reader, have you found refuge with the rejected Christ? A person doesn't do so until he is without resource and has lost all hope of helping himself. The world in this case will despise you, but not as much as you will despise yourself. And nonetheless you will lack nothing. The felt presence of the Lord Je-

sus experienced by your soul; the treasures of the Word placed at your disposition and known, as even a Jonathan clinging to Saul's court was never able to know them; and finally the means of approaching God, furnished by the priesthood of Christ who brings us into fellowship with Him: such are the benefits which our David dispenses during the time of His rejection.

Nothing more is wanting than that He be manifested in glory to the eyes of all, for already He is manifested as the center of His Assembly, even if this, as here, should consist of only four hundred faithful souls united around Him.

In verse 5, David obeys the word that Gad brings him: "Abide not in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah." Here he is then in the very territory of the enemy, but what does he have to fear and what can Saul do to him? The Lord is with him. What does it matter if he acts contrary to all human prudence? God has designs of grace and blessing in what He commands; our business is to obey.

Saul summons Ahimelech and accuses David of conspiring against himself and of lying in wait for him (vv. 7-8, 13). Ahimelech with noble frankness openly speaks the truth and bears witness to David, that peerless man, who is “faithful ... who is the king’s son-in-law, and has access to thy secret council, and is honorable in thy house.” Surely this is no insulting word, but it is a severe lesson given to Saul. The delicacy of his feelings prevents Ahimelech from mentioning the lie that David had used to have the bread and sword given to him: a lie that would have compromised him in Saul’s eyes. But it is this lie which finally leads to the ruin of the priest and all his house. David is well aware of this when he tells Abiathar: “I am accountable for all the lives of thy father’s house” (v. 22). Thus he judges himself. But at the same time he is from God’s side a type of the One who is the believer’s safeguard: “Abide with me, fear not; for he that seeks my life seeks thy life; for with me thou art in safe keeping” (v. 23). This is a perfect compensation for what Abiathar and his father’s house had to suffer for the sake of the Lord’s anointed.

This is where Psalm 52 comes in. David had learned that “Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said unto him, David came to the house of Ahimelech.” And so he announces judgment without mercy on the Edomite, Israel's sworn enemy. But that does not at all destroy the confidence and assurance of the man of God. Much to the contrary, against the dark background of this wickedness the believer's blessed portion stands out in all its splendor: “But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I will confide in the loving-kindness of God for ever and ever. I will praise Thee for ever, because Thou hast done it; and I will wait on Thy name, before Thy godly ones, for it is good (Ps. 52:8-9).

Chapter 23

The Philistines fight against Keilah. David could have refrained from intervening and could have left the trouble of helping them up to Saul, but such abstention is far from the thoughts of this man of faith. Here the rejected David becomes a savior to Israel. He stands in the breach, but not without hav-

ing consulted the Lord. Abiathar had not yet come down with the ephod; David was still lacking this means ordained by God for consulting Him. The outward resources may be beyond reach but access to God will never be, for this is free and wide open to all. David speaks with God as with a friend. Full of condescension, the Lord answers and — strikingly — in a manner more intimate and more detailed than when David consults Him with the ephod. He fills the heart of His beloved one with confidence and assurance. Whatever his companions may say (v. 3), David, acting on the word of God does not allow their fears to stop him, and he fights for the people of Israel even though they are the tool of his worst enemy. So it is with our salvation through Christ, wrought for us in our condition of enmity toward Him.

We find this truth, already perceived in the history of Jonathan, here again: that the fight of faith is waged outside of man's religious system which can only hinder it. On the rare occasions when he inquires of the Lord Saul does not receive an answer, or receives an answer by the lot which pronounces judgment on

his entire behavior (1 Sam. 14:40). David without the outward aid of divine ordinances converses directly with his God.

From this point onward we see David hounded, pursued, and betrayed, hiding in caves, in forests, endangered in cities, seeking refuge in strongholds, wandering on the mountains, on the hills, living in the wilderness of Judah, in that of Ziph, of Maon, of Paran, having no place to rest his head.

He enters Keilah. Saul in his terrible blindness can say: “God has cast him off into mine hand,” although he had heard Samuel’s solemn word: “[Jehovah] has also rejected thee from being king!” (1 Sam. 15:23). What hardening of heart! The persecutor of the “beloved one” believes that he knows God and has Him on his side, but he does not know the God of Israel any better than he knows himself. So, just as it says in Psalm 2:4: “He that dwells in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision”; so the Word answers here with well-deserved irony: “God did not give him into his hand” (v. 14).

When the ephod is brought (v. 6) God answers by the ephod and David receives adequate direction. It is lovely to see him take on the character of a servant here. He, to whom the kingdom belonged, claims only the most humble place before God. “Jehovah, God of Israel, Thy servant has heard for certain ... will Saul come down, as Thy servant has heard? Jehovah, God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell Thy servant” (vv. 10-11). In this, is he not a lovely type of Christ who, knowing that the Father had placed all things in His hands, came not to be served but to serve God and His own?

In the wilderness of Ziph Jonathan comes to visit David (vv. 16-18). On many an occasion Jonathan had proved, as we have seen, how dear David was to him. He had warned him of the danger that he was risking (1 Sam. 19:2), had spoken well of him to Saul (1 Sam. 19:4), had made a covenant with him, acknowledging his rights to the kingdom (1 Sam. 20:12-17), had borne shame and had suffered for him (1 Sam. 20:34); what then still remained for him to do? A visit to David to reassure him of his affection? No. In the life of a man of faith there al-

ways comes a critical moment when he must break his ties with the old system according to the flesh which, in actual fact, is in the hands of the enemy of God. God is going to judge this political and religious system. Today the situation is the same in Christendom as it once was in Saul's world. That which is allied to the system will fall with it and will be involved, even if only outwardly, in its loss. Well as he loved David, Jonathan was walking in this old order of things, established around the king according to the flesh, that was going to disappear. What was there to do but leave it when it was raising hateful, direct opposition to the Lord's anointed? He needed to break off with his father's court, take his place with David, with those bankrupt men at Adullam, a humiliating position for a king's son; he needed to stay at Ziph with David, in his thoughts taking not the next place to him (v. 17), but like Abigail the place of a servant of the servants of his lord. Alas! Jonathan had a position to maintain, and whereas David returns to the wood Jonathan goes to his house! (v. 18).

Yet nevertheless God grants him the lovely privilege of encouraging David in his pathway. Jonathan, it says, “strengthened his hand in God” (v. 16). And what is more, he brings David the prophetic word: “Fear not; for the hand of Saul my father will not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel,” but he adds: “and I shall be next to thee.” When it is a matter of himself he completely loses the prophetic view, and this corresponds very well to the mixed-up condition of his soul.

Keilah would have betrayed David; Ziph positively betrays him and takes part in Saul's evil designs. There is the same hardening on part of the king, who uses the Lord's name to cover his own iniquity. “Blessed be ye of Jehovah; for ye have compassion upon me!” (v. 21). And speaking of David he says: “It is told me that he deals very subtly” (v. 22). Subtly! when the Lord whom he consulted was warning him against his enemy's ambushes! This phrase “very subtly” was a direct insult against the Lord though Saul was beyond being accountable for it!

This is where Psalm 54 comes in, composed “when the Ziphites came, and said to Saul, “Is not David hiding himself with us?” In contrast to Saul who invokes the name of Jehovah, David, rejected from the midst of the people, without any apparent link to Jehovah, calls on the name of God: “O God, by Thy name save me, and by Thy strength do me justice” (v. 1). What God is as God is the resource of his soul. “Strangers,” the Ziphites, had “risen up against” him, “the violent,” Saul and his bands, “[seeking] after [his] life”; and all the while they were invoking the name of the Lord “they [had] not set God before them” (v. 3). But this God whom they did not know was David’s helper (v. 4), and when his enemies would be destroyed and he himself be delivered from every distress, he would be the one to celebrate the name of Jehovah, the God of Israel whose relationship with His people would thus be re-established.

In the wilderness of Maon David is in dire distress, but man’s extremity is God’s opportunity. He directs the events and counts the hours, the minutes, the seconds. All our times are in

His hand. At the very last moment a messenger comes to inform Saul of an attack of the Philistines (1 Sam. 23:27), and the king abandons his pursuit. This is how our God shows Himself to be superior to the difficulties that seem bound to swallow us up.

Psalm 63 is a magnificent example of the intimate experiences of David's soul "when he was in the wilderness of Judah." He considers it a desolate place, for he remembers the sanctuary where he had contemplated God; but if there is thirst it is thirst for God, and he desires that the power and the glory of the sanctuary accompany him in the wilderness and manifest themselves in his life here upon earth. The wilderness drives him to God and makes him desire that He manifest His character in the difficult circumstances through which he is passing. God answers his request by showing him his loving-kindness. His loving-kindness is His glory. David finds it to be more precious than life, preserved by the power of God from Saul's ambushes. And this power will continue to sustain him: "Thy right hand upholds me."

The result of this knowledge of God in the wilderness is that David's soul “follows hard after [Him].” Thus, his heart is bound more intimately, more practically to his God through the experiences of this desolate place. As for Saul, he will “be given over to the power of the sword,” whereas the king, the Lord's anointed, anticipates rejoicing in God on the day when every mouth will be stopped, a joy which he already is tasting in the wilderness (vv. 5, 7) so that his soul is satisfied.

Chapter 24

Saul, returned from his campaign against the Philistines, gathers three thousand chosen men to lay hold of David. Thus in the same pursuit he includes Israel's enemies and her savior. An outward zeal for safeguarding the people of God may very well ally itself with a veritable hatred for Christ.

Saul enters a cave located near the sheepfolds to relieve himself and rest. At the back of the cave with his little troop is the man whom Saul wrongly esteems to be his enemy. God's providence at this moment is delivering Saul, defenseless, into

David's hands. David's companions in their ignorance conclude that God Himself is furnishing their master the occasion to avenge himself, but David's spiritual intelligence is not fooled. His character as the rejected king is that of grace and not of judgment (it is the same with Christ), and divine providence here offers grace an admirable occasion to manifest itself.

There is also another reason for David to refrain from drawing the sword. As long as God has not Himself executed the sentence pronounced upon Saul he still bears the name “the Lord's anointed.” Whatever the evil may be, we have no right to destroy that which God allows to subsist. Doubtless there must be full separation between ourselves and evil, but we are not called to set the bounds of God's longsuffering. A spiritual Christian recognizes the authority which God has established even if it be enemy and apostate, and he leaves to God the care and the timing of executing judgement against it. Providential circumstances are not ordained to govern our conduct or to direct it, but to put our faith to the test. Such was the case with Moses at Pharaoh's court where God's providence had placed

him. When the moment was come he refused to be part of that court and left Egypt, not fearing the king's wrath (Heb. 11). It was faith that directed him and not the providential ways of God.

Nevertheless David cuts off the skirt of Saul's robe. This was a token intended to give the enemy proof of the grace which was sparing him. David's heart (not his conscience) reproaches him for even this act, for viewed outwardly, he had been lacking in the respect and deference due to the Lord's anointed although down deep he was full of grace toward his persecutor.

“And David checked his men with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul” (v. 7). His companions are formed by him and by his example, and in this way David's character is reflected in all those who surround him and who have acknowledged him as their leader.

The skirt of this cut robe serves to vindicate before Saul the character of the servant whom he was misjudging and to open his eyes as to his own state: “For in that I cut off the skirt of thy

robe, and killed thee not, know and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in my hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou liest in wait for my life to take it” (v. 11). Thus God often calls sinners through circumstances where His grace has preserved them by drawing their attention to the fact that their state deserved judgment. Nevertheless, if one hardens his heart after this he must know that judgment will not be delayed. “Jehovah judge between me and thee, and Jehovah avenge me of thee” (v. 12).

A lovely feature of the character of the man of God comes out here. In his own eyes he is less than Saul, less than nothing: “After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a single flea.” In this vein Paul says of his dear Corinthians: “The ignoble things of the world, and the despised ... and things that are not” (1 Cor. 1:28), and of himself: “Neither the planter is anything” (1 Cor. 3:7). But those who are nothing in their own eyes are something in God's eyes, and this exalts and glorifies Him: “Jehovah therefore shall be judge, and judge between me and thee, and

see, and plead my cause, and do me justice in delivering me out of thy hand” (v. 15). “If God be for us, who against us?” The love of God for us: that is what glorifies Him!

“Saul lifted up his voice and wept” (v. 16). Seeing himself so miraculously preserved, he acknowledges (but for how long?) the grace and righteousness that are in David: “Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil” (v. 17). He even acknowledges that the kingdom belongs to David: “And now behold, I know that thou shalt certainly be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thy hand” (v. 20). An reprobate heart — it is very serious to consider — may be softened in the presence of grace without being changed. God does not ask us for feelings, however righteous they may be; it is faith that counts, for faith alone is able to regenerate and save a sinner.

“Thou hast showed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me!” (v. 18). How different is this “this day” from the words of an Abigail who through faith says, even before David had

proved it to her: “Evil has not been found in thee all thy days!” (1 Sam. 25:28).

Saul goes so far as to count on David to preserve his seed. David, a beautiful example of grace, “swore to Saul” (v. 22), for grace will not be limited. Will Saul know enough to avail himself of it? No: “Saul went home.” Alas! godly Jonathan, his son, had done the same thing (1 Sam. 23:18). Whatever step the flesh may have taken, whatever truth the flesh may have acknowledged, there is always a point at which the flesh stops: the point where faith alone can act. Before “Come, follow me,” even the most amiable flesh turns its back, perhaps with sadness, but it prefers the “great possessions” of its home above the shame of Him who has no place in this world to rest His head! (Matt. 19:22).

How sweet it is to witness David's feelings in Psalm 57 “when he fled from Saul in the cave.” He knows that “God ... performs” [The French says: “brings to a good conclusion”] all for him” (v. 2). His faith already takes hold of imminent deliver-

ance: “He will send from the heavens and save me; He has covered with reproach him that would swallow me up” (v. 3). “They have digged a pit before me; they are fallen into the midst thereof” (v. 6). This fixes his heart (v. 7) and prompts him to trust himself completely to the hands of Him who “has sent forth His loving-kindness and His truth” in order to save him. Prepared in this way, he does not seek to avenge himself, but he commits himself to Him who has said: “Vengeance is mine ... saith the Lord.” Thus on every occasion David is prepared by the Spirit of God to commit his cause into His hands, thus free to be occupied only with the Lord and with His praise. “My heart is fixed: I will sing, yea, I will sing psalms ... For Thy loving-kindness is great unto the heavens, and Thy truth unto the clouds!” (vv. 7, 10).

Chapter 25

Samuel dies (v. 1), and his death is like a prelude to the last period of Saul's history. The faithful servant who had judged Israel during difficult times and who had performed the functions

of the priesthood on her behalf in the midst of the collapse that had followed the ruin of the priesthood, the man whom God had chosen to anoint the king according to the flesh and then the king according to grace, the prophet before all — the first of the prophets — was no more. In the midst of these dark times the grace of God maintained communication with the people through the prophetic word. In all the important acts of his life Saul had met the prophet who came so that he might know God's thoughts, orders, counsels, and judgments. No doubt he had not listened to them, but he had been able to hear them. It is an immense privilege as well as an immense responsibility to have the divine word within reach, and Saul had enjoyed this privilege. Samuel himself during his lifetime had transmitted the Word to prophets raised up of God in order to teach others. Now these prophets themselves were no longer answering (1 Sam. 28:6, 15). This whole dispensation had come to an end for Saul and for his people. The priesthood, destroyed by him, had sought refuge with the true king. God the prophet accompanied David in the wilderness and in the

caves. Israel and her king were left like a disabled ship without pilot and without compass, driven toward the abyss in the darkness, while a new dawn was about to rise for the faithful.

Is it surprising that Israel gathered together and mourned over Samuel? He who had interceded for them and even for their king ardently without respite was no longer. What was left for them? What terrible judgment when God withdraws His grace, resolutely despised! No other resource remained for Saul but to return to those things he had vomited forth (1 Sam. 28:7). Do we not find in him a picture of apostate Christendom returning to idolatry when God withdraws His Spirit of truth and leaves it as a prey to the lying spirit?

But before we get occupied with Saul's last days God unfolds a new scene in our chapter. Nabal, a violent man who knows no restraint, despises and insults the Lord's anointed. This is one of the characteristics of the man of sin in the end times.

Nabal, we are told (v. 3), “was a Calebite.” As a family trait these two men shared energy of nature, but this energy in the

service of the flesh produces a Nabal, whereas in the service of faith it produces a Caleb, for one may yield one's members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness or to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:13).

The only effect of grace on such a man is to excite him to evil and rebellion. A Saul may sometimes allow himself to become softened (1 Sam. 24:17); a Nabal: never.

David and his companions continue dwelling in the wilderness of Judah, waiting on God for the hour and the signal for their deliverance, but there David has occasion to prove himself the protector of the weak, exposed to a thousand dangers during the night watches. "Neither was there aught missed by them" as long as they were with him (v. 7).

David's activity in grace is not limited to this. If like the Lord when here on earth he is depending upon man for some refreshment, he to whom by rights everything belongs brings to the sinner, to Nabal, in exchange for this, peace through his messengers. "Peace be to thee, and peace be to thy house, and

peace be to all that thou hast!” (v. 6). Does Nabal want this peace after the so evident protection of his men and his flocks? For such grace and courtesy did not David have the right to ask for some proof of thankfulness? What does Nabal answer? “Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there are many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master. And shall I take my bread, and my water, and my flesh which I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men whom I know not whence they are?” (vv. 10-11). This same expression later came forth from the mouth of the chief men in the presence of the Lord's work. “As to this man, we know not whence he is” (John 9:29). This is how man treated the rejected Jesus; he despises His sovereign grace without apprehending His power in judgment and without thinking that this judgment is at the door. Nabal speaks of his bread, of his water, of his meat, and of his goods as though they belonged to him, and this at the very moment when calamity is about to strike him personally along with all that belongs to him. When he should have been falling down on his knees before the one who voluntarily had become

his servant, he rather disdainfully calls him a “servant who has broken away from his master”! Without a scruple and without thinking that it signified rejecting David personally, he rejects his messengers. “He that rejects you rejects Me; and he that rejects Me rejects Him that sent Me” (Luke 10:16). Their master had sent them to bless, and Nabal insults them (v. 14).

David is in danger of giving free vent to his indignation and of “avenging [himself] with [his] own hand” (vv. 26, 34). This is where, it seems to me, the experience of Psalm 35 is found: “They reward me evil for good” (v. 12; cf. 1 Sam. 25:21). “They speak not peace” (v. 20; cf. 1 Sam. 25:6). “I behaved myself as though he had been a friend, a brother to me” (v. 14). “Them that are wrongfully mine enemies” (v. 19; cf. 1 Sam. 25:26). But David had learned the lesson God wanted to teach him. Instead of defending his rights himself he commits his cause to the Lord: “Stir up Thyself, and awake for my right, for my cause, my God and Lord” (v. 23). “Let them be ashamed and brought to confusion together that rejoice at mine ad-

versity” (v. 26), and he commits judgment to Him: “Let destruction come upon him unawares!” (v. 8).

Before having received this teaching from the mouth of godly Abigail, David had girded on his sword and had ordered his companions to do the same. He was getting ahead of the moment for vengeance; the hour of judgment had not yet struck; it would come through the means of One greater than David. Of Him it is said: “Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Mighty One, in Thy majesty and Thy splendor” (Ps. 45:3); but as long as David was a stranger in his inheritance it was still the time of grace.

Abigail's faith understood this. This weak woman, knowing what was appropriate to grace, becomes God's instrument to keep the greatest of His servants, the very anointed of the Lord himself, from evil. Only one Man — Grace in person, the grace of God which has appeared to all men — being infallible, never needed to be reminded of the feelings that befit the position that He had taken here on earth.

We can all learn in Abigail's school. One rarely finds a more disinterested affection based on the perfections her faith was discerning in David.

When she learns that “evil is determined” against Nabal and against all his household she hastens to prepare everything that her husband had refused to David, and much more besides, without stinting, and she quickly goes to meet him. Oh! that souls who have heard that evil is decided against them might do the same. There is no time to lose: haste is essential; the avenger is already on His way. When the announcement of judgment is received as a divine testimony one hastens to escape it. This is faith. There is no other resource but to go to meet Him who is going to judge. Abigail had but one fear: that she might not meet David before his sword was drawn. She knew that then it would be too late. But she had no fear about the result of their meeting, for she knew the character of the one whom she would address.

“And when Abigail saw David, she hasted and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let the iniquity be!” (vv. 23-24). Here again Abigail makes haste; she hastens to acknowledge David's lordship, his rights over her, and her own unworthiness. She supplicates him and thus recognizes that she is dependant on his good pleasure. Much more, in taking this attitude she, the woman of faith, recognizes herself as being guilty, taking on herself all the consequences of her association with Nabal. She does not come to plead her innocence, although she had had no knowledge of what had happened (v. 25). In David's presence she has no other wish but to find herself guilty, and she hastens to confess it for she knows David's grace.

She makes haste yet one more time toward the end of the chapter (v. 42). This is when she is called by David to become his companion in suffering (cf. 1 Sam. 27:3) and later to share his reign. “And David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her as his wife ... And Abigail hasted, and arose ... and she

went after the messengers of David, and became his wife” (vv. 39-42). No delay; she hastens to meet the one who loves her, to meet the king of grace; she does not postpone her departure for better times when David's throne would be made firm. She leaves everything without thinking for an instant of what she was leaving behind. And she even declares herself unworthy of such an honor; for hers is the most humble place. Such a destiny cannot on the other hand fill her with pride, for she understands that if the king's favor is calling her to share his sufferings so as to then raise her to the highest place, the service of the king must humble her to take the lowest place. “Behold, let thy handmaid be a bondwoman to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.” What humility in this wife of the king! Only fellowship with grace, with Jesus, will enable us to abase ourselves in the dust like this, but just as Abigail abases herself, so the king increases in dignity and in majesty, and this is what his wife's heart desires.

Let us not forget, dear Christian readers, that one of faith's characteristics is to hasten. Abraham made haste when it was a

matter of the Lord's service (Gen. 18:6-8); Zacchaeus did so when the Savior invited him to receive Him into his house (Luke 19:6); Mary did so when the Lord called her to come to Him (John 11:29). If it is a matter of Him and of His Person, can we ever hasten enough? But on the other hand, should we not keep ourselves from the haste that so often characterizes the flesh and the old man? "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood" (Prov. 1:16; Prov. 6:18), "to strive" (Prov. 25:8), "to be rich" (Prov. 28:20, 22). When it is a matter concerning ourselves, let us not do as the world, spoken of here, for it says elsewhere: "He that trusts shall not make haste" (Isa. 28:16; Rom. 9:33).

She is admirable, this Abigail, for her appreciation of David. We find everything in her from her sense of her lord's dignity that impels her to bow down before him to the rapture that his beauty of character brings about. "My lord fights the battles of Jehovah, and evil has not been found in thee all thy days" (v. 28). How could her heart fail to be attracted by the sight of perfection in a man? Yet still, David, a type of Christ, is in himself

only an imperfect man. Christ would never have been in danger of procuring justice for Himself. Only the grace of God preserves David when he had already resolved to leave none of his enemies alive. Abigail is the instrument used by God to cause him to retract his decision and to prevent him from losing the character of grace befitting to the Lord's anointed.

Everything Abigail says is the fruit of her communion with God's thoughts. It is not prophecy, but she knows what will happen to David because she knows what God thinks of him. "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with Jehovah thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall He sling out from the hollow of the sling" (v. 29), and "Jehovah ... shall appoint thee ruler over Israel" (v. 30). Saul, the king of Israel, is in Abigail's estimation only "a man ... risen up to pursue [David] and to seek [his] life." In his antagonism against the son of Jesse he does not even merit the mention of his name.

It is easy to see that Abigail's words are not inspired by fear of what might happen to her household, but she is indignant at the evil that one has dared to wish on such a man; she desires that his character be preserved from dishonor; without reserve she admires the future king of Israel.

And so David blesses her. He will indeed remember her according to her request. Her “Remember thy handmaid” finds an ear just as attentive as does much later the “Remember me” of the converted thief. David sends her back to her house with the peace which Nabal had not desired and with the assurance of his favor (vv. 6, 35). There she will patiently wait for the message of the beloved one calling her to himself.

But during this time judgment overtakes Nabal. “He held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king.” Such is man! Nabal substitutes himself for David and only thinks of treating himself well. He becomes drunk and is in no condition to know anything of what awaits him. His doom is fixed. When he does learn of it “his heart died within him, and he became as a

stone.” He is already dead before being actually stricken dead ten days later.

Men's fate hinges on this alternative: whether they despise Christ today during His rejection, or whether they esteem Him as God esteems Him and appeal to His grace which alone can “accept their person.”

Happy David! He has found a wife according to his heart, a wife whom he blesses and whose wisdom he blesses (v. 33), a true helpmeet in the difficulties of his career. He blesses her for hindering him from doing evil which would have dishonored his God. Saul had blessed the Ziphites who had offered themselves to carry out his evil plans against David, and in the name of the Lord had hailed as deliverers those who would have helped him to make war against His anointed!

Chapter 26

The Ziphites reappear with their offers of betrayal. Without caring about the king's lack of righteousness and about the

grace David had shown to him they turn to the one from whom they hope to obtain advantages or whose displeasure would be able to harm them. Such disdain for David's person and character are perhaps more terrible than Nabal's crude affront. The Ziphites are a true picture of the Christian world today. In appearance it welcomes Christ and in reality it betrays Him. The favors it covets cannot be given by Jesus; therefore they turn to the enemy to obtain them, “deny[ing] the Master that bought them” (2 Peter 2:1).

Saul has forgotten everything: the grace which spared him in the cave of En-gedi, his own words of repentance, and the generous oath that David had sworn to him to spare his seed. His old hatred rises again; a proposal from the Ziphites is enough to kindle the fire smoldering within him. Animosity against Christ may lie dormant in the natural man; some occasion revives it; then one sees that nothing is changed in the sinner's heart and that it is, as always, desperately wicked.

David sends spies and is informed of everything while Saul is still searching for him. There comes a time for the believer when a certain confidence in his enemies is no longer justified, when we must be on our guard and refrain from revealing to them our secrets which they would only use as weapons against us. We are not ignorant of their designs and, if the Word recommends that we be guileless as doves, it also at the same time exhorts us to be prudent as serpents. That is what characterizes David here and what characterized the Lord Himself when He was asked whether it was necessary to pay tribute to Caesar.

But when it is a matter of confidence in God, all of David's prudence disappears. He advances boldly — the world would say “recklessly” — with Abishai alone into the midst of three thousand adversaries and fearlessly goes to seek out his enemy. Faith that feeds on difficulties grows through meeting them. The hill of Hachilah where David goes towards Saul is the witness of greater faith than was the cave of En-gedi where Saul inadvertently fell into David's hands. But however varied the circumstances may be in which faith is involved, the principles

that direct faith are unchanging. Saul, although on the verge of judgment, remains the Lord's anointed to David as long as God has not given the final signal. For David to act otherwise toward him than in grace would be to deny his character all the more seriously since he had received the Lord's approbation at En-gedi. Abishai, David's companion, lays a snare for him here without even realizing it himself, and probably because of the very affection he bears for his master. Knowing that David will not avenge himself, Abishai offers to avenge him. (v. 8). Had this taken place, the rejected king's character of grace would have been entirely compromised once again. This is one of Satan's principal objects with regard to believers. If he can induce us to take our own interests in hand, to avenge ourselves, to demand our rights in this world, he makes us fall from faith because at the same time we become like the world we deny our confidence in God alone. David had been in danger of giving up this principle in the matter with Nabal, but he had learned his lesson; God had strengthened him and his own heart had no need to reproach him as at the "rocks of the wild

goats.” “Destroy him not,” he says to Abishai, “for who can stretch forth his hand against Jehovah's anointed, and be guiltless?” (v. 9). This unchanging principle follows him until just after Saul's death, when he has the pretended murderer of the king struck down: “How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thy hand to destroy Jehovah's anointed?” (2 Sam. 1:14). Thus until his last breath Saul remains inviolable for David, as being the Lord's anointed.

Often we fail where David triumphed. In the face of the persistent unrighteousness of men after having acted in grace once or twice this seems enough to us, and we think we are right to resist and protest against iniquity. If we walk with God we will learn very quickly that by protesting we move out of His pathway, and if we act contrary to this knowledge Satan will quickly make us his prey.

The deep sleep that God had caused to fall on Saul and on all the camp might have given birth to the thought of taking advantage of such a moment. This was not so. God had sent this

sleep to preserve His beloved and not to give him an occasion to avenge himself. God would save him in view of the work of grace He would call Him to accomplish toward Saul. Grace is reserved for David; judgment is reserved for the Lord. But David takes a token, as he had taken one in the cave. The spear and the cruse of water are two witnesses by which the events that had taken place are confirmed. The weapon that Saul had sought to use against David more than once is now found in David's hand. Would he use it against the Lord's anointed as he had once used Goliath's sword against this enemy of Israel? In no way. It is enough for David to take away from Saul that which he had used in his effort to harm David, to show the king that he was well aware of his weapons and that they were powerless against him.

Now David goes far away from sleeping Saul and puts “a great space ... between them” (v. 13). To have acted otherwise would have been blind confidence in man. Sometimes the world must see the distance that separates it from the children of God. If

they do not distance themselves from the world they often support it in its illusion as to its condition.

In speaking to Abner (vv. 13-16), not without irony, David shows him that there is more interest and care for the world in a child of God than in those who pretend to support, help, or defend it.

And now (vv. 17-20) Saul is summoned to answer the one whom he is pursuing like “a partridge on the mountains.” “Why?” “What have I done?” These questions elicit only silence. Before them every mouth will be closed forever. If it is the Lord who has stirred up Saul against David why does He deliver David from his hand? If it is men let them be cursed, those men who have driven David from his inheritance and compared him, the Lord's anointed, to idol worshippers, as later they compared Jesus to demons. This sin will not be forgiven them.

But all that David asks is that his “blood [not] fall to the earth far from the face of Jehovah” (v. 20), that he may serve the

Lord, and that his death be approved by Him in the very place from which the king of Israel is seeking to chase him. Just as Jesus later on, so David must suffer in Judah; this is why the word of the Lord had sent him there (1 Sam. 22:5), and if he must die to glorify the Lord, that is where he must die.

Saul says: “I have sinned ... I will no more do thee harm ... I have acted foolishly, and have erred exceedingly” (v. 21). How many times had he not already said or acknowledged that this was so? Did that change his ways in the least? Often we allow ourselves to be deceived by appearances when it is a matter of appreciating the condition of souls. David is not fooled. He confides in God alone and not at all in Saul's feelings. He returns his weapons to him, knowing that Saul can do nothing without God's will. The king's life had been precious to David, but David does not count on his life being precious to Saul. “And behold, as thy life was highly esteemed this day in mine eyes, so let my life be highly esteemed in the eyes of Jehovah” (v. 24). He counts on the Lord. The life of David, a flea, a part-ridge on the mountains, is of great price in the eyes of Him

who had chosen him, called him, and kept him as the apple of His eye. Thus God glorifies Himself in those who are little and weak.

What does Saul's blessing matter? He who had told the Ziphites: "Blessed be ye of Jehovah," can say to David: "Blessed be thou, my son David" (v. 25); he who had said: "Thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own shame" (1 Sam. 20:30), can well say: "Thou shalt certainly do great things, and shalt certainly prevail" (v. 25). Is Saul also among the prophets? All this has no more value in David's eyes than in the Lord's eyes. David is content with his God's approval and promises and that suffices him perfectly.

Chapter 27

"And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul will despair of me to seek me any more within all the limits of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand" (v. 1).

Isn't it surprising to see David's weakness here after so many striking marks of divine protection? Just yesterday he had said, full of confidence: "Let my life be highly esteemed in the eyes of Jehovah, that He may deliver me out of all distress!" (1 Sam. 26:24). Today his courage is gone and he says: "I shall now one day perish by the hand of Saul." We must often experience that a great victory is apt to be followed by a great despondency. When God was with us, did we not happen to attribute something to ourselves? When David said to Saul: "Jehovah will render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness" (1 Sam. 26:23), God alone knows whether or not there was some self-satisfaction in these words. Therefore God leaves us to ourselves (I am not saying, of course, that He forsakes us) in order to show us that we cannot have any confidence in the flesh. Thus we learn to probe "the division of soul and spirit" which is so subtle that in the fight of faith we are often unaware of the mixture of the two, and that gold which has been refined, or which appears to have been refined, still needs the crucible to be purified from every alloy. This clearly explains

the weakness of believers at the very time when their faith has been shining so splendidly.

Elijah is a striking example of this (1 Kings 19). Heaven had been closed at his request, he had escaped the wrath of Ahab, had performed miracles, had vanquished the priests of Baal, had confronted an entire people, and now look at the great prophet of Israel who trembles and flees from a woman. Let us remember that having been used by God does not mean that we know ourselves yet, and let us remember that this self-knowledge is indispensable for us to appreciate grace. We often have this experience after times of special blessing. The enemy takes advantage of the situation to make us fall when, armed with God's power, we have illusions about our own strength, esteeming ourselves to be unassailable. Therefore a time of special favor and power is often an occasion for the flesh to act. Being introduced into the third heaven does not preserve us from this and the purpose of God's discipline, as we shall see, is to lead us to examine all this and many other things besides.

Is it God who is commanding David to save himself in the land of the Philistines? Were not the experiences he had had at Achish's court sufficient (1 Sam. 21:11-15)? Was it God who had sent him there then? No, God through the mouth of Gad had then given him a positive commandment to go into the land of Judah (1 Sam. 22:5). Had this command been revoked? And why didn't he inquire of the Lord as he had done at Keilah (1 Sam. 23:1-13)? Headlong haste, discouragement, forgetfulness of God's word, seeking help from Israel's enemies, confidence in his own thoughts while neglecting to seek divine direction: all these weaknesses are concentrated in David here.

The lovely walk of faith which had characterized him seems to be annulled by a single false step. But it is a good thing for our souls to fathom these precipices. We cannot be the companions of Christ unless we hold the beginning of our assurance firm to the end (Heb. 3:14). For David to save himself by fleeing to Achish could in no way be a type of Christ. There was no altar for Abraham in Egypt; David's second stay among the Philistines did not inspire him with any psalm.

It is an exceedingly serious thing to consider that often one false step causes us to lose all the benefit of a long life of faith. One day while hiking high in the mountains my feet slipped toward a chasm; I was done for when the strong hand of my guide succeeded in holding me back — already disappearing over the edge. Without him I was lost, His hand saved me (that is grace), but in an instant I had measured and realized the terrible consequence of one wrong step.

Grace alone is able to prevent our fall, but often we must long experience the consequences of a walk which did not have the Lord's approval. This course delivers David from Saul's pursuit: "And it was told Saul that David was fled to Gath, and he sought no more for him" (v. 4). At what price? The following chapters inform us, and this chapter instructs us already.

The stay at Gath gives rise to falsehood. Under pain of appearing to be their enemy the Philistines cannot be told that one has had to depart from Israel. Some success is had against the Geshurites, the Gerzites, and the Amalekites, but to openly declare

one's self to be their adversary would be to expose one's self to many dangers. David is a guest of the Philistine who from this fact deems him brought into subjection: "He shall be my servant for ever (v. 12). How can one then make war against their race? One uses words that have a double meaning to hide one's real sympathies (1 Sam. 28:2). Just see how many serious consequences the search for the world's assistance brings with it! The Christian swamped by "social conventions" to which he is subjected loses his true character there and has no more effect on the consciences of those around him. He lives in fear of displeasing the world which is protecting him; he seeks like David to destroy all the witnesses who could come forward to give evidence of his hostility against the enemies of God's people; he no longer has a good conscience. Although he is a child of God he is following a path of hypocrisy.

"Achish trusted David." The world believes us and flatters itself to have broken the ties that united us to God's people (v. 12). David through God's grace will be restored and in what follows his behavior will awaken Achish to his deception. But

how many Christians tangled in this net never awaken the world to their deception, lose their strength, their peace, and their joy there, sacrifice their testimony there, and finally leave this scene to go to be with the Lord feeling that they have been nothing for Him during their lifetime, nothing for Him who however has done everything for them!

Chapter 28

The day comes — David cannot escape this juncture of events — when the Philistines once again gather together their armies to go to war against Israel. David's false position in their midst will thus be made evident. Poor David! What to do? How can he draw back after having fooled the enemy about his enterprises and his sympathies? Let us remember that it is easier to enter a wrong pathway than to leave it. We shall see that God does not abandon David and that He saves him in spite of himself from the danger of fighting against God's people, but we shall also see how severe the discipline which he will have to endure will be.

Is it surprising that Achish, deceived by David, is counting on him? This proof of confidence ought to cover the man of God with shame: “Know thou assuredly that thou shalt go out with me to the camp, thou and thy men” (v. 1). A wrong walk is not only deplorable for ourselves but it draws after us into evil those whom we are called upon to guide as well. David's answer is ambiguous like all of his behavior: “Thereby thou shalt know what thy servant can do” (v. 2). Later, alas! this will be only too evident when he attempts to vindicate himself before the king and the princes (1 Sam. 29:8). Achish, deceived, replies: “Therefore will I make thee keeper of my person for ever” (v. 2). Here then is the “beloved” being called upon to support Israel's hereditary enemy! This is his reward; he advances in dignity. He, the true king of Israel, becomes Achish's bodyguard. What a promotion, what an honor! Though a Christian is nothing in his own eyes, he is a king in God's sight; he is called upon to walk according to this dignity. If he receives the world's honors he loses his royal character, for he becomes a

slave and has no part in his master's benefits except in the measure in which he is in bondage to him.

In verse 3, God's word returns to Samuel's death. As we have seen, this death left Saul and his people disabled. But Samuel's presence and Saul's profession of serving the Lord had resulted in Saul himself performing an act of purification: "Saul had put away the necromancers and the soothsayers out of the land."

The enemy gathers together: Saul "was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled. And Saul inquired of Jehovah; but Jehovah did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets" (vv. 5-6). This position was more miserable than when Israel had followed enchantments and strange gods! At least these had given the appearance of answering Israel — an illusion no doubt, but an illusion which for the moment had raised their flagging spirits. Now: nothing but silence. The house that was swept had no statue, no ephod, and no teraphim (Hosea 3:4). What to do? Whom to consult? Whom to lean on? What uncertainty for Saul! Judgment is at the door: how can it be

evaded? Oh! in this darkness where he is floundering, if even a feeble ray of light would show him a way out! Nothing is more wretched than his condition. He is aware of his inevitable fate and in his great anguish is seeking a means to escape it. Now Saul takes account of the horror of his condition. Death would be better, but death offers no shelter from the judgment which he sees steadily advancing toward him from afar and which he knows to be without pity.

“Seek me a woman that has a spirit of Python, that I may go to her and inquire of her” (v. 7). Christendom in our day is no different, about to be “spewed out” of the Lord’s mouth. It is calling up spirits and indulging herself with satanic illusions, for at one and the same time there is frightening reality and shameful illusion in these practices. The reality is that a demon puts itself at the disposal of the Pythoness; the illusion is that she is able to call up the dead. The demon only clothes itself with a shadowy appearance, for Jesus holds the keys of death and of Hades and no power but His own is able to open its doors. Satan himself cannot call up the dead. Those who have not believed and

who have died are and remain “the spirits in prison.” God alone by making an exception can permit Samuel to come forth from the realm of the invisible and appear.

“When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice” (v. 12). This was not the result she had expected from her sorcery. The spirit that she knew was not there to clothe itself with an illusory form like those which she had had her followers witness. Before she can even call up the spirit a personage who greatly frightens her suddenly rises up before her. This is not just another appearance but a divine reality, “a god ascending out of the earth” (v. 13), an personage on whom her enchantments have no hold. It is Samuel himself, recognized by the king before whom he had walked for so long. The woman does not recognize Samuel, but Saul does. He alone, Israel's head, was important enough to receive such an extraordinary vision. As for Saul, he cannot mistake the person, still less the words of Samuel. God who is not answering by the prophets posthumously answers one last time by Samuel, but only to ratify the judgment already pronounced.

Saul exposes his distress, his abandonment, his isolation, and the anguish of his soul (v. 15). It is too late; the measure is full; God has forgotten nothing; now He has become the enemy of Saul (v. 16) who has both God and the Philistines against him. And why? Saul did “not hearken to the voice of Jehovah” nor “execute His fierce anger upon Amalek” (v. 18). Moreover, beside the fact that he had “kept not ... the word of Jehovah” he had “inquired of the spirit of Python, asking counsel of it, and he asked not counsel of Jehovah” (1 Chr. 10:13). Disobedience and independence characterize man without God, and in spite of all appearances Saul was one of these. Because of these things the death of Saul and of his sons was decreed as well as the defeat of Israel (v. 19).

But yet another decision is announced to Saul, and this for the third time: “Jehovah has rent the kingdom out of thy hand, and given it to thy neighbor, to David” (v. 17). He had already heard this twice from Samuel's mouth (1 Sam. 13:14; 1 Sam. 15:28), but David's name had not yet been mentioned. Today he learns from the mouth of God what he in his hatred had long

ago suspected (1 Sam. 24:21): his “neighbor” was this despised, hated, rejected David whom he himself had pursued, and this David is the chosen one, the anointed one, the beloved one who will have the place of honor and to whom the kingdom belongs! All that Saul had feared now rises up against him. No more pity, no more pardon. David, the king of grace himself, who had spared Saul so many times, had soothed him so often, who had returned him good for evil without tiring, could no longer from this moment onward present himself to Saul except as a judge.

Saul “fell straightway his full length on the earth, and was sore afraid because of the words of Samuel” (v. 20). It is only when man finds himself before his inevitable fate that he really appreciates all its bearing. Until then there is always room for some illusion which hides the horror of our future from us. The king has no strength; he is faint with hunger but will not eat; he finally accepts some material help from the hand of one who is reprobate just like himself (vv. 20-25).

What a solemn picture of the end of the man, the king according to the flesh! All the principles of his activity are called to his remembrance and weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, are found to be only disobedience, independence, and enmity against God and against His anointed. Nothing, absolutely nothing of that which has led Saul can stand before God. All his motives, all his ways, become just so many objects of judgment.

Chapter 29

The armies of the Philistines and of Israel reach the place where they set themselves in battle formation. “David and his men passed on in the rearward with Achish,” for according to the king’s promise they have been made his bodyguards. The princes of the Philistines challenge this: “What are these Hebrews?” This is what always happens when a believer places himself in a false position by seeking the world’s protection. He cannot gain the world’s confidence unless perhaps the world is depending upon him like Achish because he has made God’s

people abhor him and has given himself into bondage in this way. Moreover Achish, we must observe, has still other motives for confidence, and we cannot help but see in him a certain natural nobility, won over by the apparent uprightness of David's character (Alas! it is not even apparently so in God's sight). Achish defends David before the princes: "I have found nothing in him since the day of his falling away to me to this day" (v. 3). Achish bears testimony to him: "As Jehovah lives, thou art upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the camp is acceptable to me; for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming to me to this day" (v. 6). A most favorable testimony, but one based on the fact that "David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel" (v. 3), had become and would remain the servant of Achish.

Did David have a good conscience at having merited these praises? Was his heart really at ease before the high opinion of the uncircumcised king who was showing himself more noble and more honest than the Lord's anointed? Could he receive

this praise as he had once received that of Abigail (1 Sam. 25:28)?

However that might be, Achish's confidence does not succeed in overcoming the distrust of the princes, for it was precisely David's character of faithfulness which could move him to return to his old master. Not so long ago he had smitten his ten thousand Philistines, in this in accord with Saul who had smitten his thousand. Why should he be for Achish today rather than for Saul? The lack of a clear-cut position in regard to the world can only produce conclusions like these. Our very faithfulness in the past is turned against us. Achish is obliged to reckon with the opinion of the princes, a policy unknown to a faithful believer, for God's mind, opinion, and will direct him. But God uses men's mistrust to save His beloved from a more serious fall than when he went up against Nabal to avenge himself. "Now," says Achish, "return, and go in peace, that thou displease not the lords of the Philistines" (v. 7).

In the face of this animosity David (and this is one of the most humiliating points in his history) denies his faith and his character: “But what have I done? and what hast thou found in thy servant so long as I have been with thee to this day, that I should not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?” (v. 8). What have I done? David could say this in truth to Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:1) and to Saul himself (1 Sam. 26:18) but he could not in good conscience say this to Achish. Knowing nothing of David's secret undertakings against Israel's enemies, the Philistine king could not find him at fault. But it is his own people whom David is asking to fight against; his people whom he terms “the enemies of the king”!

Achish acknowledges yet more explicitly the purity of David's intentions: “I know that thou art acceptable to me, as an angel of God” (v. 9), but the conclusion is that he must return. “Depart,” Achish tells David (v. 10). In sum, weighed in the same balance the opinion of the world surrounding him carries greater weight with Achish than the supposed integrity of David.

All of this shows us the abyss separating the family of God from the world, since even in respect to the child of God who is unfaithful to his calling the world is apprehensive and refuses his co-operation. This is only just. God makes us to feel, and it is grace on His part, that in this position we have nothing: neither the approval of God nor the favor of the world.

David returns back. What a helping hand the Lord has extended to him, although against his own will at the most critical moment of his entire life up until now! God has not abandoned him for a single instant. What grace! But what has become of the happy fellowship of heart with the Lord which had found expression in the songs of the sweet psalmist of Israel?

Chapter 30

A walk according to the thoughts of his natural heart had deprived David of fellowship with his God. In the path he was following he could not like Enoch have “the testimony that he had pleased God.” Left to himself he, one of the excellent of the earth, had been in danger of making shipwreck of the faith

just like another and in danger of embracing the cause of his people's worst enemies. Their leader recognized in him an upright and irreproachable character, but this was just one more danger for his soul. In the midst of these reefs when he would surely have gone down had he been left to his own strength, God, no longer able to lead him by His eye, had used the “bit and bridle” (Ps. 32:9) — that is to say, a series of circumstances contrary to the will of His servant — in order to preserve him from an irremediable fall.

In our chapter we see how God restores David, using the discipline that his lack of holiness had made necessary. But there in the midst of this discipline God (and this is infinitely precious) could be with him. God who was absent in the day of Achish's favor is now present in the midst of disaster. David is stricken in that which is dearest to him and this is a cause of great sorrow, but it produces the peaceable fruit of righteousness. How could we then regret that God's hand weighed heavily on His servant? The character of this man of God, formed

by discipline, is of great beauty and full of instruction for our souls.

In David's absence Amalek, no doubt in order to avenge themselves (cf. 1 Sam. 27:8), had seized Ziklag, David's city (1 Sam. 27:6), and after having burned it had taken the entire population away captive with the spoil, but "they had put none to death." What grace of God! In this cruel attack of a pitiless enemy all the captives had been spared. Thus God was judging His servant by measure and with a judgment which had his restoration as its object. Nevertheless the discipline must be felt deeply in order to bring forth its fruits: "David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep" (v. 4). Those dearest to David are among the captives: noble Abigail, linked by faith to her husband's wandering life and sufferings, innocent of his conduct at the court of Achish, is taken into captivity. And to make the cup of bitterness overflow, the companions whom he had directed until now, full of vexation because of their sons and daughters,

consider him responsible for this calamity, turn against him, and speak of stoning him (v. 6).

But for the man of God discipline is a bitter cordial that strengthens his soul instead of weakening it. When he has lost everything David again finds God as his resource. He “strengthened himself in Jehovah his God” (v. 6). This faithful God known by him, who had helped him in times past in all his distresses, had not changed, and again today he finds Him to be the same as He was yesterday and will be for eternity.

And David also finds again that which had previously characterized him. He “said to Abiathar ... Bring near to me, I pray thee, the ephod. And Abiathar brought the ephod near to David. And David inquired of Jehovah” (vv. 7-8). As Samuel was the man of prayer and intercession, so David at the time of his strength was the dependant man who consulted and inquired of the Lord. He returns to this. The Lord who had refused to answer Saul answers David. “Shall I pursue after this troop? shall

I overtake them? And He said to him, Pursue; for thou shalt assuredly overtake them, and shalt certainly recover” (v. 8).

Strengthened by this answer David takes up the pursuit without hesitation. At the torrent Besor two hundred men too weary to follow the troop stop and are left behind to guard the baggage. They lacked strength; nonetheless their function was useful to David and their brethren and should not be despised. The function of active combatants is highly visible and exposes us much more to spiritual pride than does a more humble position. David's companions prove this in what follows in this account by attributing to their own prowess the victory which was prepared for them and then granted by God alone (v. 22).

An Egyptian slave left behind to die puts David on the enemy's track. One sees God's hand in this circumstance. Without this poor man dying of hunger the expedition would have failed miserably. When we strengthen ourselves in the Lord our God, what mighty help He accords us, and how unexpected! (vv. 11-15).

While the enemy is eating, drinking, and dancing, “sudden destruction comes upon them.” “David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken: and David recovered his two wives. And there was nothing missed by them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil nor anything that they had taken: David brought all back” (vv. 18-19) together with an abundance of spoils (v. 20).

The trial is over; Discipline has borne its fruits; but by the grace of God it continues to bear yet more. See with what wisdom David, now restored, confronts the “wicked men, and men of Belial, of those that had gone with” him (v. 22), how he reproves them by giving the Lord all the place, all the merit: “Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which Jehovah has given us, who has preserved us, and given the troop that came against us into our hand” (v. 23). God distributes the various services among His own; He is the only judge of the activity that they display; He does not measure the reward according to the value of the gift but according to faithfulness in the administration of that which He entrusts to us. That is why the share of those

who stay with the baggage is like the share of those who go down to the battle (v. 24). This principle established by David has become “a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day” (v. 25). It was the principle of grace joined to righteousness that a restored David proclaimed, and how can we be surprised that its consequences have been lasting?

In his prosperity (vv. 26-31) David forgets none of those who had helped in the time of his adversity. He overwhelms them, and I see scarcely any but the Ziphites who were excluded and had no part in his generosity: those informers who had desired to deliver up the king of Israel. David's liberality gives all the faithful tangible proof that the Lord is with him and that it is good to accept him as master and to place one's self under his law — whereas infidelity toward Christ will one day, perhaps long afterward, bring its inevitable consequences. And in contrast, a glass of water given to David in the wilderness is recorded in the book of Him who values all our deeds according their usefulness, whether more or less, to Christ.

Chapter 31

According to the word of God spoken by Samuel (1 Sam. 28:19) Israel falls before the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. The three sons of Saul — Jonathan is one of them — perish. Saul is the last one remaining. He had been very much afraid at Samuel's announcement of judgment (1 Sam. 28:20), he had been afraid and his heart had greatly trembled at the presence of the Philistine army in the presence of the bare preparations for judgment (1 Sam. 28:5); how much more so when judgment is being executed: “He was much terrified by the archers” (v. 3). Thus from the moment when the sinner finds himself before God's judgment all his strength leaves him and gives place to terror. “It is a fearful thing falling into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31), when having made a profession of faith one has then given it up. Saul wishes to die in order to escape this nameless anguish and he only hurls himself into an agony of a quite different nature, into the torments of the invisible realm where the worm never dies and where the fire is never quenched.

“Draw thy sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me” (v. 4). The words “these uncircumcised” express even at the point of death his outward religion based on his disdain of those who were not Hebrews.* As for Saul’s circumcision, could it save him? Is it not rather circumcision of heart that God respects?

* Jonathan gave them the same name (1 Sam. 14:6), judging them from God’s point of view, and knowing that God’s power was with him to conquer them, Saul compares them to himself and speaks of them with disdain and in wrath at being unable to escape them.

Saul and his armorbearer take their own lives in order to escape the enemy’s abuse. The fear of God, had it been before their eyes, would have prevented them from doing so. A dead Saul does not feel the abuse but undergoes it nonetheless. The Philistines behead the king and may think that they have taken their revenge for the death of Goliath. Saul’s armor is placed in the house of Ashtaroth (v. 10), apparently proclaiming the victory of their idols over the true God. A similar thing took place

when the ark was taken. Israel flees, the enemy capture their cities and establish themselves there. Jabesh-Gilead, once saved by Saul (1 Sam. 11), shows pity upon the dead, but God remains silent as though indifferent to all this ruin; one might believe He had been overcome by man.

This book is like the end of everything. Here we see the end of the priesthood, of the judges, of kingship according to man. Everything crumbles; God allows it, for this is exactly what is necessary. Everything must fall before David. Let him abide: that is enough. This defeat, this judgment, this ruin of man are for God the dawn of the reign of the beloved!