

“Failure Doesn’t Have to Be Final” (1 Samuel 11:14–12:25)

How does my past sin affect my potential for present blessing? This is a question that I’m frequently asked. Many people feel that they’ve blown it so badly in the past that there’s no way that God can ever bless them again. They are tempted to ask, “Why even try to get back on track and walk with God again?” There’s a sense of hopelessness and despair. Perhaps you’ve divorced your spouse and wreaked havoc on your family. Maybe you’ve squandered your money and declared bankruptcy, jeopardizing your family and your future. Perhaps you’ve committed adultery and the consequences seem more than you can bear. Maybe you’ve neglected your family and now your kids don’t want anything to do with you. I don’t know what sin you’ve committed, but I’m sure you’ve wondered what the ramifications are on your future Christian life and ministry.

The scandalous truth of God’s character and program is that He loves to exercise grace and restoration. Think about it: No people frustrated God more than Israel, His chosen people. Their history documents the consistent pattern of God’s blessing and protection followed by their idolatry and rebellion. Yet despite Israel’s faithlessness, God always remained faithful to His chosen people. But God also urged His people to repent of their sin and recognize Him as King. When Israel submitted to Yahweh as King, they experienced blessings, but when they refused to do so, they experienced curses. This *spiritual* principle of blessings and curses also applies to you and me today. Even though our sins are forgiven, there are still consequences that we will experience. But the good news is: God doesn’t give up on us. On the contrary, He is always seeking to bless us and use us for His sovereign purposes. In 1 Sam 11:14–12:25 we will see that *present obedience can outweigh past transgressions*.

1. Samuel vindicates himself as judge (11:14-12:5). Previously, in 1 Samuel 11 Saul and Israel rejoiced over the deliverance of Jabesh-gilead from the Ammonites. Fortunately, Saul was careful to give the glory to the Lord (11:13b). However, the fact that Saul led the army in a great victory would tempt Israel to put their faith in their new king. Samuel wanted them to know their future success rested in trusting Yahweh alone. Hence, Samuel gives a retirement speech, revival sermon, and coronation address, all wrapped into one.¹

Verses 14 and 15 serve as an introduction to the purpose of the Gilgal assembly in chapter 12:² **“Then Samuel said to the people,³ ‘Come and let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there.’ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they also offered sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.”**⁴ Two important questions stem from these two verses: (1) What is meant by the phrase “renew the kingdom”? (2) Why is “Gilgal” mentioned three times? These questions are interconnected. First, if Saul is Israel’s first king, then he is their “new” king. Israel can’t “renew the kingdom” by making Saul king. Rather, the kingdom is “renewed” when Yahweh is reestablished as King.⁵ This is supported by the overall message and emphasis of chapter 12, where Yahweh is mentioned thirty times. Secondly, the “renewal” takes place at Gilgal, not Mizpah (see 7:5–10).⁶ Gilgal is a city closely related to God’s covenant with Israel. It is the place where the Israelites first crossed the Jordan River and entered into the promised land, the place where the memorial of twelve stones was built. Gilgal was also the tabernacle site during the early conquest of the Land. It is the place where Israel renewed her covenant with God (see Joshua 4 and 5).⁷ Gilgal was a place of victory, celebration, memorial, and rededication.

Like Israel, we need to experience some Gilgal moments where we express gratitude to God for all that He has done for us. We need to recognize that we are sinful people always in need of deliverance and forgiveness. In reality, the Christian life is a life of continual repentance, ever in need of renewing its allegiance to the rule of Yahweh.⁸ We must be reminded of our need to not merely repent, but to wholeheartedly obey God. *Present obedience can outweigh past transgressions*.

Now, in chapter 12 Samuel declares the nature of Israel's sin. His approach anticipates Jesus' counsel about removing the speck from one's own eye (Matt 7:4).⁹ Before he outlines Israel's sin, Samuel asks the people to confirm his innocence.¹⁰ **"Then Samuel said to all Israel, 'Behold, I have listened to your voice in all that you said to me and I have appointed a king over you. Now,¹¹ here is the king walking before you, but I am old and gray, and behold my sons are with you. And I¹² have walked before you from my youth even to this day. Here I am [Heb. "Behold me!"]; bear witness against me before the LORD and His anointed. Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? I will restore it to you.'**"¹³ They said, **'You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand.'** He said to them, **'The LORD is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day that you have found nothing in my hand.'** And they said, **'He is witness'"** (12:1–5).¹⁴ After reading this section, we might ask, "Why does Samuel seem so arrogant and defensive?" His speech seems out of character. However, Samuel wants Israel to recognize that he hasn't handed Saul a mess that he has to clean up. Instead, he has passed a good legacy of leadership to King Saul. So if Saul should prove to be a poor leader, no one could say it was because of Samuel's bad example.

As we study this section, three observations stand out. First, Samuel's actions show that spiritual leadership must be held accountable on three levels: (1) Samuel appealed to the Lord as a witness (12:5). Ultimately, he knew that as a covenant leader he was first and foremost accountable to the God of Israel. As servant leaders, we must remember that our ultimate accountability is to God. (2) Samuel also appealed to the Lord's anointed (12:5). In the immediate context, this meant Saul, the king, who was anointed to rule over Israel. Samuel, the judge, opened his ministry to Saul's scrutiny. In the same way, as servant leaders we must be accountable to one another. (3) Samuel began his farewell speech by inviting the people to examine his public ministry (12:3). Samuel was, in fact, declaring that he was subject to the same ethical standards as the people. By this we learn that spiritual leadership is also accountable to God's people. Servant leaders are not above the people; the same standards by which the people are judged also apply to them. If you are a spiritual leader, have you availed yourself to accountability? Do you welcome others to ask you pointed questions or speak into your life? Do you regularly submit to your leaders and ask them how your life represents Christ and His church? Do you regularly remind yourself that one day you will be evaluated by Christ? *Present obedience can outweigh past transgressions.*

Secondly, this section demonstrates that Samuel wants to vindicate his type of leadership as a prophet, priest, and judge under the Lord and His Word.¹⁵ Three of Samuel's five proposed charges use the verb "take" (*laqach*). The word "take" appears four times in 12:3–4, although it's obscured in some English versions. By using this verb, it's likely that Samuel is contrasting himself and his kind of leadership with the anticipated king who will "take, take, take" (cf. 8:11–18). The king "takes"; Samuel has not taken. The king will serve his own interests; Samuel has not served his own interests.¹⁶ Does your leadership seek to emulate Samuel's leadership? Would those serving with you say that you desire to serve them for their good?

Finally, Samuel started well and finished well. He walked with the Lord from the time he was a small boy, and he raced into retirement still aggressively serving God and living for Him.¹⁷ One of the advantages of being raised in a Christian home is that you can walk with the Lord from your youth and avoid making some of the same mistakes that other believers have made. But regardless of how you start, what matters is how you finish! God's goal is for you to run the race set before you and to finish the course. He yearns for you to break the tape in your spiritual marathon and to collapse in His arms. How wonderful to get toward the end of your life and be able to review your life and ministry and not be afraid or ashamed. May we be able to say like Christ in John 17:4: "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do." *Present obedience can outweigh past transgressions.*

2. Samuel vindicates Yahweh as King (12:6–15).¹⁸ Having exonerated himself as a judge, Samuel next addresses Israel as a prophet.¹⁹ In this section the emphasis is on how the Lord delivered His people through His chosen leaders.²⁰ Verses 6–11 read: **“Then Samuel said to the people, ‘It is the LORD who appointed Moses and Aaron and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt. So now, take your stand, that I may plead with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous acts of the LORD which He did for you and your fathers. When Jacob went into Egypt and your fathers cried out to the LORD, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron who brought your fathers out of Egypt and settled them in this place. But they forgot the LORD their God, so He sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the army of Hazor,²¹ and into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. They cried out to the LORD and said, ‘We have sinned because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth; but now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve You.’ Then the LORD sent Jerubbaal [Gideon²²] and Bedan [Barak²³] and Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around, so that you lived in security.”**²⁴ The pattern throughout Israel’s history: crisis, cry for help, deliverance through leadership raised up by Yahweh.²⁵ Here, Samuel chooses six leaders to highlight who protected God’s people in their time of need.²⁶ But this wasn’t just a history lecture; it was also a court trial! In 12:7 Samuel uses words with a judicial flavor: (1) “Take your stand” carries the idea of “stand up, court is in session.”²⁷ “Plead” means “to decide a case of litigation.” Elsewhere this verb is translated “judge.”²⁸ Samuel wants Israel to judge their history properly. Sadly, however, the one thing we learn from history is that we don’t learn from history.

In 12:12 Samuel links the history he has just recited to the present situation. Like the Israelites of old, God’s people are once again oppressed by a neighboring nation. In the current emergency, the memory of Yahweh’s “righteous acts” dissolves in Israelite amnesia.²⁹ Samuel states: **“When you saw that Nahash the king of the sons of Ammon came against you, you said to me, ‘No, but a king shall reign over us,’ although the LORD your God was your king.”** Israel fails to remember God’s faithfulness. Instead of trusting in the proven arm of Yahweh, they seek a new form of government. Instead of trusting the Lord to provide their salvation, Israel demanded a king like the nations around them. In effect, Israel broke the covenant by rejecting the Lord God as their true King.³⁰ Their cry became “A king or bust,” not “In God we trust.”³¹ Have you ever noticed that the most current crisis always seems the worst? How natural it is to think that God can’t come through in the midst of our latest crisis. It’s so easy to lack faith. I could cite countless examples in my own personal life when I have questioned whether God would come through for me, in spite of a track record of His past faithfulness. Nevertheless, God loves to come through; but He loves it when we trust Him instead of exhibiting unbelief.

That said, God is the perfect realist. He knows our finite and sinful ways. Verse 13, then, serves as the hinge verse of the chapter:³² **“Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for, and behold, the LORD has set a king over you.”** Samuel makes it clear that Saul was the king that Israel chose and asked for. Yet God, in His sovereignty, was behind Israel’s choice.

In spite of Israel’s bad choice, there is still the potential for success. In 12:14–15 Samuel outlines the conditions for their success: **“If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God. If you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the command of the LORD,³³ then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers.”** Twice Samuel says, “If you will . . .” This is a call to obedience! These verses tie back into 11:14 where Samuel exhorts Israel to “renew the kingdom.” Here, he is emphasizing the fact that Israel and their king must recognize that they have another King! What is required is repentance from the wicked rejection of the Lord that lay behind the request for a king. If Israel learns from her sinful choice, she can return to fruitfulness in ministry. The message is clear: *Present obedience can outweigh past transgressions.*

3. Samuel calls Israel to commitment (12:16–25).³⁴ In 12:16–18 Samuel calls down a miraculous sign and gives Israel a compelling reason to obey. He says: **“Even now, take your stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes. Is it not the wheat harvest today? I will call to the LORD, that He may send thunder and rain. Then you will know and see that your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the LORD by asking for yourselves a king.’ So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.”** Samuel again uses the judicial phrase “take your stand” (12:16; cf. 12:7). He wants Israel to know that the miracle they are about to experience is God’s judgment against them. Samuel, their own prophet, priest, and judge, literally prays up a storm during the dry season of wheat harvest, and God answers Samuel’s prayer and gives a special sign to confirm the validity of his message.³⁵ This was no coincidence or botched weather forecast. The wheat harvest took place about the end of May through early June.³⁶ Thunder and rain, rarely if ever, occurred during this time of the year.³⁷ So Israel would have understood the loss of their crops as an expression of divine discipline—a covenant curse.³⁸ The Old Testament indicated that Yahweh would use famine, not flood, to bring judgment on Israel. However, in Genesis 6–9 rain was used as a judgment on sin. Samuel may well have understood the mindset that produced Israel’s request to be as wicked as that of Noah’s contemporaries (cf. Gen 6:5). Thus, the use of rain instead of famine would have proven to be an especially harsh indictment of Israel’s sin.³⁹ Israel certainly seemed to understand the wickedness of their sin. Verse 19 states: **“Then all the people said to Samuel, ‘Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins *this* evil by asking for ourselves a king.’”**⁴⁰ The people recognize their past sins and their new “biggie.” They are broken over their sin . . . at least temporarily.

In light of Israel’s repentance, Samuel says to the people: **“Do not fear. You have committed all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. You must not turn aside, for *then you would go after futile things which can not profit or deliver, because they are futile*”** (12:20–21). Samuel reinforces his key principle and corresponding warning. Yahweh still wants an intimate relationship with Israel but only under the old covenant terms.⁴¹ Twice Samuel says “do not turn aside.”⁴² He repeats this phrase because believers are prone to turn aside to other people and pursuits. Yet, often our sins aren’t moral or ethical “biggies”; they may be refusing to depend upon the Lord or neglecting our family in our busyness. Both of these are sinful.

In 12:22 we find one of the most beautiful verses in the Old Testament: **“For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself.”**⁴³ Samuel definitively states that the Lord will not abandon Israel—no matter what! This principle also applies to the church (see Heb 13:5b). No sin can separate us from God’s gracious mercy toward us (see Rom 8:31–39). Nothing we do can put us outside the power of God’s grace to forgive and reconcile.⁴⁴ We become God’s people by grace and we remain His people by grace.⁴⁵ The deepest reason given is in the phrase “on account of His great name.” In ancient times, one’s name stood for one’s character. The name of Yahweh refers to His attributes, character, and reputation.⁴⁶ For Yahweh to abandon His people would be inconsistent with His reputation for faithfulness.⁴⁷ The rock bottom foundation of our forgiveness, assurance, and joy is the commitment that Yahweh has to His own great name. Furthermore, Samuel reminds Israel that God had chosen them, not vice-versa. Yahweh’s sovereign choice would preserve Israel, because her salvation was not based upon faithfulness or good works but upon the grace of God.⁴⁸ Israel sinned, but God incorporated her failure into His own plans. Even the institution of the kingship paved the way for David, and eventually, Jesus Christ. In God’s hands, even our failures and tragically sinful choices can be completely remade into something new and redemptive. Yahweh is capable of overcoming our failure, of turning them into His means of salvation, and of giving us a new start. Each time Israel fails or begins a new venture, Yahweh reestablishes the covenant and recommits Himself to her. Yahweh is her God and she is His people.⁴⁹ Similarly even though you are determined to sin, God is determined to provide grace to forgive and restore. God’s grace never runs out. He is forever faithful and will never let you go.

In 12:23 Samuel follows up God's covenantal commitment by informing Israel that he will not abandon them either. He states: "**Moreover, as for me, far be it from me⁵⁰ that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way.**"⁵¹ This is Samuel's retirement sermon. You would think he would be happy to coast on out of leadership. But instead, he exhibits a passionate commitment to His people. This verse also serves as a precursor to Acts 6:4 where elders are to give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.

Our account concludes in 12:24–25 with a further reinforcement of the key principle and corresponding warning: "**Only fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.**"⁵² **But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away.**"⁵³ Samuel sums up his speech with the word "only." He then challenges Israel with three exhortations that reflect the structure of this text: "fear" (12:16–25), "serve" (11:14–12:5), and "consider" (12:6–15). In keeping with the contrasting language throughout this text, 12:25 begins with, "But if," followed by an ominous word about our failure to obey. The words "swept away" depict God's discipline of the flashflood (cf. 12:16–18). But, they also anticipate Israel's disobedience to the word of the Lord, and Saul's rejection as king in 1 Sam 13.⁵⁴ Furthermore, this phrase looks to God's judgment of captivity and exile from the land (Lev 26:33–39; Deut 28:41, 63–68). Sadly, this prophecy was fulfilled when Israel was swept four hundred miles away to Babylon!⁵⁵

How can we summarize and simplify the teaching of this passage? I would suggest four simple responses:

Own your sin. You have sinned: You know it, I know it, and God knows it. So, just acknowledge your sin. Own it! Don't wallow in it, don't bathe in it, just call it what it is—sin! A large part of Christian obedience is simply coming to grips with how sinful you truly are. Once you settle this issue, God can begin to make you into the man or woman he wants you to be.

Receive God's forgiveness. Do you remember the movie *Groundhog Day* with Bill Murray? Every morning Murray would awaken to the radio playing, "I've Got You, Babe," and find himself reliving the same day. In the movie, it was hilarious. In life, reliving your experiences can be tragic. A runner can't expect to win a race while looking back at ground already covered. She's either focused on what lies behind her or what's in front of her. Likewise, you can't simultaneously relive a past stumble and concentrate on the future challenge. When you accept God's offer of forgiveness, He assures you that the death of His Son was sufficient. There's nothing you can add to the payment He has already paid for you. Since God remembers our iniquities no more and casts our sins into the depths of the sea, why should we insist on dredging them back up?⁵⁶ Instead, appropriate God's forgiveness. Count it as true!

Learn from someone else's failures. I have found that my best learning comes from studying other people's mistakes. Why should I repeat the mistakes of others when I can learn from what they have done? I try to ask questions like: What wrong assumption, attitude, or habits led to his or her downfall? Have I adopted some of those same assumptions, attitude, or habits in my life? What can I do differently to avoid the same pitfall? I don't want to ever assume that I am incapable of moral, ethical, or spiritual failure.

Take your right hand, and place it over your heart. (No, I'm not going to ask you to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.) Do you feel your heartbeat? It means you're alive. In spite of your sins, God didn't kill you, though He had every right to do so. Instead, He has given you the marvelous gift of time to recover from your failures and live for Him and others.⁵⁷ Will you redeem what time God has graciously given you? Will you stop dwelling on your past, start living in the present, and planning for the future? God wants to renew your mind, your life, and your ministry. Will you submit to Him as King and let Him change you and use you once again? *Present obedience can outweigh past transgressions.*

Scripture References

1 Samuel 11:14–12:25

Exodus 19:5–6

Deuteronomy 28:1–14

Deuteronomy 28:41, 45–64; 30:15–20

Joshua 8 and 24

Ezekiel 36:22–32

Hebrews 13:5–6

Study Questions

1. How do my past sins affect my potential for God's blessing in the present? What have I learned from my past transgressions? How can I share my past sins with others in a helpful manner without glorifying them (see 2 Corinthians 1:3–4)? How does Jesus respond to sinful but repentant women? Read Luke 7:36–50 (especially 7:47) and John 8:1–11. How can I avoid a judgmental spirit and be quick to forgive truly repentant believers?
2. How can I follow in Samuel's footsteps and finish my life and ministry well (1 Samuel 12:1–5)? How many people would be affected if I sinned morally/ethically or turned away from God? Am I being careful to walk in integrity and protect my good name and the Lord's reputation (cf. 12:22)? Do I realize the extent of my influence and how vital my obedience is because of my role in the church (1 Corinthians 12:12–17) and the world (1 Peter 2:9–12)?
3. How can I learn from biblical history (1 Samuel 12:6–15; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1–13) and contemporary examples of failure? How can I model a healthy fear and awe of the Lord (see Proverbs 1:7)? How can I stir God's people up to a greater fear of Him in a day when God is spoken of so casually and sin is redefined in more palatable terms?
4. When have I ever struggled with the concept of God's forgiveness (1 Samuel 12:20–22)? What did I learn through this experience? Have I received God's unconditional love, acceptance, and forgiveness? Do I freely proclaim God's unconditional love to others? How do I also explain God's fatherly discipline and the consequences for sin in the life of believers? Read Hebrews 12:5–11.
5. Are there some Christians whom I have given up on? What have these believers done that has disillusioned or frustrated me? In light of God's unconditional love, how should I respond to these individuals? How can I also establish proper boundaries and accountability with these brothers and sisters? Are there some wayward believers whom God wants me to invest in today?

Notes

¹ According to Bergen, 1 Sam 12 “represents one of the theological climaxes of the Former Prophets, and takes its rightful place alongside such similarly toned sections as Joshua 24, Judges 2, 1 Kings 8, and 2 Kings 17.” Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*. New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 140. Sailhamer writes: “The lesson of Samuel’s speech is that of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy (e.g., Dt 4) and the prophet Ezekiel (e.g., Eze 36:22–32).” John Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 225.

² For a new section break at 1 Sam 11:14 see J. Robert Vannoy, *Covenant Renewal at Gilgal: A Study of 1 Samuel 11:14–12:25* (Cherry Hill: Mack, 1977); Bob Deffinbaugh, “Renewing the Kingdom” (1 Sam 11:14–12:25): www.bible.org/seriespage/renewing-kingdom-1-samuel-11-14-12-25; accessed 12 December 2012; Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 636–37; John Goldingay, *1 and 2 Samuel for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2010), 61–65. However, Klein sees 1 Sam 12 as an independent passage, with no connection to the assembly at Gilgal. Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*. Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1983), 112–13. Tsumura also offers a strong discourse grammatical argument for a new section break at 12:1. David Toshio Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*. New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 317.

³ Brueggemann notes: “Samuel’s characteristic mode of leadership is always to call a meeting in which he himself is dominant and controls the discussion (cf. 1 Sam. 7:5; 8:4; 10:17; 11:14).” Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*. Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 90.

⁴ Woodhouse suggest that 1 Sam 11:15 is a summary of what happened at Gilgal, which is then expanded in 12:1–25. John Woodhouse, *1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader*. Preaching the Word series (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 213.

⁵ Deffinbaugh, “Renewing the Kingdom.”

⁶ Gilgal will be the scene both of Saul’s coronation and his rebuke and ultimate rejection as king. It is noteworthy that it will be at this same locale on the mountains of Gilboa that Saul will eventually fight his last battle. When his body is mutilated and hung up on the wall of the city of Beth-shan, it will be men of Jabesh-gilead who will rescue the body and give it a proper burial.

⁷ Gilgal was also the place from which the “angel of the Lord” came to remind the Israelites of their deliverance at the exodus, their covenant with God, and the reason for their struggle with the nations surrounding them (Judg 2:1–5). It was also one of the cities on Samuel’s circuit (1 Sam 7:16) and the place where Samuel instructs Saul to wait for him (1 Sam 10:8).

⁸ Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel*. Focus on the Bible (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2000 [1988]), 97.

⁹ David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*. Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Nottingham: Apollos; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 144.

¹⁰ “To be persuasive, we must be believable. To be believable, we must be credible. To be credible, we must be truthful.” Edward R. Murrow, *Leadership*, Vol. 1, no. 1. Preaching Today citation: <http://www.preachingtoday.com>; accessed 15 December 2012.

¹¹ One can sense Samuel’s urgency by his use of the Hebrew particle “now” (*attah*) in 12:2, 7, 13, and 16.

¹² The pronoun “I” is emphatic in the Hebrew. Samuel was presenting himself and his “walk” in deliberate contrast to that of “the king.”

¹³ Samuel’s words sound like what Jesus would say later in John 8:46, “Which one of you convicts Me of sin?”

¹⁴ Stephen J. Andrews and Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*. Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), Electronic ed.

¹⁵ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 90.

¹⁶ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 90.

¹⁷ See 1 Sam 1:26–27; 2:11, 18, 21b, 26; 3:1, 8.

¹⁸ The expression “take your stand” (*yatsab*) in 1 Sam 12:7 and 16 mark these units as distinct. Arnold writes, “Both usages prepare the audience to consider the mighty deeds of Yahweh.” Bill T. Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*. New International Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 189.

¹⁹ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 141.

²⁰ Woodhouse, *1 Samuel*, 217.

²¹ Sisera is the army commander of Jabin, a king of Canaan (Judg 4–5).

²² Jerubbaal is another name for Gideon (Judg 6:32). Youngblood feels that one reason Gideon is mentioned is “because he specifically refused to establish dynastic as opposed to divine rule over his countrymen . . . for which refusal he must surely have been one of Samuel’s heroes.” Ronald F. Youngblood, “1, 2 Samuel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), Electronic ed.

²³ Davis, *1 Samuel*, 99 writes: “The name ‘Bedan’ is problematic because this name does not appear in the book of Judges. It has been supposed by some that this is a reference to a lesser judge whose deeds were not officially recorded. This view, however, appears to be unlikely in view of the nature of Samuel’s argument. The others listed are rather imposing personalities connected with specific and important events. What purpose would the name of an unknown judge serve in his argument? Perhaps the best explanation for the appearance of this name is that it represents a copyist’s error in the text for the name Barak. The Syriac, Septuagint and Arabic versions have all adopted the latter name.” Personally, I think it is just as likely that Bedan was another name for Barak, just as Gideon was also known as Jerubbaal (see also Vannoy, *Covenant Renewal at Gilgal*, 32–33 n. 66).

²⁴ The NET study notes remark: “In the ancient versions there is some confusion with regard to these names, both with regard to the particular names selected for mention and with regard to the order in which they are listed. For example, the LXX has ‘Jerub-Baal, Barak, Jephthah, and Samuel.’ But the Targum has ‘Gideon, Samson, Jephthah, and Samuel,’ while the Syriac Peshitta has ‘Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson.’”

²⁵ Davis, *1 Samuel*, 99.

²⁶ Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 146 states: “Samuel’s speech is not a formal history; it is an impressionistic account pointing to Yahweh’s consistency in responding to His people’s cry when they face need.”

²⁷ This expression echoes the saving invitation of Moses in Exod 14:13.

²⁸ E.g., 1 Sam 4:18; 7:6, 15–17; 8:5, 6, 20.

²⁹ Davis, *1 Samuel*, 99.

³⁰ Peterson writes: “The root of their [Israel’s] demand for a king is not political aspiration, but a spiritual dodge. They suppose that getting rid of God as their King will give them more ‘say-so’ over their own lives.” Eugene H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*. Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 71.

³¹ Davis, *1 Samuel*, 99.

³² Youngblood, “1, 2 Samuel,” Electronic ed.; Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 189.

³³ The expression translated “rebel against the command of the Lord” (1 Sam 12:14, 15) is literally, “rebel against the mouth of the Lord.” This is a picturesque way of emphasizing the importance of obeying God’s words.

³⁴ Davis, *1 Samuel*, 104 notes a dual emphasis in this section: God’s people must see their great evil (12:16–19), and yet they must see Yahweh’s great steadfastness (12:20–25).

³⁵ God had also spoken in thunder and lightning on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:16).

³⁶ Davis, *1 Samuel*, 101.

³⁷ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: Norton, 1999), 68.

³⁸ Vannoy, *Covenant Renewal at Gilgal*, 47; Tremper Longman III, “1 Sam 12:16–19: Divine Omnipotence or Covenant Curse?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 168–71; Youngblood, “1, 2 Samuel,” Electronic ed.; Deffinbaugh, “Renewing the Kingdom”; Davis, *1 Samuel*, 101.

³⁹ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 144 n. 47.

⁴⁰ This verse is reminiscent of Exod 20:19 and 32:11–13 where Moses mediates for Israel.

⁴¹ Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 190.

⁴² The term *sur* (“turn aside”) is the same word used in 1 Sam 7:3–4 for “remove.” In 7:3–4 the verb is used positively, urging renunciation of false loyalties. In this chapter the same verb is used negatively as a rejection of Yahweh (see Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 95).

⁴³ Despite all that has transpired God’s basic plan for the nation hasn’t changed. We must not lose sight of the Abrahamic covenant! Israel was to mediate God’s blessing to the world and be a nation set apart unto Yahweh.

⁴⁴ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 72.

⁴⁵ God can be generous to us because Jesus died for us. This was true even of OT believers. The death of Jesus works backwards and forwards in time. Even OT believers were forgiven in the light of what God would do upon the cross. This is the point of Rom 3:25, “because of the passing over of sins committed in the past.”

⁴⁶ For other uses of “for the sake of His great name,” see Pss 25:11; 79:9; 106:8; 143:11; Isa 48:9; Jer 14:7, 21; Ezek 20:9, 22; Dan 9:19.

⁴⁷ E.g., Exod 34:6; Deut 31:6; Josh 1:5; Heb 13:5. McCarter puts it well: “Since Israel is known as Yahweh’s special people, it would reflect badly on his own reputation if he were to cast them off.” P. Kyle, McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel*. Anchor Bible series (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 217.

⁴⁸ Deffinbaugh, “Renewing the Kingdom” writes: “Nowhere does Samuel urge the Israelites to ‘try harder’ or to do good so that God’s blessings may come. Samuel urges the Israelites to trust in God, whose faithfulness is the basis for their hope and salvation. Israel’s obedience and service to God is spoken of as the *result* of God’s grace, not its cause.”

⁴⁹ Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 192.

⁵⁰ For the expression “far be it from me,” see 1 Sam 2:30; 20:2, 9.

⁵¹ Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 329 notes that the phrase “what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord” is an idiomatic expression, which appears in Deut 12:28 and 2 Chron 14:2.

⁵² Woodhouse, *1 Samuel*, 225 states it well: “The way forward was now as clear as it could be. Israel would have a king. He had been given to them by God himself. However, he was never to *replace* the Lord and his prophet. On the contrary, both people and king were to submit to the Lord’s great and good rule. Human power has its place, but only when it is exercised in humble obedience to the Lord.”

⁵³ Leithart remarks: “Though he [Samuel] remained alive for perhaps another thirty years, he no longer led Israel as judge and military commander. Instead, he led Israel by speaking the Word of God to the king. Unfortunately, and to the great sorrow of Samuel and Israel, the king rapidly stopped listening.” Peter J. Leithart, *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 79.

⁵⁴ Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 330.

⁵⁵ I am particularly impressed with the following chart from John Stevenson, “A King Over Israel” (1 Sam 8–12): www.angelfire.com/nt/theology/1sam08.html; accessed 14 December 2011.

Samuel testifies of his own past faithfulness (12:1–5).	The people repent of their unfaithfulness (12:17–25).
“Take your stand” to see what God has done in the past (12:6–7).	“Take your stand” to see what God is going to do in the future (12:16).
God has been faithful in the past despite Israel’s continued unfaithfulness (12:8–12).	God will continue to be faithful to bless faithfulness and to punish unfaithfulness (12:14–15).
Here is the King for whom you asked (12:13).	

⁵⁶ Robert Jeffress, *Second Chance, Second Act: Turning Your Messes into Successes* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2007), 108–9.

⁵⁷ Jeffress, *Second Chance, Second Act*, 15.