



HALF  
WITH THE HOURS  
LESSONS  
OF  
1883



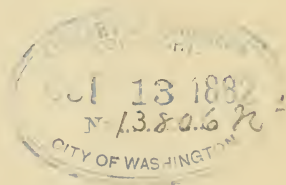
# HALF HOURS

WITH THE LESSONS OF 1883

CHAPTERS ON THE BIBLE TEXTS CHOSEN FOR  
SABBATH-SCHOOL STUDY DURING 1883

IN CONNECTION WITH

THE INTERNATIONAL LESSON SERIES



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## SAMUEL THE JUDGE.

BY THE REV. T. D. WITHERSPOON, D. D.

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Oct. 14.—1 Sam. 7 : 3-17.

FOR more than twenty years the Philistines had held undisputed sway over the greater part of the territory of Israel. Their garrisons were in every strong city; their tribute was yearly exacted of the finest of the wheat and the richest of the oil. The people of God, debased by idolatry, disheartened by defeat and enervated by subjection to a foreign power, had fallen into apathy, dead in great measure both to the claims of patriotism and piety. Shechem and Shiloh, the ancient sanctuaries of worship, were both in the possession of the Philistines. Even the sacred ark of the covenant had been surrendered ingloriously into the hands of the uncircumcised. Restored by miracle, it still remained in the Hivite town of Kirjath-jearim upon the border. Israel was without a sanctuary as well as without a ruler.

But the time had come in the sovereign mercy of God, and in fulfillment of his covenant-promises to Abraham, when the chosen people should be delivered from the galling bondage under which they had so long groaned. The power of the oppressor was to be broken. Deliverance was to come in the only way in which it could come, through the interposition of divine aid. This *help of*

*God bringing deliverance* is the great theme brought to our consideration to-day.

I. The help of God which brings deliverance comes *through the agency of a personal deliverer*. This is the first great historical lesson of those dark days in which the judges ruled. Ever and anon, when the people by their idolatry had sold themselves into bondage, and the yoke of their servitude had become so oppressive that they cried unto the Lord for deliverance, he raised up for them a liberator in the person of some great champion of the faith, who broke off for them the fetters and led them to victory and political disenthralment. Each of these hero-judges was officially a type of the great Deliverer. In each succeeding one the personal analogies to the great Antitype become more and more apparent, until in Samuel, the last and noblest of the line, we reach one of the most illustrious types of Christ to be found in Old-Testament history. In him the three great offices of prophet, priest and ruler are combined. The beautiful innocence of his childhood, the stainless integrity of his manhood, and the intensity of consecration to his life-work point conspicuously to Him who was "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners," and who gave himself for the deliverance of his people.

II. The help which brings deliverance comes *only upon condition of sincere repentance for sin and whole-hearted return to the Lord*. The great characteristic of Samuel as a judge is found in the emphasis which he lays upon this work of repentance and reform. Samson, the marvelously endowed champion of the tribe of Dan, had sought to deliver his people out of the hands of this same Philistine host. There were many points of resemblance between these two great leaders. They were both sons of pious parents, to whom they had been mi-

raculously given in token of the special favor of God. They were both solemnly set apart to the Lord in their childhood and bound with the Nazarites' stringent vow. In unshorn hair, abstinence from wine and simplest habits of dress and living they were alike. In heroic faith and zeal for God, and burning desire to liberate their people, they were animated by the same spirit. But here the parallel ceases. Samson adventured all upon personal prowess. Conscious of extraordinary powers, he sought to annoy and intimidate the Philistines into submission. Wasting his strength in brilliant but vain exploits, a romantic life was crowned with a glorious death, yet he passed away, leaving the Philistines still in possession of the land.

Samuel, tracing the miseries of his people to their true source in the chastisement of God for their sins, realizing that the first step toward disenthralment must be taken in repentance and reformation, sets himself quietly but steadfastly to work to rekindle in the hearts of his countrymen the smouldering fires of religion. "If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts," said he, "then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines."

As the result of his earnestness and his success the historian records in this chapter that "the children of Israel did put away Baalim [the images of Baal] and Ashtaroth [the images of Astarte, the Phœnician goddess], and served the Lord only." The renunciation of these idolatrous images, with the licentious rites with which their worship was accompanied, was the "bringing forth of fruits meet for repentance," an evidence of the genuineness of that "lamenting after the Lord" which

was to be speedily followed by the tokens of his divine presence and blessing.

At the basis of all true freedom from the Philistines that rule the heart, from the bondage of corruption, from the fetters of guilt, from the "lusts that war against the soul," is this bitter work of repentance, this putting away of the idols of the soul, this turning with the whole heart to the service of the Lord.

III. The help which brings deliverance comes *through a covenant sealed with blood*. When Samuel finds the people awakened to a sense of their sins and earnestly purposing reformation, he gives direction to "gather all Israel to Mizpeh," with the promise that he will pray for them. The object of this gathering was that they might solemnly renew their covenant-vows, as their fathers had done at Shechem in the days of Joshua, and as their descendants often did afterward in times of great religious awakening. The symbolical act of "drawing water and pouring it out before the Lord" has been variously interpreted—as expressing humiliation of spirit, "as water spilt upon the ground," etc.; as signifying confession of sin and of need of cleansing; as symbolizing the pouring out of the heart in repentance, etc. But the best explanation is that which connects this pouring out of water with a similar ceremony in many ancient forms of covenanting, of which examples are given by Dr. Kitto and others.

A solemn renewal of the covenant then takes place. Samuel affixes to it the divinely-appointed seal by taking a sucking lamb and "offering it for a burnt-offering wholly unto the Lord." This covenant, originally made with Abraham, and afterward renewed or ratified from time to time, is the one which underlay then, and still underlies, the visible Church of God. This blood of the

lamb, crimsoning the altar and sealing the covenant, was the divinely-appointed type of blood which twelve hundred years later should be shed on Calvary, the seal of "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." As deliverance from Philistine bondage came only through the provisions of the covenant with Abraham, as that covenant was ratified and rested in by the oppressed and suffering people, so deliverance from the bondage of Satan comes only through the provisions of the covenant of grace, as that covenant is sealed with the blood of Christ and joyfully accepted and rested in by the sin-oppressed soul.

IV. The help which brings deliverance comes *in answer to prayer*. The renewal of the covenant is accompanied by the observance of a day of public fasting and prayer. The people make humble confession of sin and call upon God for deliverance. They entreat Samuel that he will "cease not to cry unto the Lord God" for them. While he stands before the altar lifting up his cry in their behalf the divine interposition takes place and deliverance is effected. The whole record shows the efficacy of prayer. It affords an instance in a far-distant age of what has often occurred since when the people of God in times of perplexity and peril, face to face with dire calamity of war, pestilence or famine, have humbled themselves before God with solemn fasting and with public prayer—have penitently invoked his interposition and deprecated his wrath, and he has heard them and sent deliverance from their troubles.

The Church of God has never yet tested to its full extent the power of prayer. It is Samuel's memorial that he is (Ps. 99:6) "among them that call upon God's name," who "called upon the Lord, and he answered them." Luther, Knox, Whitefield, Wesley, the men who



carried forward great movements and accomplished glorious works for God, have been men pre-eminent in prayer.

V. The help which brings deliverance comes *in the use of appointed means*. Whilst the people were engaged in their devotions they saw the host of the Philistines advancing. Hastening to set the battle in array, they implore Samuel to remain at the place of prayer and to cease not to cry unto the Lord to save them. While they are using all the means in their power, the arm of the Lord interposes. Help comes to them opportunely—not a moment earlier than is needful, not a moment later than is safe. Not when the first alarm was sounded, and the people, startled by the unexpected assault, “were afraid of the Philistines,” did the Lord appear, but when Samuel, going calmly forward with the sacrifice in the face of the advancing enemy, had shown the sincerity of his trust in God—when the hosts of Israel, drawing inspiration from the faith of their dauntless leader, had set the battle in array and were making use of all available means of defence. Then it was, in the very moment of insolent assault and heroic defence, that the Lord appeared for the defence of his people and wrought with them in the strife. To the noise of their battle-shout he added the awful voice of his thunder. To the sheen of their armor he joined the terrific blaze of his lightnings, dazzling, blinding, bewildering the advancing foe, until, distracted with terror and dismayed at the thought of fighting against God, they turned to flight, and fell beneath the weapons of God’s people as the unresisting grass before the mower’s scythe. And so Israel wrought out its deliverance that day, the Lord working with his people and working in them—the victory in a subordinate sense theirs, but in the highest sense not theirs, but God’s.

Thus is it always in the deliverance which God works

for his people. In all our conflicts with Satan, the world and sin, help comes from God, but only as direct effort is put forth by us. It comes to give efficiency and success to our efforts. We may not sit idle and wait for some marvelous interposition of God's power. We may not first do our part in our own strength and then wait for God to do his. It is in and through our working that divine power is put forth and divine help given. We "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

VI. The help which brings victory in the first conflict is *the pledge, to be gratefully recognized, of complete and final deliverance*. When the battle at Mizpeh had been fought and the victory won, Samuel "took a stone and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it EBENEZER" ["the stone of help"], "saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." The object of this memorial-stone was to keep in thankful remembrance the help that had been received. It pointed gratefully to the past. Lifted up between Mizpeh and Shen, doubtless on some elevated spot near the field where the great victory had been gained, it told to the generations as they passed the story of God's goodness and power.

The Christian also has his grateful Ebenezers, the thankful memorials of help from God, without which the enemies of his soul had surely triumphed over him. There is not a day in his life but calls for some such memorial of divine help in the hour of need. And there are now and then great epochs of special and signal deliverance, when the believer should set up a more conspicuous Ebenezer to bear witness of the loving-kindness and faithfulness of the Lord.

Samuel's stone not only looked backward in gratitude,

but forward in hope. It not only said, "The Lord hath helped me," but "*Hitherto hath the Lord helped me.*" Up to this point he has not failed of assistance. Help has come when it was needed and as it was needed; and, since he changes not, faith delights to draw the inference that He who has helped me hitherto will continue to help me to the end. It is this relation of past mercies to future needs that gives them their preciousness. These "first-fruits" are the pledge of the incoming harvest. They are "the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." They give assurance that "He which hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

"His love in times past forbids me to think  
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;  
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review  
Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite through."

Samuel's hope was not disappointed, for "the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel." Not only were "all the cities which the Philistines had taken" regained, but even "the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines." The deliverance was complete, as it will ever be with those who seek the help of God in the same spirit and in the use of the same means with Israel at Mizpeh.

VII. The help which brings deliverance *engages to the lifelong service of Him who so graciously interposes for our relief.* "And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life, and he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel," etc. In these concluding words of the lesson we have the record of a life sacredly and exclusively devoted to the service of God. Nor can we doubt that the help which Samuel had obtained at Mizpeh had become a great con-

straining force in his life of daily self-sacrifice and toil. He was animated by the same spirit with the apostle Paul when he said (Acts 26 : 22), "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great," etc. It was the spirit which the apostle sought to awaken in the brethren at Rome when he wrote (Rom. 12 : 1), "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." It is the spirit which should animate every follower of Christ. Each mercy received should be a silken cord binding more closely to the service of God. Instead of presuming upon gracious interpositions in the past as occasions for indulgence or inaction in the present, we should find in these both incentive and encouragement to steady progress and patient labor in the Christian life.

So, setting up our Ebenezers along the way, and gathering from each of them fresh courage for the portion of the journey that still remains, we shall find help as help is needed until the last dread conflict is waged and the last great victory achieved. Then, gathering amid the parted waters, like Joshua of old, materials for the record of our triumph, we shall set up on the shining shore our last Ebenezer, and enter the gates of the city, singing as we go, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."