

The Wreckage of
Testimony *and*
the Remedy for It



THE WRECKAGE OF TESTIMONY.

WE ARE living in days when it is common to hear and speak of the failure of the testimony as committed to the Church of God; and as the realization of this failure produces different results among God's people, it might be well to consider what would be the godly way of meeting the condition. To some, the ruin seems so complete that, losing heart, they throw up the hands, as it were, and exclaim, "It's all a wreck; what's the use of trying to maintain a testimony for God?" and thus, despairingly, they give up the contest.

But is this God's way? Is there not a more excellent way than this? We believe there is. Don't let us close our eyes to the ruin; don't let us ignore the weakness of the situation. Rather let us seek to take it in more fully; but while we do so, let us not forget that the resources of our God are by no means exhausted because His people have failed again and again. Like Israel of old we have destroyed ourselves, yet in God is our help (Hosea xiii. 9).

The Two Ways Illustrated.

In 1st Samuel we have these two principles of action illustrated for us. The condition of Israel, as unfolded in the opening chapters of this book, was sad. The people were ignorant and idolatrous, the judges were a failure, and the priestly family a disgrace. Eli, the high priest, was a quiet, self-indulgent old man, having little control over his own house, and daily proving himself to be more and more

incapacitated for ruling the people of God. Lawlessness and impiety were glaring in the lives of his sons, and doubtless reflected in the lives of the common people. It would seem as though matters could not be much worse; and to the eye of sense there was no remedy in sight. Indeed, by the majority, possibly none was desired.

But God could not allow matters to go on thus without interfering in judgment. In 1 Samuel iv. we find how it fell on the nation, and especially on the house of Eli. The Ark of God that they had taken with them into the fight with the Philistines, in the hope that *it* might save them, was taken by the enemy. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain. Eli himself hearing of it, fell back from the seat on which he was, and being a heavy man, broke his neck. Phinehas' wife hearing of all this, "bowed herself and travailed," and gave birth to a son. It cost her her life, but ere she died she took in the whole condition of things,—the wreck and ruin all around her; and she called the name of her boy "Ichabod," saying, "The glory is departed from Israel!"

It was the wail of despair—the utterance of one who *saw the wreck, but did not know the remedy*. She could pronounce the sentence of "Ichabod" on the whole nation, but knew of no way by which even a little of that glory might be brought back again.

The Remedy Known.

In chapter i., however, we have another case. It antedates the other by several years, and presumably the condition of things was not quite as bad. Yet here is a woman who, we believe, saw how the testimony was gone, and

could see that "Ichabod" was practically written over all; yet she knew the source from which the remedy must come, and was intelligent as to what that remedy must be. *God needed a man* who would serve as a link between Himself and His needy people, and that man must come from God.

But what could she do? She was but a woman—a poor, barren woman. She could not prophesy or preach. She could not do many a thing that seemed to be needed. There was but one thing left open for her—*she could pray*. And who will say that she did not render greater service to Israel in that way than had she been able to preach with stirring eloquence? Oh! ye dear women in the Church of God who, seeing the ruin of the present testimony, feel inclined to let the hands hang down in despair, God give you to see the possibilities of prayer!

Hannah was, as we have noted, a barren woman; and her distress over her own condition is accentuated by the provocation of her adversary, who reproached her. Is it any wonder, then, that she should be desirous to have the cause of this reproach lifted from her? Is it a matter of surprise that she cried unto the Lord to give her a man child? All this seems perfectly natural; but we lose the point if we see no deeper than that in these intense utterances of dear Hannah. Her own condition was bad enough, but, after all, she was but a picture of the whole nation—they were all barren. There was this difference, however, between her and the nation; she owned her condition; they did not. She grasped the situation, and was in fellowship with God about it; with them it was not so. Her need as a woman is deep enough, but

Israel's Need Is Deeper,

and her desire was not for self, but rather that God might have a man raised up for Him to meet the conditions that existed. She does not shout nor cry aloud; the prayer is coming from her heart, and God hears it.

In due time a son is born unto her, and she calls his name Samuel, which means "asked of God." God had granted her request. Does she then say to herself, "I have no other child; this is my very own," and as she lavishes upon him the wealth of a mother's heart, add, "I will not, I cannot part with him; he must not go from me?" No; she is in fellowship with God, so she says the first year, "I will not go up (to Shiloh) until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and *there abide for ever*" (1 Sam. i. 22). She had not "asked amiss," that she might consume it on her lusts (Jas. iv. 3). No; her desire was for God, and so she brought him in due time to the Tabernacle, and said to Eli, "O my lord, . . . I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. *For this child I prayed*; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him; therefore I have returned him whom *I have obtained by petition* to the Lord; as long as he liveth he whom *I have obtained by petition* shall be returned to the Lord" (1 Sam. i. 26-28, marg.).

Triumph of Grace.

This is most beautiful! How she delights to emphasize the fact that she had obtained Samuel in answer to prayer! She was but using for God's glory that which He had given her; and chapter ii. shows how she went home with her heart filled with joy, and

her mouth with the praises of the Lord. Surely this is not nature. Ah! no; it is *the outcome and triumph of the grace of God* in Hannah. And how far-seeing she is! "He shall give strength unto His King, and exalt the horn of His Anointed" (verse 10). It was as much as saying, "My boy, whom I have left behind, shall serve for the time being, but God will never be satisfied till He has His own Anointed on the throne, with all His enemies under His feet."

In other words, Hannah was in fellowship with God about matters, and the great need there was of a man to rule for Him, so she goes right on with her song, until she speaks of God's Anointed on the throne;—and God's Anointed is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ!

It now remains to us but to show how Samuel answered to this faith of his mother. Isaiah, in his day, said of Israel, "Yea, truth faileth; . . . and the Lord saw it. . . . And *He saw that there was no man*, and wondered there was *no intercessor*," etc. (Isa. lix. 15, 16). Or, as he said in chapter lxiv. 7, "There is *none that calleth upon Thy Name*, that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee." Or, as in a later day priests and princes, prophets and people were all wrong, yet the extremity of the case is realized when God says, "*I sought for a man among them that should . . . stand in the gap before Me for the land . . . but I found none.*" (Read Ezek. xxii. 26-30.)

A Man of God.

Somewhat parallel to this was the state of matters in the times we are considering. The

spiritual condition of all was waxing worse and worse, and the need was for a man to stand in the gap before God. He must be a clean vessel, through whom God could minister to His Israel. He must be a man who could approach God on behalf of His needy people. This was what Hannah foresaw. To this end did she ask for Samuel. Does he answer to it? We believe he did.

In 1 Samuel iii. 1 we have the suggestive statement: "*The Word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.*" Alas! it was precious by reason of its very scarcity. There was none through whom God could send His Word to His people. Now, notice the contrast at the end of the chapter: "And Samuel grew, and *the Lord was with him*, and did let none of His words fall to the ground. . . . And *the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the Word of the Lord.* And *the word of Samuel came to all Israel.*" (1 Sam. iii. 19-21; iv. 1.) How suggestively beautiful is this! For a long time there had been no open vision. The heavens were silent. Now, however, God has a man through whom He can speak, and He appeared again in Shiloh, and revealed Himself there to Samuel by the Word of the Lord. And that Word, through Samuel, reached *all Israel!* Once more communication between God and His people has been restored. God has a man among them in fellowship with Himself, whom He can use. Is this one thing not greatly needed now? We mourn the dearth of profitable ministry. Is there not a cause? And is this not the cause, that there is a lack of men in touch with God, through whom He can speak?

A Man of Prayer.

But there is another point. Samuel was a man who could pray, and get answers from God. In 1 Sam. vii. we find Israel putting away their idols, and seeking to get back to God. In this revival Samuel is a prominent figure. The Philistines, hearing of the movement, are stirred up to oppose, and Israel called on Samuel to pray for them. This he did in connection with his sacrifice of a sucking lamb. And the statement is made that "*Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him*" (verses 8 and 9). It is needless to add the enemy was defeated. This is but a sample of Samuel as an intercessor. Grace does not run in the blood, but in this case a godly, praying mother is followed by a praying son. Later on the Spirit of God speaks thus: "Moses and Aaron among His priests, and *Samuel among them that call upon His Name*; they called upon the Lord, and He answered them." (Psa. xcix. 6.) Thus, both as God's mouthpiece to His people, and the people's intercessor with God, did Samuel answer to the desire of his mother, who, seeing the ruin and wreck of the testimony, did not despair; but rather laid hold on God, that He would raise up a man to be a link between Himself and his needy people. Samuel was such a man. Oh! for more of such in this our day. God grant it!

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