

Book Review: “In the Midst of Your Enemies”

A commentary on I Samuel by Joel McDurmon, 2013. Review by Andrew McColl, July 2014.

1.

Introduction:

Joel McDurmon is married with 4 children from Powder Springs, Georgia, and works for American Vision. His commentary is an important one, in that he seeks to take an Old Testament book and apply its lessons practically to today's world.

McDurmon believes strongly in the development of what is commonly today called a Christian World View: applying the truths and principles of scripture, and not just in matters of the heart, the individual or the family. McDurmon sees the need to apply the scriptures to law, government, economics and taxation; to a raft of subjects that have commonly been avoided in the modern era by Christians. For me, McDurmon's work represents an exciting phenomena!

I have chosen a number of quotes from McDurmon's book, with my comments being added underneath.

1. I Samuel addresses, among other things, the direct link between social freedom and God's Law, national security and God's Law, as well as specific politic issues such as biblical principles of warfare, kingship, national defence, the right to bear arms, taxation, military conscription, national greatness, political candidacy, political parties, party rivalries, jurisprudence (including biblical “common” law versus arbitrary civil or “statute” law), how to remain faithful under a regime hostile to biblical law, expatriation, political compromise, voting, the lesser of two evils, the surveillance state, and more. And it is simply staggering, once you understand the narratives involved, just how closely Samuel's and David's situations parallel our own in many ways, and how often the political expressions of modern Christians more closely align with Saul's than with David's (p.x).

Clearly, McDurmon is prepared to confront some major issues of modern, western society. This is important. He is really inferring even at this point of the book, that the scripture is to be the authority for all human activity. Thus all ways of thinking and acting apart from the Bible have no legitimacy; they are an affront to God.

This will mean change, beginning in the church, which has actively contributed to the shift away from the focus on God's Word as the basis for all human activity. It means radical change of the kind that John the Baptist referred to: “the axe is already laid at the root of the trees...” (Mat.3:10).

The logic of McDurmon's position is that the world needs a Reformation to occur in the church, for it is supposed to be “...the pillar and support of the truth” (I Tim.3:15). Without that Reformation, there will simply continue to be more of the same: evil and abuse, perpetuated by government, often tacitly aided by the church.

2... We are reminded that God's promise is the same promise from beginning to end. A seed of the woman should come and crush the head of the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Between these two seeds there shall be rivalry and hatred until that time. That promise and the themes pertaining to it are repeated throughout Scripture, and we see types and shadows of that promised seed and his adversary during momentous epochs in God's redemptive history. 1 Samuel introduces us to one of those momentous revolutions of history (p.18).

So many times in scripture, pregnancy and birth were points of celebration. These are not merely for an addition to a family, but because of the potential of this new individual for the kingdom of God. This is what is really behind the excitement when Moses' mother bore him (Ex.1:1-10), when Samson's parents had a visitation from an angel, promising them a child though Manoah's wife had been barren (Judges 13), when Zacharias and Elizabeth were promised a child in the person of John (Luke 1:5-25), and the birth of Jesus Himself (Matt.1:18-25). In all these cases, the promise in the background of scripture is "the seed of the woman..." (Gen.3:15), ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Himself.

McDurmon shows how the birth of Samuel to Hannah, who had failed to conceive for so long, would be significant for the nation. Whilst it would be God who anointed Saul through Samuel, even before this event, God was raising up Samuel who would go on to anoint Saul's successor. And Hannah would be used of the Lord too, not only as Samuel's mother, but in her prayers, that the corrupt priestly leadership of the nation would come to judgment.

3. While wickedness abounded all around her, Hannah was privately planning revival and restoration for her nation. She had a plan that began with prayer, proceeded with self-sacrifice, and required bold public truth-telling: three jobs no one really wants in any age. But Hannah's actions were filled with grace—the meaning of her name, after all. What looks at first like a story of a personal rivalry ends up illustrating the tremendous self-sacrificial character of Hannah (p.22-23).

Godly individuals at prayer are powerful people in God's hands. Furthermore, godly people who know what their nation really needs, and are prepared to ask God for it, will be used of Him. And this should be a stimulus for us today. We who know that there is much wrong in the nation, must not be content to simply say, "Well, that's the way that it is, and we cannot do much about it."

If we believe that God knows the needs of our nation, and that He hears our prayers, we are obliged to go to Him in prayer. The Bible (in the Messianic promise of the Father to the Son) declares, "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession" (Ps.2:8). In fact, the promise of God concerning the healing of our land (II Chron.7:14) is contingent upon the prayers of God's people.

4. The content of Hannah's prayer also shows that she had big faith. She was not afraid to approach God for a solution to the nation's biggest problems, on a national level. This has two facets. First, she was not afraid to pray a prayer that had direct political implications. She wanted revival in the land, and that meant political and social revival. As we shall see in 1 Samuel 2:1-11, she had in mind a massive judgment of the house of God, beginning with the corrupt priesthood, and she told them so. She also envisions a Lord who kills his enemies and levels them to the dust. Her prayer for a Nazirite son was a prayer to bring about such national social change.

Yes, there was a lot of work left to do—a lot of hard work. Hannah was not afraid to confront the enormity of the problem for what it was, and then to pray for a solution on that magnitude (p.30).

It is one thing for us to understand the enormity of our nation's problems. It is another thing to grasp the enormity of the promises of God. Like this one:

Do not be afraid little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32).

For every great and small problem, whether it relates to the individual, the family, the church or a nation, God has a solution, beginning in His Word. And we don't need to go running here and there outside of scripture to find His solutions. Just as Hannah was prepared to shoulder enormous personal and indeed national responsibility in her day in having a son, giving him to the Lord, and in prayer, so must believers today.

For example, if there is a corrupt priesthood today, believers need to be in prayer about this. The Christian leaders of the church world-wide need to know what God did to Israel, in Hannah's time. So they need to either repent or be judged, and that is how we ought to pray. If there is corruption, there must be change, for God will not continue to permit leaders to continue to purport to represent Him, if they are really corrupt and misrepresenting Him. He will deal with their hypocrisy, one way or the other. And this is how we ought to be praying, for "it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God..." (I Pet.4:17).

2.

5. We must be of a similar mindset [to Hannah] in raising children. First, we must in fact desire children, but second, we must more importantly desire to have them for the work of the Lord, for the advancement of His kingdom and His dominion in the earth. To this end, we must train them theologically and prepare them for spiritual warfare in our day. All personal agendas, vicarious attachments of self-justification, and over-romanticized productions of Victorian pseudo-piety must be set aside as trivial at best, if not idolatrous in some cases. The child exists for the advancement of the kingdom of God and for His dominion in the earth, not for your personal satisfactions, although these come as a by-product of faithfulness and grace. And it is only the dedication of our children to the work of God that will redound to ultimate joy at the end of this holy war (p.31).

There is a lot of sentimental nonsense in the church about raising children, mainly rooted in the failure of Christians to accept that our children do not belong to us, but to the Lord. We are merely stewards of their lives for a period of time. That means that we must have in mind the issue of our accountability before God, in all that we are doing with our children. I'd like to encourage every Christian parent considering their child's education:

The child exists for the advancement of the kingdom of God and for His dominion in the earth.

This means that whatever form of preparation is necessary, we should consider. Our days as parents are numbered, and we have serious business to attend to, preparing our children for a life of service and dominion, in subjection to the King of Kings.

6. *As with so many stories we will encounter throughout 1 Samuel, the Gospel is foreshadowed clearly in certain ways here. We have a child of miraculous birth to a mother who then praises the God of judgment, etc. We have already noted the parallel in Mary's magnificat (Luke 1:46–56). It is not accidental. Just as Hannah was calling down judgment upon a corrupt priesthood and nation of Israel, so Mary was introducing the Messiah to the same corrupt people who would not receive Him. He ends up predicting the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24) and the end of the Israelite kingdom in favour of the Church (Matt. 21:43). Both were announcing great reversals in history—Jesus, of course, being the hinge upon which all history turns (p.40, 41).*

One aspect of Israel's disobedience in Samuel's era, was its refusal to face the issue of God's judgments. When Samuel warned them of what the consequences would be if they did in fact get the king they wanted, they said, "No, but there shall be a king over us..." (I Sam.8:19). They were really saying, "Give us what we want, and we'll risk the consequences that God may send."

Regrettably, the modern church is hardly different. Mostly, it doesn't want to acknowledge that God judges individuals, cultures and nations. It would prefer to look the other way, and talk about God's love. Talking about God's love and grace is legitimate, sometimes. But as Martin Luther warned, "Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved." Consider this news report from the US:

Judge Says Man's Law Higher than God's Law:

Judges around the country have become a law unto themselves. There were five church-going judges in Alabama who ruled that sodomy marriages are constitutional. Their Christianity made no difference in their lives. I don't know who to blame, the churches they attend who separate the Christian faith from politics (and nearly everything else) or the law schools they attended that do the same thing.¹

The failure of the church to understand God's judgment explains the spiritual decline of the West now, for over a century. We've been going backwards, and hardly even known it. Not only that, it's going to get worse before it gets better. While the church is unwilling or unable to fundamentally direct the world to the truth, it will not only inherit the world's scorn and derision (which Jesus predicted would happen, see Mat.5:13), but it will not see the blessing of God.

Israel was in decline in Hannah's era, in Mary's era, and the church is in decline today, until such time as it takes its God-given tasks seriously again, and begins to "...make disciples of all the nations..." (Mat.28:19).

7. *At the heart of the delusions and despair which cause our personal and social problems is often bad theology. There may be simple factual mistakes as well, but bad theology should not be overlooked. Bad theology makes for bad worldviews. Bad worldviews lead to poor decisions. Poor decisions create corrupt societies.*

This began in the ecclesiastical leadership. Remember: what happened to these Israelites on this battlefield originated with a failure in worship and teaching (see 2:12–36). Perversions

¹ Gary Demar, www.americanvision.com, 16/7/2014

in the house of God produced defeat in society, law, and now international affairs. The advance of the kingdom of God had come to a halt (p.76, 77).

This much is evident: during Samuel's childhood, God treated the corrupt priesthood of Israel like an infected, putrid appendix, needing to be removed.

Now, only a foolish person would say, "Well, what's that got to do with us, today?" The warning from scripture is that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb.13:8), and that by God's judgments, "...Your servant is warned" (Ps.19:11).

Cleaning up the house of God was painful then, and it may be today. But what other options do we have? We either faithfully represent God to the world, or we misrepresent Him. And when we foolishly choose or permit the latter, just as Eli, Hophni and Phinehas did, we expose ourselves to His wrath.

This means that there will need to be audits made amongst God's people: "...great searchings of heart" (Judges 5:16). Individuals, families and churches will need to thoroughly consider beliefs and practices that we have held. We will have to say of all that we have believed and done, "Is this in accordance with God's Word?"

This will require humbling of heart, prayer, debates, culminating in significant theological shifts, followed by changes of attitude and lifestyle. If the house of God needs a cleanout, we'd best arm ourselves with a new broom and put it to use.

Believers had best be praying, perhaps along these lines: "O Lord God of hosts, restore us; cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved" (Ps.80:19).

8. What we've just covered [in I Samuel 7] is nothing less than an account of a national revival. From it we can derive necessary elements that form something of a blueprint.

- 1. Preaching of the Law.*
- 2. The removal of false gods from hearts, homes, and the land.*
- 3. Repentance, corporate worship individual*
- 4. A self-sacrificial attitude among the people*
- 5. Faithful response to crises (in prayer and action)*
- 6. Perseverance in faithful action*
- 7. Return to godly education*
- 8. Restoration of predictable justice according to God's law (p.106, 107).*

McDurmon has been courageous enough to give us a blueprint. It's not an easy one, but it is exciting. Now, a Christian leader is telling God's people what it is they will have to do, if they are truly serious about inheriting the blessing of God in their nation. All of these changes require change among the grass-roots of every community, but beginning in the church. None of them will take place without this. We cannot say, "Well, that's a matter for church and political leaders to deal with." It may involve those groups of people, but if the grass-roots of a community doesn't want to embrace the changes necessary for revival in a nation, it simply won't happen.

No person on earth is exempt from the commands of the gospel; we are all sinners in need of the Saviour. It wasn't merely the religious and political leaders who crucified Jesus. When Jesus came and spoke at Nazareth, He confronted people in the synagogue. The Bible tells us that "all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things, and they got up and drove Him out of the city..." (Luke 4:28-29). The very person Who could have saved them, they got rid of.

This should warn us. It's easy to say "Yes" to God. But saying "Yes" will mean lots of changes for the rest of our lives, because God is always about up-setting the apple-carts of humanism, especially when He finds them among God's people. And in I Samuel, this is what Samuel as the spiritual leader of God's people, was responsible to lead the nation in.

Do we have leaders like this today? Let's pray that God will certainly raise them up.

3.

9. We saw how the Philistines gathered for war when Israel returned to God. We can expect that when the saints get serious about their faith, the enemy will mobilize against them. The moment we put those idols away and make the sacrifices of faithfulness, we can expect that new and vexing challenges will confront us, making us doubt whether we have made the right decision. This is nothing but a test of faith, and we must respond to it the way reconstructed Israel responded: prayer and perseverance. We turn to God for help, and then continue in the battle ahead of us until it is finished (p.112).

Positive steps of faith and obedience by individuals or the people of God are often followed by God with a test. This is what took place with Jesus when He was tempted (Mat.4:1-11), and this is what James spoke of: "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12).

Now it has come for Israel, in the form of a Philistine attack. God is challenging His people: "Have you really got what it takes to stand your ground, or not?"

Throughout I Samuel 7, Israel had grown in its faithfulness to God. Now they were confronted by an unprovoked Philistine attack, and they responded positively to it, just as we must too.

10. Western liberty began when the claim of the state to be man's saviour was denied. The state then, according to Scripture, was made the ministry of justice. But, wherever Christ ceases to be man's saviour, there liberty perishes as the state again asserts its messianic claims. Man is in trouble, and history is the record of his attempt to find salvation. Man needs a saviour, and the question is simply one of choice: Christ or the state? No man can choose the one without denying the other, and all attempts at compromise are a delusion.²

² Quoted from Rousas Rushdoony, "The Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church," 1998, p.67. Quoted in McDurmon, p.128.

This is one vital area that the church has always had a charge from God, to speak the truth. The idea that the state can save is not only a delusion, but it is something that ought to be constantly challenged by the church, which hasn't understood the theological, religious and sociological implications of this belief.

The early church saw it with Rome and the Caesars, and their obedience meant they sometimes paid in blood.

Why can't we see it today? Is it because we have been too engrossed in getting what Caesar could give us, while ignoring what Jesus Christ said? I believe so, and for this, God is bringing His people to judgment, just as He did Israel.

*11. There would be a new income tax. The king would take **the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and . . . the tenth of your flocks** (8:15–17). This also was beyond God's Law. The Mosaic Code nowhere allowed for civil taxation. None was needed if the culture simply followed that Law—that is, lived free, loved God, and loved their neighbour accordingly. The only required payment was God's command to tithe to the priests and Levites, and to the family for festivals (Deut. 14). These payments were God's portion, paid to the ecclesiastical establishment or spent in a family and community setting. There was never supposed to be any means of civil enforcement for even God's portion. But this new administration would impose a civil tax on income. This would send a message as well: the state is rival to God and deserves just as much honour and sacrifice. This is revealed in two ways: 1) the fact that a civil tax was imposed to begin with (the King's word attempting to improve upon God's Word), and 2) the fact that the tax would be as high as God's portion—a tithe, or 10 percent (p.135).*

Why was Israel determined to have a new king? They were in rebellion against the God Who was their true King, and so they were really choosing a new law-giver. This would mean over-turning Israel's structure, shifting the nation from a Biblically religious structure, to a pagan political order.

As Paul later explained about all people who turn from God, "...They became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools" (Ro.1:21-22).

We need to ensure that we don't think Israel's choice was some kind of political accident. Israel was self-consciously rebelling in what it was doing. Speaking to Samuel, God said about them that

...they have rejected Me from being king over them. Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day-in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods-so they are doing to you also (1 Sam.8:7-8).

Once again Israel was turning away from God to paganism, and their deliberate choice of Saul as their king would be a manifestation of this. They wanted him, and God gave him to them. As He said later, "I gave you a king in My anger, and took him away in My wrath" (Hos.13:11).

The pagan manifestations of Saul's regime are with us today,, but more so. And some of us kid ourselves that ours is a Christian nation! The fact that this has happened among the once Christian West, reflects very badly on the church of the West. It's happened on our watch, and we've been responsible.

12. The most important point to take from Samuel's warning is that the welfare-warfare state is divine punishment for rejecting God and His Word in the civil realm. It was judgment for civil idolatry and godlessness by Israel, and it is upon us for the same reasons. So when the Christian observes the same hallmarks of the road to serfdom paralleled in our allegedly free society today, we ought to pause before we call ourselves the "Land of the free and home of the brave." In light of our taxation and socialistic systems, we might rather consider whether we are in fact the "Land of the fee and home of the slave." In many instances, our society has far surpassed the tyranny which Samuel described. We are in so deep it is difficult for us to see some aspects of Israel's tyranny as unacceptable or even undesirable. Parts of it look like greater freedom to us. Who wouldn't settle for a mere 10 percent income tax today? But rest assured, the welfare-warfare state period is God's judgment for rejecting His Word in the civil realm. And this means we have a lot of repenting and restoration ahead of us; or worse, decline into further slavery (p.137).

McDurmon is specifically referring to the United States today, but he could very well be referring to almost any nation of the world, because we all have the same hall-marks of humanism: a community (led by the church) that has essentially turned from God and His law, taxation of well over 10%, along with numbers of other means of social oppression. We're up to our eye-balls in nations that are in rebellion against God, but we in the church hardly even know it. And the problems began with us, hundreds of years ago. Indeed, some of the problems began within the first few hundred years AD, when the Church tried to marry Christian theological beliefs with Greek humanistic philosophy. The bastard offspring still lives.

4.

13. So be mindful of two things here: 1) Samuel's warning was a description of a rebellious society under God's judgment, and 2) our own society far surpasses the tyrannies that he described as judgment and outright slavery. This drives us to the conclusion that our society has rejected God in the civil realm, and is far down the road in doing so. In some aspects, it rejected him long, long ago. We need to turn a critical, prophetic voice upon this world, call it to repent, and get on with the long work of Christian reconstruction. Toward this end, we must outline the blueprint of what a free, biblical civil society looks like. That is, what is the goal toward which we must aim? (p.139, 140)

What does a Christian society look like? Are there similarities between that, and what we see today? Should society be centred around Biblical law, or humanistic law? And if so, why? Along with that, what about politics, government, education and economics? Does the Bible have anything to say about these critical spheres of human activity?

Until the church is able to resolve these fundamental issues in a God-honouring way, we will continue to be like the blind leading the blind. Only when this does change will we be able to gain a measure of leadership in the communities of the world.

*14. Few things are more commonly misunderstood than the nature and meaning of theocracy. It is commonly assumed to be a dictatorial rule by self-appointed men who claim to rule for God. In reality, theocracy in Biblical law is the closest thing to a radical libertarianism that can be had*³(p.140).

Because antinomians both in and out of the church have successfully demonised God's law, the church has a lot of repenting to do, before it can once again teach the world from God's law. But this will be a crucial factor, in the church regaining its influence in the communities of the world. The Bible speaks of this.

Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us of His ways and that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa.2:2-3).

This will mean massive changes, firstly within the church, and then the world. But that change will be inevitable in the long-term, for God's people to become the people of influence and freedom that He wants us to be. And it will be exciting!

15. If we are to break free from the downward spiral into tyranny that we have experienced since—since when? 1965? 1937? 1913? 1865? 1789? Does it matter?—then we have to get serious about biblical Law and biblical definitions of a free society. This means home schools, private welfare, local government, states' rights, private charity instead of civil taxation, honest money, free markets, private and local courts, voluntary militias for godly causes only, and executive governments limited to the strict enforcement of God's Laws and nothing beyond. To call for civil government to get involved in anything contrary to God's Law is to lead society in the rejection of God. The result will be the slow decline into tyranny and total state slavery over generations (p.141).

This is the stark choice every society must make. Tyranny, or Biblical liberty? We have had a very limited taste of Biblical liberty, through constitutional government in much of the west, but this has only been scratching the surface. Progressing to true liberty will mean truly radical change, and it will have to begin in the church.

It will mean a great repentance in the church for failing to teach and preach the truth that leads from applying the scriptures to all of life.

It will mean that the church begins to lead the way in turning away from the blasphemous notion of the Messianic Saviour State that can provide healing for all. For only God can save, heal and deliver, but we in the church have failed to communicate this, and now it has come back to bite us.

³ Rousas Rushdoony, "The Roots of Reconstruction," 1991, p.63.

We must be prepared to preach and teach Biblical liberty. We have to continue the process, begun by Bible teachers such as Calvin, Rushdoony, Bahnsen and North of applying the scriptures to all of life. That will mean taking the Ten Commandments, along with the subsequent Case Laws of Exodus 21-23 (and the additions contained in the Pentateuch and the New Testament), and applying them to all forms of social behaviour.

This will mean much change in the long-term. It will mean ultimately, that education, health and welfare revert to their Biblical origins. They again become individual, family and church responsibilities, unfunded by the taxpayer. It will mean such reduction in the cost of civil government, that the overall taxation rate drops below 10%.

This will entail a great privatisation of almost all government activity, the progressive closure of government departments and a selling off of assets to individuals and industry, who are better managers of assets, anyway. It will mean privatisation of transport services such as railways, which historically have been a great drain on the taxpayer.

None of this can happen overnight. There will have to be a steady build-up of individual, family and church social responsibility. We have to realise just how much we have let slip now, for centuries. But the process must begin of re-claiming lost territory, right throughout the echelons of society.

16. The choice we have is whether we shall choose to obey God or to reject God in the public square. There is no neutrality, which means any compromise with humanism is a victory for humanism. Christians must decide today whether they wish to stand before God with the testimony that they dragged His name through the public square while trampling it their whole lives, or whether they stood for His Law despite the worst men could do. We must decide whether we shall continue to love the godless state in the name of God, embracing the welfare-warfare state as a gift rather than judgment from God; or whether we decide to get serious about His true gift to society: what the New Testament calls the "perfect law of liberty" (Jam. 1:25), the "royal law" (Jam. 2:8), which is the revealed standard of civil liberty, justice, freedom, and prosperity. That is the choice before us, and the time to make it now, before our own rejection of God in the civil order leads us to lament our own Babylon (p.144).

As time moves on, the choices God's people have become starker. God has been bringing down the thumb screws on His people, increasing the pressure on them to repent, or feel more pressure from Him. And when another decade or generation has passed, we look back and see how we've continued to decline.

We seem to think little of the fact that our nations make wars on others, and at the same time trying to pour mammoth amounts of confiscated money back to the community, in the form of welfare payments. And all the time God's law, which would have precluded such abuse in the community is given no attention amongst God's people.

When will this all change? And when will we get the message? The scripture tells us:

Who among you will give ear to this? Who will give heed and listen hereafter? Who gave Jacob up for spoil, and Israel to plunderers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned, and in whose ways they were unwilling to walk, and whose law they did not obey? (Isa.42:23-24)

5.

17. So what do you have here? You have a people moved by fear of terrorist attacks, and by this fear are moved to demand an aggressive national military leader (8:20) contrary to God's command (Deut. 17, 22), fashioned after the standards of the very pagans they condemned. This pro-war, pro-military desire on the part of the people, God considered a complete rejection of His rule. Yet when a self-centered, lying, cheating, coward comes along whose only asset is his appearance, this people spontaneously burst into a praise chorus, "Long live the king!"(p.151)

People always want to be led by those who are just like themselves. A godly community will choose godly leadership, whereas a pagan, ungodly people will choose pagan, ungodly leadership. This explains the prevalence of poor leadership in the world today, and the choice of Saul by Israel, in I Samuel 8.

It also serves as a warning. You want good national leadership? It will be drawn from the community, and cannot differ much from it. Why? The community will not tolerate it. This is why the saying, "Like priest, like people," is so apt. It also points to the fact that what every nation has always needed is grass-roots change, never change from the top-down.

The Wesleyan revival in England changed the nation, because it began with individuals, who became change-agents in the community. So reaching the community's grass-roots should always be the goal of the church. Change from the top-down will be at the best, temporary. The Puritan Revolution as it applied to politics, didn't last beyond Oliver Cromwell.

McDurmon is right when he points to the link between Israel's ungodliness in Saul's era, and a vast increase in government military expenditure in peacetime. When a nation doesn't trust in God, it has to come up with a substitute defence mechanism. The absence of the fear of God (in an individual or nation) leads to the fear of man. This is not only evil, it is expensive, and leads to the curtailment of liberties. Governments that fear some kind of revolt are really afraid of liberty, and thus they move to limit those who are allowed to have firearms, and the rest is history.

18. There is no more unbiblical abomination at the heart of modern life than a monopolistic fiat currency. In this nation [the U.S.], the Federal Reserve System and the "printing" of money is the beast. God's Word clearly calls for just weights and measures, and a false balance is just as much an "abomination" (Prov. 11:1) as abortion, sacrilege, idolatry, or sexual deviancies. The manipulation of the value of money and the priority distribution of huge sums to government for welfare and warfare programs, and to favoured banks and industries, is the very abomination which God condemned. Yet many Christians and conservatives, even many alleged proponents of free markets, support and defend this system as a good and necessary thing. And the rationalization for it is just like Israel's support of successful Saul: it has brought us such great success. Who can argue with the system that has produced the largest economy and greatest financial superpower in human history? (p.168).

When nations have embraced financial experiments that appear to have succeeded, they don't give them up easily. People may cry "End the Fed," but the Federal Reserve is going nowhere for now. The US is too blind and ignorant to let such an institution go away in a hurry, for it's become a national icon.

Has it failed? Well, I think it's failed comprehensively, but who am I? I'm not even an American. The Fed is an example of the crony capitalism which has plagued the US for over a century now, a statement of the cosy relationship between banks and government.

"You scratch my back? I'll scratch yours." Like an addictive drug that can bring temporary relief, the Fed will be held onto by a nation that knows nothing better and nothing else.

When there is a financial crisis, Americans don't turn to God. They turn to the Fed for answers, which has dished up its "answers," in spades. Not until its work has been comprehensively shown to be a national disaster, will it be abandoned.

This is why the wise person has to be one step ahead of the game. The present level of international economic stability is unsustainable as it's really a house of cards, built upon US national debt that hasn't and will not stop growing, until there is a collapse. Things that cannot continue, don't. And the outcomes from such a collapse will be massive.

19. The only plan to maintain a free society is one in which the government is held strictly limited and accountable to God's Law. At the legal level, a free society requires strict fiscal accountability, strict protection of private property, strict enforcement of contracts, and freedom from oppression. Civil governments are instituted among men to protect these things. For this reason, God gives the power of the sword to the civil magistrate. But the agency which has the power of the sword must itself be held strictly accountable, or else oppression, theft, and fraud are inevitable. Once accountability is compromised, compromise becomes a precedent. Government by compromise and corruption become the new normal, and the cycle of God's judgment sets in. If we think that our political devices, economic successes, or military might are going to serve us well apart from faithfulness, then we have already accepted the delusion that invited the tyranny of Saul upon the Israelites (p.170).

McDurmon is right to consistently emphasise that Israel's problems immediately preceding Saul's regime began with their abandonment of God's law. Not only does society need God's law, but government does too, for governments have always been a chief means of the oppression of nations.

And this should point us to the main issue. When the grass-roots of the community has abandoned God, there is no hope for a lasting political solution to problems. They will always fail, because they are built on the shifting sands of humanism, in opposition to God's law.

This is why we Christians have to realise that without individual, family, church and community social responsibility, politics can rarely solve problems. Political leaders can certainly have power, but power to save? Never.

"Helping" people without Biblical responsibility is not to help them at all. It generally means in the modern era, the confiscation of other people's monies and its subsequent distribution without justice.

20. *The second question raised by Israel remaining disarmed between [I Samuel] chapters 7 and 13 is why their great military leader Saul allowed them to stay that way. The most likely answer is that the total eradication of blacksmiths had meant also the total loss of the knowledge and skill of that profession throughout the land. Not only were there no smiths left, there was no one to train up a new generation of them. Even this scenario, however, would not have been irremediable. Blacksmithing would have been an easily importable technology. Why was this route neglected? Why was the Philistine monopoly on blacksmithing allowed to keep the Israeli populace in subjugation for tooling as well as disarmed?*

The conspiratorial implications of the question are too suggestive to ignore: is it possible that Saul wanted the populace to remain unarmed? Knowing that he has been motivated by fear and selfishness, and seeing this recently manifest in the selection of a standing imperial guard, it is certainly not out of the picture... Disarmament is perfectly in concert with the warnings of tyranny in 1 Samuel 8, though not explicitly stated. Saul was showing that he was indeed a king like those of the pagan nations. Indeed, he would continue their explicit policies. He was no different than them (p.179, 180).

It is a stunning suggestion McDurmon makes, that Saul may have wanted Israel disarmed to prevent an uprising. Nevertheless, it is certainly possible. While the text (I Sam.13:19-22) clearly points the finger at the Philistines, this scenario of Philistine control/restriction of Israel's arms was clearly something that Saul tolerated, for

it came about on the day of battle that neither sword nor spear was found in the hands of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan, but they were found with Saul and his son Jonathan (I Sam.13:22).

Saul tolerated his men being disarmed, but he and Jonathan had access to weapons. This reeks of hypocrisy: "Do as I say, not as I do." "One rule for me Buster, and another for you!" According to the Bible, the 600 men with Saul at Geba were essentially disarmed.

When they finally got to engage the Philistines in battle they could have done nothing, unless they could access Philistine arms, which may have happened. Amongst the Philistines in the battle, "Every man's sword was against his fellow, and there was great confusion" (I Sam.14:20). This may have been amplified by the fact that the Philistines were shocked by the fact that Jonathan and his armour-bearer had swords. The Philistine arms monopoly had been partially circumvented, and they may have been panicked. "How many more of Israel's soldiers have arms? We're unprepared for this!"

But the issue of an implicit collusion between Saul and the Philistines cannot be ignored. The tyrant's lust for the maintenance and protection of power, even to the disarmament of his own soldiers in warfare is evident. He clearly must have permitted Israelite blacksmiths to be either killed, or forced to give up their trade, or kidnapped, and taken to Philistia. The blacksmiths may have been among those who later were with the Philistines, but who joined their compatriots when the battle commenced (I Sam.14:21).

20. *Christians should be aware that the use of force, even lethal force, in preservation of life is a biblical doctrine and upheld by the Law of God (Ex. 22:2-3; Prov. 24:10-12; Est. 8-9; Neh. 4; cp. Jn.15:13-14). Likewise, those who possessed weapons in Scripture are often said to be well skilled in the use of them (Judg. 20:15-16; 1 Chron. 12:1-2, 21-22). We can only*

surmise that 1) God gave them talent in this regard, and that 2) they engaged in target practice regularly (p.181).

The Bible is not a pacifist document. Both Abraham (Gen.14:13-16; Heb.7:1) and Moses (Ex.2:11-12) killed evildoers in protection of the innocent. While the believer does not place his strength in his arms, he knows that weapons are a legitimate means of defence in an evil world, and that law-abiding people without weapons are at a distinct disadvantage.

Yes, weapons are used for criminal activity. But far more frequently in nations at peace, they are used to protect innocent people against criminal activity. This has been evident for centuries.

University of Houston Professor Larry Bell explains that:

"Law-abiding citizens in America used guns in self-defence 2.5 million times in 1993 (about 6,825 times per day), and actually shot and killed two and a half times as many criminals as police did (1,527 to 606)... " ⁴

Furthermore, an armed citizenry:

- * Requires no police.
- * Costs the taxpayers no money.
- * Requires no up-front paperwork.
- * Protects innocent lives.
- * Is deployed in as little as FIVE seconds.
- * Works everywhere.
- * Deters violent crime.
- * Makes bad guys flee immediately.
- * Is easy to learn.
- * Functions at the local level.
- * Does not require control or intervention by the United Nations or any government entity.

6.

21. From this [I Sam.13:19-22] it should be quite clear why would-be tyrants move especially for gun control laws before much else. An armed populace always presents the end to tyrannical and socialistic plans. Without this obstacle removed, there shall be no domination, no subjugation of the people, no elite-directed utopia (p.183).

Tyrants are always suspicious of armed, confident independent subjects. Charles II sought to disarm Protestants, and one of the early attempts of Britain to move against dissident Americans prior to the War of Independence, was when the British Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, General Gage, sought to stop armed protest by confiscating American stores of arms in September 1774.⁵

⁴ Pat Buchanan, "America is an Armed Camp," Lew Rockwell website, 4/4/2012.

⁵ Source: Wikipedia.

The English Revolution of the 1640's, and the American Revolution which began in 1776, were conservative, defensive revolutions, resisting new and unpopular taxation. One of the reasons they were both successful, was that the revolutionaries were able to obtain similar or better firearms, than those they were fighting against. These two revolutions have much to teach us, as does our own home-grown revolution in Australia, commonly (but inaccurately) called the Rum Rebellion of 1808.

George Washington claimed that

Firearms stand next in importance to the Constitution itself. They are the American people's liberty teeth and keystone under independence... From the hour the Pilgrims landed to the present day, events, occurrences, and tendencies prove that to ensure peace, security, and happiness, the rifle and pistol are equally indispensable... The very atmosphere of firearms everywhere restrains evil interference – they deserve a place of honour with all that's good.

Confiscation of firearms was the normal procedure for twentieth century tyrants. Why? So that subsequent resistance to revolution would be difficult for the people to sustain. No firearms-no power to resist. The Turks confiscated the Armenians' firearms in 1915, before beginning their massacre of 1.5 million innocents, and Hitler through a selective gun registration process, prevented Jews from owning firearms. By 1936, Jews were defenceless.

In 1940, when England was threatened with invasion by Germany after the fall of France, millions of firearms were donated by Americans and shipped over to England because individuals in England possessed few firearms for self-protection in the case of invasion.

Mao claimed that "power comes out of the barrel of a gun," and one of his first acts when taking over an area of China, was total firearm confiscation from the community.

When the Hutus murdered some 800,000 Tutsis in 1994 in Rwanda, they had access to firearms, not the Tutsis.

22. ...when wicked kings rule you can guarantee it is an expression of wickedness in the populace. This leads to two phenomena: first, the abandonment of God's Law in civil government leads to the creation of arbitrary statutes, usually in an effort to glorify and perpetuate the greatness of the wicked establishment, or special interests associated with it. Second, along with this comes and ever-increasing difficulty of returning to liberty before total tyranny or social collapse comes about. This latter phenomenon itself has two parts: 1) efforts at restoration and revival will almost always have to originate as grassroots efforts. These will at first comprise a minority, and the minority will have to fight uphill... 2) The longer tyranny is allowed to creep, the more entrenched it becomes, the more evil it does, and the more difficult it becomes to remove. Yet even here we will see that God can move even complacent masses to withstand tyrants and override tyrannical laws (p.199).

McDurmon here indirectly shows the great need for the church to be the foremost institution in mobilising the community against all forms of tyranny. The best resistance to tyrants must be among the community's grass roots, and it is the church which is most ably equipped for this task.

How? Because the Bible tells us that the church is “the pillar and support of the truth” (I Tim.3:15). We have a proclaiming role in every community: encouraging, directing and confronting, with a long heritage and history going back to Elijah, Nathan and John the Baptist.

Historically, the church has been aware of this, and it’s no accident that significant political progress in Christian nations around the world, including defiance of tyrants, has been brought on by bold, uncompromising Christian leaders like Stephen Langton (the Archbishop of Canterbury who wrote the Magna Carta, in defiance of King John), Oliver Cromwell and Margaret Thatcher.

We believers cannot remain silent when great national matters are being decided. As Mordecai exhorted Esther, “Who knows whether you have attained royalty for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14) There are occasions when silence is a crime. Rather, we must accept the God-given charge to leaven the community with the values of the kingdom of God. If we do not, others will bring their peculiar form of leavening to the community, with dire consequences. So, the first task we have is faithfulness to God and His Word, and proclaiming that Word.

23. The path to dominion is constant faithfulness to His Law no matter what may come. This means that you should simply do your job, and get busy and serious about doing it. Just as God commanded Samuel the priest to get busy doing things that priests do, so He calls you to get busy homemaking, or accounting, or video editing, or engineering, or building, or digging, or whatever. God has not only provided the holy things like His Word and corporate worship; He has also provided the all-too-often-demeaned normal parts of life: your extended family, your business, your friends, your job, your grocery store. All the things we take for granted or treat as parts of a daily grind—these are the things we should engage in with the most optimistic eagerness. It is from these things that God provides most of the opportunities for us to advance the kingdom in subtle but meaningful ways (p.236).

I appreciate McDurmon emphasising the run of the mill activities we all have, as part of our daily responsibilities. Getting out of bed and attending to our God-ordained tasks is a most important aspect of our faithfulness to God, that mustn’t be diminished.

Is baking a loaf of bread important? It is, when there are people who’ll be waiting to consume it. Is getting the washing on the line, sweeping the floor, completing the grocery shopping and paying the bills? Of course.

The Reformers knew this, 500 years ago. Bell claimed that, for the Protestant reformers, “All work was endowed with virtue.” Luther claimed that “A housemaid who does her work is no farther away from God than a priest in his pulpit.” For Zwingli and Calvin, “work was connected with the joy of creating and with exploring even the wonders of creation.” Calvin added that “if a man is deprived of his work he is degraded.”⁶

***Don’t push the world along and live in a world of fame
Be like the oxen and get there just the same.***

Solomon was blunt: “Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise, which, having no chief, officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest” (Prov.6:6-8).

⁶ Bell, D., “Work and its Discontents,” 1956, p.54-56.

24. So Paul reminds us that we do not wage war according to the flesh, and the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but have divine power to tear down strongholds (2 Cor. 10:3–6). Do not forget, therefore, that dominion begins and is thoroughly maintained by prayer, by praise, by mercy, by self-sacrifice, by worship, by the arts, and similar things. If your dominionism is not thoroughly saturated with these things, and with the earnest desire to pursue such things, then you need to repent and reset (p.240).

If we want to win the world to the gospel, this requires Christian faithfulness and responsibility, right throughout what we do. We all want progress and we'd like it quickly, but the church's international decline which has been happening for centuries, may take generations to turn around. Rome wasn't built in a day; neither will the church be.

Healthy growth happens the way that Jesus described: "First the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head" (Mk.4:28). This means we ought to be cautious about instant success and flash results. Oak trees take much longer to grow than mushrooms, but they also last much longer. The Christian individual in all he's doing, should aim to be much more like Steady Eddy than Flash Harry.

The first assignment we are told that David had was away from people, down the paddock looking after his father's sheep. He may have been destined for greatness, but would we have thought so initially from where he began? And this should serve as both an encouragement and a warning to us.

The scripture teaches us that "...the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God" (I Cor.1:28-29). Neil Diamond, in "Rhinestone Cowboy" sang, "I want to be where the light's on me," but that should never be the Christian's anthem. We should never be concerned about where we are serving, so long as it's in the place where God wants us to be.

The scripture always warns us that "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). So when there is only a seemingly minor task to attend to which is unimpressive to man, we ought to make it our goal that we deal with this as well as we can.

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7.

25. David was on the path to a battle that would literally change the course of history. It would vault him from shepherddom to national prominence. Yet en route to that standoff with Goliath, David had to overcome several impediments ranging from his own spirituality to sibling rivalry to being publicly doubted by his government—among much else. How did David handle this? The simple answer is: with steady faithfulness. No matter what obstacle was thrown at him, he never took his eye away from God’s Law. This steadfastness involved humility, and it involved courage, and it involved being prompt in answering all challenges with appropriate words or actions. We can learn much from the types of challenges David met, and how he met them; and these lessons can apply whether we are speaking to our father, brother, community, or the king himself (p.249).

Not everyone wants to see you successful, let alone faithful to God. David’s brother Eliab had been present when David had been anointed by the prophet Samuel (I Sam.16:13). Clearly, Eliab had not forgotten this, when David had arrived at the battlelines with supplies. He did not rejoice at his younger brother’s anointing by the prophet. In fact, he seeks to diminish him and his home tasks, then misrepresents his motivation:

“I know your insolence and the wickedness of your heart; for you have come down in order to see the battle” (I Sam.17:28).

Despite his elder brother’s accusations, David was neither insolent or wicked. David had been chosen by God for a national task, while Eliab is seething with envy.

The Bible teaches us that “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecc.1:9). Sibling rivalry was endemic throughout Genesis, and the first murder of history was when Cain (the first child in scripture) slew Abel, his brother (Gen.4:8). Behind sibling rivalry can be a greater difference: a hostility which is religiously motivated, and Eliab in his animosity clearly exhibits this.

26. With David, the anointed king of Israel, facing off against the great serpent, we can now understand that this showdown is a covenantal showdown. When we skip ahead just a bit and recall Goliath’s end, we get that picture even better: the serpent’s head is crushed. We are dealing here not only with a historical incident that has an inspiring moral, but with another episode in God’s redemptive history. The biblical imagery is God’s way of teaching us that fundamental message once again—of the seed of the woman versus the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15)—and flashing like a neon sign in the narrative, “Look here. Look here.” Here is the advance of God’s covenantal promises for His people (p.255).

In the flow of Biblical history, there is nothing peculiar about Goliath. In His wisdom and providence, God sees to it that Goliath displays the attributes one could expect from him. One could argue that he is a perfectly consistent character; big, loud, threatening, abusive, and despising God and His people.

He is outside the covenant, so that is what we should expect. David seems to know all of this, probably better than we do today. Unlike Saul, his brother Eliab and the rest of the Israelite

army, his faith and knowledge move him to display great confidence in the outcome of this confrontation, so that he "...quickly ran towards the battle line to meet the Philistine" (I Sam.17:48).

Of course this sounds very dangerous, and humanly speaking it was. But David has this confidence in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the covenant keeping God. He knew his God was bigger than Goliath. He also knew Goliath's weakness was his bare forehead, and David knew how to hit the mark with a stone from a sling. What else mattered?

*27. As the two move on to prepare for battle, their covenantal allegiances become clearer. Nor is the biblical theology exhausted yet. After putting off Saul's armour, David equips himself with only the arms of a shepherd—a sling and staff, and a pouch. We then we get the curious detail of David choosing **five smooth stones from the brook** as his ammunition. Why such a vignette? Because these are stones "cut out without human hands." These are stones upon which no human tool has been lifted. This detail is something which God prescribed for the building of an altar to Him (Ex. 20:25)—it symbolized the fact that God's work is not accomplished, ultimately, by the hands and works of man. It was just such a "stone cut out by no human hand" that Daniel prophesied would crush Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold, silver, etc., destroy the empires for which that image stood, and then itself grow to become a mountain and fill the entire earth (Dan. 2:34–5, 44–45). This detail appearing here is another one of those signs that this battle is about something greater than the moment. It was about the promised seed of the woman, God's salvation of His people (p.257).*

All of the Bible attests to the fact that the Holy's Spirit's choice of words and terms in scripture is consistent, and for His purpose. "Five smooth stones" really do mean something specific to God; hence they should for us, too.

Scripture requires that we be firstly, people of faith and obedience to God. Our prime confidence is to be in God, not weaponry. Thus it is hardly an achievement to be a nation that bristles with weaponry, but has no faith in God or obedience to his Word. This is to descend to "the arm of the flesh."

Having said this, scripture does not negate the notion and use of weaponry. David's willingness to defend his father's flock against predators and to kill them, was replicated by his willingness to confront the army of the Philistines, and to kill Goliath. He first thought was to have confidence in the covenant keeping God of Israel. Then he chose a vulnerable, undefended part of Goliath's body and struck it with a stone, mortally wounding him.

The lesson we can draw from this is this: weapons are not to be our first place of confidence. We are to trust in the Lord, and choose appropriate action or weaponry to fit the crisis we're facing. The Bible tells us that before this crisis, David was considered to be "...a mighty man of valour, a warrior, one prudent in speech" (I Sam.16:18), and it tells us that "Every prudent man acts with knowledge..." (Prov.13:16).

David clearly had practiced his craft; he knew how to use his weapon well, and in the crisis he successfully put his skills to work and gained the victory for the Lord, himself, and all Israel.

As James Jordan commented,

Christ has crushed Satan's head definitively in His victory on the cross. Christ's people are called to join with Him in this victory, and the promise is that we too shall crush Satan's head, in union with Christ (Ro.16:20).⁷

28. Godly society will only last if it is built on true covenantal communities. This is exactly what we see in Jonathan's covenant with David. Not only was humility and service at the root, but the bond of affection and loyalty formed is the backbone of any true community. This level of eternally-committed self-sacrifice should be the nature of all our covenantal communities: family, church, state.

Christ's exposition to His disciples was that He was a vine and we are the branches. We are vitally connected to Him, and yet by virtue of this we are vitally connected to each other as well. Thus He went on, as we saw, to explain true friendship as well: when one is willing to lay down one's life for his friend. This is self-sacrifice to the max, which, of course, Christ did for us.

When we are so connected to Him (by His choice and grace), we are enlivened by His Spirit to show the same grace to others in our covenant relationships. We then serve others before ourselves, even in precarious and self-detrimental situations, so that we may sacrifice much in the process. We sacrifice time, patience, money, feelings, "face" in marriage and childrearing; but this is the basis of successful family (p.276-277).

We mustn't make the mistakes of either ignoring or minimising the ethical issues flowing from the covenantal relationship between Jonathan and David. Both of them had fought their battles against the Philistines, believing in the God of covenant. Now, another outworking of that same covenant was to be manifested, man to man.

McDurmon is right to emphasise that "Godly society will only last if it is built on true covenantal communities." Our Christian life and expression may require many different things, but they all must be based on the reality of Christ's covenant with one another. Otherwise, we become just another banging drum in the community.

Authority does grow from service and integrity. There are no other legitimate bases for it to develop from. This explains Jesus' determination to be always doing the Father's will. He said, "...I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (Jn.8:29).

Jesus' oneness with the Father must characterise our behaviour too. We simply don't have the right to do as we wish. This requires that we "do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves," and that we "have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil.2:4, 6).

Ananias and Sapphira denied this (see Acts 5:1-11). They tried to play a game of religious charades, but Peter in confronting Ananias, claimed his deception was a "lie to the Holy Spirit" (v.3). Later, when he confronted Sapphira, he asked her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test?" (v.9) They both died instantly for their breach the covenant.

⁷ James Jordan, "Judges: God's War against Humanism," 1985, p.86.

A generation later Paul dealt with the same issues, when he taught about communion. He explained to the Corinthians that their attitudes and respect for one another as believers could in fact determine whether they lived or died.

For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep (I Cor.11:29, 30).

Only a Christian society, based upon the individual faithfulness of people to God, can be a lasting society.

8.

*29. Verses 1–40 of [I Samuel] chapter 20 detail a plan made by David and Jonathan to discern whether or not it would ever again be feasible for David to return to court. David assumed it would not be; Jonathan thought a little better of his father, but agreed with David to make a plan. Remembering (and honouring) his covenant with David more than his father, Jonathan promised, “**Whatever you say, I will do for you**” (20:4). Jonathan was in for the proverbial rude awakening.*

I am not sure why this plan and its execution are drawn out over so many verses. There may be something I am missing, but for now I will simply abbreviate the story. David planned to be conspicuously absent from a Sabbath dinner with Saul’s elite. Jonathan would provide a plausible alibi, although it was untrue (another example of covenant deceit). David’s absence would provide reason for him to be the subject of discussion, and Jonathan would learn the king’s disposition toward David because of this. Jonathan and David agreed upon a clever way of communicating the results via arrow shots (p.284).

The actions of Jonathan in relation to David do show us what sometimes must be done when authority is being misused. Jonathan in his love for David, has been compelled by Saul’s murderous intent to set aside the normal attitudes of respect, deference and obedience towards his father the king. It simply isn’t practical any more, with Saul behaving the way he is. Furthermore, Jonathan knows he’ll have to come up with imaginative means of deceiving his father, if he is going to be successful in protecting David, the innocent target of Saul’s abuse.

There are of course, many scriptural precedents for what McDurmon classifies as “covenant deceit,” going back to Abraham when he entered Egypt (Gen.12:10-20). Not long before Jonathan is compelled to use deception towards his father, the Lord showed Samuel how to partially deceive Saul, when the Lord had sent Samuel to anoint David (I Sam.16:1-3).

Scriptural precedents notwithstanding, none of this is joyful. None of this is fun. But it all becomes a grim necessity for Jonathan, who doesn’t flee from the dual responsibility of both saving David from being murdered, and his father from bloodguiltiness. Jonathan, out of the fear of the Lord, his love and respect for David, and willingness to forego his own kingly ambitions, accepts this challenge.

This is why truly Christian attitudes must always come before even legitimate ambitions. God’s way for us is not always easy, or simple. He commands us to “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of heart regard one another as more important

than yourselves” (Phil.2:3). Jonathan’s willingness to forego his own opportunity, in deference to the one he knew had been anointed by the prophet to be king, and to shrewdly protect David from his father, is a shining example to us of just how we should behave, too.

The scripture reminds us to “Let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come” (Heb.13:13, 14). The way of convenience and comfort, appealing as it may be, isn’t always God’s plan.

30. Let us recall today what Christ has done for us. As we learn so much about Christian life and society from the great acts of the faithful and wicked alike, let us also remember the foundations of such a faithful family, church, and state. Christ suffered and died in such humiliation that no mere Saul could ever inflict. It was demonic. And yet, Christ emerged from behind that stone having defeated every demon and death itself. And He confirms His covenant with us every time we receive His Word preached and especially when we receive His supper with Him. He forgives us our impossible offenses, and teaches us to forgive others likewise. It is only through Him and His means of grace that we can conform to His Law, and see the many grievances and offenses among us healed, our social relationships repaired, and the wicked and implacable among us destroyed and removed for the society. Let us embrace His good news of the Kingdom of God, and pray that He advances these promises further today (p.292).

God has seen to it that the scripture has recorded not only Jonathan’s love for David, but how far he would go to protect David from murder. He gave up his ambitions and risked his own life in order to secure David’s future, which is all reminiscent of what Jesus said: “Greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn.15:13).

Jonathan found the grace to face this crisis. He who had fought the Philistines and won, had now won in his heart the awful dilemma of siding with his father, or David. He chose David. A thousand years before Jesus Christ, Jonathan served Jesus’ ancestor David. He seems to have understood what Jesus later said:

If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:26).

31. ...those who quit fighting the Lord’s battles end up fighting against His people. Here we not only have a clear and extreme example of that, but we see an interesting contrast to Saul’s earlier failures. Recall that his crowning failure was with the Amalekites. He refused to obey God by thoroughly eliminating their civilization, including the cattle. Saul saved the cattle, allegedly for sacrifices to God. Here we see him doing just the opposite. In a murderous bout of self-gratification and autonomous fiat-law, Saul wipes out the entire city of God’s priests, including their families and cattle. He who could not obey God’s Word, asserted his own, and ended up treating God’s people as if they were the worst of God’s enemies, deserving the most extreme of His wrath. Further, Saul, who could not bring himself to destroy the real enemies, had no problem at all destroying every last vestige of the priesthood. He could not execute Agag, but Ahimelech was no problem. Thus we see how backwards, and how extremely backwards, sin drives men to act (p.301).

Saul almost from the day he was crowned, had never had much time for God. Fallen men do fallen things. Saul had been anointed by the prophet of Israel, but Israel's first king has now murdered Israel's priests, along with women, children and infants (I Sam.22:18-19). This ought to show us how abuses of authority will always take place when men in authority refuse to submit themselves to God's Word.

The scripture had required every king of Israel to "write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up..." (Deut.17:18-20). Now, Israel's stubbornness in wanting this king (despite the warnings of her prophet Samuel), was coming back to bite her.

32. The work of dominion and Christian reconstruction of society will inevitably proceed, even when we cannot see it, often where we cannot see it, and usually by people in whom we refuse to see it. Therefore, we should not despair nor compromise, but remain faithful despite what we see. God is always busy preserving His kingdom, and preparing the next phase of it. That phase may be dramatic growth, or shelter from dramatic judgment. That is not our choice. It is our job to be faithful with what He puts in front of us, and to wait upon His lead in faith that He will do what He has said. And we are not to impede or ignore what He is really doing by imposing prejudices regarding whom He chooses to include (p.305).

We do not live in a glorious time for the church, just as Saul's era in Israel wasn't a glorious period for Israel. It wasn't glorious then, and it isn't glorious now, because the people of God were then as now, generally disobedient to God.

This is awful, hurtful and ought to cause us grief. But there is hope, just as there was hope for Israel then. The people of God must return to the Lord in repentance and faith, putting aside the various idolatries we've been clinging to; and God knows, there have been lots of them. Wholesale change is necessary amongst God's people, if we are to regain our place of authority in the community and subsequently, the nations of the world.

This cannot be overnight, for the changes have to be deep, real and long-lasting. Lip-stick on a pig still leaves us with that same pig. The scripture tells us that the purpose of God in redeeming and cleansing His church, is that "He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless" (Eph.5:27).

We have to begin with obedience and faithfulness to God. And it is in this context that the promises of God come into play:

Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the creeping locust, the stripping locust and the gnawing locust, My great army which I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you (Joel 2:25, 26).

9.

33. *Who was Doeg? [I Sam.22:18, 19] What motivated him? Was he merely a deranged mass murderer, a wild-eyed savage? Not so, he was the chief of Saul's herdsmen—a high-level bureaucrat. Let us not think of him as merely a typical black hat put in this narrative to fill the role of the insatiable bad guy. How do you think he would have described himself? This was a man whose life was invested in government service, a life-long civil servant. He would have certainly seen himself as the most loyal of patriots, a proud member of a powerful and legitimate administration. He was a political leader in the greatest nation in history, the city on a hill, the land of the chosen and free, God's country and all. Further, he would have believed wholeheartedly Saul's version of the narrative: this administration was under imminent threat of terrorist attack from a rogue force following that evil, plotting, purist "freedom fighter" David.*

Being an employee of the government of the day can present people with a serious problem that they hadn't contemplated: issues of conscience. When your employer has the power of the sword, your use of the sword can be problematical. You can (like Doeg) employ the sword in strict obedience to the employer, or you can submit to God, as the Hebrew midwives did (see Ex.1:15-22). God blessed them in their obedience to Him.

The Nuremberg War Crimes trials in 1946 illustrated one thing: a lot of Germans in particular could not make this important distinction. Many of the defendants then, tried to use the excuse that they were merely following orders, when executing innocent Jews. Fortunately, the courts gave this argument no credibility; many of the defendants forfeited their lives for their crimes.

The Bible makes this point: "each one of us will give an account of himself to God" (Ro.14:12). The knowledge of this must fill the heart of every employee, regardless of who is employing them.

34. *David not only shared the spoil equally among the remnant, he gave gift after gift abundantly to all who were connected to him throughout Judah. This is Christ inheriting all things (Heb. 1:2), and then ascending on high, giving gifts to men. The parallel type in David here is remarkable, as Paul quotes from Psalm 68:18: "Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men'" (Eph. 4:8). David here leads a host of captives—brides and children, in fact—into their freedom and gave gifts to everyone. So in the end, this narrative illustrates for us the death and resurrection of Christ, the defeat of the enemy, the freeing of the captives, and the ascension of the Christ along with the distribution of the inheritance of the saints. There are few portrayals of Gospel imagery in Scripture as complete as this one (p.386).*

Our Heavenly Father has instructed His Son to "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession" (Ps.2:8). The scripture also tells us that "...you have given me the inheritance of those who fear Your name" (Ps.61:5), and that "...all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ" (I Cor.3:22, 23).

We Christians ought to be the confident ones. If we are faithful to God, God and history will surely be on our side. We should have great confidence about our future under God. He controls all things, and "...causes all things to work together for good to those who love

God...” (Ro.8:28). Thus we must be responsible to work hard and build for the future, praying, “Thy kingdom come...”

35. We should build relationships and networks throughout society, not just among those Christians closest to us and within our own circles. You have no idea when such relationships can turn to your favour—and this is not mere selfishness. Christ taught His disciples specifically to make friends among the “unrighteous mammon” (Luke 16:9). Many commentators are baffled here. This really has to do with surviving AD 70, but it has larger implications. We should take that lesson to heart. Build relationships and make friends in whatever situation you are in, for God is always orchestrating something providential of which you have no idea and for which you could never plan yourself. One of these days, your own Philistine lords will complain enough to deliver you from a predicament; an Egyptian servant will appear out of nowhere and lead you to a victory over an enemy you would never even have found on your own; or perhaps some people to whom you reach out—who may have hated you previously—will turn later to support you in a crisis. This is every reason to live according to God’s Law and treat every neighbour with love and self-sacrifice. Then, as God rules all things, you will be surprised how He orchestrates blessing for you even through the most impossible of channels (p.387).

We Christians must be the ones who allow God to define our relationships, and who submit to God in relating to people. David wasn’t to know that his service to the Philistines would ultimately work in his favour. What he initially needed was a place to live outside of Israel, where he could be safe from his demented king. Any port in a storm was what he needed, and as he was faithful to the Philistines, they repaid the favour.

A lot of people in the Bible were saved and delivered, in leaving Israel or her people for a time. Moses and Joseph come quickly to mind, but there were many more. Joseph and Mary in fleeing Israel with Jesus because of Herod, were protected for a time in Egypt. There is sometimes a season to be apart from the people of God, or from those we would prefer to be relating to.

“Out of Egypt I called My Son” (Mat.2:15) applied directly to Jesus; it can clearly apply to us too. And God in His providence cares for His people. Blessing can come from the most surprising of sources.

36. ...judgment in history is certain. God will not tolerate wickedness from a nation forever. He will give space, but He will bring judgment. We should, therefore, be quick to call for repentance, and we should maintain that call persistently and clearly. That call should ring from every pulpit, and it should be directed toward every man, woman, and child, from the lowliest to the most influential. It should be directed specifically toward our statesmen, elected officials, judges, and prominent leaders. The Sauls of our nation, and all the hyper-nationalistic forces that support Saul’s agendas in our nation, must be called to repentance by a thousand voices from a thousand directions, daily (p.395).

All politics must be viewed with a measure of scepticism, because the political realm is generally about the getting and maintaining of power, not truth or integrity. Thus statements from political leaders should always be held up to the light.

The scripture also tells us that “The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether” (Ps.19:9). God is no respecter of persons, and He does judge men, churches, communities and nations according to scripture, so that we are without excuse. Sodom does not exist anymore, because God destroyed it for its wickedness.

Can we expect to have a future any different to Sodom? Why? If we want a better future, we’d better begin by repenting; asking God to forgive us in the church for our many sins, one of which has been failing to be salt and light in the nations of the world. Take away salt and light, and the world quickly become corrupt and dark, just as it is today.

Judgment is certain in history, and it begins with the household of God (I Pet.4:17).

10.

It is an abomination for kings to commit wicked acts, for a throne is established on righteousness (Prov.16:12).

1st Samuel gives us a commentary on the period of Israel under its first king, Saul. It is not a happy era, partially because of the nature of Saul. But more importantly, the narrative makes it clear that Saul was a symptom of something terribly wrong within Israel, within the people themselves. People really do get the government they deserve.

As such, 1st Samuel serves as a warning to any nation: the abandonment of God and His law inevitably leads to God’s judgment, and God knows how to chastise a nation to bring it to its knees.

The pattern which is writ large in I Samuel is really given to us in the book of Judges; I Samuel merely continues the process established there. And what we saw in Judges was the steady abandonment of God and His law, right throughout Israel. By the time Samuel was born, the nation was ripe for further decline and apostasy, led downhill by its corrupt priesthood.

McDurmon highlights that the decline of Israel did not commence with Saul, but rather with its priesthood and its people. It was the elders of Israel who came to Samuel with their request, and when he had plainly told them what sort of leader their king would be (I Sam.8:10-18), they said “No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles” (v.19, 20).

This is the conclusion: if we Christians get upset about the state of the nation, and consequently think we will change the nation by changing the members of Parliament, we are grievously ill informed. This has never been a solution, anywhere. The challenge is not with government or politics at all. Yes, there are symptoms of the problems there all right, but who was it that elected those individuals?

I Samuel and history make it clear. True and lasting national change for good has to begin with the grass-roots of the community, commencing with the church. Saul was a disastrous

king, because Israel's people and its priesthood were in a disastrous state. He was merely a political and governmental manifestation of what was really in their hearts: the rejection of God and His law.

When commenting on the judgments on Israel in her wilderness journeys under Moses, the apostle Paul wrote

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (I Cor.10:11).

Conclusion:

We must learn this from I Samuel: it's incumbent on us Christians to lead the way by bringing the salt and light of God's Word to the nations of the world. This will not come about with the blowing of trumpets or grand and expensive political campaigns. It begins with the steady, faithful pursuit of God's ways and God's law in the hearts and lives of Christians: His Church. And as such, we are speaking of steady, long-term change, just as Jesus predicted:

The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head (Mk.4:28).

This requires patience on the part of believers, one of the fruits of the Spirit. The best days of the Church may lie ahead of us, and these are dependent on our faithfulness to God and His Word.