

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### ISRAEL'S CHOICE OF A KING.

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The people of Israel were very desirous to have a king. They thought a fit opportunity had come for them to press their wish. Samuel was now an old man, and his sons had given evidence that they were not fit to be his successors. They embraced this opportunity and through their elders came to Samuel with the request. "Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." Samuel was displeased with this action of the people, but wisely carried the matter to the Lord for counsel. The answer he received strengthened his convictions that the notion of the people was sinful, but, at the same time, was told to comply with their request. Samuel told the people of their sin and presented to them some additional burdens which would come upon them should they have a king. Of these additional burdens they had no fear; of these they were willing to run all risk so great was their anxiety to have their desire granted. They would have a king what ever might be the consequence, and answered, "But we will have a king that we also may be like all the nations and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

When they presented this request they seem not to have had before their minds any person whom they thought fit for the duties they specified. None had appeared among them who gave evidence of superior skill to judge the people or lead their armies to victory. There was no hero who had distinguished himself in late contests, whom they could name as the object of their choice, but they make the extraordinary request of Samuel to find a king for them.

Like many who have a wish to gratify, but know not how it is to be done, they seek others to do the work and bear the responsibility. This conduct shows that their wish was one to which they had given little consideration. Apparently the idea of having a king like other nations was that which constrained them to present this request.

This unreasonable state of mind, in which they persevered in the face of all argument to the contrary, the Lord complied with, and, by means of a simple event in His providence, led a man into the presence of Samuel whom He commanded to anoint as king. The young man was sent away to seek his father's asses, and in the course of his fruitless search for the asses, greatly to his surprise and manifest confusion, found a throne.

The Lord well understood that desire which the people cherished and knew what qualities they wished their king to possess, so he provided a man for them endowed with those qualities which they sought. He chose their delusions and let them have their will.

These passages present some important practical thoughts regarding the truth that God sometimes grants the evil desires of men. The first thought in connection with this to which I ask attention is:

#### I. Men have freedom of choice

We enter not here upon the consideration of the much disputed question of freedom and necessity. With us that is a metaphysical and not a practical question. We desire here to confine ourselves to the truth which is admitted by reasonable men and which is so fully assumed in all God's invitations, warnings, exhortations, and dealings.

Whatever mystery there may be about the pre-arrangement of God, and the power of motive over men's wills, the truth is manifest that must be pressed home upon the conscience, *man is free to choose*. As free now as were the children of Israel at any time in their history. Though we do not always get the things we choose we have full freedom to make the choice. No one can compel us to choose, and, generally, men get those things which they themselves have chosen.

We may not have chosen the things in detail as they have come to us, but we have chosen that line of life in which those things were to be found. We have chosen the trade or profession or company in which we find ourselves. In choosing any of these we have placed ourselves face to face with those things which are necessarily allied with these varied paths of life we have chosen to enter. The scholar who chooses to be idle and trifles with his opportunity, of necessity has chosen all the natural consequences which flow from the course of life he has chosen. The man who

chooses to idle his time and allow thorns and thistles to grow and spread over his fields may find many things he did not choose in detail, but he chooses the way in which these things naturally arise. A Christian man or woman makes choice of a partner for life who is godless. And afterwards finds the misery of being allied to one who has no sympathy with the holiest and highest aspirations of the soul. There may not have been a conscious choice of this lonely isolation which is felt in being bound for life to one who has no response to give to the purest sentiment that is felt by the Christian spirit. There may not have been a conscious choice of this spiritual loneliness, yet this is the necessary consequence of the choice which the Christian has made.

The personal suffering and family desolation were not the things the drunkard made choice of when he chose to put the cup to his lips, but when he chose the cup he also embraced the consequences and finds the misery in the way he has chosen. So is it with the criminal shut up in the dungeon, he chose the way which naturally ends there.

On the other hand, the diligent man may not have made choice of all the individual things which have come to him in his prosperity, but he made choice of the path where the hand of the diligent maketh rich. The Christian, when he became a follower of Christ, did not anticipate all the sweet experiences which he afterwards found, and therefore could not then have chosen them in detail; but, having chosen Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, these experiences were included in his choice. The transgressor and the believer, to-day have therefore very much of that which they have freely chosen. Be not deceived, God is not mocked, that which a man soweth—we may add that which a man chooseth—he shall also reap. If we choose the things of the flesh we shall of the flesh reap corruption. If we choose the things of the spirit we shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.

#### II. Frequently the choice is made from very inferior motives.

The reason is often one which should have very little influence with reasonable beings. Often it is like rejecting the gold and choosing the tin, as it was with the ignorant Kaffir who gave up the gold sovereign for a tin button. It was so with Israel in their choice of a king. They rejected God and desired a man instead. They desired a king but thought not of the high qualifications required for the office, and seemed so bent on obtaining their wish that they were ready to accept any man Samuel might present. One reason they had for their choice was that they might be like others. This is a reason still by which many determine their choice. It is a powerful argument among men for doing many things. When changes are desired the question is not settled on the ground of need nor on the ground of usefulness, nor whether it will be right in God's sight, but only because it is the way of others. Out of this motive spring many of the evil habits of men which are learned through a considerable amount of self-denial. Men make their lips a smoke funnel because others do it. Men drink strong drink because others do it. Men and women keep themselves in poverty and discomfort in order to be like others in the gay fashions in life; while there is lack of consideration whether these things are in accordance with bodily wants or the will of God.

Again, they desired a king that he might defend them from their enemies. With many this reason would have force, and yet it might not, had they reflected on the past, in which they had been delivered without the presence of the king they now desired. God had saved them whenever they had trusted Him. They were rejecting the Most High and purposing to lean upon an arm of flesh.

Again, they made choice of Saul because he was a head higher than the rest of the people. They were cherishing the prospect of war and when they saw him he was the man they sought. They seemed not to have founded their choice on the fact that God had given him, but because he was a giant who would be a fit match for the sons of Anak.

These surely were very inferior reasons they had for their choice. But let us not suppose these people were singular in so acting. Men still make the outward appearance a reason for choosing and refusing.

The mind which finds its comfort and safety only in earthly things is easily pleased with large portions of material. How often it is men are fighting an imagin-

ary battle with poverty, so that they are looking out for some giant in the form of material wealth to go before them to overcome the foe which may never appear, and when God in His providence gives such a giant they pray for his preservation, then say to their soul, thou hast goods laid up for many years, take thine ease.

These are not misrepresentations of the grounds on which men make their choice. These may be regarded as an example of the reasons all unbelievers in God's superintending providence have for their choice. They choose the inferior and reject the superior. They choose the material and reject the spiritual. They choose man and reject God. They choose their own way of life and reject the way by the Son of God. Being warned by the folly of Israel let us be wiser in our choice.

#### III. God sometimes chooses to let men have their choice.

We misinterpret God's providence if we conclude that, because success attends our prospects He gives His approval. The facts in history are sufficiently numerous to correct such a mistake. This case in which God granted the desire of Israel, after urgent pressure for a king, is a case in which the misinterpretation of Israel is manifest. Evidently they thought that because the Lord had complied with their desire they therefore had His full approval and felt they had reason to triumph over Samuel and no longer to lean on his judgement. He objected to their having a king, but God had given them one. Was not this a clear evidence that they were right in their desire and that Samuel was wrong. Prosperity attended their effort and is not that a good reason for the conclusion that God has given his approval?

It is true that, God gave them their desire and allowed them their choice; more, by an act in his providence he provided for them a man such as they sought for. Yet we know this was not with his approval, instead of this he has spoken by the prophet; "I gave thee a king in mine anger and took him away in My wrath."

The truth we learn from Isaiah: "They have chosen their own ways. I also will choose their delusions. They chose that in which I delighteth not."

We may believe that the providence of God in the days of Noah was misinterpreted. As far as we know, while Noah built the ark and told the people of the coming flood their crops grew as before, and might be pointed to as evidence that God was approving of their actions.

We can believe that a like misinterpretation was made of God's long suffering as the people worshipped the golden calf in the wilderness. The manna continued to fall every morning. The water ceased not to flow from the rock, and to these men might point as evidence that God was not disapproving of their conduct. Balaam may have so reasoned when he got permission to go with the servants of king Balak.

At the beginning he was plainly told "thou shalt not go with them," but he pressed his request and permission was given but with such conditions that he could not comply with the king's desire, y.e. he went, and seemed to delude himself that he would gain the Lord's approval.

In all these cases we have evidence that success in gaining the objection which our hearts are set, without any visible mark of God's displeasure, does not embrace his approval of our course of actions.

Because Benjamin at the beginning prospered in war against the other tribes; because the southern army succeeded in the first battle with the northern; because a dishonest merchant prospers in his deception; because a robber escapes with his booty; because the sun shines and the rain falls on a wicked man's field so that his crops grow abundantly, it would be a very great misinterpretation of God's providence were we to conclude that in these or in any like cases, prosperity is a proof of God's approval. He may choose to give prosperity in the ways men have chosen though they be ways in which he delighteth not.

#### IV. God sometimes grants men their choice as a punishment.

He says I will choose their delusions and will bring their fears upon them.

The spirit of Lot had become much engrossed with the world while he was in company with Abraham. His flocks and herds increased, but not so rapidly as the covetous spirit desired. He saw an opportunity by which his wealth might grow more rapidly, so he pitched his tent toward Sodom and forsook all the