

Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God; now thy kingdom shall not continue." How had he transgressed? Was not sacrificing to the Lord the regular and orthodox thing to do? Was it not a highly *religious* act? and why should Saul be condemned? He transgressed because he yielded to circumstances, took the priest's office into his own hands, and did all that he did, not from Divine impulse as he had done in the case of Jabesh-Gilead, but from reason and common sense, in view of the threatening aspect of his surroundings. He walked not by faith but by sight, and by his own confession, did not what he did from Divine dictation. "He that believeth shall not make haste"—but he was impatient and therefore unbelieving.

He had not felt the need of making any offering to the Lord in the former case—why does he feel it now? He must have failed in some way previously to obey the Spirit and become conscious of the Spirit's absence. Was it because he had instituted a standing army of definite number as recorded in the second verse, on which he might place reliance, and whose presence would add to his visible dignity? Men *have* grieved the Spirit of the Lord by providing a visible organization and relying upon it.

The fourteenth chapter tells the story of the battle that ensued. Victory was eventually on Israel's side, but in the earlier hours of the contest "there was trembling in the host in the field, and among all the people," until "Saul said unto Ahiah, Bring hither the ark of God," and very soon "every man's sword was against his fellow, and there was a very great discomfiture." The ark rested in peace in its proper place until Saul ceased to be a temple of the Holy Ghost, but when he rendered himself unfit to be indwelt by the Spirit and thereby became a "natural" man once more, it was necessary that the ark, which was the recognized vehicle of God's presence, should come into the camp in order that Israel should triumph.

But let it be noticed how in the narrative Saul himself ceases to be the

central hero identified with success. Jonathan his son is hero of the first success; the ark of God is the cause of the final victory and the narrative is, "So the Lord saved Israel that day" (verse 23). Further on we read how that although Saul builds an altar unto the Lord (verse 35), yet when he asked counsel of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Wilt thou deliver them into the hand of Israel? But he answered him not that day" (verse 37). Sad and terrible is the fall from grace, when earnest prayer to the God of love meets no response from Him. This monitory fact is the dark converse of the shining promise, "Whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we do those things that are pleasing in His sight."

*Facile decensus Averno*, the downward progress of this man becomes positive and rapid from this point onward. He becomes whimsical and arbitrary, as is seen by his order to his troops to fast, and by his willingness to sacrifice the life of his son Jonathan to sustain his own unreasonable and despotic decree. The decisive event in his career, that which completed and emphasized his apostasy, was his action in the case of the Amalekites (chapter 15). The command was, "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." But this command was flatly and directly disobeyed, for "Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fatlings and the lambs and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them," and when he tried to excuse himself to Samuel he said they were spared "to do sacrifice unto the Lord thy God." Yes! to do sacrifice of course. So Italian banditti will build shrines to the Virgin out of the spoils of robbery, and Christian distillers and usurers will restore cathedrals and endow colleges with their ill-gotten gains. But God will accept no such offerings. Hear Samuel's indignant protest (verse 22), "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to