

Samuel 1–7

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The inspired historians become typical or parabolical by the simplest necessity. Because, God acting in them, He must act according to Himself, according to His own counsel. And thus the fragments of history which we get (introducing God as they do; necessarily become so many revelations, more or less full, more or less distinct, of God's way, of the purposes of His grace, of the operations of His Spirit, and of the doings of His hand and the mode of bringing His purposes to pass. Man being in action also, expresses himself in various ways, as God being in action, reveals Himself. This may prepare us to find parables in histories – in other words, parts of the divine way in the pieces of history which we get in the inspired Book. Now I have thought this in connection with 1. Samuel 1–7, which forms the first part of 1 Samuel, and is a very complete piece in itself. Man is here expressed, but God, in the ways and counsels of His grace, and in the operations of His Spirit, is also revealed. Man is expressed first in Peninnah. Confidence (or pride) in fleshly advantages (a common principle of corrupt nature) betrays itself in her. She provokes Hannah weak in the flesh – in the spirit of Hagar and Ishmael. Man is exposed, next in the camp of Israel. Confidence in fleshly or carnal ordinances, even in spite of a bad conscience and evil practices (another common principle of corrupt nature) betrays itself there. They bring the ark into the battle (ch. 4). I say not how man betrays himself in the sons of Eli – that is evident enough. But even in the saint, in Eli, the easiness that conformed with flesh and blood, and did not take counsel with the ark of God (only common enough with us all) betrays itself in him. In these ways man is here exposing himself. But God is revealed. He enters this scene of action, and He cannot but enter it consistently with Himself, and this of necessity reveals Him. He takes up the weak thing. He visits Hannah. This is a great principle with Him. To be sure it is, in a world that has departed from Him in pride – for while He *blesses* us, He must *humble* us, leaving us no room or occasion to boast. His Spirit in Hannah celebrates this; as His Spirit afterwards in Samuel forms a vessel, or quickens a vessel, the very opposite of the proud and confident Peninnah. Samuel is all *meekness* in the presence of Eli, Peninnah had been all *haughtiness* in the presence of Hannah (ch. 3) – different ways in which they used their several advantages. Then His anointed One, the true Ark, has some of the dearest mysteries in His history, brought out in type here. The Ark which symbolises Him is a *captive* but a *conquerer* also in the place of its captivity (ch. 5–6). This is Christ dead and risen. Thus in the last place the *divine* way of blessing is traced in chapter 7. Samuel, the vessel and witness of the Spirit, instructs the people in this way. It is the very contradiction of the *human* way. We saw that in chapter 4, how man will trust in an ordinance, a carnal piece of religiousness, a rudiment of the world, and that, too, in the midst of his practical uncleanness. Man will be *religious* and *worldly*, *religious* and *polluted* at the same time. But God's way, witnessed and taught by Samuel, is the way of *faith* and *righteousness*. Samuel requires of them to be honest with the Lord by putting away the strange gods. He then will have them take the place of good-for-nothing ones, like water spilt on the ground. Then, on their cry, he pleads the blood sacrifice, and then God answering the sacrifice with deliverance, he raises the Pillar that tells how the Lord Himself had done it all for His people. Here the witness for God instructs the camp in God's way, which leads them to blessing – for they take that way in the obedience of faith.

Extract from Letters