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THE SCHOOLS OF THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS.

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The prophetic order of the Old Testament is generally regarded as founded upon the authority of the utterances in Deut. 18:15,18. The order itself, however, did not exist until the time of Samuel. Between Moses and Samuel Israel passed through the middle ages of its history. Few characters appear who give shape to and mould political and religious life. No great character comes forth until Samuel is called. He is the last and the climax of the Judges, the end of the old order of things and the beginning of the new, the water-shed, the borderland between the theocracy and the monarchy. He, the reformer, the reorganizer of Israel, politically and religiously, the priest, prophet and judge, anoints the first two kings of Israel. Political and religious Israel is revolutioned in his day. By later Old Testament writers he is compared with Moses (Jer. 15:1, cf. Ps. 99:6). During his life we find the existence of collections or schools of sons of the prophets. These are attributed to Samuel as their founder. They form the beginnings of the prophetic order, whose continuous existence can be traced down through Old Testament times, and whose influence is felt in all subsequent Old Testament history and literature.

In the treatment of this subject the Old Testament will be used as the authority. Tradition and legend will not be considered. The endeavor shall be to examine and classify the information given concerning the sons of the prophets 1) as collected in bands or schools; 2) in particular localities; 3) under different teachers; 4) with specified instruction; 5) with an occupation; 6) as to their means of subsistence.

1. BANDS OR SCHOOLS. The earliest mention of these bands is found in 1 Sam. 10:2-5. When Samuel has anointed Saul king of Israel he sends him away with certain directions. Saul is to meet three men going up to Bethel to worship. "After that," says Samuel, "thou shalt come to the hill (marg. Gibeah) of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a band of prophets coming down from the high place;" Samuel without doubt knew all about this band of prophets, and their order of worship at particular times. In 1 Sam. 19:20 we find: "And Saul sent messengers to take David: and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them; the spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied."

Here a company is mentioned, while in the preceding passage they are called a band, without any information as to their probable numbers. When Jezebel was determined on the destruction of the Lord's prophets we find (1 Kings 18:4): "Obadiah took an hundred prophets and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water." At this point (Samaria) we have further evidence of a band or collection of prophets in 1 Kings 22:6: "Then the king of Israel gathered

the prophets together about four hundred men." Again when the farmer from Baal Shalishah brought his contribution to Elisha, the old prophet commands him to set it before the people (sons of prophets), the man replied (2 Kings 4:43): "What, should I set this before an hundred men?" When Elisha returned from the east of Jordan, after the ascension of Elijah, the sons of the prophets at Jericho, fearing lest Elijah might have been cast upon some mountain or in some valley, and desiring to search for him, said (2 Kings 2:16): "Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men." These passages all show that the sons of the prophets were not only collected in bands or companies, but that these companies consisted of considerable numbers.

2. THEIR HEADQUARTERS. 1) *Ramah*. This was the birth-place and home of Samuel. After he made his yearly circuit as judge, "his return was to Ramah, for there was his house; and there he judged Israel: and he built there an altar unto Jehovah" (1 Sam. 7:17). When Saul was in pursuit of David (1 Sam. 19:18-24) "David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah. . . . and Saul sent messengers to take David, . . . they saw the company of prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them." In the narrative we find that three successive sets of messengers from Saul prophesy as soon as they come into contact with the sons of the prophets and also that Saul himself finally comes into the same state. At this place was without doubt the original school of the prophets as founded by Samuel.

2) *Bethel*. We have no definite information that a school existed in this place in Samuel's day. But the inference from the information given is that it was a centre of worship (1 Sam. 10:3) and ere long became a headquarters for the sons of the prophets. In the reign of Jeroboam an old prophet made his home at this place (1 Kings 13:11). While Elijah and Elisha were on their way to the place of translation of the former, "The sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, knowest thou that Jehovah will take away thy master from thy head, to-day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace," (2 Kings 2:3). After his return from the east of the Jordan, and after the healing of the bitter waters near Jericho, Elisha "went up from thence to Bethel" (2 Kings 2:23), undoubtedly with the express purpose of reporting to the sons of the prophets his sad experience in the loss of his master, Elijah.

3) *Gilgal*. Samuel's command to Saul (1 Sam. 10:8): "thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal," and the consequent prophesyings of Saul among the sons of the prophets in the neighborhood of Gibeah, are a reasonable evidence that at or near this point a school of the prophets was to be found in Samuel's day. At any rate, in Samuel's yearly circuit as judge (1 Sam. 7:16), Gilgal received his regular visits. Not again until Elijah's day do we have definite information on this point. "And it came to pass, when Jehovah would take up Elijah by a whirlwind into heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal" (2 Kings 2:1). The two prophets were probably giving instruction in the school at this place. On their way they stop at two other schools to leave a parting word (2 Kings 2:2,4,5). A number of years after this time there was a famine in the land "and Elisha came again to Gilgal" (2 Kings 4:38). At this time he heals the pottage, poisoned by the use of wild gourds. At this point we learn that there were at this time about one hundred of these sons of the prophets (2 Kings 4:43).

4) *Jericho*. The third stopping place of Elijah and Elisha on their last journey together was at Jericho. Here Elijah gives his last exhortation to the sons of the

prophets. After this was done (2 Kings 2:4-7) "they two went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood over against them afar off." After the departure of Elijah, Elisha returns to Jericho (vs. 15-18) and tarries three days with the sons of the prophets, whence he goes on up to Bethel. The prosperity of this school may be inferred from 2 Kings 6:1,2, in which it is evident that they had grown in numbers beyond the capacity of their building.

5) *Carmel*. The evidence for this place as a headquarters of the sons of the prophets is inferential rather than positive. In 1 Kings 2, we find that Elisha on his return from the Jordan and Jericho, "went up from thence unto Bethel" (v. 23), and "from thence to Mount Carmel" (v. 25). When the Shunammite woman was sorrowing over the death of her son (2 Kings 4:8-25) "she went and came unto the man of God (Elisha) to Mount Carmel" (v. 25). This must have been one of his regular engagements, because it was "neither new-moon nor sabbath" (v. 23), at which times he undoubtedly held special services at the religious centres other than the schools. Mount Carmel may have been chosen as a centre for the sons of the prophets in commemoration of the test between Elijah and the false prophets, and the consequent slaughter of the latter (1 Kings 18).

6) *Samaria*. And Elisha "went up from thence unto Bethel" (2 Kings 2:23), and "from thence unto Mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria" (v. 25). At Jericho and Bethel and probably at Mount Carmel, Elisha had already visited the schools of the prophets. Samaria was, at least a part of his life, his home (2 Kings 6:32). Samuel had his greatest school at his residence and home, Ramah. It is hardly credible that so forcible a character as Elisha should settle down in Samaria, and not collect about himself a body of sons of the prophets. In fact—we find (1 Kings 18:4) during the persecutions of Jezebel: "Obadiah took an hundred prophets and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water." Again at this same place, when Jehoshaphat and Ahab were about to war with Ramoth-Gilead (1 Kings 22:1-6), "the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men" (v. 6). These passages reveal the fact that at Samaria there were large numbers of prophets. It is perfectly reasonable to suppose that these men were members of a school of the prophets which was under the direct control of Elisha whose residence was at this place.

The result of the examination of the above passages finds schools of the prophets at 1) Ramah, 2) Bethel, 3) Gilgal, 4) Jericho, and probably 5) Carmel and 6) Samaria.

That they dwelt apart and in their own buildings is certified by two or three passages. In 1 Sam. 19:18,19, we find that when David fled to Ramah "he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth" (i. e. dwellings, buildings, probably college buildings); "And it was told Saul, saying, Behold, David is at Naioth (the college buildings) in Ramah."....."And he went thither to Naioth (the college buildings) in Ramah; and the spirit of God came upon him also, and he went on and prophesied, until he came to Naioth (the college buildings) in Ramah" (v. 23). In 2 Kings 6:1-2, "the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, the place where we dwell before thee, is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make a place there, where we may dwell." This school was probably at Jericho, as they went down into the Jordan valley for their timber (v. 4). In 2 Kings 4:38-41 we find an additional evidence of their common dwelling. They all ate from the same pottage. And in vs.

42,43 the gifts of the farmer are set before all. So that we can conclude that while a few may have married and had homes of their own (2 Kings 4:1) the sons of the prophets as a class occupied buildings together, and ate together as members of one household.

3. **THEIR TEACHERS.** The sons of the prophets had as their teachers, at least, three of the great men of their day. 1) *Samuel*. When the messengers of Saul went to Ramah to capture David (1 Sam. 19:20), "they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head (superintendent) over them." He was the presiding officer of this school, whether of any other we know not. "He went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and he judged Israel in all those places" (1 Sam. 7:16). In Bethel and Gilgal there were in later times schools; but we have no evidence that Samuel founded them or that he did more in these places than to judge the people.

2) *Elijah*. Only in the last days of Elijah's life have we any evidence of his relations to these schools. The word of Jehovah seems to have found him at Gilgal, the seat of one of the schools, (2 Kings 2:1). On his way to the east of the Jordan he stops at the school at Bethel (vs. 2,3), and at Jericho (vs. 4-6). Jehovah had sent him to these places (vs. 2,6), evidently to deliver his last message of instruction to these sons of the prophets.

3) *Elisha*. Elisha was the God-appointed and anointed successor of Elijah (1 Kings 19:16,19); and he was recognized as such by the sons of the prophets, (2 Kings 2:15). Almost his entire life after the departure of Elijah was spent among the various schools of the prophets. If *this* had been his master's work, Elijah must have been the main supporter and guide of these schools in his day. Elisha's authoritative connection with them seems to have begun when his master had departed. He visits the schools at Jericho, Bethel, Carmel and Samaria (2 Kings 2). A little later we find him at Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38). Then he is found by the Shunammite at Carmel (2 Kings 4:25); and again at Jericho (2 Kings 6:1-7). He seems to have cared as well for their families, where any were in need (as in 2 Kings 4:1-7), as for themselves. While carrying almost the entire burden of the kingdom of Israel on his shoulders, he was vigilant and faithful in his care of these schools.

The teachers of the sons of the prophets were so far as the Bible reveals, 1) *Samuel*, 2) *Elijah* and 3) *Elisha*. The chief man was known in these schools under different titles. Samuel is called Father (1 Sam. 10:10); Elijah is designated Master (2 Kings 2:3,5,16), Father (v. 12); Elisha is called Master (2 Kings 6:5), Man of God (2 Kings 4:40). These all indicate superiority and power. Compare also on this point, 2 Kings 2:15; 4:38.

4. **THINGS TAUGHT.** The information on this point must be also largely inferential. We can suppose that the law was taught, and that the ceremonies connected with worship were fully explained.

1) *Prophesying*. It is difficult to understand the full force of this word. When Saul met the prophets coming down from the hill of God, they were prophesying (1 Sam. 10:5). Again when Saul met the band of prophets in Gilgal, "the spirit of God came mightily upon him, and he prophesied among them" (v. 10). When the three sets of Saul's messengers to capture David came to Ramah they all prophesied; Saul himself yielded to the same spirit (1 Sam. 19:18-24). This was probably a physically active and exhausting method of worship. We find that Saul was so worn out by it that he lay down exhausted one day and night

(v. 24). In the other cases above referred to, the simplest explanation is that the prophesying was a recital of verses or psalms in praise to God.

2) *Music*. That these prophesyings were accompanied with music is shown in 1 Sam. 10:5; the band of prophets came down from the high place "with a psaltery (suggesting the use of psalms), and a timbrel, and a pipe, and a harp before them." Some years after this time (1 Chron 25:1-7) we find that "David and the captains of the host separated for the service certain of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries and with cymbals." "And the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in singing unto Jehovah, even all that were skillful was two hundred fourscore and eight" (v. 7). It is quite evident that, if in David's day the temple music was so elaborate, there must have been considerable musical instruction somewhere within the reach of these sons of the prophets. The almost necessary accompaniment of prophesying as well as of worship was music. Even Elisha attests this statement (2 Kings 3:15).

Without doubt these sons of the prophets composed sacred poetry and music and used them widely in their praises and worship. Perhaps also they were instructed in the religious and political matters of the times in which they lived. They learned of the wisdom of their master (2 Kings 4:38).

5. *THEIR OCCUPATION*. 1) *Study and Worship*. Their first duty was probably to make the most of their instruction. They were to be exercising in worship and praise; in bringing under their influence all whom they met (1 Sam. 10:10-13; 19:18-24). 2) *Run errands*. In 2 Kgs. 9:1-12 we find: "Elisha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this vial of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramoth-Gilead" (v. 1). Elisha gives him his orders, and his words for Jehu, whom he is to anoint king over Israel. "The young man, even the young man the prophet" (v. 4), performed with precision and promptness his master's command. 3) *Regular duties of a prophet*. When Ahab had allowed Ben-hadad to escape (1 Kgs. 20:29-34), "a certain man of the sons of the prophets" (v. 35) met him, and by an illustration (vs. 34 and 40) inveigled Ahab into pronouncing judgment upon himself. Ahab regarded him as one of the prophets, and "went to his house heavy and displeased." This work of one of the sons of the prophets corresponded in every respect to the work of any regular prophet. It can scarcely be imagined that *all* of the sons of the prophets received revelations; it is probable that they did not. On the other hand, there were those outside of these schools who received messages of God and delivered them (Amos 7:14).

6. *THEIR MEANS OF SUBSISTENCE*. If these young men were constantly engaged in religious services and duties, they had little time to look after the necessities of life. The information on this point leads to the conclusion that they were dependent on the charity of Israel. Some of the most definite information on this point is found in 2 Kgs. 4. Passing over the poverty of one of the wives of the sons of the prophets (vs. 1-7), and the house provided by the Shunammite woman for Elisha in his journeys (vs. 8-11), we find the sons of the prophets gathering their food in the fields—evidently uncultivated (v. 39). Soon "there came a man from Baal-Shalishah, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of corn in the husk. And he (Elisha) said, Give unto the people that they may eat. And his servant said: What, should I set this before an hundred men?" (vs. 42 and 43). The severity

of the dearth about Gilgal may have induced this husbandman to aid Elisha and these sons of the prophets, but the aid is received as a matter of course, and justifies the supposition that this was not out of the usual order of events. A still clearer case is found where Gehazi (2 Kgs. 5:21-24) follows the chariot of Naaman, saying, "My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from the hill country of Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets; give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of raiment" (v. 22). The bare fact that such a request should be made, shows that it was in accordance with the custom of the times to aid and help support these sons of the prophets. They were evidently largely dependent upon the charity of Israel and the people of God.

In conclusion, we have found in this brief discussion that the sons of the prophets 1) were collected together in bands or schools; 2) in six different localities, viz., (a) Ramah, (b) Bethel, (c) Gilgal, (d) Jericho, (e) Carmel, (f) Samaria; 3) under the tuition of (a) Samuel, (b) Elijah and (c) Elisha; 4) with instruction in (a) prophesying-worship, (b) sacred music, (c) practical matters of their day; 5) with their time wholly occupied in (a) study and worship, (b) doing errands for their masters and God, (c) performing the regular duties of a prophet; 6) largely dependent for their support upon the charity of the people.

All of these facts and inferences throw a new halo about the prophet of the Old Testament.

THE BABYLONIAN IŠTAR-EPIC.

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Among the Assyrian kings, Aššurbanipal is conspicuous both as a ruthless warrior and as a man of letters and scientific aspirations. It is to him and to his famous library, which was destroyed in the downfall of Nineveh, through the Chaldeans, that we are indebted for the preservation of this poem as well as for a large part of the literature that has come down to us. He was the great patron of science and art. He not only employed scribes to record his own fortunes and achievements in war, but also, either out of a purely literary instinct or from a consciousness of the solidarity of the human family, felt impelled to preserve for his own and future times the intellectual products of the past. For this purpose he gathered about his court competent scholars to translate the heritage of literary works bequeathed to the Babylonian and Assyrian Semites, from a people whose ancestry, language and traditions were distinct from his own, viz., the early Akkadian inhabitants of Babylonia. Touching the lineage of this people archaeology has not much information. Their language was highly agglutinative. Several of its syllabic characters bear a suggestive similarity, both in form and meaning, to the early Chinese characters, the difference being between horizontal and perpendicular lines. In the compounding of ideographs there is a further similarity. Their physiological features and habits of life, so far as we know them, would also favor comparison. The Akkadians are called in the texts sal-