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a *Grace Notes* course

## Old Testament History

by Alfred Edersheim

**History 509**

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*Grace Notes*

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## by Alfred Edersheim

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## Volume IV - Samuel, Saul, and David, to the Birth of Solomon

### Preface

THE history of Israel, viewed as the Theocracy, or Kingdom of God, consists of three periods:

First, that under the guidance of Prophets (from Moses to Samuel); Secondly, that under the rule of Kings (from Saul to the Babylonian Captivity); and, Thirdly, that under the reign of High-Priests (from Ezra to the birth of Jesus Christ).

Thus the Theocracy had passed through its full typical development in all its stages, when He came, to Whom they all pointed: Jesus Christ, the Prophet, King, and High-priest of the Kingdom of God. The period described in the present volume closes one of these stages, and commences another. The connecting link between them was Samuel - who alone fully realized the mission of the Judges, and who was also Divinely appointed to inaugurate the new institution of royalty in Israel. That royalty next appeared in its twofold possibility - or, as we might express it, in its negative and positive aspects. Saul embodied the royal ideal of the people, while David represented the Scriptural ideal of royalty in its conscious subjection to the will of the Heavenly King. Saul was, so to speak, the king after Israel's, David after God's own heart. But with the actual introduction of monarchy the first period had come to an end, and a new era begun, which was intended to continue till the third and last preliminary stage was reached, which prepared the way for the Advent of Him, Who was the fulfillment of the typical meaning of all.

From what has been said it will be inferred that the period about to be described must have witnessed the birth of new ideas, and the manifestation of new spiritual facts; otherwise spiritual advancement would not have kept pace with outward progress. But it is in the rhythm of these two that the real meaning of Scripture history lies, marking, as it does, the *pari passu* inner and outer development of the kingdom of God. On the other hand, the appearance of new ideas and spiritual facts would necessarily bring out in sharper contrast the old that was passing away, and even

lead to occasional antagonism. Of course, these new ideas and facts would not at first be fully understood or realized. They rather pointed towards a goal which was to be reached in the course of history. For nothing could be more fatal to the proper understanding of Holy Scripture, or of the purposes of God in His dealings with His ancient people, than to transport into olden times the full spiritual privileges, the knowledge of Divine truth, or even that of right and duty, which we now enjoy. It is not to do honor, but dishonor, to the Spirit of God to overlook the educational process of gradual development, which is not only a necessity of our nature, but explains our history. A miracle of might could, indeed, have placed the age of Samuel on the same spiritual level with that of the New Testament, at least so far as regards the communication of the same measure of truth. But such an exhibition of power would have eliminated the moral element in the educational progress of Israel, with the discipline of wisdom, mercy, and truth which it implied, and, indeed, have rendered the whole Old Testament history needless.

What has been stated will lead the student to expect certain special difficulties in this part of the history. These concern, in our opinion, the substance more than the form or letter of the text, and raise doctrinal and philosophical rather than critical and exegetical questions. The calling and later rejection of Saul; his qualification for the work by the influence of the Spirit of God, and afterwards the sending of a spirit of evil from the Lord; in general, the agency of the Spirit of God in Old Testament times, as distinguished from the abiding Presence of the Comforter under the Christian dispensation, and, in connection with it, the origin and the character of the Schools of the Prophets and of prophetic inspiration - these will readily occur to the reader as instances of what we mean. As examples of another class of difficulties, he will recall such questions as those connected with the ban upon Amalek, the consultation of the witch of Endor, and in general with the lower moral standpoint evidently occupied by those of that time, even by David himself. Such questions could not be passed over. They are inseparably connected with the Scriptural narratives, and they touch the very foundations of our faith. In

accordance with the plan of progressive advance which I set before myself in the successive volumes of this Bible History, I have endeavored to discuss them as fully as the character of this work allowed. Whether or not I may always succeed in securing the conviction of my readers, I can at least say, that, while I have never written what was not in accordance with my own conscientious conviction, nor sought to invent an explanation merely in order to get rid of a difficulty, my own reverent belief in the authority of the Word of God has not in any one case been the least shaken. It sounds almost presumptuous to write down such a confession. Yet it seems called for in clays when the enumeration of difficulties, easily raised, owing to the distance of these events, the great difference of circumstances, and the necessary scantiness of our materials of knowledge - whether critical, historical, or theological, - so often takes the place of sober inquiry; and high-sounding phrases which, logically tested, yield no real meaning, are substituted for solid reasoning.

As in the course of this volume I have strictly kept by the Biblical narratives to be illustrated, I may perhaps be allowed here to add a bare statement of three facts impressed on me by the study of early Old Testament history.

First, I would mark the difference between the subjective and objective aspects of its theology. However low, comparatively speaking, may have been the stage occupied by Israel in their conceptions of, and dealings with God, yet the manifestations of the Divine Being are always so sublime that we could not conceive them higher at any later period. As we read their account we are still as much overawed and solemnized as they who had witnessed them. In illustration, we refer to the Divine manifestations to Elijah and Elisha. In fact, their sublimeness increases in proportion as the human element, and consequently the Divine accommodation to it, recedes. Secondly, even as regards man's bearing towards the Lord, the Old Testament never presents what seems the fundamental character of all ancient heathen religions. The object of Israel's worship and services was never to deprecate, but to pray. There was no malignant deity or fate to be averted, but a

Father Who claimed love and a King Who required allegiance. Lastly, there is never an exhibition of mere power on the part of the Deity, but always a moral purpose conveyed by it, which in turn is intended, to serve as germ of further spiritual development to the people. We are too prone to miss this moral purpose, because it is often conveyed in a form adapted to the standpoint of the men of that time, and hence differs from that suited to our own.

Of course, there are also many and serious critical and exegetical questions connected with such portions of the Bible as the two Books of Samuel and the first Book of Chronicles. To these I have endeavored to address myself to the best of my power, so far as within the scope of a volume like this. Whether or not I may have succeeded in this difficult task, I am at least entitled to address a caution to the reader. Let him not take for granted that bold assertions of a negative character, made with the greatest confidence, even by men of undoubted learning and ability, are necessarily true. On the contrary, I venture to say, that their trustworthiness is generally in inverse ratio to the confidence with which they are made. This is not the place to furnish proof of this, - and yet it seems unfair to make a charge without illustrating it at least by one instance. It is chosen almost at random from one of the latest works of the kind, written expressly for English readers, by one of the ablest Continental scholars, and the present leader of that special school of critics. The learned writer labors to prove that the promise in Genesis 3:15 "must lose the name of, 'Proto-Evangelism,' which it owes to a positively incorrect view" of the passage. Accordingly he translates it: "I will put enmity between thee (the serpent) and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: this (seed) shall lie in wait for thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for his heel" - or, as he explains it: "man aims his attack at the head of the serpent, while it tries to strike man in the heel." It may possibly occur to ordinary readers that it scarcely needed what professes to be a record of Divine revelation to acquaint us with such a fact. Very different are the views which the oldest Jewish tradition expresses on this matter. But this is not the point to which I am desirous of directing attention. Dr. Kuenen supports his interpretation by two arguments.

First, he maintains that the verb commonly rendered "bruise," means "to lie in wait for," "according to the Septuagint and the Targum of Onkelos," - and that accordingly it cannot bear a Messianic reference.

Secondly, he, of course, implies that it is used in this sense by Onkelos in the passage in question. Now, the answer to all this is very simple, but quite conclusive.

First, the Hebrew verb referred to is always used in the Targumim for "bruise," or "rub off," as will be seen by a reference to Levy's well-known Dictionary of the Targumim, Vol. 2, pp. 462b, 463a.

Secondly, neither the word nor the rendering in question occurs in the Targum Onkelos, nor anything at all like it (as implied in the language of Kuenen); while, Thirdly, it is used, not indeed in the Targum Onkelos, but in the so-called Targum (Pseudo-) Jonathan and in the Jerusalem Targum (which in the whole of this history closely follow Jewish traditionalism), but in the sense of "bruise," with evident mystic reference - and what is more, with express mention of its application to Messiah the King!

I will not be so rash as to say, *Ex una disce omnes*, but this instance may at least point the moral to our caution. In conclusion, I can only repeat the apostolic assurance, as in this sense also expressive of the feelings with which I close the present part of my investigations:

"NEVERTHELESS THE FIRM FOUNDATION OF GOD STANDETH!"

#### **IV\_01 Purport and Lessons of the Books of Samuel - Eli - Hannah's Prayer and Vow - Birth of Samuel - Dedication of the Child - Hannah's Song**

##### **2 Samuel 1:1 to 2:11**

ONCE more, after long and ominous silence, the interest of the sacred story turns towards the Tabernacle which God had pitched among men, and the Priesthood which He had instituted. The period of the Judges had run its full course, and wrought no deliverance in Israel. In this direction, evidently, help or hope was not to be looked for. More than that, in the case of Samson, it had appeared how even the most direct aid on the part

of God might be frustrated by the self-indulgence of man. A new beginning had again to be made; but, as we have hitherto noticed in all analogous cases in sacred history, not wholly new, but one long foreshadowed and prepared.

Two great institutions were now to be prominently brought forward and established, both marking a distinct advance in the history of Israel, and showing forth more fully than before its typical character. These two institutions were the Prophetic Order and the Monarchy. Both are connected with the history of Samuel. And this explains alike why the books which record this part of sacred history bear the name of Samuel, and why they close not with the death of David, as might have been expected in a biography or in a history of his reign, but with the final establishment of his kingdom (2 Samuel 20). At the close of 2 Samuel four chapters (21-24.) are added as a sort of appendix, in which various events are ranged, not chronologically, but in accordance with the general plan and scope of the work, which is: to present Israel as the kingdom of God, and as under the guidance of the spirit of prophecy. This also explains two other peculiarities. In a work compiled with such an object constantly in view, we do not expect, nor do we find in it, a strictly chronological arrangement of events. Again, we notice large gaps in the history of Samuel, Saul, and David, long periods and important facts being omitted, with which the author must have been acquainted - and to which, indeed, in some instances, he afterwards expressly refers, - while other periods and events are detailed at great length. All these peculiarities are not accidental, but designed, and in accordance with the general plan of the work. For, we must bear in mind, that as in the case of other parts of Holy Scripture, so in the Books of Samuel, we must not look for biographies, as of Samuel, Saul, and David, nor yet expect merely an account of their administration, but a history of the kingdom of God during a new period in its development, and in a fresh stage of its onward movement towards the end. That end was the establishment of the kingdom of God in Him to Whom alike the Aaronic priesthood, the prophetic order, and Israel's royalty were intended to point. These three institutions were prominently brought forward in

the new period which opens in the books of Samuel. First, we have in the history of Eli a revival of the interest attaching to the priesthood. Next, we see in Samuel the real commencement of the Old Testament prophetic order. Not that the idea of it was new, or the people unprepared for it. We can trace it so early as in Genesis 20:7 (comp. Psalm 105:15); and we find not only Moses (Deuteronomy 34:10), but even Miriam (Exodus 15:20; Numbers 12:2) designated by the title of prophet; while the character and functions of the office (if "office" and not "mission" be the correct term) are clearly defined in Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:9-22.

And although Joshua was not himself a prophet, yet the gift of prophecy had not ceased in his time. In proof we point not only to Deborah (Judges 4:4), but also to other instances (Judges 6:8). But on the other hand, the order of prophets as such evidently began with Samuel. The same remarks apply to the institution of royalty in Israel. It had been contemplated and prepared for from the first. Passing from the promise to Abraham (Genesis 17:6, 16), with its prophetic limitation to Judah (Genesis 49:10), we find the term kingdom applied to Israel, as marking its typical destiny (Exodus 19:6), centering of course in the King (Numbers 24:17, 19). And as the character of the prophetic order, so that of this royalty also was clearly defined in Deuteronomy 17, while from Judges 8:23 we learn, that the remembrance and expectation of this destiny were kept alive in Israel. It was, however, during the period which we are about to describe, that royalty was first actually introduced in Israel. It appeared, if we may so express it, in Saul in its negative, and in David in its, positive aspect; and to the latter all the promises and types applied which were connected with its establishment. Nor is it without the deepest significance in this respect that in the books of Samuel the designation "Jehovah of Hosts," occurs for the first time, and that Hannah, who was the first to use this title in her prayer (1 Samuel 1:11), prophesied of that King (2:10) in Whom all Israel's hopes were fulfilled, and Whose kingdom is the subject of grateful praise alike by the Virgin-mother, and by the father of the Baptist (Luke 2).

But to turn to the history itself. Once more the Sanctuary had been restored to its former and God-destined position, and Eli the high-priest judged in Israel.<sup>1</sup> Once more God had visibly interposed to own the institution of Nazarites, which, more than any other, symbolized Israel's spiritual calling of voluntary self-surrender to God.

Alone, and unaided by man, the Nazarite Samson had made war for God against the Philistines. In the miraculous strength supplied from on high, he had prevailed against them. But neither priest nor Nazarite of that time had realized the spirituality of their calling. Both had been raised up to show what potentiality for good there was in God's institutions; and both were removed to prove that even God's institutions were powerless, except by a continuous and living connection with Him on Whose presence and blessing depended their efficacy. But already God was preparing other instrumentalities - a prophet, who should receive and speak His Word, and another Nazarite, voluntarily devoted to God by his mother, and who would prevail not in the strength of his own arm, but by the power of prayer, and by the influence of the message which he brought from God. That prophet, that Nazarite was Samuel His birth, like that of Samson, was Divinely announced; but, in accordance with the difference between the two histories this time by prophecy, not as before, by angelic message. Samuel was God-granted, Samson God-sent; Samuel was God-dedicated, Samson was God-demanded. Both were Nazarites; but the one spiritually, the other outwardly; both prevailed-but the one spiritually, the other outwardly. The work of Samson ended in self-indulgence, failure, and death; that of Samuel opened up into the royalty of David, Israel's great type-king.

Up in Mount Ephraim, due west from Shiloh,<sup>2</sup> lay Ramah, "the height," or by its full name,

<sup>1</sup> Ewald suggests that Eli had attained the dignity of judge owing to some outward deliverance, like that of the other judges. But the Scriptural narrative of Eli, which is very brief, gives us no indication of any such event.

<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding high authority, I cannot look for Ramah, as most modern writers do, anywhere within the ancient territory of Benjamin. The expression, "Mount Ephraim," might

Ramathaim Zophim, "the twin heights of the Zophites." From Joshua 21:20, we know that, amongst others, certain districts within the tribal possession of Ephraim were assigned to the Levitical families which descended from Kohath.

One of these - that of Zophai or Zuph (1 Chronicles 6:25, 35) - had given its name to the whole district, as "the land of Zuph" (1 Samuel 9:5). From this family sprang Elkanah, "the God-acquired," or "purchased," a name which characteristically occurs in the Old Testament only in Levitical families. It was not in accordance with what "was from the first," that Elkanah had two wives,<sup>3</sup> Hannah ("favor," "grace") and Peninnah ("pearl," or "coral"). Perhaps the circumstance that Hannah was not blessed with children may have led to this double marriage. "Yearly" - as has been inferred from the use of the same peculiar expression in Exodus 13:10 - "at the Feast of the Passover," the one above all others to which families as such were wont to "go up" (Luke 2:41), Elkanah came to Shiloh with his household for the twofold purpose of "worshipping" and of "sacrificing" peace-offerings according to the law (Exodus 23:15; 34:20; Deuteronomy 16:16).

Although, Eli being old, the chief direction of the services devolved upon his unworthy sons, Hophni and Phinehas, yet these were joyous occasions (Deuteronomy 12:12; 16:11; 27:7), when the whole household would share in the feast upon the thank-offering. At that time Elkanah was wont to give to Peninnah and to her children their "portions;" but to Hannah he gave "a portion for two persons," as if to indicate that he loved her just as if she had borne him a son. Whether from jealousy or from malevolence, Peninnah made those joyous seasons times of pain and bitter emotion to Hannah, by grieving and trying to make her dissatisfied and rebellious against God. And so it happened each year: Hannah's sorrow, as time passed, seeming ever more hopeless. In vain

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indeed be taken in a wider sense; but then there is the addition "an Ephrathite," that is, an Ephraimite. Keil's suggestion that Elkanah was originally an Ephraimite, but had migrated into Benjamin, is wholly unsupported.

<sup>3</sup> The Mosaic Law tolerated and regulated, but nowhere approved it, and in practice polygamy was chiefly confined to the wealthy.

Elkanah tried to comfort her by assurance of his own affection. The burden of her reproach, still unrolled from her, seemed almost too heavy to bear.

It was surely in the noble despair of faith - as if in her own way anticipating the New Testament question: "Lord, to whom shall we go?" - that Hannah rose from the untasted sacrificial feast, with the resolve to cast upon the Lord the burden she could not bear. It was early evening in spring time, and the aged high-priest Eli (a descendant not of Eleazar, but of Ithamar, to whom the high-priesthood seems to have been transferred from the elder branch of the Aaronic family, comp. Josephus' *Antiquities*, 5. 11. 5)<sup>4</sup> sat at the entrance probably to the holy place, when a lonely woman came and knelt towards the sanctuary. Concealed by the folds of the curtain, she may not have noticed him, though he watched every movement of the strange visitor. Not a sound issued from her lips, and still they moved faster and faster as, unburdening the long secret, she poured out her heart<sup>5</sup> in silent prayer.

And now the gentle rain of tears fell, and then in spirit she believably rose to the vow that the child she sought from the Lord should not be cherished for the selfish gratification of even a mother's sacred love. He would, of course, be a Levite, and as such bound from his twenty-fifth or thirtieth year to service when his turn for it came. But her child should wholly belong to God. From earliest childhood, and permanently, should he be attached to the house of the Lord. Not only so - he should be a Nazarite, and that not of the ordinary class, but one whose vow should last for life (Numbers 6:2; comp. Judges 13:5).

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<sup>4</sup> That Eli was a descendant of Ithamar, not of Eleazar, appears from 1 Chronicles 24:1, Abimelech being the great-great-grandson of Eli. Ewald, suggests that Eli was the first high-priest of that branch of the family of Aaron, and that he was invested with the office of high-priest in consequence of his position as judge. Other writers have offered different explanations of the transference of the priesthood to the line of Ithamar (comp. Keil, *Bibl. Comm.* 2. 2, pp. 30, 31). But the Scriptural narrative affords no data on the subject. It gives not the personal history of Eli, nor even that of the house of Aaron, but of the kingdom of God.

<sup>5</sup> Ver. 13, literally rendered: "She was speaking to her heart."

It leaves on us the twofold sad impression that such prayerful converse with God must have been rare in Shiloh, and that the sacrificial feasts were not infrequently profaned by excesses, when such a man as Eli could suspect, and roughly interrupt Hannah's prayer on the supposition of her drunkenness. But Eli was a man of God; and the modest, earnest words which Hannah spake soon changed his reproof into a blessing. And now Hannah comes back to those she had left at the sacrificial feast. The brief absence had transformed her, for she returns with a heart light of sorrow and joyous in faith. Her countenance<sup>6</sup> and bearing are changed. She eats of the erst untasted food, and is gladsome. She has already that for which to thank God, for she is strong in faith.

Another morning of early worship, and the family return to their quiet home. But God is not unmindful of her. Ere another Passover has summoned the worshippers to Shiloh, Hannah has the child of her prayers, whom significantly she has named Samuel, the God-answered (literally: heard of God - Exauditus a Deo). This time Hannah accompanied not her husband, though he paid a vow which he seems to have made<sup>7</sup>, if a son were granted; no, nor next time. But the third year, when the child was fully weaned,<sup>8</sup> she presented herself once more before Eli. It must have sounded to the old priest almost like a voice from heaven when the gladsome mother pointed to her child as the embodiment of answered prayer: "For this boy have I prayed; and Jehovah gave me my asking which I asked of Him. And now I (on my part) make him the asked one unto Jehovah all the days that he lives: he is 'the asked one' unto Jehovah!"<sup>9</sup> And as she so vowed and paid her

<sup>6</sup> Ver. 18, literally: "And her face was the same face no more to her."

<sup>7</sup> This we infer from the addition, "and his vow," in ver. 21.

<sup>8</sup> The period of suckling was supposed to last three years (2 Maccabees 7:27). A Hebrew child at that age would be fit for some ministry, even though the care of him might partially devolve on one of the women who served at the door of the tabernacle.

<sup>9</sup> This literal rendering will sufficiently bring out the beautiful meaning of her words. It is difficult to understand how our Authorised Version came to translate "lent."

vow, one of the three bullocks which they had brought was offered a burnt-offering, symbolic of the dedication of her child.<sup>10</sup> Once more Hannah "prayed;" this time not in the language of sorrow, but in that of thanksgiving and prophetic anticipation. For was not Samuel, so to speak, the John the Baptist of the Old Testament? and was it not fitting that on his formal dedication unto God, she should speak words reaching far beyond her own time, and even furnishing what could enter into the Virgin-mother's song?

"And Hannah prayed and said:

1 "My heart rejoices in Jehovah - Uplifted my horn in Jehovah, Wide opened my mouth upon my foes For I rejoice in Thy salvation!

2 None holy as Jehovah - for none is beside Thee, Nor is there rock as our God! 3 Multiply not speech lofty, lofty - (Nor) insolence come out of your mouth, For God of all knowledge<sup>11</sup> is Jehovah, And with Him deeds are weighed.<sup>12</sup>

4 Bow-heroes are broken,<sup>13</sup> And the stumbling girded with strength.

5 "The full hire themselves out for bread And the hungry cease - Even till the barren bears seven, And the many-childed languisheth away! 6 Jehovah killeth and maketh alive,<sup>14</sup> He bringeth down to Sheol, and bringeth up.

7 Jehovah maketh poor and maketh rich, He layeth low and lifts up. 8 He lifts from the dust the weak, And from the dunghill raiseth the poor To make

<sup>10</sup> They had brought with them three bullocks - two for the usual burnt and thank-offerings, and the third as a burnt sacrifice at the formal dedication of Samuel. The meat-offering for each would have been at least 3/10 of an ephah of flour (Numbers 15:8).

<sup>11</sup> In the original, "knowledge" is in the plural; I have rendered this by "all knowledge."

<sup>12</sup> Many interpreters understand this not of man's but of God's deeds, as meaning that God's doings were fixed and determined. But this seems very constrained. I would almost feel inclined to discard the Masoretic correction of our Hebrew text, and retaining the Chethib to translate interrogatively, "And are not deeds weighed?"

<sup>13</sup> The verb which agrees with heroes is used both in a literal and a metaphorical sense - in the latter for confounded, afraid.

<sup>14</sup> Cp. Deuteronomy 32:39; Psalm 30:3; 71:20; 86:13.



them sit down with nobles. <sup>15</sup> And seats of honor will He assign them - For Jehovah's are the pillars of the earth, And He hath set on them the habitable world.

9 The feet of His saints will He keep, <sup>16</sup> And the wicked in darkness shall be put to silence, For not by strength shall man prevail! <sup>17</sup>

10 Jehovah - broken they that strive with Him, Above him (over such) in the heavens shall He thunder; Jehovah shall judge the ends of the earth, And give strength to His King, And lift on high the horn of His Anointed!"

And so the child and his parents parted - where parting is ever best: leaving him "ministering unto The main element of hope and the prospect of a possible revival lay in the close adherence of the people to these services. But the sons of Eli seemed determined to prove that these ordinances were mainly designed for the advantage of the priesthood, and therefore not holy, of Divine significance, and unalterably fixed. Contrary to the Divine institution, "the priest's right," as he claimed it, <sup>18</sup> was to take, if necessary by force, parts of the sacrifices before these had really been offered unto the Lord (Leviticus 3:3- 5; comp. 7:30-34).

Nor was this all. The open immorality of the high-priest's sons was as notorious as their profanity. <sup>19</sup> The only step which the aged high-priest took to put an end to such scandals was mild expostulation, the truisms of which had only so far value as they expressed it, that in offenses between man and man, Elohim would, through the magistracy, restore the proper balance, but who

was to do that when the sin was against Jehovah? Such remonstrances could, of course, produce no effect upon men so seared in conscience as to be already under sentence of judicial hardening (ver. 25).

But other and more terrible judgments were at hand. They were solemnly announced to Eli by a prophet (comp. Judges 13:6), since by his culpable weakness he shared the guilt of his sons. As so often in His dealings with His own people, the Lord condescended to reason, not only to exhibit the rightness of His ways, but to lay down principles for all time for the guidance of His church. Had He not dealt in special grace with the house of Aaron? He had honored it at the first by special revelation; He had singled it out for the privilege of ministering unto Him at the altar; for the still higher function of presenting in the incense the prayers of His people; and for that highest office of "wearing the ephod" in the solemn mediatorial services of the Day of Atonement. Moreover, He had made ample provision for all their wants. All this had been granted in perpetuity to the house of Aaron (Exodus 29:9). It had been specially confirmed to Phinehas on account of his zeal for the honor of God (Numbers 25:13). But even the latter circumstance, as well as the nature of the case, indicated that the whole rested on a moral relationship, as, indeed, the general principle holds true: "Them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." In accordance with this, Eli and his house would become subjects of special judgment: none of his descendants, so long as they held office, should attain old age (1 Samuel 2:31); in punishment of their own insolence of office they would experience constant humiliation (ver. 32); <sup>20</sup> another and more faithful line of priests should fill

<sup>15</sup> Cp. Psalm 113:7, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Psalm 56:13; 116:8; 121:3, and others.

<sup>17</sup> Psalm 33:16, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Notwithstanding high authority, I cannot accept the view which would connect the first clause of 1 Samuel 2:13 (of course, without the words in italics) with the last clause of ver. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Ver. 22. "The women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle" were, no doubt, officially engaged in some service, although we know not wherein it consisted. Comp. Exodus 38:8.

<sup>20</sup> The Authorised Version renders, evidently incorrectly: "Thou shalt see an enemy in My habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel." But the suggestions of modern critics are not more satisfactory. I would venture to propose the following rendering of these difficult expressions: "And thou shalt see adversity to the tabernacle in all that benefits Israel;" i.e., constant humiliation of the priesthood during the prosperity of Israel, a prediction amply fulfilled in the history of the priesthood under Samuel, Saul, and latterly under David, until the deposition of the line of Ithamar.

the highest office (ver. 35); <sup>21</sup> and the deposed family would have to seek at their hands the humblest places for the sake of the barest necessities of life (ver. 36). Thus justice would overtake a family which, in their pride of office, had dared to treat the priesthood as if it were absolutely their own, and to degrade it for selfish purposes. As for the chief offenders, Hophni and Phinehas, swift destruction would overtake them in one day; and their death would be the sign of the commencement of those judgments, which were to culminate in the time of Solomon (1 Kings 2:27; comp. Josephus' *Antiq.* 5. 11, 5; 8. 1, 3).

But, uncorrupted by such influences around, "the child Samuel grew, and was in favor both with Jehovah and with men," - in this respect also the type of the "faithful Priest," the great Prophet, the perfect Nazarite (Luke 2:52). It was in many respects as in the days of the Son of man. "The word of Jehovah" by prophetic revelation "was precious," it was rare, and prophetic "vision was not spread."

Meanwhile Samuel had grown into a youth, and was, as Levite, "ministering unto Jehovah before Eli." But as yet, beyond humble, faithful walk before God, heart-fellowship with Him, and outward ministrations in His sanctuary, Samuel had not other knowledge of Jehovah, in the sense of personal revelation or reception of His message (3:7). The sanctuary in Shiloh had become permanent, and we are warranted in inferring that "the dwelling," which formerly was adapted to Israel's wanderings, had lost somewhat of its temporary character. The "curtains" which in the wilderness had formed its enclosure, had no doubt been exchanged for buildings for the use of the priesthood in their ministry and for the many requirements of their services. Instead of the "veil" at the entrance to the outer court there would be doors, closed at even and opened to the worshippers in the morning. The charge of these doors seems to have devolved upon Samuel, who as "minister" and guardian lay by night within the

sacred enclosure, in the court of the people - or, at least, close to it, as did the priests on duty in later times. The aged high-priest himself seems to have lain close by, probably in one of the rooms or halls opening out upon the sanctuary.

It was still night, though the dawn was near. <sup>22</sup> The holy oil in the seven-branched candlestick in the holy place was burning low, but its light had not yet gone out, when a voice calling Samuel by his name wakened him from sleep. As Eli's eyes had begun to "wax dim," so that he would require the aid of the young Levite on ministry, it was natural to infer that it was the voice of the aged high-priest that had called him. <sup>23</sup> But it was not so, and Samuel again laid him down to rest. A second time the same voice called him, and a second time he repaired in vain to Eli for his commands. But when yet a third time the call was repeated, the high-priest understood that it was not some vivid dream which had startled the youth from his sleep, but that a voice from heaven commanded his attention. There is such simplicity and child-like faith, such utter absence of all intrusive curiosity, and such entire self-forgetfulness on the part of Eli, and on that of Samuel such complete want of all self-consciousness, as to render the surroundings worthy of the scene about to be enacted. Samuel no longer seeks sleep; but when next the call is heard, he answers, as directed by his fatherly teacher: "Speak, <sup>24</sup> for Thy servant heareth." Then it was that not, as before, merely a voice, but a vision was granted him, <sup>25</sup> when Jehovah repeated in express terms, this time not in warning

<sup>22</sup> The expression, "ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord," seems intended to mark the time, as indicated by us in the text.

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<sup>24</sup> It is remarkable, as indicative of Samuel's reverential fear, that his reply differs from that taught him by Eli in the omission of the word "Jehovah."

<sup>25</sup> This is implied in the words, "Jehovah came and stood" (1 Samuel 3:10). The "voice" had come from out of the most holy place, where the Lord dwelt between the Cherubim; the "vision" or appearance, in whatever form it may have been, was close before Samuel. In the one case Samuel had been asleep, in the other he was fully awake.

<sup>21</sup> I venture to think that this promise should be applied impersonally rather than personally. Thus it includes, indeed, Samuel and afterwards Zadok, but goes beyond them, and applies to the priesthood generally, and points for its final fulfillment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

prediction, but as the announcement of an almost immediate event, the terrible judgment impending upon Eli and his sons.

With the burden of this communication upon him, Samuel lay still till the gray morning light; nor, whatever thoughts might crowd upon him, did the aged high-priest seek to intrude into what might pass between that Levite youth and the Lord, before Whom he had stood for so many years in the highest function of the priestly office, and into Whose immediate Presence in the innermost sanctuary he had so often entered. Suffice it, the vision and the word of Jehovah had passed from himself - passed not to his sons and successors in the priesthood, but to one scarce grown to manhood, and whose whole history, associated as it was with that very tabernacle, stood out so vividly before him. This itself was judgment. But what further judgment had the voice of the Lord announced to His youthful servant?

And now it was morning, and Samuel's duty was to open the gates of the sanctuary. What was he to do with the burden which had been laid upon him? In his reverence for his teacher and guide, and in his modesty, he could not bring himself unbidden to speak of that vision; he trembled to repeat to him whom most it concerned the words which he had heard. But the sound of the opening gates conveyed to Eli, that whatever might have been the commission to the young prophet, it had been given, and there could be no further hesitation in asking its import. Feeling that he and his family had been its subject, and that, however heavy the burden, it behooved him to know it, he successively asked, entreated, and even conjured Samuel to tell it in all its details. So challenged, Samuel dared not keep back anything. And the aged priest, however weak and unfaithful, yet in heart a servant of the Lord, received it with humiliation and resignation, though apparently without that resolve of change which alone could have constituted true repentance (1 Samuel 3:17, 18).

By the faithful discharge of a commission so painful, and involving such self-denial and courage, Samuel had stood the first test of his fitness for the prophetic office. Henceforth "the word of the Lord" was permanently with him. Not

merely by isolated commissions, but in the discharge of a regular office, Samuel acted as prophet in Israel. A new period in the history of the kingdom of God had commenced; and all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, knew that there was now a new link between them and their Heavenly King, a living center of guidance and fellowship, and a bond of union for all who were truly the Israel of God.

#### **IV\_02 The Sin of Eli's Sons - Eli's Weakness - A Prophet's Message - Samuel's First Vision - His Call to the Prophetic Office.**

##### **1 Samuel 2:12 to 3:12**

QUITE another scene now opens before us, and one which, as it shows the corruptness of the priestly family, also argues a very low religious state among the people. The high-priest Eli was "very old,"<sup>26</sup> and the administration of the sanctuary was left in the hands of his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. The energy, amounting almost to severity, which, even in his old age, Eli could display, as in his undeserved reproof of Hannah, was certainly not exercised towards his sons. They were "sons of Belial," and, "knew not Jehovah" in His character and claims.<sup>27</sup> Their conduct was scandalous even in a decrepit age, and the unblushing frankness of their vices led "the people of the Lord to transgress," by "bringing into contempt" the sacrificial services of the sanctuary.

The main element of hope and the prospect of a possible revival lay in the close adherence of the people to these services. But the sons of Eli seemed determined to prove that these ordinances were mainly designed for the advantage of the priesthood, and therefore not holy, of Divine significance, and unalterably fixed. Contrary to the Divine institution, "the priest's right," as he

<sup>26</sup> The mention of this in Scripture is not intended to represent Eli as a man whose faculties were gone, but to account for the absolute rule of his sons, and for that indulgence which men in their old age are apt to show towards their children.

<sup>27</sup> Belial means literally lowness, that is, vileness.

claimed it, <sup>28</sup> was to take, if necessary by force, parts of the sacrifices before these had really been offered unto the Lord (Leviticus 3:3- 5; comp. 7:30-34).

Nor was this all. The open immorality of the high-priest's sons was as notorious as their profanity. <sup>29</sup> The only step which the aged high-priest took to put an end to such scandals was mild expostulation, the truisms of which had only so far value as they expressed it, that in offenses between man and man, Elohim would, through the magistracy, restore the proper balance, but who was to do that when the sin was against Jehovah? Such remonstrances could, of course, produce no effect upon men so seared in conscience as to be already under sentence of judicial hardening (ver. 25).

But other and more terrible judgments were at hand. They were solemnly announced to Eli by a prophet (comp. Judges 13:6), since by his culpable weakness he shared the guilt of his sons. As so often in His dealings with His own people, the Lord condescended to reason, not only to exhibit the rightness of His ways, but to lay down principles for all time for the guidance of His church. Had He not dealt in special grace with the house of Aaron? He had honored it at the first by special revelation; He had singled it out for the privilege of ministering unto Him at the altar; for the still higher function of presenting in the incense the prayers of His people; and for that highest office of "wearing the ephod" in the solemn mediatorial services of the Day of Atonement. Moreover, He had made ample provision for all their wants. All this had been granted in perpetuity to the house of Aaron (Exodus 29:9). It had been specially confirmed to Phinehas on account of his zeal for the honor of God (Numbers 25:13). But even the latter circumstance, as well as the nature of the case,

<sup>28</sup> Notwithstanding high authority, I cannot accept the view which would connect the first clause of 1 Samuel 2:13 (of course, without the words in italics) with the last clause of ver. 12.

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indicated that the whole rested on a moral relationship, as, indeed, the general principle holds true: "Them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." In accordance with this, Eli and his house would become subjects of special judgment: none of his descendants, so long as they held office, should attain old age (1 Samuel 2:31); in punishment of their own insolence of office they would experience constant humiliation (ver. 32); <sup>30</sup> another and more faithful line of priests should fill the highest office (ver. 35); <sup>31</sup> and the deposed family would have to seek at their hands the humblest places for the sake of the barest necessities of life (ver. 36). Thus justice would overtake a family which, in their pride of office, had dared to treat the priesthood as if it were absolutely their own, and to degrade it for selfish purposes. As for the chief offenders, Hophni and Phinehas, swift destruction would overtake them in one day; and their death would be the sign of the commencement of those judgments, which were to culminate in the time of Solomon (1 Kings 2:27; comp. Josephus' Antiq. 5. 11, 5; 8. 1, 3).

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#### **IV\_03 Expedition Against the Philistines - The Two Battles of Ebenezer - Death of Eli's Sons, and Taking of the Ark - Death of Eli - Judgment on the Philistine Cities - The Return of the Ark**

##### **1 Samuel 4:1 to 7:1**

TIME had passed; but in Shiloh it was as before. Eli, who had reached the patriarchal age of ninety-seven, was now totally blind,<sup>36</sup> and his sons still held rule in the sanctuary. As for Samuel, his prophetic "word was to all Israel."<sup>37</sup> Some effect

<sup>36</sup> Literally, "his eyes stood" (1 Samuel 4:15). Through a mistake, probably in reading the numeral letters (I for x), the Arabic and Syrian versions represent Eli as seventy-eight instead of ninety-eight years old.

<sup>37</sup> We regard the first clause of 1 Samuel 4:1 as entirely unconnected with the account of Israel's expedition against the

must have been produced by a ministry so generally acknowledged. True, it did not succeed in leading the people to repentance, nor in teaching them the spiritual character of the relationship between God and themselves, nor yet that of His ordinances in Israel.

But whereas the conduct of Eli's sons had brought the sanctuary and its services into public contempt (1 Samuel 2:17), Samuel's ministry restored and strengthened belief in the reality of God's presence in His temple, and in His help and power. In short, it would tend to keep alive and increase historical, although not spiritual belief in Israel. Such feelings, when uncombined with repentance, would lead to a revival of religiousness rather than of religion; to confidence in the possession of what, dissociated from their higher bearing, were merely externals; to a confusion of symbols with reality; and to such a reliance on their calling and privileges, as would have converted the wonder-working Presence of Jehovah in the midst of His believing people into a magic power attaching to certain symbols, the religion of Israel into mere externalism, essentially heathen in its character, and the calling of God's people into a warrant for carnal pride of nationality. In truth, however different in manifestation, the sin of Israel was essentially the same as that of Eli's sons.

Accordingly it had to be shown in reference to both, that neither high office nor yet the possession of high privileges entitles to the promises attached to them, irrespective of a deeper relationship between God and His servants.

It may have been this renewed, though entirely carnal confidence in the Presence of God in His sanctuary, as evidenced by the prophetic office of Samuel, or else merely a fresh outbreak of that chronic state of warfare between Israel and the Philistines which existed since the days of Samson and even before, that led to the expedition which terminated in the defeat at Eben-ezer. At any rate, the sacred text implies that the Philistines held possession of part of the soil of Palestine; nor do

Philistines. Keil, following other interpreters, connects the two clauses, and assumes, as it appears to me, erroneously, that the war was undertaken in obedience to Samuel's word. But in that case he would have been the direct cause of Israel's disaster and defeat.

we read of any recent incursion on their part which had given them this hold. It was, therefore, as against positions which the enemy had occupied for some time that "Israel went out to battle" in that open "field," which from the monument erected after the later deliverance under Samuel (1 Samuel 7:12), obtained the name of Eben-ezer, or stone of help. The scene of action lay, as we know, in the territory of Benjamin, a short way beyond, Mizpeh, "the look out," about two hours to the north-west of Jerusalem. The Philistines had pitched a short way off at Aphek, "firmness," probably a fortified position. The battle ended in the entire defeat of Israel, with a loss of four thousand men, not fugitives, but in the "battle-array" <sup>38</sup> itself.

They must have been at least equal in numbers to the Philistines, and under favorable circumstances, since at the council of war after their defeat, "the elders of Israel" unhesitatingly ascribed the disaster not to secondary causes, but to the direct agency of Jehovah. It was quite in accordance with the prevailing religious state that, instead of inquiring into the causes of God's controversy with them, they sought safety in having among them "the ark of the covenant of the Lord," irrespective of the Lord Himself and of the terms of His covenant. As if to mark, in its own peculiarly significant manner, the incongruity of the whole proceeding, Scripture simply puts together these two things in their sharp contrast: that it was "the ark of the covenant of Jehovah of Hosts, which dwelleth, between the cherubim," and that "Hophni and Phinehas were there with the ark of the covenant of God" (1 Samuel 4:4).

Such an event as the removal of the ark from the sanctuary, and its presence in the camp, had never happened since the settlement of Israel in Canaan. Its arrival, betokening to their minds the certain renewal of miraculous deliverances such as their fathers had experienced, excited unbounded enthusiasm in Israel, and caused equal depression

among the Philistines. But soon another mood prevailed. <sup>39</sup>

Whether we regard ver. 9 as the language of the leaders of the Philistines, addressed to their desponding followers, or as the desperate resolve of men who felt that all was at stake, this time they waited not to be attacked by the Israelites. In the battle which ensued, and the flight of Israel which followed, no less than thirty thousand dead strewed the ground. In the number of the slain were Hophni and Phinehas, and among the booty the very ark of God was taken! Thus fearfully did judgment commence in the house of Eli; thus terribly did God teach the lesson that even the most sacred symbol connected with His immediate Presence was in itself but wood and gold, and so far from being capable of doing wonders, might even be taken and carried away. Tidings of this crashing defeat were not long in reaching Shiloh. Just outside the gate of the sanctuary, by the way which a messenger from the battlefield must come, sat the aged high-priest. His eyes were "stiffened" by age, but his hearing was keen as he waited with anxious heart for the expected news. The judgment foretold, the presence of his two sons with the army in the field, the removal of the ark, without any Divine authority, at the bidding of a superstitious people, must have filled him with sad misgivings. Had he been right in being a consenting party to all this? Had he been a faithful father, a faithful priest, a faithful guardian of the sanctuary? And now a confused noise as of a tumult reached him. Up the slopes which led to Shiloh, "with clothes rent and earth upon his head," in token of deepest meaning, ran a Benjamite, a fugitive from the army. Past the high-priest he sped, without stopping to speak to him whose office had become empty, and whose family was destroyed. Now he has reached the market-place; and up and down those steep, narrow streets fly the tidings. They gather around him; they weep, they cry out in the wildness of their grief, and "the noise of the crying" is heard where the old man sits alone still waiting for tidings. The messenger is brought to him. Stroke

<sup>38</sup> So literally in 1 Samuel 4:2: "They slew in the battle-array in the field about four thousand men."

<sup>39</sup> In vers. 7 and 8 the Philistines speak of God in the plural number, regarding Him from their polytheistic point of view.

upon stroke falls upon him the fourfold disaster: "Israel is fled!" "a great slaughter among the people!" "thy two sons are dead!" "the ark of God is taken!" It is this last most terrible blow, rather than anything else, which lays low the aged priest. As he hears of the ark of God, he falls backward unconscious, and is killed in the fall by "the side of the gate" of the sanctuary. Thus ends a judgeship of forty years!

Yet another scene of terror. Within her house lies the wife of Phinehas, with the sorrows and the hopes of motherhood upon her. And now these tidings have come into that darkened chamber also. They gather around her as the shadows of death. In vain the women that are about try to comfort her with the announcement that a son has been born to her. She answers not, neither regards it. She cannot forget her one great sorrow even in this joy that a man is born into the world. She has but one word, even for her new-born child: "Ichabod," "no glory." To her he is Ichabod - for the glory is departed from Israel. And with that word on her lips she dies. The deepest pang which had wrought her death was, as in the case of her father-in-law, that the ark, the glory of Israel, was no more. <sup>40</sup> Two have died that day in Shiloh of grief for the ark of God - the aged high-priest and the young mother; two, whose death showed at least their own fidelity to their God and their heart-love for His cause and presence.

But although such heavy judgment had come upon Israel, it was not intended that Philistia should triumph. More than that, in the hour of their victory the heathen must learn that their gods were not only wholly powerless before Jehovah, but merely idols, the work of men's hands. The Philistines had, in the first place, brought the ark to Ashdod, and placed it in the temple of Dagon as a votive offering, in acknowledgment of the victory which they ascribed to the agency of their national god. Had not the ark of God been brought into the camp of Israel, and had not the God of Israel been defeated and led captive in His ark through the superior power of Dagon? But they

were soon to feel that it was not so; and when on the morn of its arrival at Ashdod, the priests opened the temple doors, they found the statue of their god thrown upon its face in front of the ark. It might have been some accident; and the statue, with its head and bust of a bearded man, and body in the form of a fish, was replaced in the cella at the entrance of the temple. But next morning the head and hands, which were in human form, were found cut off and lying on the threshold, as if each entrant should in contempt tread upon these caricatures of ideal humanity; and nothing but the Dagon itself, <sup>41</sup> the fish-body, was left, which once more lay prostrate before the ark.

But this was not all. If the gods of Philistia were only vanity, the power and strength in which the people may have boasted, were likewise to appear as unavailing before the Lord. He "laid waste" the people of Ashdod - as we infer from 1 Samuel 6:4, 11, 18 - by that terrible plague of southern countries, field-mice, which sometimes in a single night destroy a harvest, and are known to have driven whole tribes from their dwelling-places. While thus the towns and villages around Ashdod were desolated, the inhabitants of that city itself and of its neighborhood, suffered from another plague, possibly occasioned by the want caused by famine, in the form of an epidemic - probably a malignant skin disease, <sup>42</sup> - highly infectious and fatal in its character.

As we gather from the context, Philistia consisted at that time of a federation of five "cities," or cantons, under the oligarchic rule of "lords," or princes, with this provision, that no great public measure (such as the removal of the ark, which had been placed at Ashdod by common decree) might be taken without the consent of all. Accordingly, on an appeal of the people of Ashdod, the lords of the Philistines ordered the removal of the ark to Gath, probably judging, that the calamities complained of were due rather to natural causes than to its presence. But in Gath the

<sup>40</sup> As I understand the narrative, her only words, as quoted in the text, were Ichabod, as the name of the child, and the explanation which she gave of it in ver. 22. All the rest is added by the narrator of the sad tragedy.

<sup>41</sup> Dagon means the "fish-form," from dag, a fish.

<sup>42</sup> Judging from the derivation of the word, and from its employment (in Deuteronomy 28:27) in connection with other skin diseases, we regard it as a kind of pestilential boils of a very malignant character.



same consequences also followed; and when on its further transportation to Ekron the public sufferings were even greater and more sudden than before,<sup>43</sup> the cry became universal to return the ark to the land of Israel.

The experience of these seven months during which the ark had been in their land, not only convinced the lords of the Philistines of the necessity of yielding to the popular demand, but also made them careful as to the manner of handling the ark when returning it to its place. Accordingly they resolved to consult their priests and soothsayers on this question: "What shall we do in reference to the ark of Jehovah - instruct us with what we shall send it to its place?" The reply was to this effect, that if the ark were returned it should be accompanied by a "trespass-offering" in expiation of their wrong (Leviticus 6:5; Numbers 5:7),<sup>44</sup> - consisting, according to common heathen custom, of votive offerings in gold, representing that wherein or whereby they had suffered. Never perhaps did superstition more truly appear in its real character than in the advice which these priests pressed upon their people. Evidently they were fully acquainted with the judgments which the God of Israel had executed upon the Egyptians when hardening their hearts, and with solemn earnestness they urge the return of the ark and a trespass-offering. And yet they are not quite sure whether, after all, it was not mere chance that had happened to them; and they propose a curious device by which to decide that question (1 Samuel 6:7-9).

The advice of the priests was literally followed. The ark, with its trespass-offerings,<sup>45</sup> was placed

on a new cart, which had never served profane purposes. To this were attached two milk cows, on whom never yoke of other service had been laid, and from whom their calves had just been taken.

No force was to be used to keep them from returning to their calves; no guidance to be given what road to take. And, behold, it happened as the priests had suggested it would, if it were God Who had smitten them. "Though lowing as they went" for their calves, the kine took the straight road to the nearest Israelitish border-city, Beth-shemesh ("the house of the Sun"), followed by the wondering lords of the Philistines. The boundary was reached, and the Philistines waited to see what would happen. About fourteen miles west of Jerusalem, on the northern boundary of the possession of Judah, about two miles from the great Philistine plain, and seven from Ekron, lay the ancient "sun city," Beth-shemesh. It was one of those allotted by Joshua to the priests (Joshua 21:16), though, of course, not exclusively inhabited by them. To reach it from Ekron, the great plain has first to be traversed. Then the hills are crossed which bound the great plain of Philistia. Ascending these, and standing on the top of a steep ridge, a valley stretches beneath, or rather "the junction of two fine plains." This is "the valley of Beth-shemesh," where on that summer afternoon they were reaping the wheat-harvest (1 Samuel 6:13); and beyond it, on, "the plateau of a low swell or mound," was the ancient Beth-shemesh itself.

A fit place this to which to bring the ark from Philistia, right in view of Zorah, the birth-place of Samson. Here, over these ridges, he had often made those incursions which had carried terror and destruction to the enemies of Israel. The sound of the approaching escort - for, no doubt, the Philistine "lords" were accompanied by their retainers, and by a multitude eager to see the result - attracted the attention of the reapers below. As, literally, "they lifted up their eyes" to the hill whence it slowly wound down, the momentary

<sup>43</sup> From the text it appears that the Ekronites, immediately on the arrival of the ark, entreated its removal; but that before the necessary steps could be taken, they were visited with plagues similar to those in Ashdod and Gath, but more intense and widespread even than before. Thus the strokes fell quicker and heavier as the Philistines resisted the hand of God.

<sup>44</sup> The last clause of 1 Samuel 6:3 should be rendered: "If ye shall then be healed, it will be known to you, why His hand is not removed from you," viz., not until you had returned the ark and brought a trespass offering.

<sup>45</sup> In 1 Samuel 6:4, we read of "five" golden mice as part of the trespass-offering, the priests computing the number according to that of the five Philistine capitals. But from ver. 18

we infer that, in point of fact, their number was not limited to five, but that these votive offerings were brought not only for the five cities, but also for all "fenced cities" and "country villages," the plague of the mice having apparently been much wider in its ravages than that of the pestilential boils.

fear at seeing the Philistine escort gave place first to astonishment and then to unbounded joy, as they recognized their own ark heading the strange procession. Now it had reached the boundary - probably marked by a "great stone" in the field of Joshua.<sup>46</sup>

The Philistines had remained reverently within their own territory, and the unguided kine stood still by the first landmark in Israel. The precious burden they brought was soon surrounded by Beth-shemites. Levites were called to lift it with consecrated hands, and to offer first the kine that had been devoted by the Philistines to the service of the Lord, and then other "burnt-offerings and sacrifices" which the men of Beth-shemesh had brought. But even so, on its first return to the land, another lesson must be taught to Israel in connection with the ark of God. It was the symbol to which the Presence of Jehovah in the midst of His people attached. Alike superstition and profanity would entail judgment at His Hand. What the peculiar desecration or sin of the Beth-shemites may have been, either on that day of almost unbounded excitement, or afterwards, we cannot tell.<sup>47</sup> Suffice it that it was something which the people themselves felt to be incompatible with the "holiness" of Jehovah God (ver. 20), and that it was punished by the death of not less than seventy persons. In consequence the ark was, at the request of the Beth-shemites, once more removed, up the heights at the head of the

<sup>46</sup> In vers. 14, 15 we read of a "great stone," while in ver. 18 it is called the great Avel." Interpreters regard this as a clerical error of the copyist - ( lba for öba ), A VeL for EVeN. But may it not be that this "great stone" obtained the name Avel, "mourning," as marking the boundary-line towards Philistia?

<sup>47</sup> The Authorised Version translates in ver. 19, "they had looked into the ark," following in this the Rabbis. But this view is scarcely tenable. Nor is the rendering of other interpreters satisfactory: "They looked (in the sense of curious gazing) at the ark," although this assuredly comes within the range of the warning, Numbers 4:20. But the whole text here seems corrupted. Thus in the statement that "He smote threescore and ten men," the addition "of the people, 50,000," has - judging it both on linguistic and rational grounds - unquestionably crept into the text by the mistake of a copyist. But Thenius points out other linguistic anomalies, which lead to the inference that there may be here some farther corruption of the text. Accordingly, he adopts the reading from which the LXX. translated: "And the sons of Jechonias rejoiced not among the men of Beth-shemesh, that they saw the ark of the Lord."

valley to the "city of forest-trees," Kirjath-jearim, where it was given in charge to Abinadab, no doubt a Levite; whose son Eleazar was set apart to the office of guardian, not priest, of the ark.<sup>48</sup>

Here this sacred symbol remained, while the tabernacle itself was moved from Shiloh to Nob, and from Nob to Gibeon, till David brought it, after the conquest of Jerusalem, into his royal city (2 Samuel 6:2, 3, 12). Thus for all this period the sanctuary was empty of that which was its greatest treasure, and the symbol of God's Personal Presence removed from the place in which He was worshipped.

#### **IV\_04 Samuel As Prophet - The Gathering at Mizpeh - Battle of Ebenezer; Its Consequences - Samuel's Administration-The Demand for a King**

##### **1 Samuel 7, 8**

PERHAPS the most majestic form presented, even among the heroes of Old Testament history, is that of Samuel, who is specially introduced to us as a man of prayer (Psalm 99:6). Levite, Nazarite, prophet, judge - each phase of his outward calling seems to have left its influence on his mind and heart. At Shiloh, the contrast between the life of self-denial of the young Nazarite and the unbridled self-indulgence of Eli's sons must have prepared the people for the general acknowledgment of his prophetic office. And Nazarite - God-devoted, stern, unbending, true to his calling, whithersoever it might direct him, - such was ever the life and the character of Samuel!<sup>49</sup>

It needed such a man in this period of reformation and transition, when all the old had signally failed,

<sup>48</sup> It is difficult to say why the ark was not carried to Shiloh. Ewald thinks that the Philistines had taken Shiloh, and destroyed its sanctuary; Keil, that the people were unwilling to restore the ark to a place which had been profaned by the sons of Eli; Erdmann, that it was temporarily placed at Kirjath-jearim for safety, till the will of God were known. The latter seems the most satisfactory explanation, especially as Kirjath-jearim was the first large town between Beth-shemesh and Shiloh, and the priesthood of Shiloh had proved themselves untrustworthy guardians of the ark.

<sup>49</sup> Second, probably, only to Moses, if such comparisons are lawful. But even so, Samuel seems at times more majestic even than Moses - more grand, unbending, and unapproachable. Ewald compares Samuel with Luther.

not through inherent weakness, but through the sin of the people, and when the forms of the new were to be outlined in their Divine perfectness.<sup>50</sup> The past, the present, and the future of the people seemed to meet in his history; and over it the figure of the life-Nazarite cast its shadow, and through it the first voice from the prophetic order was heard in Israel.

The sanctuary, destitute of the ark, and tended by a decrepit priesthood, over which the doom had been pronounced, had apparently fallen into utter disregard. The ark, carried captive into Philistia, but having proved a conqueror there, had indeed been restored to Israel, but was rather a witness of the past than the symbol of present help. The only living hope of Israel centered in the person of Samuel. Although, since the death of Eli, no longer attached to the sanctuary, which indeed his mission to a certain extent set aside, his spiritual activity had not been interrupted. Known and owned as prophet, he closely watched, and at the proper time decisively directed the religious movement in Israel. That decisive hour had now come.

Twenty years had passed since the return of the ark - a period, as we gather from the subsequent history, outwardly of political subjection to the Philistine, and spiritually of religious depression, caused by the desolateness of their sanctuary, and the manifest absence of the Lord from among His people. It was no doubt due to the influence of Samuel that these feelings led them towards the Lord. In the language of Scripture, they "lamented after Jehovah."<sup>51</sup> But this was only preparatory. It was Samuel's work to direct to a happy issue the change which had already begun. His earnest message to all Israel now was: "If with all your

hearts you are returning to Jehovah," - implying in the expression that repentance was primarily of the heart, and by the form of the Hebrew verb, that that return had indeed commenced and was going on - "put away the strange gods (Baalim, ver. 4), and the Ashtaroth, and make firm your hearts towards Jehovah" - in opposition to the former vacillation and indecision - "and serve Him alone." To Israel so returning with their whole heart, and repenting alike by the removal of their sin, and by exercising lively faith, Jehovah would, as of old, prove a Savior - in the present instance, from the Philistines.

The words of Samuel produced the marks of at least full outward repentance. The next step was to call the people to one of those solemn national gatherings, in which, as on former occasions (Joshua 23:2, etc.; 24:1, etc.), they would confess national sins and renew national obligations towards Jehovah. On its mountain height,<sup>52</sup> Mizpeh, the "look out" of Benjamin, was among those ancient sanctuaries in the land, where, as in Shechem (Joshua 24:26), in Gilgal (Joshua 5:2-12, 15), and in Bethel (Judges 20:18, 23, 26; 21:2), the people were wont to assemble for solemn deliberation (Judges 11:11; 20:1). But never before, since the days of Moses, had Israel so humbled itself before the Lord in confession of sin.<sup>53</sup> It was thus that Samuel would prepare for his grand act of intercession on their behalf, and it was under such circumstances that he publicly exercised, or more probably that he began his office of "judge" (1 Samuel 8:6), in its real meaning, by setting right what was wrong within Israel, and by becoming the means of their deliverance from the enemy.

<sup>50</sup> In the New Testament dispensation the outward calling is the result of, or at least intimately connected with, the inner state. The reverse was the case under the Old Testament, where the outward calling seems to mold the men. Even the prophetic office is not quite an exception to this rule.

<sup>51</sup> As Schmid puts it: "One who follows another, and lamentingly entreats till he obtains," - as did the Syrophenician woman. Thenius imagines that there is a hiatus between vers. 2 and 3; while Ewald regards vers. 3, 4 as a later addition. Impartial students, however, will fail to perceive either, but will be content to leave these two assertions to refute one another.

<sup>52</sup> The ancient Mizpeh, as we have identified it, lay about 2848 feet above the level of the sea. It seems to us impossible, from the localization of this assembly and of the battle which followed, to identify Mizpeh with the hill Scopus, close to Jerusalem.

<sup>53</sup> The ceremony of drawing and pouring out water, which accompanied Israel's fast and confession, has been regarded by most interpreters as a symbol of their sorrow and contrition. But may it not have been a ceremonial act, indicative not only of penitence, but of the purification and separation of the service of Jehovah from all foreign elements around? Comp. here also the similar act of Elijah (1 Kings 18:33-35).

The assembly had met in Mizpeh, not with any thought of war, far less in preparation for it. In fact, when Israel in Mizpeh heard of the hostile approach of the Philistines, "they were afraid" (ver. 7). But as rebellion had caused their desertion, so would return bring them help from the Lord. As so generally in this history, all would happen naturally in the ordinary succession of cause and effect; and yet all would be really and directly of God in the ordering and arrangement of events. Israel must not go to war, nor must victory be clue to their own prowess. It must be all of God, and the Philistines must rush on their own fate. Yet it was quite natural that when the Philistines heard of this grand national gathering at Mizpeh, after twenty years of unattempted resistance to their rule, they should wish to anticipate their movements; and that, whether they regarded the assembly as a revival of distinctively national religion or as preparatory for war. Similarly, it was natural that they would go on this expedition not without serious misgivings as to the power of the God of Israel which they had experienced during the stay of the ark in their land; and that in this state of mind they would be prepared to regard any terrible phenomenon in nature as His interposition, and be affected accordingly.

All this actually took place, but its real causes lay deeper than appeared on the surface. While Israel trembled at the approach of the Philistines, Samuel prayed,<sup>54</sup> and "Jehovah answered him." The great thunder-storm on that day, which filled the Philistines with panic, was really the Lord's thundering. It was a wild mass of fugitives against which Israel went out from Mizpeh, and whom

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<sup>54</sup> In the text we read: "And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering wholly unto Jehovah: and Samuel cried unto Jehovah for Israel" (1 Samuel 7:9). The two words which we have italicized require brief comment. The "sucking lamb" would, according to Leviticus 22:27, be, of course, seven days old. It was chosen so young as symbol of the new spiritual life among Israel. The expression, "a burnt-offering wholly unto Jehovah," is regarded by Keil as implying that the sacrifice was not, as ordinarily, cut up, but laid undivided on the altar. But this view is, on many grounds, untenable; and the expression, which is also otherwise used (Leviticus 6:22; Deuteronomy 33:10; Psalm 51:19) is probably intended to point to the symbolical meaning of the burnt-offering, as wholly consumed (Leviticus 1:9).

they pursued and smote until under the broad meadows of Beth-car, "the house of the lamb." And it was to mark not only the victory, but its cause and meaning, that Samuel placed the memorial-stone on the scene of this rout, between "the look out" and Shen, "the tooth," probably a rocky crag on the heights down which the Philistines were hurled in their flight. That stone he named "Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath Jehovah helped us."

Helped - but only "hitherto!" For all Jehovah's help is only "hitherto" - from day to day, and from place to place - not unconditionally, nor wholly, nor once for all, irrespective of our bearing. But even so, the outward consequences of this Philistine defeat were most important. Although their military possession of certain posts, and their tenure of these districts still continued (comp. 1 Samuel 10:5; 13:4, 11-21; 14:21), yet the advancing tide of their incursions was stemmed, and no further expeditions were attempted such as that which had been so signally defeated.<sup>55</sup> More than that. In the immediate vicinity of the field of battle, all the cities which the Philistines had formerly taken from Israel, "with the coasts thereof," - that is, with their surroundings - were restored to Israel, along the whole line extending north and south from Ekron to Gath.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, "the Amorites," or Canaanitish tribes in that neighborhood, had withdrawn from their alliance with the Philistines: "And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites."

Similarly, order was introduced into the internal administration of the land, at least so far as the central and the southern portions of it were concerned. Samuel had his permanent residence in Ramah, where he was always accessible to the people. But, besides, "he went from year to year in

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<sup>55</sup> It is thus that we understand 1 Samuel 7:13. Indeed, the expression: "the hand of Jehovah was against (or rather, upon) the Philistines all the days of Samuel," implies that the hostilities between the two parties continued, although no further incursions were attempted, and the Philistines stood on the defensive rather than took the offensive.

<sup>56</sup> Of course, outside these two cities. The expression, "with the coasts thereof," refers to the towns restored to Israel, and not to Ekron or Gath.



circuit" - to Bethel, thence to Gilgal,<sup>57</sup> returning by Mizpeh to his own home. In each of these centers, sacred, as we have seen, perhaps from time immemorial, he "judged Israel," - not in the sense of settling disputes between individuals, but in that of the spiritual and national administration of affairs, as the center and organ of the religious and political life of the people.

We have no means of judging how long this happy state of things lasted. As usually, Holy Scripture furnishes not details even of the life and administration of a Samuel. It traces the history of the kingdom of God. As we have no account of events during the twenty years which preceded the battle of Eben-ezer (1 Samuel 7:2), so we are left in ignorance of those which followed it. From the gathering at Mizpeh, with its consequences, we are at once transported to Samuel's old age.<sup>58</sup> He is still "the judge;" the same stern, unbending, earnest, God-devoted man as when in the full vigor of manhood. But he has felt the need of help in matters of detail; and his two sons are now made "judges," with residence in Beer-Sheba,<sup>59</sup> the ancient "well of the seven," or "of the oath," on the southern boundary of the land. Their office seems to have been chiefly, if not exclusively, that of civil administration, for which in the border district, and so near a nomadic or semi-nomadic population, there must have been ample need.

Unfortunately, they were quite unlike their father. Although not guilty of the wicked practices of Eli's sons, yet among a pastoral and nomadic population there would be alike frequent opportunity for, and abundant temptation to, bribery; nor would any other charge against a

judge so quickly spread, or be so keenly resented as this.<sup>60</sup>

Soon the murmurs became a complaint; and that loud enough to bring about a meeting of that most ancient and powerful institution in Israel, "the eldership," or local and tribal oligarchy. Probably it was not merely discontent with this partial administration of justice that led to the proposal of changing the form of government from a pure theocracy to hereditary monarchy. Other causes had long been at work. We know that a similar proposal had been made to Gideon (Judges 8:22), if not to Jephthah (Judges 11:6). Although in both instances these overtures had been declined, the feeling which prompted it could only have gained strength. An hereditary monarchy seemed the only means of combining the tribes into one nation, putting an end to their mutual jealousies, and subordinating tribal to national interests. All nations around had their kings; and whether for war or in peace, the want of a strong hand wielding a central power for the common good must have been increasingly felt.

Moreover, the ancient God-given constitution of Israel had distinctly contemplated and provided for a monarchy, when once the people had attained a settled state in the land. It must be admitted that, if ever, circumstances now pointed to this as the proper period for the change. The institution of "judges," however successful at times and in individuals, had failed as a whole. It had neither given external security nor good government to the people. Manifestly, it was at an end. Samuel must soon die; and what after him? Would it not be better to make the change under his direction, instead of leaving the people in charge of two men who could not even keep their hands from taking bribes? Many years had elapsed since the battle of Mizpeh, and yet the Philistines were not driven out of the land. In fact, the present administration held out no prospect of any such result. This then, if ever was the proper time to carry out the long-desired and much-needed reform.

<sup>57</sup> Of course, not the Gilgal in the Jordan-valley, but that formerly referred to in Joshua 12:23.

<sup>58</sup> According to Jewish tradition, Samuel, like Solomon, died at the age of fifty-two. He is said to have become prematurely old.

<sup>59</sup> Josephus adds "Bethel" (Ant., 6. 3, 2), implying that one of the two sons "judged" at Bethel, the other at Beersheba. But this suggestion - for it amounts to no more than that - is wholly unsupported.

<sup>60</sup> The rendering of the Authorised Version, they "perverted judgment," is stronger than the original, which means, "they inclined," or "bent," judgment.

It cannot be denied that there was much force in all these considerations; and yet we find that not only Samuel resented it, but that God also declared it a virtual rejection of Himself. The subject is so important as to require careful consideration.

First, as to the facts of the case. The "elders of Israel" having formally applied to Samuel: "Make us now a king to judge us, like all the nations," on the ground of his own advanced age and the unfitness of his sons, "the thing was evil in the eyes of Samuel as they spake it, Give us a king to judge us." But instead of making an immediate reply, Samuel referred the matter to the Lord in prayer. The view which Samuel had taken was fully confirmed by the Lord, Who declared it a rejection of Himself, similar to that of their fathers when they forsook Him and served other gods. Still He directed His prophet to grant their request, with this twofold proviso: to "bear strong testimony against them" in reference to their sin in this matter, and to "declare to them the right of the king," - not, of course, as God had fixed it, but as exercised in those heathen monarchies, the like of which they now wished to inaugurate in Israel. Samuel having fully complied with the Divine direction, and the people still persisting in their request, the prophet had now only to await the indication from on high as to the person to be appointed king - till which time the deputies of Israel were dismissed to their homes.

Keeping in view that there was nothing absolutely wrong in Israel's desire for a monarchy (Deuteronomy 17:14, etc.; comp. even Genesis 17:6, 16; 35:11), nor yet, so far as we can judge, relatively, as concerned the time when this demand was made, the explanation of the difficulty must lie in the motives and the manner rather than in the fact of the "elders," request. In truth, it is precisely this - the "wherefore" and the "how," not the thing itself, - not that they spake it, but "as they spake it," which was "evil in the eyes of Samuel."<sup>61</sup> Israel asked "a king" to "judge"

them, such as those of all the nations. We know what the term "judge" meant in Israel. It meant implicit reliance for deliverance from their enemies on an individual, specially God-appointed - that is, really on the unseen God. It was this to which the people had objected in the time of Gideon, and which they would no longer bear in the days of Samuel. Their deliverance was unseen, they wanted it seen; it was only certain to faith, but quite uncertain to them in their state of mind; it was in heaven, they wanted it upon earth; it was of God, they wanted it visibly embodied in a man. In this aspect of the matter, we quite understand why God characterized it as a rejection of Himself, and that in reference to it He directed Samuel to "bear strong testimony against them."

But sin is ever also folly. In asking for a monarchy like those around them, the people were courting a despotism whose intolerable yoke it would not be possible for them to shake off in the future (1 Samuel 8:18). Accordingly, in this respect Samuel was to set before them "the right of the king" (vers. 9, 11), that is, the royal rights, as claimed by heathen monarchs. But whether from disbelief of the warning, or the thought that, if oppressed, they would be able to right themselves, or, as seems to us, from deliberate choice in view of the whole case, the "elders" persisted in their demand. And, truth to say, in the then political circumstances of the land, with the bond of national unity almost dissolved, and in the total failure of that living realization of the constant Presence of the Divine "Judge," which, if it had existed, would have made His "reign" seem the most to be desired, but, when wanting, made the present state of things appear the most incongruous and undesirable, their choice seems to us only natural. In so doing, however, they became openly unfaithful to their calling, and renounced the principle which underlay their national history. Yet even so, it was but another phase in the development of this history, another stage in the progress towards that end which had been viewed and willed from the first.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> It is noteworthy that Samuel introduces no personal element, nor complains of their charges against his sons. If I have not remarked in the text on the absence of all prayer before making such an application, as, contrasted with the conduct of Samuel, it is not that I am insensible to it, but that I

wish to present the matter in its objective rather than its subjective aspect.

<sup>62</sup> This account of the origin of monarchy in Israel seems to us to have also another important bearing. It is impossible to regard it as either unauthentic or of much later origin. For the

#### IV\_05 The Calling of Saul - Occasion of his Interview with Samuel - Samuel Communes with Saul - Saul is Anointed King - The Three "Signs" - Their Deeper Significance

##### 1 Samuel 9:1 to 10:16

THE Divine direction for which prophet and people were to wait was not long withheld. It came, as so often, through a concurrence of natural circumstances, and in the manner least expected. Its object, if we may venture to judge, was to embody in the person of the new king the ideal which Israel had had in view in making their demand for a monarchy. He should possess all the natural attractions and martial qualities which the people could desiderate in their king; he should reflect their religious standpoint at its best; but he should also represent their national failings and the inmost defect of their religious life: that of combining zeal for the religion of Jehovah, and outward conformity to it, with utter want of real heart submission to the Lord, and of true devotedness to Him.

Thus viewed, we can understand alike the choice of Saul at the first, his failure afterwards, and his final rejection. The people obtained precisely what they wanted; and because he who was their king so corresponded to their ideal, and so reflected the national state, he failed. If, therefore, it is with a feeling of sadness that we follow this story, we must remember that its tragic element does not begin and end with Saul; and that the meaning of his life and career must be gathered from a deeper consideration of the history of his people. In truth, the history of Saul is a summary and a reflection of that of Israel. A monarchy such as his must first succeed, and finally fail when, under the test of trials, its inmost tendencies would be brought to light. Such a reign was also necessary, in order to bring out what was the real meaning of the people's demand, and to prepare Israel for the king

manifest tendency of the Jewish mind in later periods increasingly was to surround existing institutions with a halo of glory in their origin. This would especially be the case in reference to the origin of monarchy, associated as it was in later times with the house of David. Of anti-monarchical tendencies we discover no real trace. An account so disparaging to royalty would never have been invented, least of all in later times. The thoughtful reader will find in what we have just marked a principle which has a wide application in the criticism of Old Testament history.

of God's election and selection in the person of David.

Of all the tribes in Israel perhaps the most martial, although the smallest, was that of Benjamin. The "family" of Abiel<sup>63</sup> was, indeed, not famous for wealth or influence. But it must have occupied a prominent place in Benjamin for the manly qualities and the military capacity of its members, since within a narrow circle it numbered such men as Saul, Jonathan, and Abner.<sup>64</sup> The whole of this history gives such sketches of primitive life in Israel as to prove that it was derived from early and authentic sources.

Kish, the father of Saul, and Ner, the father of Abner, were brothers, the sons of Abiel (comp. 1 Samuel 14:51). The former is described in the text as "a hero of might," by which, as in the case of Boaz, who is similarly designated (Ruth 2:1), were meant in those times men stalwart, strong, and true, worthy representatives and, if need were, defenders of their national rights and of their national religion. Such, no doubt, was also the father of Abner. And yet there was exquisite simplicity about the family-life of these great, strong men. Kish had lost his she-asses - a loss of some consequence in times of such poverty that a man would consider "the fourth part of a shekel," or a sus - about 6 and 1/2d. of our money - as quite an adequate gift to offer a "seer" in return for consulting him (1 Samuel 9:8). To find, if possible, the straying animals, Saul, the only son of Kish,<sup>65</sup> as we infer from the text, was sent in company with a servant. Saul, "the asked-for," was

<sup>63</sup> It is only such a view of the character of Saul which, I venture to think, satisfactorily accounts for his choice in the first instance, and then for his fall and final rejection. But thus read, there is a strict unity about his whole history, and his outward religiousness and the deeper defects of this religion appear consistent with each other.

<sup>64</sup> 1 Samuel 9:1; comp. 14:51. The notice, therefore, in 1 Chronicles 8:33, 9:39, must probably be a clerical error, though Keil suggests that, as in other places, the reference is to a "grandfather," or even more remote ancestor.

<sup>65</sup> Critics infer from the name Shaul - "the asked for" - that he was the firstborn. But I rather conclude from the use of the term in such passages as Genesis 46:10, 1 Samuel 1:17, 27, that Kish had long been childless, and that Saul was the child of prayer; while from the absence of the mention of any other children, I would infer that he was the only son of Kish.

not only "choice" <sup>66</sup> and goodly," like all his race, but apparently as handsome as any man in the land, and taller than any by head and shoulders. In any country and age this would tell in favor of a popular leader, but especially in ancient times, and more particularly in Israel at that period.

From his home at Gibeah <sup>67</sup> Saul and his servant passed in a north-westerly direction over a spur of Mount Ephraim. Thence they turned in their search north-eastward to "the land of Shalishah," probably so called from the circumstance that three Wadys met there, <sup>68</sup> and then eastwards to the land of Shaalim - probably "the hollow," the modern Salem. Having traversed another district, which is called "the land of Yemini," - either "the right hand," or else "of Benjamin," though apparently not within the territory of Benjamin - they found themselves in the district of Zuph, where Samuel's home at Ramah was. <sup>69</sup>

For three days had the two continued their unsuccessful search, when it occurred to Saul that their long absence might cause his father more anxiety than the straying of the she-asses. But before returning home, Saul's servant suggested that since they were just in view of the city where "the seer" lived, they might first consult him as to

"the way" they "should go" in order to find the she-asses. <sup>70</sup>

Having ascertained that the seer was not only in the city, but that the people had had "a sacrifice" on the "height" outside, where, as we know (1 Samuel 7:17), Samuel had built an altar, the two hastened on, in the hope of finding him in the city itself, before he went up "to bless," or speak the prayer of thanksgiving, with which the sacrificial meal would begin. For, amidst the guests gathered there, the two strangers could have little expectation of finding access to the president of the feast. They had just entered the city itself, and were "in the gate," or wide place inside the city-entrance, where the elders used to sit and popular assemblies gathered, when they met Samuel coming from an opposite direction on his way to the "Bamah," or sacrificial "height." To Saul's inquiry for "the seer's house," Samuel replied by making himself known. <sup>71</sup> He had expected him - for the day before the Lord had expressly intimated it to him. Indeed, Samuel had prepared for it by ordering the choicest piece of that which was to be eaten of the sacrifice to be set aside for his guest - so sure was he of his arrival. And now when he saw before him in the gate the stateliest and finest-looking man in all Israel, the same voice

<sup>66</sup> Most critics render the term by "young." But I prefer the rendering "choice" - not, however, in the sense of the Vulgate: electus, chosen. From 13:1-3 we know that Jonathan was at the time capable of taking a command, so that Saul his father must have been at least forty years old.

<sup>67</sup> Our Authorised Version renders 1 Samuel 10:5, "the hill of God," and again, ver. 10, "the hill." In both cases it is Gibeah; and, as we infer from the familiarity of the people with Saul (ver. 11), either the place where Saul lived or quite close by it.

<sup>68</sup> The modern Wady Kurawa (see Keil, p. 66).

<sup>69</sup> "The land Yemini" could not have been intended to designate the tribal territory of Benjamin. It is never so employed, and the analogy of the expressions "land Shalishah," "land Shaalim," "land Zuph," forbids us to regard it as other than a district. Again, it is said, "he passed through the land of Benjamin." From where, and whither? Certainly not into Ephraim, for he came thence; and as certainly not into Judah. But the whole question of the localization of the Ramah of Samuel and of the journey of Saul is amongst the most difficult in Biblical geography. There is another important consideration in regard to this subject to which we shall refer in a subsequent Note.

<sup>70</sup> There can be no reasonable doubt that this "city" was Ramah, the ordinary residence of Samuel. The question and answer in vers. 10 and 11 imply this; so does the circumstance that Samuel had a house there. Lastly, how could Saul's servant have known that the "seer" was in that city, if it had not been his ordinary residence? These two points, then, seem established: Saul's residence was at Gibeah, and he first met Samuel in Ramah. But if so, it seems impossible, in view of 1 Samuel 10:2, to identify the Ramah of Samuel with the Ramah of Benjamin, or to regard it as the modern Neby Samuel, four miles north-west of Jerusalem.

<sup>71</sup> We may here give a curious extract from Siphre, all the more readily that this commentary on Numbers and Deuteronomy, which is older than the Mishnah, is so little quoted even by those who make Rabbinical literature their study. In Siphre 69a, by way of enforcing the duty of modesty, the expression of Samuel, "I am the seer" (1 Samuel 9:19), is thus commented on: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, Art thou the seer? by thy life, I shall shew thee that thou art not a seer. And how did He shew it to him? At the time when it was said: Fill thy horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse, the Bethlehemite," etc. Upon which 1 Samuel 16:6 is quoted, when the Holy One reminded Samuel that he had said: "I am a seer," while nevertheless he was entirely mistaken on the subject of the choice of Eliab!



which had led him to expect, indicated that this was the future leader of God's people.

The bearing of Samuel towards Saul was precisely such as the circumstances required. Moreover, it was consistent throughout, and dignified. An entirely new office, involving the greatest difficulties and responsibilities, was most unexpectedly to be almost thrust upon Saul; an office, besides, the reality of which would not only be soon tested by such enemies as the Philistines, but to which he had neither family nor personal claims, and which would be sure to excite tribal jealousies and personal envies. To prepare Saul, it was necessary to call forth in him expectations, it might be vague, of great things; to inspire him with absolute confidence in Samuel as the medium through whom God spake; and finally, by converse on the deepest concerns of Israel, to bring out what lay inmost in his heart, and to direct it to its proper goal. Accordingly, Samuel invited Saul first to the feast and then to his house, at the outset intimating that he would tell him all that was in his heart (ver. 19). This assuredly could not have reference to the finding of the she-asses, since he immediately informed Saul about them, as evidence that he was "a seer," whose words must, therefore, be received as a message coming from God. Mysterious as was the allusion to what was in Saul's heart, the remark which accompanied his intimation of the finding of the she-asses sounded even more strange. As if treating such a loss as a very small matter, he added (ver. 20). "And whose is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not thine and thy father's house?"

The remark was so strange both in itself and as coming from "the seer," that Saul, feeling its seeming incongruity, could only answer by pointing to the fact that Benjamin was the smallest tribe, and his own family among the least influential in it. Saul was undoubtedly aware that Israel had demanded and were about to receive from Samuel a king. His reply leaves the impression on us, that, although, probably he did not exactly formulate it in his own mind, yet Samuel's words had called up in him thoughts of the kingdom. Else why the reference to the size of his tribe and the influence of his family? And this was exactly what Samuel had wished: gradually to

prepare him for what was coming. Apparently the "seer" made no answer to what Saul had said. But at the sacrificial feast he pursued the same course towards his guest. To the Ephraimites there assembled he was, of course, unknown. But even they must have been surprised at finding that, while the mass of the people feasted outside, among the thirty principal guests who were bidden into "the parlor," not only was the chief place given to this stranger, but that the principal portion of the sacrifice had, as a mark of special honor, been reserved for him.

The feast was past, and Saul followed his host to his house. There on the flat roof, <sup>72</sup> so often the scene of private converse in the East, Samuel long "communed" with Saul, no doubt of "all that was in his heart;" not, indeed, of the office about to be conferred on him, but of the thoughts which had been called up in Saul that day: of Israel's need, of Israel's sin, of Israel's help, and of Israel's God. After such "communing," neither of them could have found much sleep that night. It was gray dawn when they rose; and as the morning broke, Samuel called up to Saul on the roof that it was time to depart. He himself convoyed him through the town; then, sending forward the servant, he stopped to deliver the message of God. Taking a vial of oil, <sup>73</sup> he "anointed" Saul, thus placing the institution of royalty on the same footing as that of the sanctuary and the priesthood (Exodus 30:23, etc., Leviticus 8:10, etc.), as appointed and consecrated by God and for God, and intended to be the medium for receiving and transmitting blessing to His people. And with this, a kiss, in token of homage (Psalm 2:12), and the perhaps not quite unexpected message: "Is it not that Jehovah hath anointed thee to be prince over His inheritance?" Saul was appointed the first king in Israel.

In order to assure Saul of the Divine agency in all this, Samuel gave him three signs. Each was

<sup>72</sup> The LXX. translators in this, as in several other passages in this section, either had a Hebrew text somewhat varying from ours or else altered it in their translation. Notwithstanding the views of some critics (notably Thenius), we have seen no reason to depart from the textus receptus.

<sup>73</sup> The Hebrew word indicates a narrow-necked vessel from which the oil would come by drops.

stranger than the other, and all were significant of what would mark the path of Israel's king. After leaving Samuel, coming from Ephraim, he would cross the northern boundary of Benjamin by the grave of Rachel.<sup>74</sup> There he would meet two men who would inform him of the finding of the she-asses and of his father's anxiety on his account.

This, as confirming Samuel's words, would be a pledge that it was likewise by God's appointment he had been anointed king. Thus the first sign would convey that his royalty was of God. Then as he passed southwards, and reached "the terebinth Tabor,"<sup>75</sup> three men would meet him, coming from an opposite direction, and "going up to God, to Bethel," bearing sacrificial gifts.

These would salute him, and, unasked, give him a portion of their sacrificial offerings - two loaves, probably one for himself, another for his servant. If, as seems likely, these three men belonged to "the sons of the prophets," the act was even more significant. It meant homage on the part of the godly in Israel, yet such as did not supersede nor swallow up the higher homage due to God - only two loaves out of all the sacrificial gifts being presented to Saul. To Saul this, then, would indicate royalty in subordination to God. The last was the strangest, but, rightly understood, also the most significant sign of all. Arrived at Gibeah Elohim, his own city, or else the hill close by, where the Philistines kept a garrison,<sup>76</sup> he would, on entering the city, meet "a band of prophets" coming down from the Bamah, or sacrificial height, in festive procession, preceded by the sound of the nevel, lute or guitar, the thof, or tambourine (Exodus 15:20), the flute, and the

chinnor<sup>77</sup> or hand-harp, themselves the while "prophesying."

Then "the Spirit of Jehovah" would "seize upon him," and he would "be turned into another man." The obvious import of this "sign," in combination with the others, would be: royalty not only from God and under God, but with God. And all the more significant would it appear, that Gibeah, the home of Saul, where all knew him and could mark the change, was now held by a garrison of Philistines; and that Israel's deliverance should there commence<sup>78</sup> by the Spirit of Jehovah mightily laying hold on Israel's new king, and making of him another man. When all these "signs happen to thee," added the prophet, "do to thyself what thy hand findeth" (as circumstances indicate, comp. Judges 9:33); concluding there from: "for God is with thee."

The event proved as Samuel had foretold. Holy Scripture passes, indeed, lightly over the two first signs, as of comparatively less importance, but records the third with the more full detail. It tells how, immediately on leaving Samuel, "God turned to Saul another heart" (ver 9); how, when he met the band of prophets at Gibeah (ver. 10, not "the hill," as in our Authorized Version), "the Spirit of Elohim" "seized" upon him, and he "prophesied among them;" so that those who had so intimately known him before exclaimed in astonishment: "What is this that has come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" Upon which "one from thence," more spiritually enlightened than the rest, answered: "And who is their father?" implying that, in the case of the other prophets also, the gift of prophecy was not of hereditary descent. Thus the proverb arose: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" to indicate, according to circumstances, either a sudden and almost incredible change in the outward religious bearing of a man, or the possibility of its occurrence.

<sup>74</sup> The traditional site of Rachel's grave near Bethlehem must be given up as wholly incompatible with this passage. The reasons have been fully explained in my *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p. 60.

<sup>75</sup> The locality cannot be identified. The suggestion of Thenius and Ewald, who regard Tabor as equivalent for Deborah, is scarcely tenable.

<sup>76</sup> Thenius and Bottcher render it, "a pillar;" Ewald, "a tax-collector." But the rendering in the text seems the correct one (comp. 13:3, 4).

<sup>77</sup> The difference between the navel and the chinnor is explained in my volume on *The Temple*, etc., p. 55. The chinnor differed from our harp in that it was carried in the hand (comp., Samuel 6:5).

<sup>78</sup> In the original the clauses - "which there a garrison of the Philistines", - reads like an emphatic parenthesis, altogether meaningless except for the purpose indicated in the text.

But there are deeper questions here which must, at least briefly, be answered. Apparently, there were already at that time prophetic associations, called "schools of the prophets." Whether these owed their origin to Samuel or not, the movement received at least a mighty impulse from him, and henceforth became a permanent institution in Israel. But this "prophesying" must not be considered as in all cases prediction. In the present instance it certainly was not such, but, as that of the "elders" in the time of Moses (Numbers 11:25), an ecstatic state of a religious character, in which men unreservedly poured forth their feelings. The characteristics of this ecstatic state were entire separation from the circumstances around, and complete subjection to an extraordinary influence from without, when thoughts, feelings, words, and deeds were no longer under personal control, but became, so to speak, passive instruments. Viewing it in this light, we can understand the use made of music, not only by true prophets, but even among the heathen. For the effect of music is to detach from surrounding circumstances, to call forth strong feelings, and to make us yield ourselves implicitly to their influence.

In the case of the prophets at Gibeah and in that of Saul, this ecstatic state was under the influence of the "Spirit of Elohim."<sup>79</sup> By this, as in the case of the judges, we are, however, not to understand the abiding and sanctifying Presence of the Holy Ghost dwelling in the heart as His temple. The Holy Ghost was peculiarly "the gift of the Father" and "of the Son," and only granted to the Church in connection with, and after the Resurrection of our Blessed Lord.

Under the Old Testament, only the manifold influences of the Spirit were experienced, not His indwelling as the Paraclete. This appears not only from the history of those so influenced, and from the character of that influence, but even from the language in which it is described. Thus we read that the Spirit of Elohim "seized upon" Saul, suddenly and mightily laid hold on him, - the same

expression being used in Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Samuel 16:13; 18:10. But although they were only "influences" of the Spirit of Elohim, it need scarcely be said that such could not have been experienced without deep moral and religious effect. The inner springs of the life, thoughts, feelings, and purposes must necessarily have been mightily affected. It was so in the case of Saul, and the contrast was so great that his fellow-townsmen made a proverb of it. In the language of Holy Scripture, his "heart," that is, in Old Testament language, the spring of his feeling, purposing, and willing, was "turned into another" from what it had been, and he was "turned into another man," with quite other thoughts, aims, and desires than before. The difference between this and what in the New Testament is designated as "the new man," is too obvious to require detailed explanation. But we may notice these two as important points: as in the one case it was only an overpowering influence of the Spirit of Elohim, not the abiding Presence of the Paraclete, so the moral effects produced through that influence were not primary, but secondary, and, so to speak, reflex, while those of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of God's people are direct, primary, and permanent.<sup>80</sup>

The application of these principles to "the spiritual gifts" in the early Church will readily occur to us. But perhaps it is more important to remember that we are always - and now more than ever - prone to confound the influences of the Spirit of God with His abiding Presence in us, and to mistake the undoubted moral and religious effects, which for a time may result from the former, for the entire inward change, when "all old things have passed away," and, "all things have become new," and are "of Christ." Yet the one is only the reflex influence of the spirit of man, powerfully influenced by the Spirit of Elohim; the other the direct work of the Holy Ghost on the heart.

One of the effects of the new spiritual influence which had come upon Saul was, that when his uncle, Ner, met him upon the Bamah, or high

<sup>79</sup> Samuel speaks of "the Spirit of Jehovah," while in the actual narrative we read of the "Spirit of Elohim." Can the change of term have been intentional?

<sup>80</sup> If I may express it by a play upon two Latin words: In the one case it is affectus ab effectu; in the other, if there effectus, it is effectus ab affectu.

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place (ver. 14), probably joining him in his worship there to find out the real meaning of a change which he must have seen more clearly than any other, and which it would readily occur to him to connect with the visit to Samuel, he forbore to gratify a curiosity, probably not unmixed with worldly ambition and calculations.

But yet another charge had Samuel given to Saul before parting (ver. 8), and that not only a charge,

but a life-direction, a warning, and a test of what was in him. That he understood it, is evident from 1 Samuel 13:7, 8. But would he submit to it, or rather to God? That would be to him the place and time when the two ways met and parted - and his choice of either one or the other would be decisive, both so far as his life and his kingdom were concerned.

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