

# SAMUEL THE PROPHET

by

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE VISION OF GOD

(I Samuel 3)

“Oh! give me Samuel’s mind,  
A sweet un murmuring faith,  
Obedient and resigned  
To Thee in life and death;  
That I may read with child-like eyes  
Truths that are hidden from the wise.”

- J. D. Burns

IT is very touching to notice the various references to the child Samuel as they recur during the progress of the narrative, especially those in which an evident contrast is intended between his gentle innocence and the wild license of Eli’s sons it is like a peal of sweet bells ringing on amid the crash of a storm.

Hannah said,

- “. . . I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever.”
- “And she . . . brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh; and the child was young”
- “As long as he liveth he is lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there.”
- “And the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the Priest.”
- “Now the sons of Eli were wicked men; they knew not the Lord; but Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child.”
- “Now Eli was very old, and he heard all that his sons did unto all Israel. And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour with the Lord, and also with men.”
- “And the Lord said, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle . . . And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.”

His life seems to have been one unbroken record of blameless purity, integrity, and righteousness. One purpose ran through all his years, threading them together in an unbroken series. There were no gaps nor breaks; no lapses into sensuality or selfishness; no lawless deeds in that wild, lawless age. Towards the end of his long life he was able to appeal to the verdict of the people in memorable words, which attested his consciousness of unsullied rectitude.

It was a beautiful life strong in its faculty of administration, wise in steering the nation from the rule of the judges into the royal state of the kings, unimpeachably just, but blamelessly pure, towering above his contemporaries like a peak of glistening chrysolite, on which the sunlight plays, while all the valleys beneath are wrapped in scudding clouds and sweeping rain.

Samuel was not a prophet in the sense of foretelling the long future, and was not possessed of Isaiah's genius and eloquence; his only contribution to his age was a saintly character, and it was by the saintliness, the moral grandeur of his character, that he arrested the ruin of his people.

We too may be called to face an era of change; our eyes may have to witness the passing of the old and the coming of the new; it may be that in our time also the Lord will shake once more, not earth only, but Heaven, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain; in our time also ancient landmarks may be removed, as familiar and sacred as the tabernacle of Shiloh, and the Ark of the Covenant to Israel. But there is one property within our reach which need never pass away, which shall remain unimpaired and radiant through the years and that is an unblemished character, a soul stainlessly arrayed, and the holy life in which these shall be embodied.

**“Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children, and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands, establish Thou it.”**

The noblest gift that any of us can make to our fatherland or age is an undefiled character and a stainless life. Let us live our best in the power of the Spirit of God, and prove that the God of Pentecost is living still.

### **I. THE TRANSITION OF A YOUNG SOUL**

For Samuel, however, a great change was necessary and imminent. Up to this moment he had lived largely in the energy and motive-power of his mother's intense, religious life. It was needful that he should exchange the traditional for the experimental.

His faith must rest, not on the assertions of another's testimony, but on the fact that for himself he had seen, and tasted, and handled the Word of Life. Not at second-hand, but at first, the Word of the Lord must come to him, and be passed on to all Israel.

Probably this change comes to everyone who desires and seeks after the best and richest life.

You may be the child of a pious home, where from boyhood or girlhood you were trained in the traditions of evangelical religion, you were expected to pray and to serve God, you have been borne along by a blessed momentum; but suppose for a minute that that momentum should fail you, have you come to apprehend Christ as a living reality for yourself?

It may be that God, out of mercy to you, will break up and destroy the traditions and forms on which you have been relying; that the eternal and divine may stand forth apparent to your spiritual apprehension, and be apprehended by yourself for yourself, as though they were meant for you alone.

It is a great hour in the history of the soul when the traditional, to which it has become habituated by long wont and use, is suddenly exchanged for the open vision of God; when we say with Job, **“I have heard of Thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee”**; when we say with the Apostle, **“Leaving the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before, I press toward the mark.”**

Will you believe then that God may be coming very near you, and is about to reveal Himself to you in the Lord Jesus, as not unto the world? He is about to transform your life, and lift it to an altogether new level, so that though you may have to face the old circumstances, it shall be from a higher standpoint as the spiral staircase is always returning to the same view-point, though always at the elevation of some few additional feet.

## II. THE VISION OF THE YOUNG EYES

(1) *When God came near his young servant, it seemed as though He placed his seal upon his faithfulness.*

Hitherto, but small services had been required of him. To close and open the doors of the Tabernacle; to light the seven-branched candlestick in the late afternoon, and supply it with pure olive oil every morning; to render little services to the aged priest, whether by day or night such were the duties assigned to him and performed with punctilious care. It was meet that he who had shown himself faithful in a very little should have a larger and wider sphere assigned to him.

(2) *The vision came as night was beginning to yield to dawn; but “**the lamp had not yet gone out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was.**”*

Thrice the boy was startled from his innocent slumbers on his little bed in the chamber he occupied adjacent to the sacred building. He heard his name called softly, tenderly, lovingly, and made sure that Eli needed him, and thrice sped across the intervening space to report himself. Once, and again, and yet again, he ran unto Eli, and said, “**Here am I, for thou calledst me.**”

When God approaches us to reveal his Son in us, the tendency is always to speed with all haste to some place, or some spiritual adviser, where we suppose that the interpretation of the vision will be given.

Young converts, for instance, are apt to say, “If only I could have my questions answered by such a man of God, I am sure I should get blessing.” And thus they are kept in constant perturbation, running backwards and forwards, repeating Samuel’s vain experience running to Eli and saying, “Surely you called me, and can interpret for me the vision and the voice.”

(3) *Eli was very wise in his treatment of the lad.*

He might have posed as the sole depository of the Divine secrets, might have warned the lad against listening to vain delusions, might have given way to ungoverned jealousy and suspicion might have stood on the dignity and pride of office.

But instead of any of these, without the slightest trace of hurt pride, he took the boy’s hand in his, and, so to speak, led him into the Divine Presence, knowing full well that the seals of sacred office, which had been taken from himself, were about to be laid on those youthful palms.

If Eli had inherited the traditions of the priesthood merely, he would have stood between that soul and God, hearing its confession, wielding over it a terrorizing influence, and directing it, as in the place of God. Instead of this, however, the old man said sweetly, “**Go, lie down; and it shall be if He call thee, that thou shall say, Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.**”

It is not the business of the Christian minister to lord it over the eager and aroused disciple, to demand confession, or offer absolution, but to say in effect; “Thou needest more than we can give. God, and God only, can suffice thee. Go, and lie down again. Be quiet. Let thy soul be still before God. Wait, for He will assuredly come again. And it shall be, if He call thee, that thou shall say, **‘Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.’** “

As Thomas à Kempis puts it: -

“Let not Moses speak unto me, nor any of the prophets, but rather do Thou speak, O Lord God, the Inspirer and Enlightener of all the prophets; for Thou alone without them canst perfectly instruct me, but they without Thee can profit nothing. Speak Thou unto me, to the comfort, however imperfect, of my soul, and to the amendment of my whole life, and to Thy praise, and glory, and honour everlasting.”

(4) *The message entrusted to the lad was a very terrible one.*

We cannot wonder that he feared to show Eli the vision. With a beautiful modesty and reticence he set about the duties of the day, and opened, as usual, the doors of the house of the Lord. It was not for him to blurt out the full thunder which had burst on him. This was another lovely trait in the boy’s character. But he had misread Eli’s character; he did not realize that men like him will die, but not murmur will resign themselves without a word of expostulation or defence, determined to know the worst, and when they know it, meekly answering, **“It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good.”**

(5) *It is well to notice that the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the Word of the Lord.*

Let us not seek for revelations through dreams or visions, but by the Word of God. Nothing is more harmful than to contract the habit of listening for voices, and sleeping to dream. All manner of vagaries come in by that door. It is best to take in hand and read the Scriptures reverently, carefully, thoughtfully, crying, **“Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.”** And in response there will come one clear, defined, and repeated message, asseverated and accentuated with growing distinctness from every part of the inspired volume, “This is the way walk in it; this is my will do it; this is my word speak it.” Let us hear what God the Lord shall speak.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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