

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

FIRST SAMUEL

The key word of First Samuel is “**Kingdom**”, the key verse, I Samuel 10:25.

These two books take their name from the great man whose history they relate, the prophet Samuel. In some earlier Bibles they are designated as “First and Second Kings,” and those which follow as “Third and Fourth Kings.” All four relate to the kingdom of Israel. The general history, interrupted by Ruth, is again taken up and carried forward to the captivity.

First Samuel is divided into two parts:

Part I, the theocracy under Eli and Samuel; chapters 1-7.

Part II, anointing of Saul as king, and his reign; chapters 8-31.

First Samuel narrates a radical change in the relations of the chosen people with God. Up to this point the Lord God was their king. Now in answer to their unbelieving clamor (I Samuel 8:5-9), a king was given them. To the king they were directly responsible; indirectly to the Lord, as through the king.

A new office was introduced in connection with the change of relationship, viz., the office of prophet. Prophets there were before; Moses was such and others, Numbers 12:6-8. But now the office becomes a part of the national life, as we may say; and prophecy implies failure. Yet out of it all God wrought infinite good. How much we owe to this office cannot be computed. By it we have the revelation of the grace and counsels of God. First Samuel shows us the failure of the people, the breaking up of the old relationship, the appointment of a king, and the office of the prophet inaugurated.

The fall of Shiloh contributed much to the change. The first place where the sanctuary was located after the passage of the Jordan was Gilgal, Joshua 5:10. It was ere long established at Shiloh, Joshua 18:1, and there it remained until captured by the Philistines, I Samuel 4. Afterward it was located at Kirjath-jearim, I Samuel 7:1, 2; and was finally brought to Jerusalem by David, where it remained, II Samuel 6.

Wherever the ark was, there was the “**house of God**,” Judges 18:31; I Samuel 3:3. There were other places where worship was offered, but the Tabernacle was preeminent. The other sanctuaries held a relation to the Tabernacle such as the synagogues held to the temple. They were altogether subordinate.

There are three great names about which most of the events of these books of Samuel may be grouped, Samuel, Saul and David.

I. Samuel

His birth was the answer to his mother’s agonizing prayer, I Samuel 1:10, 11. He was asked of God, given by Him, and his happy mother named him Samuel— “**asked of God**,” 1:20.

Two things are noteworthy as to Hannah’s conduct:

First, after her very earnest prayer, “**the woman went her way and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad**,” vs. 18. An example of faith! Her tears and sighs all gone.

Second, her song of joy, 2:1-10. It is a very noble hymn, the outpouring of a glad heart which could not but sing. There is a close resemblance between it and Mary’s song, Luke 1: 46-55. Both thrill with the deepest fervor and piety.

1. *Samuel throughout his long life was a Nazarite, 1:11.*

Given in answer to prayer he was consecrated to God from infancy, and brought up in the sacred tent at Shiloh. Simple, devout, true, he was strong in will, unflinching in the discharge of the most painful duties, 3:17, 18; 15:26.

2. *He was a man of prayer, I Samuel 3; 7:8, 9, etc.*

Stanley holds that the “Cry” for which Samuel was noted, was shrill and piercing, and was uttered in all his intercessions for the people, when they were in danger of trouble. All the very great men of the Bible and of the Church were men of prayer, of persevering, believing, importunate prayer.

3. *His influence was felt throughout the whole nation.*

Of all the judges of Israel, Samuel, the last of them, wielded the greatest power. Men trembled at his presence, I Samuel 16:4. Saul himself feared him. His influence lay not in military exploits, nor in diplomatic skill, nor in political shrewdness, but in his unswerving integrity, his splendid loyalty. In his old age, when the time was come for him to lay down the heavy burden he had so long borne, he could challenge all Israel to point out a single instance of his selfishness or unrighteousness, I Samuel 12:5.

4. *Samuel was a prophet, and the first of the long line of prophets which closes with the Old Testament, Acts 3:24; 13:20; Hebrews 11:32.*

With him the office and order began a distinct feature of the Hebrew polity. Prior to Samuel **“the word of the Lord was precious [rare] in those days; there was no open vision,”** 3:1. With him the “revelations” through prophecy (which means a message from God) began, 3:21. Of the nature of these revelations, suffice it to say now, that they were not by intuition or genius or imagination of the prophet, but by direct communication from God, II Peter 1:20, 21; Hebrews 1:1, 2, cf. Jeremiah 23:16, 21.

We learn something of the nature of prophecy from the word used about Samuel, viz., **“Seer,”** I Samuel 9:9. This was the most ancient name for the office; and it seems to intimate that the prophet was gifted with a preternatural sight, the faculty and power of vision as to unseen things which ordinary men do not possess. Balaam defines it, **“to have the eyes open, to hear the words of God and to see the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having the eyes open,”** Numbers 24:3, 4, 15, 16.

5. *The schools of the prophets.* These were founded by Samuel, and were designed to make the office permanent and effective. One was located at Ramah, of which Samuel seems to have been at the head, I Samuel 19:19, 20; and others at other places, I Samuel 10:5. Still others, afterward, at Bethel, II Kings 2:3; at Jericho, II Kings 2:5; at Gilgal, II Kings 4:38.

The chief study of the young men in these schools, no doubt, was the law and its interpretation; but we gather from I Samuel 10:5, cf. I Chronicles 25:1-3, that the cultivation of music was a part of their labors. The art was not an integral part of the office of prophecy, but its accompaniment; for in the rapt ecstatic condition of soul into which he was thrown when the spirit of prophecy came upon him, his utterances rushed forth in a tuneful flow, and very naturally he accompanied them with a musical instrument, II Kings 3:15.

6. *Samuel, as prophet, was the channel of communication between the Lord and the people.*

The priest was so no longer; nor the judge. Whatever message the Lord had for His people was addressed to them through the prophet.

It was he, acting under divine direction,

- Who inaugurated the kingdom and anointed the king, 8; 10:1;
- Who announced the forfeiture of the throne by the first king, I Samuel 15:28;
- Who anointed his successor, 16:12, 13.

This high place the office maintained until the fall of Israel. It was the change of relation with God consequent upon the establishment of the kingdom which made it so. Through the priest the people drew near to God; through the prophet God drew near to the people.

In Hebrews 3:1 the two offices are united in Christ.

- As Apostle He pleads God’s cause with us;
- As Priest He pleads our cause with God.

II. Saul

He was of the tribe of Benjamin, the son of Kish, of the family of Abiel. Abner, his chief officer, was his near kinsman, probably his uncle. The family was one of wealth and influence, I Samuel 9:1.

I. In Saul we have man acting in the energy of the flesh, with small spiritual force.

He was of gigantic stature; his physical powers enormous. At the close of his first interview with Samuel, he “turned his shoulder [margin] to go”—one can almost see that massive shoulder wheel round, suggestive of strength, and endurance, I Samuel 10:9. Indecision and irresolution mark his life throughout. He had the military qualities of a leader, and was something of a statesman, but he was destitute of true spiritual power. The gift promised and conferred upon him, I Samuel 10:6, 9, had to do with his ruling and leadership. It does not mean the new birth.

2. Condition of Israel at Saul’s inauguration.

It was as bad as it could well be. The nation’s helplessness appears in the graphic words of I Samuel 13:19; no smith in all Israel; no sword or spear, save those of Saul and Jonathan. Could national disarmament and prostration be greater?

3. His jealous disposition.

This is seen in his treatment:

- Of his own son Jonathan, a better man than his father, I Samuel 14:38-44; 20:30;
- Of David the truest friend he had in the whole realm, 23;
- Of Ahimelech, the high priest, and of the priests, 22.

Saul’s life was one long tragedy. A strange frenzy took possession of him. The Scripture calls it an evil spirit, I Samuel 16:14-16; 18:10; 19:9, etc. He became suspicious, distrustful, violent and dark thoughts tormented him.

Wild passions shook his huge frame, with fierce spasms of conscience and murderous moods of jealousy—in fact, he seems at times to have been mad. He fell into melancholy, and his courtiers trembled before him as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand, and the evil spirit brooding over him. His courage forsook him, and he who had been admired for his stature and strength, whose armor no ordinary man could wear, sometimes fought with desperation, and sometimes was craven. So fully had come to pass the words of the prophet about him and the people, I Samuel 8:18; 12:12, 13, 25. To such an end “**the flesh**” at length arrives.

4. His rejection.

Two acts of disobedience marked his downward course.

The first was his rash sacrifice. He had been bidden to tarry until Samuel should arrive. About the hardest thing a weak and impulsive man can do is patiently to wait in the presence of uncertainty or perplexity. Samuel plainly intimated to him that the kingdom should pass away from him, I Samuel 13:14. It was Saul's first distinct warning of the doom that awaited him and his house.

The second was his refusal to execute on Agag the punishment his crimes merited, I Samuel 15. This was a willful violation of the Lord's command, Exodus 17:16; Deuteronomy 25:19. This time Samuel pronounced the decisive sentence, I Samuel 15:22, 23, 27-29.

One of the strange leaves in human history here turns. Saul refused to punish Agag the Amalekite; and at his death the fallen king is stripped of his crown and his ornaments by a prowling son of Amalek, II Samuel 1:10.

Slay your enemy, sin,
and it will be well with you,
Spare your enemy, sin,
and it will despoil and murder you.

The reprisals of sin and of law—how awful they are!

5. *Saul's death*, I Samuel 28, 31.

He was in sore distress; his kingdom was in imminent peril; himself forsaken of God; he felt that the fatal net was fast closing in upon him; that escape was now impossible; and in his dire extremity, goaded to desperation, he tried the experiment of consulting the witch of Endor.

“All human history has failed to record a despair deeper or more tragic than his, who, having forsaken God, and being of God forsaken, is now seeking to move hell, since heaven is inexorable to him; and infinitely guilty as he is, assuredly there is something unutterably pathetic in that yearning of the disanointed king, now in his utter desolation, to change words once more with the friend and counselor of his youth, and if he must hear his doom, to hear it from no other lips but his” (Trench).

As to the question of Samuel's appearance in response to the witch's incantations, let the following be considered:—

(1) *Saul testified that God no longer answered him at all*, 28:15. Is it likely that God, who refused to hold intercourse with Saul by any appointed channels of communication, would send Samuel in answer to the conjuring of this hag? Would He so far recognize the “black art”?

(2) Vs. 15. That the power of the necromancer could reach to the abode of the saintly dead, and “disquiet” them is incredible.

(3) “God brought Samuel up to pronounce his doom. The sorceress had nothing to do with it.”

But He had pronounced his doom, 16:1. The specter foretells nothing that was not already known, save his approaching death; and in the state in which the king and all Israel were at the time, it would not be difficult to predict the issue of the impending battle.

On the face of it, this strange account bears evidence of the tricks of a juggler, and the powers of both the clairvoyant and ventriloquist. And it is noteworthy that the name of the witch in the Septuagint version is, “ventriloquist.”

The next day Saul died. **“I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath,”** Hosea 13:11.

There is an apparent discrepancy in the two accounts of Saul’s death which we have. In I Samuel 31:4, 5, we are told he died by his own hand; but in II Samuel 1:10 the Amalekite tells David that he slew him.

John Trapp is right:

“An artificially composed speech, but scarce ever a true word. This Amalekite, which signifieth a licking-people, would, like a cur dog, have sucked David’s blood only with licking, but was happily disappointed.”

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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