

# SAMUEL THE PROPHET

by

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## CHAPTER THREE

### THE YOUNG LEVITE

(I SAMUEL 2 and 3)

Be still! sad soul! lift thou no passionate cry,  
But spread the desert of thy being bare  
To the full searching of the All-seeing eye;  
Wait! and through dark misgiving, blank despair,  
God will come down in pity, and fill the dry  
Dead place with light, and life, and vernal air.”

- J. C. Shairp

DEAN STANLEY tells us that, in his gentler moments, Luther used to dwell on these early chapters of the Books of Samuel with the tenderness which formed the occasional counterpoise to the ruder passions and enterprises of his stormy life.

Indeed, students of the Scriptures in every age have been arrested by the figure of this little child girded with his linen ephod, or in the little robe which his mother brought him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

With what passionate and almost irrepressible desire the mother must have anticipated that annual visit, all too transient to satisfy her natural longings. It must have been hard to leave him at so tender an age as three; but Hannah was solaced for her deprivation. There was the precious memory of those early years, when he had filled the house with his childish prattle, and she had been able to sow in the receptive soil of his tender heart the seeds of manhood's harvest. Other children, also, were born to her; and, as three sons and two daughters grew up at her knees, surely the thought of their little brother, in his sacred office a continual inspiration, must have been a subject of lively and perennial interest!

The Lord had vindicated the woman's wrongs, as He will assuredly vindicate all those who, when they are reviled revile not again, when they suffer threaten not, but commit themselves and their complaint to Him who judgeth righteously. Peaceful, reverent, and loving thoughts filled the mother's heart as she wrought at the little robe, which in shape was of the pattern which, probably, Mary made for her Son, **“woven from the top throughout and without seam,”** which the soldiers would not tear.

## THE INFLUENCE OF A MOTHER

Mothers still make garments for their children not on the loom or with their busy needles merely,

- But by their holy and ennobling characters displayed from day to day before young and quickly-observant eyes,
- By their words and conversation, and
- By the habits of their daily devotion.

What the children see they imitate, and unconsciously array themselves in the gentleness or rudeness, the reverence for religion or indifference, the refinement or coarseness of manner, which are daily presented to their gaze. As fish take on the mottled color of the ground on which they lie, and as the plovers change their plumage to match the winter or the spring, so children wear the robes which their mother's character and behavior, temper and tones, weave for them.

**“And the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest”**; slept his innocent sleep unconscious of the sins around him, attracted the growing attachment of the old man by his reverent affection and endearing ways, and gave many evidences that he was being prepared to become a link between God and his people, a mediator between the old and the new between the turbulent days of Samson and the splendid peace of the reign of Solomon.

## THE SACRILEGE AND SINS OF ELI S SONS

**“Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial (worthlessness); they knew not the Lord. And the priests' custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand”** (2:12).

The law of Moses authorized the priest to take as his portion, and instead of fees in coin, the whole of the sin-offerings, and the breast and right shoulder of the peace-offerings, the fat only of the latter being burned on the altar, whilst the remainder of the animal was handed back to the offerer, to be consumed by himself, his sons, and his daughters, his men-servants and his maid-servants, and the Levite that was within his gates (Deuteronomy 12:12).

It was befitting, as the Apostle states it, that they which ministered about sacred things should eat of the things of the Temple, and that they which waited upon the altar should have their portion with the altar (I Corinthians 9:13).

The first act of every peace-offering was the sprinkling of blood upon the altar round about; the second was the burning of the internal fat. It was never eaten, but always consumed by fire. The flame fed on it, as the food of God, who, so to speak, ate with the accepted worshipper (Leviticus 3:1 6, 17).

After this solemn rite was performed, the priest's portion was waved and presented to God, and the group of worshippers made way for others, carrying away with them their portion for the joyful sacrificial feast.

Here Eli's sons stepped in with their rapacious greed- Not satisfied with their legally allotted portion, they sent their servant after the retiring group, with a flesh-hook of three teeth in his hand, and while the meat was boiling for the sacred meal, he thrust his trident into the cauldron, and claimed as the priest's perquisite whatever was brought up.

**“So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither.”**

But even this did not long satisfy them. They went on to insist that after the breast and shoulder had been handed them, but before the remainder had been put to boil, they should be supplied with raw meat from the offerers portion; nor would they burn the fat, which was the essential part of the whole sacrifice, and one for which the worshippers must needs wait, until their demands were satisfied.

This final touch seems to have aroused the long-suffering people to exasperation. “At least,” they said, “wait till the Lord's portion has been presented before you proceed to your lawless depredations. Burn the fat, and afterwards take as much as you will.”

“Nay,” was the ruthless answer of the priest, **“but you shall give it me now, or I will take what I choose by force.”**

**“Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.”**

It becomes us to inquire with much anxiety and heart-searching whether we, as the servants of Christ, are doing or abetting things which cause men to abhor that holy Name by which we are called. We may begin with our own characters and habits, and thence proceed to our doctrinal statements and ecclesiastical arrangements.

Rightly or wrongly, I have heard of men forswearing the Christian religion, to which they were once attached, because professing Christians were so dilatory in paying their debts, so evasive in their excuses, so profuse in promises that were never kept, so difficult to please, so thoughtless and careless in their demands on work-people and servants, so touchy and fretful, so liable to do things in business which high-minded men of the world would not permit.

I have heard of men, rightly or wrongly, turning from misstatements of Christian doctrine which revolted their moral sense in making God our Father as cruel as Chemosh or Molech.

I have heard of men, rightly or wrongly, refusing to enter places of worship because of the class distinctions which were maintained, and the strong dislike with which a stranger's admission into the family pew was resented.

For these things too many excuse their refusal of the Gospel and their absence from the house of prayer. Not content with their extortionate greed, Hophni and Phinehas perpetrated the vilest excesses of heathenism amid the woods and vineyards of Shiloh.

Licentious rites had from time immemorial been associated with heathen festivals, but never before had they sullied the sacred vestures of the priests of Aaron's line. So abandoned were these young men, though they had wives of their own, that they did not scruple to lead astray the women who were appointed to perform the various offices about the sanctuary that demanded female labour.

Remonstrances were addressed to the aged priest; he heard of their evil doings from all the people (2:23), but instead of strong disapproval and stringent threats, he contented himself with a mild rebuke, **“He said unto them, Why do ye such things? . . . Nay, my sons, for it is no good report that I hear; ye make the Lord's people to transgress.”**

On this the Divine Judge makes the terrible comment that his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. He had reproved, but not restrained them. Even supposing they had disregarded the reproof of their father, they could hardly have defied their deposition insisted on by him as High Priest, embodying as he did so the highest authority in the realm. And for this weak laxity he was condemned and deposed.

**“Therefore the Lord, the God of Israel, saith, I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever; but now the Lord saith, Be it far from Me; for them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.”**

### **THE NEED OF FAMILY TRAINING**

This suggests a very serious inquiry for those who take a prominent position in the Church and before the world, but who neglect their own families. We are held responsible for our children. Our weakness in restraining them is sin, which will be inevitably followed, not only by their punishment, but by our own. Better do less in the Church and the world than allow your children to grow up a misery to themselves and a reproach to you.

Remember that one essential qualification for office in the primitive Church was the wise and wholesome rule of house and children. If a man could not keep his children in subjection, with all gravity, and rule his house well, he surely could not know how to take care of the house of God (I Timothy 3:4, 12).

Probably Eli had not begun early enough.

The wise parent will begin training children from their earliest months, to say nothing of years; and the early strain of careful observation and chastisement may well be lightened and eased by remembering that the child who from the earliest is trained in God's way will not depart from it when he is old.

Above all, let us seek the conversion of our young children to God. The Apostle distinctly affirms that God will give us life for those who sin not unto death; and this description is, above all, applicable to little children. Surely He will not be unrighteous to forget the tears and prayers, or to overlook the faith, of those who travail a second time till Christ is formed in the hearts of their offspring.

As the child of godly parents, who cannot date the hour of my conversion, because the love of God stole over my heart in early boyhood like the dawn of a summer sky, I put my seal to that word of God as true;

**“My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, from henceforth and for ever” (Isaiah 59:21, and I John 5:16).**

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