

CHAPTER XIII

Samuel

Samuel, 1:1-29

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Hints to Bible Study

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After the death of Joshua, the twelve tribes of Israel settled each on its own portion of the land. The wandering nomadic tribes now had a country, and the elements of national unity in their common acknowledgment of Jehovah as their God and Moses as their lawgiver. Otherwise they were scattered, and each still had his own borders to fortify, for the Canaanites were far from conquered.

At this period of Hebrew history we have an Anarchial state of society. Anarchy (self-government) is supposed to be the antipode of Socialism. In fact, Anarchy must precede Socialism. I am using these terms in their original meaning, not in the party significance given them in modern politics. Until the individual is self-governing, he can by no means affiliate under a social form of government. Socialism, which is unity in government, the welfare of the whole, the ideal that all must conform to, can result only from the aggregation of self-governing units, each voluntarily giving up selfish purposes for the good of the whole. We cannot give up self until we possess it, therefore a period of anarchy is absolutely essential in both individual and national growth. In this period of Hebrew history there is no central government. "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

Do we not find this true in our individual growth? After the restraints of childhood, it matters not how lovingly administered, there is a period of anarchy in the life of every boy and girl, which we find most unmanageable. The youth must find his own central self. This is so apparent that our psychologists say, "There never was a child who did not at some time wish its parents dead." It is indeed the wise parent who knows this fact and gives to his child that period in which he must find himself untrammelled, and the child may voluntarily come to him for advice without being either ridiculed or coerced.

The nation is but the aggregation of the individual and passes through the same phases. Russia and Mexico are both in this period today. Should we not understand by now and be both tolerant and patient, until these nations find themselves? Judges is this period of Hebrew history. When men came in conflict with each other their disputes were carried before a judge. These "judges" imply to us something quite different from what they implied to the Hebrew. Disputes were settled by the elders of the tribe of the village or town. At this period there were no appointed heads of government, but natural ability, fairness and spiritual power drew its own clientele, and these people were called judges. This period lasted for about two hundred years.

The last and greatest of the judges was Samuel, who found the nation a loosely knit body of tribes, but left it a united people with national aspirations and power.

Samuel (asked of God) received his name because he is the answer to his mother's prayer. Hannah consecrated her child to the Lord all the days of his life, before he was born, and in the fulness of her heart at his birth burst into lyric thanksgiving:

"Mine heart exulteth in the Lord,
Mine horn is exalted in the Lord.
My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies;
Because I rejoice in thy salvation."

Eli is judge at this time, and Shiloh is the center of national worship. Here the ark of the covenant rests, and to this temple presided over by Eli, the little Samuel is brought by his grateful mother. "And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli, and the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision."

There can be but one reason for this; no one was at this time able to see the Vision. Eli in his indulgence of his sons, a sin against God, his sons, and society, could not see it. The penalty for sin is spiritual blindness. The Vision never fails, it always abides, but, alas, those who have the eyes that see, the ears that hear, are always the few, never the many.

Samuel's birthright is the Open Vision. It is woman indeed who must crush the head of the serpent (materiality) as she carries the unborn generations. Did woman but know the formative power of her own consciousness, each child would be born into the world with Samuel's gift; and humanity would walk freely on the King's Highway of creative power, spiritual unity, and the joy that no man can take from them.

It is a touching and beautiful account that we read in first Samuel; of the little lad girded in the linen ephod, serving in the temple with the old Eli. Samuel and Eli had both "laid down to sleep, in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was; then the Lord called Samuel; and he said, Here am I. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou callest me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. And the Lord called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou callest me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou callest me. And Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down; and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."

So the Lord speaks to Samuel, and Samuel tells Eli every whit; and Eli, recognizing his sin and the justness of his doom, submissively says: "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth good." But Samuel's secret is the key to every great life. "And Samuel grew and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground."

We meet at this period an enemy that the nation was long in conquering, the Philistines. These people, unlike the rest of the Canaanites, are not Semites, and have a strong political organization.

Samuel is not a man of war as was Joshua, nor a lawgiver as was Moses; but he "was a friend of man, and he dwelt by the side of the road." The people come to him in trouble, and he prays for them. He has "the hearing ear, and the seeing eye," and they are always at the service of his fellow-man. He is a natural unifier and peacemaker and forms such a strong national organization, that while the Philistines are not conquered, they come no more to the border of Israel all the days of Samuel.

Samuel grows old in the service, and his sons walk not in his ways, so the nation comes to the conviction that centralization of government means national strength. They demand that Samuel appoint a king over them. He who has harmonized the scattered tribes and has become a recognized national leader is the one who has made the monarchy possible, and he must find and anoint the king. He is much displeased at this demand. Was not Jehovah their king? And was not the national government a theocracy under this invisible king? Samuel is not a terrorist as many of the doom prophets were, but he shrewdly tells them what will occur if they insist on a monarchy.

And he says, "This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: he will take your sons, and appoint them unto him, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and they shall run before his chariots; and he will appoint them unto him as captains of thousands, and captains of fifties; and he will set some to plow the ground, and to reap the harvests, and to make instruments for war, and to make instruments for chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks and to be bakers. And he will take your fields and your vineyards, and your olive yards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take your manservants, and your maidservants, and the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers and to his servants. He will take your sons and your daughters and put them to work. He will take a tenth of your flocks and ye shall be servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye have chosen you; and the Lord will not answer you in that day."

It all falls on ears that can not listen to reason, they wish to be as other nations and have "a king to rule over us." Samuel gives way to the popular demand, and anoints [the] first king of Israel, Saul, "A young man and goodly; and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he." Over against the monarchy, however, stood the restraining bands, or schools of the prophets. They are the antidote for the king. The Hebrew word for "prophet" means to "announce" or to "foretell." Their message was always Jehovah's commands to the people. Thus they became the heralds at once of patriotism, national unity and religion. Samuel was neither prophet nor judge in the technical sense; but he organized prophetic bands, and this organization lasted until the time of Elijah and Elisha.

The true prophet had a peculiar place in the nation. He was the national conscience, and the kings feared him as man fears that something that invariably appears with the pointing finger of accusation, when he has been guilty of selfishness, sensuality, or oppression. The prophet stood between the people and the king, for the rights of Jehovah's people. The idea of a theocracy was never lost to the Hebrews, and the national king was only a vice-regent of the righteous Jehovah, and the prophets reminded the kings of this, to their great discomfiture.

Thus Samuel unwillingly becomes a king-maker; but as he is above all things a prophet, the rise of the prophetic order at the same time as the monarchy, is the national consequence of this insight. "An institution is the lengthened shadow of a man's consciousness," and this prophetic order, lasting for centuries, has given to the human race a great literature, whose influence on the character of the human family it is impossible to compute.

Samuel with the establishment of the monarchy, at the installation of Saul as king, would fain retire; and here in the presence of all Israel said: "Behold, I have hearkened to your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you; I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you; and I have walked before you from my youth unto this day. Here I am; witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I taken a ransom to blind mine eyes withal? and I will restore it to you." And they said: "Thou has not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand." And Samuel said: "The Lord is witness this day, that ye have not found aught in my hand." And they said: "He is witness."

A great seer cannot retire, he is a light that cannot be hid under a bushel. Saul walks not after the ways of the Lord, and Samuel is appointed to find a king after Jehovah's own heart. So he finds and anoints a shepherd lad, who was "ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look upon." This choice of Samuel's marks the zenith of the national power, but from his other order, is founded that which supplants the Son of Man by the Son of God.

Samuel goes the way of all flesh, but the Spirit of a prophet can never die. Undoubtedly the greatest gifts of God to the children of men are its seers. To these we owe that power which separates man from the brute and makes him akin to the angels. These great supermen stand out in history as beacon lights, nor can their light ever fail, for it has entered the consciousness of the race and makes it what it is.

Woven into the fabric of our being is Samuel, with his incorruptible honesty, his clear vision, his large, tolerant charity, that like unto God lets us make our own mistakes, and then correct them. How otherwise can we come into his vision of the invisible Theocracy, where we need no visible ruler, and no man can say to us, "Knowest thou God, for all shall know Him."