

THE VOICE OF THE LORD

– FEBRUARY 14. – 1 SAMUEL 3:1-13,19,20 –

SAMUEL DEVOTED TO GOD BEFORE HIS BIRTH, BY HIS MOTHER – AN OPENING FOR SERVICE – FAITHFULNESS IN SERVICE – CALLED TO HIGHER SERVICE – SAMUEL THE FIRST OF ISRAEL'S PROPHETS – JOHN THE BAPTIST THE LAST.

"Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." – 1 Samuel 3:9.

TODAY'S Study gives a little insight into the family conditions of the Israelites at a time not long after the days of Samson and of Ruth. It shows us the deep religious sentiment prevailing amongst many of the people. The Tabernacle of the Lord, in this Study styled the Temple, was located at Shiloh, a few miles north of Jerusalem. The priest in charge was Eli. The people by Divine direction went annually to worship the Lord, to offer sacrifice, etc., at the Feast time, the Passover.

The father and the mother of Samuel were of these annual worshipers before Samuel was born. It was on the occasion of one of these visits that Hannah made earnest prayer to the Lord for a son, vowing that if her petition was granted, her son should be devoted to the Lord's service for life. Her prayer was answered. The child was born and named Samuel, which signifies In God's Name. When he was weaned he was presented to the Lord through Eli, the priest – to be the latter's servant, assistant, in the service of the Tabernacle and the service of the priest's home, which was connected with the Tabernacle. The word weaned we may properly understand to signify, not the time merely when the child ceased to receive suck from the mother, but the time [R5615 : page

25] when he was able to do without his mother's care – probably ten years old.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD CHILDREN

It is difficult to imagine the value to a child of being well-born – born of healthy parents, and particularly of intelligent and God-fearing parents. Few realize the dignity and responsibility of the parental office. Many are aware of the fact that vitality and constitution proceed from father to child – whether this be slight vitality or strong vitality, weak constitution or strong constitution. The mother indeed has to do with this also, since the portion assigned to her by nature is that of nourisher, provider, for the child, up to the time of its weaning.

But the still more important part of the mother's responsibility toward the child few parents realize. The mother's mentality during the period of gestation stamps itself upon her unborn child. Her fretfulness or vacillation or discontent, or her peace, her joy, her high ideals, are affecting not only her own happiness, but stamping almost indelibly her offspring. In view of this, how serious is the responsibility of motherhood, as well as fatherhood!

Moreover, we must remember that the mother's attitude of mind is largely under the influence and control of her husband. He is the provider, caretaker, of his wife. The responsibility is with him to place before his wife, at this important period of life, high ideals, noble sentiments, helpful suggestions, peaceful and restful surroundings. Thus parents co-operating intelligently might produce children even nobler than themselves, as their ideals may be better than were their own birth conditions; or reversely, they may produce children inferior to themselves, while their conditions are possibly more favorable than those of their parents.

The Bible declares that we are all born in sin, "misshapen in iniquity, in sin did our mothers conceive us"; but, as we have seen,

these conditions of the fallen race may be accentuated or diminished to a considerable degree by the mental conditions of the parents, their appreciation of their office. But how often children come into the world undesired and permanently marked thereby to their disadvantage through life! How favorable is the condition, in comparison, of the child that is desired, prayed for, prepared for, and whose mental conditions have been well provided for by the parents! Samuel, the subject of today's Study, was such a child – such a man.

GOD'S REPROOF OF ELI

Our lesson opens with the declaration that the child Samuel "ministered unto the Lord before Eli"; that is to say, he was a servant of the Lord by virtue of his being a servant to Eli, who was the Lord's representative and priest. The Word of Jehovah was precious in those days; that is, it was seldom that God sent messages at that time. Perhaps that of the angel of the Lord who appeared to the father and mother of Samson, probably fifty years before, was the last direct communication between the Lord and any of His people Israel. "There was no open vision" – visions and revelations were not then being given. The Divine Plan was hidden. The Urim and the Thummim answers of the Lord to the inquiries of the people had ceased.

It is supposed that Eli at this time was about seventy years of age – some think nearer eighty. His vision was dim. He was sleeping in one apartment and little Samuel, his servant, in another. The latter heard a voice calling him and three separate times went to Eli to ask what service he could render, only to be told that it was a mistake, and that he had not been called. But by the third time Eli the priest realized that it was God who had called Samuel; and he instructed the lad that if the voice should again be heard, he should answer, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." And so it was. The voice came again, and apparently the angel of the Lord

appeared to Samuel at the same time. Then the Lord gave a message to Samuel respecting Eli – foretelling the sad end of the lives of his two sons, and Eli's own death, and that Eli's family should nevermore serve the Lord as priests. The inference is given that Eli's sons misused their position as under priests, taking more of the sacrifices than they were properly allowed in the Divine arrangement, and besides this, practising immorality, and thus misleading the people into unrighteousness, whereas, as the Lord's servants and priests, they should have been instructors of the people in righteousness, both by precept and example.

DIVINE DISAPPROVAL OF WEAK CHARACTER

This was not the first time that the Lord had reproved Eli regarding the wrong course of his sons and what would happen. Years before a message had been sent him on this very subject, and although Eli himself apparently was faithful and loyal to God, he had not restrained his sons; hence he was a sharer in the penalty which came upon his sons.

In the morning Eli inquired of Samuel whether or not the Lord had spoken any further, and what He said. It was a trial to Samuel to tell his friend and benefactor, who was like a father to him, respecting the Lord's criticism and pronouncement of judgment against himself and his family; but Eli demanded to know the full particulars, and we read that "Samuel told him every whit." Thus it is often with the Lord's faithful servants; their tenderness of heart, their sympathy, might prompt them to hide, to cover, matters which their sense of duty may require them to speak boldly. In every case the individual's conscience must be educated, and of course the Word of God is the educator.

When Eli heard what the Lord had declared respecting his family, he answered most loyally, "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good." But however faithful and submissive he may thus appear to be, we know that his character was not satisfactory to

God. There are many like Eli, willing to take, without murmuring, the [R5616 : page 25] punishments which God metes out; but the Lord prefers characters that are stronger. Eli would have been more pleasing to the Lord had he had more firmness of character – a clearer appreciation of his duty toward the Lord as His servant, and toward his children as their father. We may be sure that strong characters are more pleasing to everybody. They may in some respects be more difficult to deal with; but, nevertheless, firmness of character is something that is a jewel, highly esteemed by all wise men and women, as well as by the Lord.

Samuel grew in favor with God and with Eli and with all the people of Israel, as they came to know him; and they perceived that the Spirit of the Lord was with him, and that he would be a representative of God amongst them.

All in Samuel's time could not be priests, but only those of the priestly tribe. All then could not be prophets, but merely such as God was pleased to use as His mouthpieces. As St. Peter says, "Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." But, as St. Peter proceeds to tell us, the prophecies were not generally understood by those who uttered them, but were meant to be understood by the Church of this Age, in due time, as the Holy [R5616 : page 26] Spirit would make them known – "meat in due season."

As Samuel is styled the first of the Prophets of Israel, so the Lord informs us that John the Baptist was the last of those Prophets, and that "none were greater than he." It astounds us perhaps to find the Bible clearly teaching that while the offices of prophet and priest were restricted in olden times, as we have seen, yet, during this Gospel Age, all who come unto God through Christ may become priests, and every priest of this New Order may be a prophet of the Lord.

Failure to discern the change from the Jewish Dispensation to the Christian Dispensation, which began at Pentecost, leaves many Christian people in confusion of mind. Jesus clearly presents the

matter, saying, "Verily I say unto you, There hath not risen a greater Prophet than John the Baptist; notwithstanding, he that is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he."

The Church is the Kingdom of God in embryo. It is to be the Kingdom of God after being set up at the Second coming of Christ, by the power of the First Resurrection, but even now it is God's Kingdom class in preparation, being educated, tested, in respect to faith, obedience and loyalty. The overcomers will be the Church of Glory, the Kingdom of Glory; but even in the embryo state, these are styled by St. Peter a Royal Priesthood. He is not in this speaking of any clerical class as a priesthood, but speaking of all who become united to Christ, of every faithful believer anointed with the Holy Spirit, as such a priest in things pertaining to God. He is a priest in the sense that he is counted in as a member of the Body of the great High Priest. As a member of Christ he is associated in the work of sacrifice, "presenting his body a living sacrifice" daily.

Additionally, all of the Royal Priesthood class, even at the present time, are God's prophets, God's mouthpieces. These, and these only, are authorized to speak in the name of the Lord. Their ordination, or authorization, does not come by any laying on of hands of bishops or anybody else; but, as the Scriptures declare, it comes directly from God – through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Hearken to St. John speaking to the whole Church. He says, "Ye have an unction [anointing] from the Holy One, and ye all know it." Whoever has this anointing of the Spirit should be able to discern its influence in his heart and life, and should recognize that it is his authorization to serve as a priest and as a prophet of the Lord; as St. Peter says, "that we should show forth the praises of Him who hath called us."

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