

A PATRISTIC COMMENTARY

FIRST
SAMUEL

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INTRODUCTION

NOMENCLATURE

The two books of Samuel: I and 2, in the Hebrew origin, are one book that carries the name “Samuel”; not only on account of that the prophet ‘Samuel’ plays the main role in the first part of that book, but also because he was the first to anoint kings for Israel: ‘Saul’ and ‘David’; and because he was the first to introduce such kind of prophetically historical record, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; as well as other main roles that appeared in the two books.

The word ‘Samuel’ does not mean, as some people think, (asked for from the Lord), based on the phrase: “*and called his name ‘Samuel,’ saying, ‘because I have asked for him from the Lord’*” (1 Samuel 1: 20); but it means, (The Lord listened); If ‘Hannah’ said “*I have asked for him from the Lord,*” she actually meant that (the Lord listened to her quest). The phrase “I have asked for him from the Lord” is probably closer to the name ‘Saul’ than it is to that of ‘Samuel’. Still some believe that the word ‘Samuel’ means (the name of God) or (His name is God).

This book, in the Septuagint version, was divided into two, just for practical reasons: There was a need for using two rolls instead of one to accommodate it. This version considered that book to be among the ‘Kingdom Books,’ that embraced the four books: (1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 kings, and 2 kings), having included a comprehensive history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. St. Jerome adopted the same method in the Latin version of the ‘Vulgate,’ and called these books, ‘The Regnum books’; namely ‘The Royal Books’: (1 kings, 2 kings, 3 kings, 4 kings), instead of the ‘Kingdom books’.

This mode of classification was adopted in the Hebrew Holy Book in the fourteenth century; and appeared in the second print by Daniel Bomberg in Venice in the year 1517 AD.

Therefore the nomenclature followed here: (1 Samuel and 2 Samuel), came after the Hebrew version, using the Greek classification.

AUTHOR

According to Jewish tradition, delivered to the Church of the New Testament, the author of these two books, is the prophet Samuel - the head and pioneer of the school of prophets - until his death after which it was completed by the two prophets: Gad and Nathan (1 Chronicles 29: 29, 30).

As the school of prophets, initiated by the prophet Samuel, had been the center of Hebrew culture, it kept special records of God’s dealings with His people, as is clear in the words: “*Then Samuel explained to the people the behavior (regulation) of royalty, and wrote it in a book and laid it up before the Lord*” (1 Samuel 10: 25; this is while 2 Chronicles 9: 29), refer to the prophet Nathan, together with other prophets, as sources of the history of the reign of King Solomon.

TOPIC

(1) Establishing a kingdom for the people; covering a history of about 150 years, between the birth of Samuel in the year 1171 BC, and the death of Saul. The first six chapters of the first book of Samuel introduce to us 'Samuel' as a prophet; then, after the sixth chapter his role as a judge is introduced. Yet, the second book of Samuel, introduces David as the indisputable king, who seized Jerusalem, and set it as a new center of worship, by bringing up the ark of the covenant, and setting it in the city (2 Samuel 5 - 6).

(2) Concerning the anointment of a king for Israel, God Himself has been the King of the people who chooses their leaders, as prophets, like Moses and Samuel, or Judges like Gideon, and Samson. But when the people and their priests deviated from the truth, they were repeatedly chastised by the Lord (the Book of Judges) until they came to acknowledge their sins and to declare their repentance; The Lord then responded to them, and chose a new Judge to save them. Therefore the job of the judge was not official, inherited, nor was it confined to a particular tribe. When corruption reached a climax, that the children of priests and judges committed evil deeds, and became offense to the people, like the children of Ali the High priest, and those of the prophet Samuel, the people thought of a human solution, that is, setting a king to defend them.

Speaking of setting kings for Israel, we find that this book, and for the first time, calls God "*The Lord of hosts*" (1 Samuel 1: 3); to be mentioned after that more than 280 times. It is as though the divine inspiration intended to confirm that God is the King, who cares for His people, and who manages their affairs.

Speaking of the anointment of kings, we also read, for the first time in the Holy Book, the term, "The Lord's anointed": "*The Lord will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to His king, and exalts the horn of His anointed*" (1 Samuel 2: 10). The kings were called "The Lord's anointed, being symbols of the Lord Christ who reigns on the cross, and who sets His kingdom in the heart. That is why we should not wonder why David refrained from stretching out his hand with evil, against king Saul, despite God's rejection of him, on account of that he is "the Lord's anointed" (1 Samuel 26: 11). David himself then became a symbol of Christ the King, from whom He descended according to the flesh. The New Testament included David in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was born in the "city of David," and was truly the "Son of David" (See Acts 2: 25 - 31; Romans 1: 3).

It is to be noticed that these two books (Samuel 1 and 2), are not intended to introduce a history of religion but have concentrated mainly, in their presentation of the history of Israel, on revealing the role of God in the life of His people; controlling and guiding history, particularly in the sequence of events, by which He introduced, or allowed for the introduction of the royal system; setting it in the house of David to reign forever, as a Messianic house, having a promise of its permanency.

FEATURES

(1) The historical review in the first and second books of Samuel, is considered as the first magnificent historical review in the history of mankind. The author -through the divine inspiration -has preceded all historians in his system.

The following are some comments on this subject:

[A modern scholar said: “the Book of Samuel is a greatly magnificent Book; not surpassed by any other, in its dealing with history, its insight in human nature, and its truthful portrayal of events. This Book reveals God’s ways of dealing with people, either good or evil; his dealings with peoples; and gives a true portrait of God’s works in His judgment and chastisement as well as in His forgiveness and mercy.]

[We have to comprehend that the two Books of Samuel include, in an extraordinary way, an original and objective history, particularly of the royal history of king David. For the first time we encounter a genuine historical record, in its regular modern sense. It is clear that the history of the royal palace has been written by an eyewitness of events who presents firsthand information, frankly and with the least amount of preaching. Although he had seen the hand of “Jehovah” in the events, he was thinking of ‘Jehovah,’ working through persons and events in actual life more than through miracles. According to the opinion of some scholars, the author of that royal history, was definitely the first historian ever].

Robert H. Pfeiffer wrote about the author of the two Books of Samuel, as being the true pioneer of history, saying: [He is, undoubtedly, the real father of history, and more so than Herodotus who came 500 years later. In our opinion, he created history as an art, surveying events of the past through a great mind... without having before him a prior model to follow. Bearing a psychological insight, he introduced a marvelous model, without disregarding historical facts that were beautifully written, and perfectly produced.

(2) The two Books of Samuel shed the light on the most important institutions at that time: Those of prophecy [the school of prophets]; of clergy [the spiritual work of the priest, and his worshipping liturgical role, not separated from keeping the commandment, and obeying God with a spiritual concept]; and of Messianic [Kings as the Lord’s anointed, who were committed to obey God in humility and to serve the people].

These institutions were led by the Holy Spirit, in its capacity as a divine Person:

- * Granting prophecy (1 Samuel 10: 6).
- * Granting a new heart (1 Samuel 10: 9).
- * Granting good zeal (anger) (1 Samuel 11: 6)
- * granting several capabilities (1 Samuel 16: 13, 18).
- * protecting man against the distressing evil spirits (1 Samuel 16: 14).

(3) The first Book of Samuel is considered to be an essay on praying and its fruits in a believer’s life:

* The prophet Samuel came as a blessing to the people; and as a fruit of his mother's prayers (1 Samuel 1: 10 - 28).

* Israel gained conquest with the blessing of his prayers (1 Samuel 7: 5 - 10).

* When the people rejected God as their king, Samuel resorted to prayer, to be comforted by God (1 Samuel 8: 5 - 6).

* Prayer grants proclamations of divine secrets (1 Samuel 9: 15).

* Samuel considered it a sin, to cease to pray for the sake of his people, (1 Samuel 12: 23).

* When God rejected Saul, He stopped listening to his prayers (1 Samuel 28: 6).

We can say that the prominent verse in this Book is: "*Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you*" (1 Samuel 12: 23).

SECTIONS

(1) Samuel, the prophet and the judge 1 Samuel 1 – 7.

(2) Saul, the king 1 Samuel 8 – 15.

(3) David, the king 1 Samuel 16 - 31.

UNITY OF THE BOOK

Some critics believe that the two Books of Samuel, have dealt with particular events more than once; They even claim, that they have drawn their material from two sources: one of them is an 'early source' that was pro-Monarchy; and the other is a 'late one, written at the time of captivity, or after it, that was anti-Monarchy, and had a preaching, more than a historical approach, when the drawbacks and corruption of Monarchy became apparent. That concept led to that some of the critics went as far as dividing one phrase into two parts, referring one of them to the 'early source,' and the other to the 'late source'. Another group of critics even believed that the two books came out of three sources or may be more.

Here, I recall the words of **St. Augustine**, saying, that the problems aroused by some critics against the Holy Book, are actually motivating us to enjoy new depths through studying it, more thoroughly.

'Oesterley, Robinson' and others dealt with the most important events claimed by critics to be repeated in the two books of Samuel Here, I shall introduce the responses of certain scholars to their claims:

1- Establishing Monarchy: in a group that is anti-Monarchy : (1 Samuel 8; 10: 17 - 25); and another group that is pro-Monarchy (1 Samuel 9: 1 - 16; 11: 1 - 15).

if we refer back to the contexts, we do not only find that there is no contradiction between them but we may even find harmony in some cases as the following can be noticed:

(1) In Samuel 8, the prophet Samuel was displeased, when the people demanded a king to judge them like all the other nations on account of that that request meant the following:

a- A denial of the giving and loving ministry of the prophet Samuel; It was more fitting for them to ask God to choose a judge to save them, as He did before.

b- A disregard of God's consistent work with them, all along the time of judges; It was more becoming of them to refer the failure, not to God's system of government 'Theocratic System,' to request replacing it with a 'Monarchy'; but rather to their deviation from God's ways, and to their spiritual corruption.

c- A desire to be like all the nations (1 Samuel 8: 5), caring for outer appearances.

As to referring that context to a 'late source,' written during captivity or after it, when the disadvantages of Monarchy became apparent and not written in the days of the prophet Samuel, this could be rebutted by the fact that the Israeli people have had contacts with neighboring nations and peoples; and although they asked for a king to judge them like all the nations,, they were aware of how those nations suffered under the reign of tyrant and corrupt rulers. Moreover, they could never have forgotten how their ancestors suffered on the hands of Egyptian Pharaohs. What is more important, is that in referring some books to later eras, just because they mentioned certain future events believing that an author has to be a contemporary or even late to those events, those critics disregard the notion of the ability of divine inspiration, to speak of future events through prophecy.

Here, we find the prophet Samuel, in putting the people's request before God, frankly showing his displeasure; and despite the fact that God granted their request, He revealed to Samuel all the troubles that were to happen on the hands of the future kings: a portrait that Samuel honestly relayed to the people. Samuel's displeasure, and his talk, that reflect his anti-monarch feelings, should not therefore be referred to the captivity or the post-captivity eras, as some critics claim, but they were prophetic articulations, in which the prophet revealed the extent of oppression that would befall the people on the hand of their kings.

(2) As to the contexts that seem pro-Monarch, like the words of God to the prophet Samuel: "*Tomorrow about this time I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him commander over my people Israel, that he may save my people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon my people, because their cry has come to me*" (1 Samuel 9: 16), It does not imply a contradiction to the previous contexts; but this is the good nature of God, caring for human freedom, especially if the demand is unanimous. He granted them their heart request, using their evil, through His goodness, for their benefit. That was the way He did with Joseph's brothers, when He used their selling of their brother to slavery, as a chance to plant the first seed of His people in Egypt. He comforted the heart of His prophet Samuel, telling him: "*They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them*" (1 Samuel 8: 7); and at the same time He said to him: "*Now therefore, heed their voices*" (1 Samuel 8: 9).

2- The origin of the proverb : “Is Saul also among the prophets?! “ : That was said when the Spirit of God came to dwell on Saul, to prophesy among the prophets, the day he was anointed a king (1 Samuel 19: 11); and also when he chased David to ‘Naioth’ where Samuel was dwelling; as he prophesied before David and Samuel, after he stripped off his (outer) clothes, and laid down almost naked all that day and all that night (1 Samuel 19: 24). ‘Welhausen’ claimed that the second context has been the product of a later anti-Monarch era; as Saul was shown exposed in a miserable way, that was enjoyed by Samuel and David.

This can be rebutted by the fact that this proverb was said the first time, after Saul had been anointed, when God gave him another heart (1 Samuel 10: 9); as no one of those who knew, that he never entered the school of prophets, expected to see him granted the divine gift of prophecy. So that proverb came to be known within a narrow circle of friends and acquaintances (1 Samuel 10: 11, 12). As to repeating it a second time, after his heart went astray, that was a natural reaction for somebody like Saul, known for his changing moods and reactions, as is evident from his dealings with David; sometimes weeping and commending him, other times throwing a spear at him; making a covenant with him, then breaking it again... When he saw Samuel and David, his soul was so shaken by memories, to make him stagger and strip his clothes and prophesy.... Here, that proverb, already known, came to be more quoted; as Saul who deviated from the truth prophesied again. As to Samuel and David, they never despised him, as was claimed by Welhausen.

3- Saul proclaimed king: Some critics claim that that proclamation in ‘Mizpah’ (1 Samuel 10: 17 - 27), came from a later anti-Monarch source,; while the renewal of the kingdom in Gilgal (1 Samuel 11: 14), came from an early pro-Monarch source. That can be rebutted by the fact, that Samuel was committed while proclaiming Saul in Mizpah, to confirm God’s response for the request of His people, despite their rejection of His reign over them, demonstrating God’s goodness and His gentle dealings with man. Yet, in Gilgal, after a conquest over the enemies, Saul refused to kill the sons of Belial (among his people) who have previously rejected him, saying: *“Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord had accomplished salvation in Israel”* (1 Samuel 11: 13). That is why it was becoming to commend Saul, to renew his kingdom, and to have joy among the people.

I wish here to confirm that the prophet Samuel did not intend to resist nor to be biased to a certain political regime, but he rejected every inner corruption, and every disguised superficial cure, that lacked true spiritual meaning. When Saul followed the commandments, Samuel publicly commended him; but when he deviated, he bravely and frankly rebuked him; while when he anointed David, he supported him till the end.

4- Two similar incidents took place when David spared the life of Saul,his pursuer : The first book of Samuel presents those two similar incidents, to demonstrate the good nature of

David when Saul, his pursuer, fell into his hands (1 Samuel 24; 26). It is to be noticed that these stories refer to two different incidents:

1- Repeating them is a natural thing, taking into consideration the abnormal psychological condition of Saul; After raising his voice weeping, and proclaiming to David: *“You are more righteous than I, for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil”* (1 Samuel 24: 17), Saul resumed his pursuit of David.

2- The first time, the Ziphites came to tell Saul that David was hiding in the hills of Hachilah (1 Samuel 24), as they were his enemies; but the second time they did that out of fear of revenge.

3- Despite some similarities between the two stories, as for example giving the number of Saul’s men as 3000 - having been his personal guards -, they referred to two different episodes:

a- In the first time, Saul was in a cave during daytime; while in the second, he was in a camp at night.

b- In the first time, David fled hastily; while in the second, he took refuge with the Philistines, having completely lost confidence in Saul who kept on breaking his promises.

To make a long story short, I will deal with the events considered by the critics to be repetition when I come to the interpretation of the book itself. But here, I would like to mention what some scholars said in their endeavors to rebut the views of those critics:

a- This work is not the product of two sources, one earlier than the other, but it is an integral work, that carries a clear goal, beautifully and harmoniously written.

b- The two books were not written as historical records, but to reveal God’s plan and dealings with His people; that is why the events mentioned in them were not always chronologically recorded.

c- It has been unanimously said, that the two books of Samuel were written in a refined Hebrew language; which shows that the time of their writing was the golden era of the Hebrew literature. If the two books were just scattered narration, written in different times, they would not have such magnificent literary form.

d- ‘Driver’ says that the two books include certain expressions that were commonly used in that time (the early period); like: “As your soul lives”; The sons of Bileal”; “The Lord of hosts,” “So God does, and even more”; and “Blessed you are from Jehovah”; etc.

THE FIRST SECTION

THE PROPHET SAMUEL (1 SAMUEL 1 TO 7)

- 1- The birth of Samuel 1.**
- 2- The growth of Samuel 2.**
- 3- The Lord' call to Samuel 3.**
- 4- The ministry of Samuel 4-7.**

A TRANSITIONAL STAGE

The life of Samuel, the prophet and the judge, represents a transitional stage, through which Israel passed over from the Judge system to that of Monarchy. Samuel was born by pious parents, as a fruit of prayers and faith of his mother; then was raised by 'Ali,' the priest and judge, who has been characterized by piety and a weak personality, especially before his own sons.

Samuel was raised in the house of the Lord in 'Shiloh,' where the tabernacle of meeting settled down for 300 years; then was destroyed by the Philistines in one of their attacks; probably during the battle of 'Aphek' (1 Samuel 4) after which the ark never returned there.

His role as a judge (1 Samuel 7: 6; 15 - 17), like that of 'Ali' the priest, had a special feature - a spiritual role, praying and counsel giving, but not leading armies for wars. It was characterized by spiritual guidance as much as possible; as the people still had a prevailing tendency to deviate from the Lord, and to be ignorant, that prevailed from the time of the judges; That is why God allowed for their humiliation on the hands of the Philistines.

When the people demanded a king like the other nations around them, Samuel considered that to be a rejection of the reign of God, and of him. Yet, through a divine ordinance, Samuel anointed 'Saul' as their king whom God eventually rejected when he rebelled against Him. David was secretly anointed as a king to have his life persistently pursued by Saul.

CHAPTER 1

THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL

Samuel was granted by God to 'Hannah,' a pious and barren mother, as a fruit of her prayers and faith; and was raised in the temple of God, to become a blessing to many people.

- 1- Hannah, the pious and barren 1-8.**
- 2- The son of prayer 9-18.**
- 3- The birth of Samuel 19-23.**
- 4- Samuel lent to the Lord 24-28.**

1- HANNAH, THE PIOUS AND BARREN

'Elkanah' had two wives: the name of one was 'Peninnah,' meaning (a coral) or (a pearl); and the name of the other was 'Hannah,' meaning (compassion) or (grace).

a- Elkanah was said to be an Ephramite (1 Samuel 1: 3), because he dwelt in the mountains of Ephraim; yet, he was of the tribe of Levi, of the family of Kohath (1 Chronicles 6: 22 - 28), although he did not practice as a Levite. He has been the head of the family of 'Zuphim,' that gave its name to the village of 'Ramathaim Zophim'; namely, (the two heights of Suf' or wool). It was so called to designate it from other places that carried the same name 'Ramathaim'; and probably is 'Ram Allah' nowadays.

b- every year, 'Elkanah' used to take his family to 'Shiloh' to worship and sacrifice to the Lord; namely, to present the sacrifice of peace offerings (Leviticus 7: 11 - 21). Some believe that this pilgrimage was personal for his own family; beside his commitment to appear before the Lord in the three feasts: of 'unleavened bread' or the 'Passover'; of 'Harvest'; and that of 'Ingathering' (Exodus 23: 14). some scholars believe that the Jews used to appear before the Lord only once every year to celebrate the feast of the harvest with great joy; and that what made 'Ali' the priest think that Hannah was drunk.

Shiloh or Shiloh - most probably (silon) nowadays, about 17 miles north of Jerusalem, had been the center of worship chosen by Joshua to be the place for the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant and where he divided the promised land among the tribes of Israel (Joshua 18: 1; 8). In it Ali the priest, Samuel and Ahija the prophets dwelt; (1 Kings 14: 2).

c- Elkanah loved Hannah his barren wife, and used to give her a double portion, something that probably inflamed the jealousy of his other wife Peninnah' and proved to be a wrong policy on his part. Anyway, the two women symbolized the Churches of the Old and the New Testaments. If 'Peninnah,' means a (pearl) or a (coral), and brought forth many children, the Church of the Old Testament enjoyed the treasures of God: having received the law, got the

promises, and brought forth men of God, the fathers, the prophets, etc. Yet, that fertile mother, turned barren, when she rejected faith in the Lord Christ; as expressed by the song of Hannah, saying: *“Even the barren has borne seven, and she who has many children has become feeble”* (1 Samuel 2: 5). Hannah, on the other hand, whose name means (compassion) or (grace) resembled the Church of the New Testament that has enjoyed the exalted compassion of God, proclaimed through the sacrifice of the cross and the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of son hood to God and communion with Him. It is His beloved Church that has gathered together, from the Gentiles, all those who have been barren, to bring forth sons to God.

God allowed it, for the soul of the pious Hannah, to get so saturated with bitterness, to cry out from the depths of her heart, to grant her the son He had prepared beforehand for her, and for all His people; whose life and ministry became an integral part of the Holy Bible. So also, God allows it for His pious Church to enter unto Passion, to partake of the affliction of the cross, and to experience His death in her in order to bring forth an inner joy, and an incomprehensible peace. *“If indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together”* (Romans 8: 17).

So God let her *“year by year”* suffer bitterness (1 Samuel 1: 7); and when the fullness of time came, He expounded to her what surpassed all what she asked for, or even imagined; she got ‘Samuel,’ the great among the prophets.

d- Listen to how her man who loved her admonished her; who expounded to her his soul, before any double portion, saying to her: *“Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?”* (1 Samuel 1: 8). Jesus the Lord of glory, the Groom of our souls, likewise admonishes us; saying [Why is your heart grieved for worldly worries? or for temporary afflictions? Can’t I fulfill and comfort you? Is it not enough for you that I am the eternal Groom of your soul?]

I wish we can say with the apostle Paul: *“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?!... For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8: 32 - 39).

Let us love God for His own sake; and let us accept Him to dwell in us; to proclaim His divine Kingdom inside us, and not to deny us even worldly blessings, if they are for our edification... In such a way, God was glorified in Hannah, and granted her Samuel, a fruit of her prayers and faith.

2- THE SON OF PRAYERS

a- Hannah was in bitterness of soul (1 Samuel 1: 10); yet her anguish did not keep her from sharing with other believers, eating of the sacrifice, so that all would be reconciled together

in God. Her bitterness of soul did not cause her to hate or envy her husband's other wife, but made her entreat for divine help to take away her disgrace. She yearned for bringing forth a son, not only for the sake of fulfilling her natural motherhood, but also for what is more: every Jewish woman was anticipating that the Messiah would come from her descent; as is clear from Hannah's song, in which she vowed to lend her son to the Lord as long as he lives (1 Samuel 2: 1 - 10).

So Hannah arose, after they have finished eating and drinking, to offer a secret personal prayer before the temple of the Lord [The tabernacle was called the temple of the Lord, having settled for about 300 years in Shiloh; and all around it buildings were established; and a seat by the doorpost for Eli the high priest to sit for judgment].

It happened as Hannah continued praying before the Lord, that Eli watched her mouth but he could not apprehend the secret of power of her prayer, and thought that she was drunk (1 Samuel 1: 14). Yet God listened to her.

Hannah became a living example - along the generations - of the power of a silent prayer, springing out of an inner deep faith; her prayer has been mixed with her faith, as well with her meekness. The following are comments of the saintly fathers on Hannah's silent prayer, by her heart as well as her tears:

- ❖ As to Hannah, once she harbored the thought, her wish was granted, and got Samuel. The Book says: *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find"* (Matthew 7: 7). We are taught that God knows the heart; and does not care for the apparent movements of the body, nor is He influenced by the outer events.
- ❖ Praying is to dare to speak and debate with God; If we silently whisper, without even opening our lips, crying out from inside, we should be sure that God will always hear us.
- ❖ Now, if we assign for ourselves, certain hours for praying - like the third, the sixth, and the ninth hours - the Gnostic; namely, the spiritual man of knowledge, prays all his life long, seeking to have a communion with God through his prayers.
- ❖ It is possible to utter a prayer with no sound; through the concentration of all the inner spiritual nature, without the distraction of the mind from thinking of God.

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ Hannah - mentioned in the first book of the kings (1 Samuel) – who is a symbol of the Church, held fast to praying to God, not by noisy requests, but in silence and meekness from the depths of her heart, She uttered a secret prayer with an obvious faith. She did not speak with her voice, but within her heart; and believing that God listens to such prayer, she got what she prayed for. That is what the Book confirms, saying: *"Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard (but God listened to her)"* (1 Samuel 1: 13). And we read in the Psalms: *"Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still"* (Psalm 4: 4).

St. Cyprian

- ❖ Hannah, though her voice was not heard, her quest was granted, because her heart cried out! ‘Abel,’ the righteous, not only prayed while silent, but also prayed while dead, as his blood cried out louder than any trumpet!
- ❖ Her tears preceded her tongue, more clearly than any trumpet; that is why God opened her womb, and turned the solid rock into a fruitful field.

If you so weep, you would follow the example of your Lord who has wept for Lazarus, and for Jerusalem and got troubled in spirit because of Judas. He often wept, but was never seen laughing.

St. John Chrysostom

It was not possible for the high priest to discern between a contrite hearted woman, to whose inner moaning, heaven responds and a daughter of ‘Bileal’ [a Hebrew word meaning (evil) or (vain), a name given to him who does not fear God (2 Corinthians 6: 15)... Only God, who knows what is inside the heart, can discern between this and that.

Hannah combined her hidden prayer with her meekness; When Eli the high priest accused her of being drunk, she humbly answered him, saying: “*No, my Lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, but out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken until now*” (1 Samuel 1: 15, 16). **St. John Chrysostom** was impressed by that meekness, and commended her more than once; saying: “This is the proof of a contrite heart; when we do not respond in anger to him who slanders us; but within the limits of self defense”.

She spoke politely and humbly, saying: “*Let your maidservant find favor in your sight*” (1 Samuel 1: 18). And her faith becomes apparent in the words of the Book: “*So the woman went her way..., and her face was no longer sad*” (1 Samuel 1: 18). Her heart was comforted after her prayer.

I wish that God grants us such faith so as not to be troubled or distressed, especially after praying, and surrendering our life in the hands of God our Father.

Speaking of the activity of prayers in the life of the barren Hannah, the scholar Origen expounds the barren fruitless souls, to enjoy what Hannah got; saying: “The souls that have remained for so long, barren in mind and thought as they realize their loss, would conceive by the Holy Spirit, to bring forth words of salvation, filled with concepts of truth through persisting on prayer]. In other words, we are in need to acknowledge our inner barrenness, so that when our souls would become embittered and contrite before God, we entreat him in faith, confident that He, alone, is able to turn our barrenness into fruition; granting us the fruits of His Holy Spirit in us.

3- BIRTH OF SAMUEL

Hannah's returning joyfully to her family to partake peacefully in their life, reveals her realization, that the solution of problems, is not in the hand of man, nor in the outer circumstances, but through entering into the depths of soul, and discovering God's possibilities in us. That was what Hannah did, and how she encountered God through her secret prayer; and how she felt God's power, capable of solving all problems. That is why when the apostle Paul preached to the Corinthians, he demonstrated to them "*the power of God*" and not "*the persuasive words of human wisdom*" (1 Corinthians 2: 4, 5).

In due time, God granted Hannah a son. She called him "Samuel". She stayed with her child until she weaned him, then fulfilled her vow to lend him to the Lord, "*that he may appear before the Lord and remain there forever*" (1 Samuel 1: 22)

4- SAMUEL LENT TO THE LORD

a- "*Now when she weaned him, she took him up with her*" (1 Samuel 1: 24). Some wonder, how could she offer him to the house of the Lord directly after weaning (about 9 months). The answer is that, in the region of the Middle East, mothers used not to wean their babies before the third, and sometimes the fifth year of their life.

b- What does she mean by saying: "*Therefore I have also lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the Lord*" (1 Samuel 1: 28)? She has previously "*vowed to (give) him to the Lord all the days of his life*" (1 Samuel 1: 11); and now, she does not say, "I give him," but, "*I have lent him to the Lord*" She did not retract her promise to deliver her child to the Lord to minister to him as long as he lives; but she wanted to confirm her attachment to her child as a mother; So, though she is giving him to serve the Lord as long as he lives, she is counting him as "lent" to the Lord, thus holding fast to him as her own son. It is a living portrait of family love in the Lord!

- ❖ Women should follow the example of those amazing mothers! Let her, who brought forth a child, have Hannah as a role model, and see what she did (1 Samuel 1: 14); She brought him to the temple to serve the Lord! Who of you does not wish her son to become a "Samuel," thousand of times greater than a king?!
- ❖ She did not say "for one year" or "for two years," as we usually do; nor said, "If you grant me a child, I shall offer You money"; but said, "I shall give You back your whole gift! I shall give you my firstborn son, "the son of my prayers". She is truly the daughter of Abraham! Abraham offered his son when he was asked to do that; but Hannah offered him even before being asked to do so!

St. John Chrysostom

Hannah lent her son, Samuel, to the Lord to serve him all the days of his life, to be anointed by the Lord as a great prophet (1 Samuel 3: 20); to be counted in the Old Testament, together with Moses and Aaron (Psalm 99: 6; Jeremiah 15: 1); and to be referred to, in the New Testament, as the first prophet (Acts 3: 24). Samuel is considered to be the founder of the school

of prophets (1 Samuel 19: 20), in Ramah, that was followed by other schools in Bethel (2 Kings 2: 3), in Jericho (2 Kings 2: 5), and in Gilgal (2 Kings 4: 38). He is also considered as the founder of the Monarchy, despite his preliminary disapproval of it; He anointed Saul, who succeeded for sometime; then anointed David, whose descendants inherited the monarchy though he did not live long enough to crown him a king.

Having weaned the child Samuel, his mother took him up to the house of the Lord in Shiloh (1 Samuel 1: 24). The Book did not say that his father took him up; not because she took over as head of the household but her exalted faith made her hasten to take him up, to be exalted in the sight of the Lord, who referred to her taking Samuel up to the house of the Lord, with the following offerings:

a- Three bulls; one of which was presented as a burnt offering (Leviticus 1: 1 - 9; 1 Samuel 1: 25); on account that Samuel was presented as a burnt offering to the Lord to offer all his life, with all his capabilities, as a sacrifice of love to the Lord. As to the other two bulls, these were the annual offering of Elkanah: 'a peace offering' and 'a sin offering' (Leviticus 3, 4).

b- One ephah of flower, about 10 Libra (the figure 10 refers to the consummation of the law).

c- A skin of wine, referring to rejoicing... as she joyfully offered her son to the Lord; counting it a great dignity to herself, that the Lord received her son as an offering of love; and not counting it a loss on her part.

CHAPTER 2

THE BRINGING UP OF SAMUEL

Having lent her son Samuel to the Lord as long as he lives, Hannah beheld him in the house of the Lord, to see in him a symbol of the expected Messiah, who would open up the divine sanctuaries before believers. Then her tongue burst forth to praise the Lord for His gift, not only to her, but to all His people, through presenting the work of salvation in the Messiah.

Whereas the two priest sons of Eli, the high priest, violated the law and the statutes, and corrupted the people of God and the sanctuaries, Samuel, the son of Hannah - a woman of faith, prayer, and praise - was raised in a holy life in the Lord. In other words, although Eli's two sons were raised in a religious atmosphere, they did not enjoy the inner sanctified life; whereas Samuel grew, attached to the spiritual depths of his family, to bear blessed fruition.

- 1- Hannah's salvation praise** 1 – 10.
- 2- The son of Elkanah and the two sons of Eli** 1 – 17.
- 3- God's blessings to Elkanah and Hannah** 18 – 21.
- 4- Negligence of Eli the priest with his two sons** 22 – 36.

1- HANNAH'S SALVATION PRAISE

When the Lord realized Hannah's petition, she gave Him thanksgiving and praise. This is while many of us resort to God in the times of affliction, then forget Him in our times of joy; Hannah, on the other hand, did not forget the Lord and did not thank Him, just for granting Samuel to her, but she rather entered into new depths, seeing in her child a symbol of God's work of salvation. Her praise came to be close to that of St. Mary, the mother of God (Luke 1: 46 - 55); Hannah's praise was for the sake of the symbol while that of St. Mary was for the sake of the Messiah Himself.

We can say that the opening up of Hannah's inner tongue, her spiritual insight, and her deep response to the work of God, were all reflected on her son Samuel, who hearkened the gentle voice of the Lord in the temple, while Eli the high priest could not. She fed her son the life of response to God's work, His call, and His words... something that many of our sons are deprived of, because of the closing up of their parents' hearts, the blindness of their insights, the heaviness of their tongues in talking to the Lord and praising Him.

Getting back to Hannah's praise, or let us say, her psalm, considered to be a royal psalm, if compared to psalms 2: 1; and 4: 10; that refer to the anointed King, we notice the following:

a- Hannah started her praise by proclaiming her joy, not just for gaining the gift of Samuel, but because of her enjoyment of the Grantor Himself of that gift; She said: *“My heart rejoices in the Lord”* (1 Samuel 2: 1).

Her inner depths got filled with God Himself, the source of joy; and as said by the apostle Paul: *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy...”* (Galatians 5: 22)

This inner joy, grants the soul the strength, not to collapse under any circumstances; but to say : *“My horn is exalted in the Lord”* (1 Samuel 2: 1).

The use of the term “horn” as a sign of strength, was common in the Hebrew literature.

She was granted strength, not to spite or to boast over her enemies, but to have her mouth opened to preach them the joy of salvation saying: *“My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I rejoice in your salvation”* (1 Samuel 2: 1).

Nothing would abolish the animosity of enemies, like rejoicing in God’s salvation, that draws the enemies to the enjoyment of the joyful gospel.

b- *“There is none holy like the Lord; For there is none besides you; Nor there is any rock like the Lord”* (1 Samuel 2: 2)

If God alone is the holy (Revelation 15: 4), the incarnate holy Word of God (Luke 1: 49) came to bring us to Him, to bear in us the holy life. This is the secret of our salvation; not only because God has forgiven our sins, but because He carried us in Him to partake of His holy life, and to realize in us His commandment: *“You shall be holy, for I am holy”* (Leviticus 11: 44, 45).

He is the ‘Rock’ that gave water to the people of Israel in the wilderness to drink and to get fulfilled (Exodus 17: 6; Numbers 20: 11); the apostle Paul says: *“They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ”* (1 Corinthians 10: 4).

c- Having experienced the exalted grace of God, Hannah realized that God’s ways and measures are different from those of humans. While her husband’s other wife ‘Peninnah’ has been a mother of many children, she has been barren in humiliation and shame; then was granted the gift of ‘Samuel,’ to become as though she has given birth to seven children; while her husband’s other wife, who had several children, has become feeble (1 Samuel 2: 5)! So she proclaimed:

“The bows of the mighty men are broken, and those who stumbled are girded with strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, and those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. Even the barren has borne seven, and she who has many children has become feeble. The Lord kills and make alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and brings up. He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes, and make them inherit the throne of glory” (1 Samuel 2: 4 - 8)

So the horns of Peninnah, the haughty, were broken;... and came to be like those who hire themselves out for bread;... she became feeble despite the many children she had;... she lost her

life, and became as though, brought down to the grave;... she became poor and brought down to dust. On the contrary, Hannah, by the spirit of humility, became girded, by the hand of God, with strength;... got fulfilled after hunger;... brought forth many children after barrenness;... enjoyed life, after being like the dead;... and was lifted up by the Lord, who granted her dignity to be sit among princesses and to inherit the throne of glory.

We can also say that 'Peninnah' represents the Jewish people who lived for a long time in faith under the law, to become as men of valor, fulfilled, fruitful, prosperous, dignified, etc.... But having denied faith, they collapsed, became spiritually poor, had their life fading away, and lost their dignity;... whereas 'Hannah' represented the Gentiles, who lived weak, hungry, barren, and even as dead, once they believed in the Lord, the Savior, their situation dramatically changed.

d- *"Even the barren has borne seven, and she who has many children has become feeble"* (1 Samuel 2: 5). Hannah did not have seven children, but only one - Samuel, to be followed by three brothers and two sisters (1 Samuel 2: 21); So, what did she mean by the seven? She probably saw in Samuel - as a symbol of the Lord Christ - a perfect man, counted as seven; as the figure 7 means perfection. Or she probably meant, that being a symbol of the Church of the New Testament, whose members come from many nations, she begot for the Lord many children, through the waters of Baptism; while her husband's other wife 'Peninneh,' a symbol of the Church of the Old Testament, after delivering many children for the Lord, has become feeble, because of her denial of faith in the Messiah.

+ Samuel was a symbol of Christ.... The seven children were the seven Churches; That is why Paul wrote to the 7 Churches; and the book of Revelation dealt with 7 Churches...; So also the 7 angels standing, going in and out before God, according to the words of the archangel Rafael in the book of Tobias; the lamp stand with the 7 lamps in the tabernacle; the 7 eyes of God that keep the world; the stone with the 7 eyes (Zechariah 2: 9); the 7 spirits in the book of Revelation; and the 7 pillars on which wisdom has built her house (Proverb 9: 1).

St. Cyprian

e- *"For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's"* (1 Samuel 2: 8)

An allegoric saying, that reveals God's care for us; For our sake He set the earth as His own property, and entrusted it to us. He is the Almighty, nothing of our life escapes His eyes; He even cares for the steps of our feet, bringing to naught the snares set for us in the darkness by the wicked ones:

"He will guard the feet of His saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness" (1 Samuel 2: 9)

and as said by the Psalmist: *"For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways"* (Psalm 91: 11)

"He will not let your foot slip - He who watches over you will not slumber" (Psalm 121 3)

As long as we are God's pious, our feet shall be watched, and our peace shall be kept. St. Jerome says: "As long as we are in a condition of grace, our souls shall be kept in peace; But once we start to fall in the depths of sin, our souls shall fall into confusion, to become like a boat struck by waves".

St. Augustine says: "If you want your feet to be steady over the steps, not to tire, to stumble nor to fall, pray the words: "*He will not let your feet slip*"...; Nothing shall let the feet slip, but pride. Love will move the feet to walk, and to ascend; whereas pride would lead them to stumble and fall".

"For by strength no man shall prevail. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces; From heaven He will thunder against them. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed" (1 Samuel 2: 9, 10)

❖ We should know that we could not strive without God's help; and our strife to gain the gift of great purity, would be of no avail, unless it is granted to us through the divine help and mercy; as "*The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but the deliverance is of the Lord*" (Proverb 21: 31); "*For by strength no man shall prevail*".

Abbot Paphnotius

2- THE SON OF ELKANAH, AND THE SONS OF ELI

a- What a big difference between the son of Elkanah and Hannah - the son of prayer and faith; and the two sons of Eli the high priest. The first was raised in the fear of God, to become a blessing for himself, for his family, for his people, and even for us, having become an example to be followed across generations. The sons of Eli the priest, on the other hand, had abused their father's position for their own benefit. They forsook their flock to the wolves; and even turned, themselves, into wolves, doing evil and leading the people to transgress. Their father was negligent in restraining them; and when he rebuked them, he spoke with looseness. They brought shame on their father, on their family, and on their people; and became an example of those who are negligent in raising their children.

The holy Book calls the sons of Eli, "the sons of Bileal"; and as St. Gregory, the Bishop of Nyssa says: [Those two persons have been called, both as "the sons of Eli" and "the sons of Bileal"... When they were called "the sons of Eli," that proclaimed their natural relationship to Eli the priest; and when they were called "the sons of Bileal," the evil they chose was proclaimed].

c- It was said about the sons of Eli that "*they did not know the Lord*" (1 Samuel 2: 12). As priests, they knew much about the Lord, through learning and theoretical knowledge; yet they did not know Him in their conduct and their practical life. And as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [The holy Book tells us of many kinds of knowledge of which was that expressed by the apostle Paul, saying: "*They profess to know God, but in words they deny Him*" (Titus 1: 16).

d- As the hearts of the sons of Eli got corrupted, they despised the rites (1 Samuel 2: 13 - 16); despised the pure life and sanctity, by corrupting the women of God's people (1 Samuel 2: 22); and despised even God Himself. According to the rite, a priest has the right to eat the breast and the right thigh of the sacrifice, after burning the fat for the Lord (Leviticus 3: 3 - 5); then give the remaining parts to the family of the one who offered the sacrifice (7: 29 - 34); But the sons of Eli behaved differently and corrupted the sanctuaries (1 Samuel 2: 17).

When corruption gets into the depths of man, he despises every thing: the rites, as well as the purity, and the right of others even that of God Himself.

3- GOD BLESSES ELKANAH AND HANNAH

Samuel began his ministry before the Lord as a child wearing a linen ephod (1 Samuel 2: 18), like an overcoat girded at the waist. St. Jerome believes that the ephod presented by Hannah to her son, was the garment of Levites and not of priests. That ephod was different from that made by 'Gideon' (Judges 8: 28), and by 'Micah' (Judges 17: 5).

The holy Bible confirms that Samuel started his ministry as a child, in a very corrupt priestly atmosphere; that could not be mended nor resisted...; Yet God who saves with a little, as well as with a plenty, used that child for mending.

His mother used to bring him a little robe every year like that of kings, prophets, and esquires. It was an inner woolen wear, woven without sewing, going down to the feet (1 Chronicles 15: 27; 1 Samuel 15: 27). That annual robe, represented a continuous renewal of the loving family relationships. Although she presented her child to the Lord, she is renewing her vow, confirming her prayers for her son, and reminding her son of his mission, as a nazirite to the Lord, through bringing him that robe. By her annual visit, she probably meant to guard her son against corruption and offense, because of Eli's two sons.

4- ELI'S NEGLIGENCE WITH HIS SONS

a- Eli's reproach to his two sons was not firm enough. He knew that they corrupted the women assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, turning God's sanctuary into a place of defilement; and the haven of peace into a location of perdition for the women ministering the tabernacle. All what Eli did was to reveal to his sons the seriousness of their deeds, without any sort of chastisement against them. He proclaimed to them:

"You make the Lord's people transgress. If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?" (1 Samuel 2: 24, 25)

Novatian used this phrase, to close the door of repentance before the fallen; but St. Ambrose rebutted him, saying: [It is not written, 'Nobody will pray for him,' but 'Who will pray for him?'; namely, 'Who can pray for him in that situation?; It would be difficult, but not impossible!].

b- Amid that corruption, a man of God (a prophet) was sent to Eli the priest before getting condemned (1 Samuel 2: 27), to remind him of the honor that God has granted his family since the days of Aaron (Exodus 4: 14 - 16); having been privileged to present the offerings and incense on the altar of God; to put on the ephod and other items that proclaim God's will toward His priests; beside getting a great portion of the offerings (Leviticus 10: 12 - 15). Due to all that, there was no excuse for Eli the priest to be slothful in chastising his two sons, who despised the divine sanctities. That warning was a new opportunity offered by God, for Eli the priest to try to put every thing in order. yet, through his weak personality, he did not honor God by chastising them, but despised Him through his negligence to apply the statutes of the law (Deuteronomy 13), that proclaims that man should have no compassion on a relative, on the expense of divine sanctities.

c- The Lord says: "*Those who honor Me, I will honor, and those who despise Me, will be disdained*" (1 Samuel 2: 30)

How should we honor the Lord? **St. Cyprian** answers saying, that honoring God is by accepting son hood to Him, and resembling Him as His children (Matthew 5: 43 - 45). For, if it would for humans be a source of joy and glory, to have children who follow their ways..., how much more would be a pleasure for God, to see someone, spiritual in his works and praises, who proclaims the divine exaltation in his life]. And **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Let us honor God by our faith as well as by our works, to get the reward through glorifying Him, "*Those who honor Me, I will honor (glorify)* ". Indeed, even if there is no reward, through glorifying God we glorify ourselves... For, what a glory for us, to have God glorified in our life]. He also says: [Through honoring God we honor ourselves. Whoever opens his eyes to behold sunlight, will receive joy in himself... Whoever honor God, would do that for the sake of his own salvation and benefit;? For whoever pursues virtue will honor God... So, let us honor God, and carry Him in our bodies and Spirits (1 Corinthians 6: 20).

d- **St. John Chrysostom** compares between Eli the high priest, who, after getting great privileges, fell under serious judgment, because of his slothfulness; and the prophet Samuel, who was rejected by the people (1 Samuel 8: 7), to be honored by God Himself; And said about the spiritual shepherds: [Insults for them are gains, while honors are a burden].

e- The man of God proclaimed to Eli the high priest, God's chastisements to him and his descendants:

- Removing priesthood from his house (1 Samuel 2: 30): 'Abiathar' was removed from being a priest to God, in the days of king Solomon, and was replaced by Zadok, a descendant of Eleazar, followed by his descendants up to the days of the Lord Christ.

- Loss of strength from his household: all his descendants were to die in the flower of their age (1 Samuel 2: 31).

- To see the ark of God captured by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4: 11).

- His descendants would wish to die, but their wish would be denied: *“Every one of you that I do not cut off from my altar, will be spared only to blind your eyes with tears and to grieve your heart”* (1 Samuel 2: 33)

He gave him, as a bitter sign of the divine chastisement, that both his sons would die in the same day (1 Samuel 2: 33; 4: 11). Yet God did not end His proclamation by that, but He, as usual, opened the door of hope; namely the coming of the true Priest - the Savior Messiah. **St. Hippolitus** sees in God’s saying through His man:

“Then I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall be according to what is in My heart and in My mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before My anointed forever. And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left in your house will come and bow down to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and say, ‘Please, put me in one of the priestly positions, that I may eat a piece of bread” (1 Samuel 2: 35 - 36) a prophecy about the coming of the Lord Christ, the High Priest of the New Testament. He says: [All the kings and priests were called ‘the Lord’s anointed’. having been anointed with the holy oil, that was prepared by Moses in the old days, they bore the name of the Lord in themselves; displaying a symbol and presenting an image, until the time, when the perfect King and the Priest from heaven will come, who, alone, will do according to the will of the Father].

CHAPTER 3

THE CALL TO SAMUEL

In the midst of the outer darkness, *“Before the lamp of God went out;... in the tabernacle”* (1 Samuel 3: 3), God called Samuel, to set him as a lamp amid His people, to proclaim His divine will, and to testify to His truth.

- 1- The call to Samuel 1 – 14.**
- 2- Samuel talk with Eli 15 – 18.**
- 3- God supports Samuel 19 – 21.**

1- THE CALL TO SAMUEL

a- God probably called Samuel just before dawn, amid the outer darkness; as it is said:

“And before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down to sleep” (1 Samuel 23: 3)

In the books of Exodus (27: 21); and Leviticus (24: 2, 3), it was mentioned that the lamp (the lamp stand) was to be lightened from evening till morning; so, the call of God came by the end of the night, just before dawn.

Beside the material darkness, there was another sort of darkness; as it is said: *“The word of God was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation”* (1 Samuel 3: 1)

This was expressed by the Psalmist by saying: *“O God, why have you cast us forever?!... We do not see our signs; There is no longer any prophet; nor is there any among us who knows how long”* (Psalm 74: 1, 9); and by the prophet Amos: *“Behold, the days are coming’, says the Lord, ‘that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord”* (Amos 8: 11).

Amid that darkness, and spiritual famine, God set a little child to minister to the temple and the tabernacle with faithfulness through whom God gives light to His people. Such was the case in every generation: God set a faithful remnant to testify and minister to Him, by Spirit and truth. When the people fell in bondage, He sent them Moses; and when the heretic Arius rebelled against the divinity of Christ, God sent St. Athanasius the apostolic; Thus God watches over His Church even if the darkness assumes its prevalence. By saying: *“Before the lamp of God went out”* (1 Samuel 3: 3), He means that amid the darkness, Jehovah - the Landlord Himself - was watching over His house, caring for His people.

b- The holy Book presented us with the circumstances in which God called Samuel: *“While Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see..., in the tabernacle of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down to sleep”* (1 Samuel 3: 2, 3)

Samuel was not lying in the tabernacle itself, in the holy or the most holy place, but in one of the annex tents; and Eli was in another annex; Why then, was it said that Samuel was lying down in the tabernacle of the Lord, where the ark of God was. while Eli was lying down “in his place”? Physically, they were both in the same complex; but, in the eyes of God, Samuel was counted as being in the temple of God before the ark of God; even while sleeping, he is saying together with the bride: *“I sleep but my heart is awake”* (Song 5: 2); though his body was lying outside the tabernacle, his heart was attached to it!

Samuel was asleep. Yet his insight was enlightened, beholding the sanctuaries; whereas Eli’s eyes had begun to grow dim, that he could not see! In him, the inner incapability of age started to be reflected; and his insight was blinded through his slothfulness toward the divine sanctities because of his two sons!

c- *“Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him”* (1 Samuel 3: 7)

There is a big difference between Samuel’s lack of knowledge, and that of Eli’s two sons; Samuel had not yet known the Lord through His voice nor through visions though he knew him through faith and daily experience.. Eli’s sons, on the other hand, did not know the Lord, having not enjoyed obedience, love, and the experience of fellowship with Him.

In the fullness of time, we have not just heard His voice - as Samuel had - but the divine Word came incarnated, and dwelt among us, to behold, to recognize, and to abide in Him; to bring us to the bosom of His Father, and to reveal to us His divine secrets. That is the knowledge, because of which, the Lord of Glory Jesus *“rejoiced in the Spirit,”* as He revealed it to believers through simplicity (Luke 10: 21). St. Clement of Alexandria called the true Christian, a ‘Gnostic’; namely, one of spiritual knowledge, whose goal is to recognize and behold God (the Truth); namely to pass over to the perfection of knowledge through faith, By practicing the pure life, and consistent contemplation. This knowledge is a divine gift, that we receive through the Son, by accepting Him and following His example. In other words, through the purity of heart, we behold God, and comprehend what is incomprehensible for others. .

d- The Lord called Samuel - a child, according to ‘Josephus,’ of about 12 years old- who heard His voice, because the strings of his heart were sensitive to hearken God’s voice, though he thought the voice, at the first time, to be that of Eli the high priest, so, *“He ran to Eli and said, ‘Here I am for you called me”* (1 Samuel 3: 4)

There is no doubt that Samuel saw by his own eyes the offenses and corruption of the two sons of Eli. yet, with the spirit of humility and love, when he thought he heard the voice of Eli, “he ran” to him, lest he might be in need of help or service. He was used to serve others joyfully and readily, regardless of their worthiness. That incident was repeated three times, and he ran to the old priest every single time, without complaining, though it was just before dawn. The child Samuel continued

faithfully to serve the old priest, and to seek his guidance obediently.

St. John Climacus says in his essay on “obedience” that, obedience, together with the feeling of sojourning, constitute two golden wings, that carry man to heaven (Psalm 55: 6); Yet, obedience has to be ‘in love of Christ,’

- ❖ Obedience - as a daughter of humility - is not for man to do what he wishes to do,... but it is for him to disregard his own wishes, to do those of him, to whom he wholly submitted himself; namely, to his spiritual guide

St. Philoxinus

- ❖ The path of obedience is the shortest of paths, yet it is the most difficult.

St. John Climacus

e- Although the Lord called Samuel by his name, the blessed child could not recognize nor encounter Him, without the guidance of the priest, despite all his shortcomings of slothfulness to God with his sons. So, it is becoming of us, never to underestimate a priest, as a guide and a father, who can lead us to a personal encounter with God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, through the holy Spirit of God.

- ❖ God allowed Samuel to go once and again to Eli, the old priest; He meant for him, who deserved to hearken the voice of God, to benefit from the experience of Eli, who happened to have offended God....So that, he who was called for a divine mission, would experience a life of humility, to become a role model to young people in this concern.

Abbot Moses

- ❖ The book of Proverbs says that security and safety are in the abundance of counseling (See the Septuagint version)... See what the holy Book is teaching us. It confirms to us that we should not set ourselves as a center of leadership, count ourselves as highly thoughtful, or believe that we are capable of directing ourselves. Beside the grace of God, we need the help and guidance of someone else. There is nobody who could be easily trapped, like him who is not guided by a mentor on the path to God.

How can we recognize the will of God, or seek it in its perfection, if we only trust ourselves, and hold fast to our own will? **Abbot Poemen** used to say “Self will” is a brass wall, that separates man from God.

If man seeks security for himself, he should lay bare all his hidden thoughts, and listen to the counsel of an experienced guide: Do this, and do not do that; This is right, and that is wrong; This is not the right time to do this, or this is the right time to do that. By this, the devil would not have a chance to harm or to strike him.

Abbot Dorotheos of Gaza

- ❖ Whoever leans upon his own counsel, even if he is a saint, is actually deceived; and his deception is far more dangerous than that of a beginner, who surrenders his ordinance into the hands of another.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Whoever listens to his spiritual fathers, is listening to the Lord.

St. Anthony the Great

f- *“Then the Lord came and stood and called as all other times, ‘Samuel, Samuel’* (1 Samuel 3: 10)

It is as though the Lord descended from His Cherubic throne, took off the veil, to stand in the holy sanctuary, and to call the child. What an amazing divine condescension, and what an exalted love for man! God stands to call a child to an exalted mission!

g- *“And Samuel answered: ‘Speak, for Your servant hears’”* (1 Samuel 3: 10)

This answer declares that hearing and obeying the divine voice are the essence of prophecy. Samuel was trained since his childhood on obedience, realizing that it is, far better than many sacrifices; something that king ‘Saul’ failed to realize (1 Samuel 15: 22).

2- SAMUEL TALK WITH ELI

God talked to Samuel about future issues, as though they are being realized in the present (1 Samuel 3: 11), proclaiming to him that He is going to execute the horrible things He previously stated, concerning the house of Eli, saying to him:

“I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifices or offerings forever” (1 Samuel 3: 14)

He did not go into details of those chastisements; yet His words were clear and firm; probably to give Eli and his sons a chance to repent... taking into consideration that that talk happened, about ten years prior to the realization of the events spoken of.

Samuel was afraid to tell Eli his vision (1 Samuel 3: 15); not out of fear that he would bring on himself the old man’s wrath, but out of apprehension that he might hurt the feelings of such a respectable old man whom he dearly loved. But, responding to Eli’s command he told him every thing.

Eli’s reaction revealed his piety, despite his weak personality before his two sons, saying: *“It is the Lord; Let Him do what seems good to Him”* (! Samuel 3: 18)

3- GOD SUPPORTS SAMUEL

Having called Samuel for a leading prophetic mission, God gave him the capabilities to achieve it, as follows:

a- Being with God: *“So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him”* (1 Samuel 3: 19)

God Himself is the secret of the strength of His beloved children, accompanying them, and granting Himself and His divine capabilities to them to let them need nothing more; as what happened with Abraham (Genesis 21: 22), Jacob (Genesis 28: 15), Joseph (Genesis 39: 2), Moses (Exodus 3: 12), Joshua (Joshua 1: 5), Gideon (Judges 6: 16), and with David (1 Samuel 16: 18).

The secret of the strength of the apostle Paul in his ministry, was his awareness of his enjoyment of God's grace, which in its essence is the transfiguration of God Himself in his life; That is why he says: "..., yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15: 10).

❖ God is the 'Vinedresser': though the work is done through prophets and apostles, God is the true Vinedresser. What are we then? We are probably laborers in His vine yard, working by His power and grace that He grants us.

St. Augustine

❖ "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4: 1). An honest steward follows the instructions of his employer to the best of his ability, without referring what belongs to his employer to himself... Do you want to see an example of an honest steward? Hear what Peter says: "Why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk" (Acts 3: 12); and to Cornelius, he also says: "Stand up, I myself am also a man" (Acts 10: 36). The apostle Paul was not less honest when he says: "I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15: 10)

St. John Chrysostom

b- He let him have favor in the sight of his people: "He let none of His words fall to the ground; And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord" (1 Samuel 3: 19, 20). The expression "from Dan to Beersheba" means (from the far north to the far south); namely, all over the country (Judges 20: 1).

c- God began to appear to proclaim Samuel Himself in Shiloh, by His word, to put an end to a period of darkness, during which "the word of God was rare" (1 Samuel 3: 1).

CHAPTER 4

LOSS OF THE ARK OF GOD

Having gone out to battle against the Philistines, without sanctifying their life, nor asking God's counsel, The Israelites were defeated. Instead of repenting, and returning to God, they carried the ark of God to the battle with the two corrupt priests 'Hophni' and 'Phinehas,' sons of Eli the high priest. The ark was captured from them, Hophni and Phinehas were killed, thirty thousand foot soldiers fell, and the neck of Eli was broken and died on that day.

- 1- Capture of the ark of the covenant 1 – 11.**
- 2- Death of Eli the high priest 12 – 18.**
- 3- Birth of Ichabod, son of Phinehas 19 – 22.**

1- CAPTURE OF THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

In the book of Judges 13: 1, it was said that God delivered the children of Israel into the hand of the Philistines for 40 years; The events mentioned here probably happened during that period. The Philistines encamped in Aphek, and the Israelites beside Ebenezer opposite them.

'Aphek' is a Hebrew word that probably means (strength) or (castle); there were 5 cities that carried that same name; the city mentioned here is Canaanite, captured by Joshua (Joshua 12: 18). The Philistines encamped in it twice to fight against Israel: once in the time of Eli the high priest (1 Samuel 4: 1), and another time in the days of king Saul (1 Samuel 29: 4). In its location nowadays exists a city by the name of 'Ras-El-Ein'. That city was rebuilt in the first century B C by Herode, and, after him, was called by his son Antipatris. There,, the apostle Paul spent a night on his way from Jerusalem to Caesarea (Acts 23: 31).

'Ebenezer' is a Hebrew word meaning (the Stone of help). It was so called, 20 years after the events mentioned, as Samuel set there a memorial stone, between 'Mizpah' and 'Shen,' south-east of Aphek, saying, "*Thus far the Lord has helped us*" (1 Samuel 7: 12).

As they joined battle, Israel was partly defeated by the Philistines, who killed about 4000 men of the Israelites (1 Samuel 4: 2). When the people returned to the camp -and here, we hear about the people and not about the men of valor, as they entered the battle unprepared, beside their horrible corruption - the elders of Israel said:

"Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?" (1 Samuel 4: 3)

If they realized that it was because of their corruption, and their deviation from God, and returned to Him in repentance, He would have dwelt in their midst as the secret of their victory; But what happened was a cover-up of the corruption, by carrying the ark of the covenant, hoping it would save them from their enemies. They brought it from Shiloh together with the corrupt priests Hophni and Phinehas. This was expressed by the Psalmist in his saying:

“Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God, and did not keep His testimonies; They were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their carved images. When God heard this, He was furious, and greatly abhorred Israel; So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He had placed among men. He delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy’s hand. He also gave His people over to the sword, and was furious with His inheritance. The fire consumed their young men, and their maidens had no wedding songs. Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows could not weep” (Psalm 78: 56 - 64)

Why did God allow that to happen?

a- Bringing the ark of the covenant did not imply a return to God in repentance, but a leaning on the outer formalities of worship. This happened several times along the generations: In the days of the prophet Jeremiah, the leaders and the people assumed, despite God’s numerous and repeated warnings through his prophets, that God would never deliver Jerusalem - being the city of the Lord - nor His temple. Instead of repenting, they came to sing: *“The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these”* (Jeremiah 7: 4); They trusted *“in lying words that cannot profit”* (Jeremiah 7: 8). Yet Jerusalem was captivated and the temple was destroyed. That was also mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel, who said: *“The glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple, and stood over the cherubim”* (Ezekiel 10: 18; 11: 22).

St. Augustine says: [*“He (God) forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh; the tent which He had placed among men”* (Psalm 78: 60). He made it clear, why He forsook His tent, by saying *“which He had placed among men”*. As they became unworthy to have God dwelling among them, He forsook the tent which He set, not for His own sake but for theirs.

“He delivered His strength (their virtue and beauty) into captivity; The ark itself, that they assumed to be unconquerable..., that He called (their virtue and beauty), He delivered into captivity. Later on, as they lived in wickedness, and took pride in the temple of the Lord, He shook them through a prophet who said to them: “Go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I sat My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel” (Jeremiah 7: 12). *“He also gave His people over to the sword, and was furious with His inheritance”* (Psalm 78: 62)

“The fire (of divine wrath) consumed their young men, and their maidens had no wedding songs (because of the enemy)” (Psalm 78: 63).

“Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows could not weep” (psalm 78: 64). The wife of one of Eli’s sons became a widow, and could not mourn for her husband, as she died while giving birth to a child (1 Samuel 4: 10)] and could not even attend the funeral.

b- Hophni and Phinehas came to the battle with the ark of the covenant. They were corrupt and corrupters of the people, and assumed that God is committed to fight for the people,

at least for the sake of the ark, that represents His divine presence. Indeed, God declared that He is capable of protecting the ark, and of defending His glory; yet, this would not happen except after chastising the people together with their priests for their corruption.

Speaking of how God delivered the ark and the tabernacle into the hands of the enemies and how He chastised His people and priests, the Psalmist added: *“Then the Lord awoke as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man who shouts because of wine. And He beat back His enemies; He put them into a perpetual reproach”* (Psalm 78:65, 66). **St. Augustine** comments on this, saying: [*“He struck His enemies in concealed places”*; namely, those who rejoiced because they were capable of capturing the ark, were struck in backward places (tumors)...They loved backward things, so they were justly struck in those places].

c- As the ark of God came into the camp, all the people of Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook. When the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said: *“God has come into the camp”* (1 Samuel 4: 7).

They shouted with their tongues and throats, until the earth shook; Yet their hearts, were still without repentance, and their corrupt bodies unshaken. That is why the Philistines, though frightened,, instead of retreating, got more zealous and fought stronger; and temporarily defeated the Israelites.

The people shouted with their tongues not realizing that the true conquest, is not through the shouts of the tongue, but through the purity of the heart, and the obedience to God; according to the words in the book of Deuteronomy: *“Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.... The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; They shall come out against you one way, and flee before you seven ways”* (Deuteronomy 28: 1, 7). *“But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God,...The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; You shall go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth”* (Deuteronomy 28: 15, 25).

That is why the Psalmist also says: *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear”* (Psalm 66: 18).St. Augustine comments on the words of the Psalmist, saying: [Be a condemner to yourself within yourself; Look into your secret place, in the depths of your heart; where you are alone with God; There, let iniquity be abhorrent to you, to please God].

2- DEATH OF ELI, THE HIGH PRIEST

As the great struck took place: [the defeat of the people; the death of 30000 men; the death of the two priests; and the capture of the ark of God], a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line, and came to Shiloh, about 20 miles far from Ebenezer, to tell the news. He came before the high priest with his clothes torn and dirt on his head, to find Eli sitting on a seat by the

wayside watching, “*for his heart trembled for the ark of God*” (1 Samuel 4: 13). It is obvious that Eli did not approve of taking the ark of God to the battle line; yet he submitted to the will of the people.

As the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out. When Eli - the 90 years old man - heard from the messenger, of how Israel was defeated, of the great slaughter among the people, and of the death of his two sons, he was shocked; Yet when he heard of the capture of the ark of God, he fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate being unable to bear this news in particular and his neck was broken and died, for the man was old and heavy.

He had judged Israel for 40 years (1 Samuel 4: 18); Yet his slothfulness towards his two sons to the sanctities of God, caused him to loose every fruit, and put a tragic end to his life.

3- BIRTH OF ICHABOD, SON OF PHINEHAS

The wife of Phinehas called her child “Ichabod,” meaning (the son of glory), saying: “*The glory has departed from Israel for the ark of God has been captured*” (1 Samuel 4: 22). That was a misunderstanding on her part; as actually the ark of God had been captured, because the glory had departed from Israel. Israel lost its glory, through his deviation from God; That is why God delivered His ark to the enemies, to chastise both parties together.

Capturing the ark was more painful to her soul, than the death of her father-in-law and of her man. She realized that the death of her father-in-law, her man, and her child’s loss of his father before his birth are all incomparable to the people’s loss of capturing the ark, a sign that God forsook His people.

CHAPTER 5

THE FALL OF DAGON BEFORE THE ARK OF GOD

God allowed the Philistines to capture the ark of the covenant, to chastise His people to make them realize that through corruption, they lost the dwelling of God in their midst. At the same time, God proclaimed His glory and might, when Dagon the god of the Philistines fell down before the ark of God, and when they were ravaged with tumors; so they decided to send it back.

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| 1- Dagon falls to the ground before the ark of God | 1 – 5. |
| 2- The people of Ashdod ravaged with tumors | 6 – 8. |
| 3- The people of Gath ravaged with tumors | 9. |
| 4- The people of Ekron ravaged with tumors | 10. |
| 5- A unanimous decision to send the ark back | 11 – 12. |

1- DAGON FALLS TO THE GROUND BEFORE THE ARK OF GOD

“If we are faithless, He (God) remains faithful” (2 Timothy 2: 13). If, because of His people’s corruption, God delivered His ark of the covenant into the hands of pagans, He, despite all this, revealed His glory and might, through the fall of Dagon their god to the ground. The people Of Ashdod should have realized that there is no partnership of God and Dagon in one place; and that they should have chosen one and forsaken the other. When they disregarded that, they came in the morning to find their god fallen on his face with his head and both the palms of his hands broken off on the threshold of the house. God confirmed to them that their god is headless and handless, incapable of leadership or control.

If we have set in our heart or mind, a god like Dagon like the love of wealth, of carnal lust, of revenge, or of vain glory..., the entrance of Jesus, the Lord of glory into our depths would destroy Dagon, would bring it down to the ground, and would cut his head and hands on the threshold, to be treaded upon under our feet. **St. Augustine** says: [Let the ark of God enter into your heart; and let Dagon fall. Listen now and learn to yearn for God; Be prepared to learn, how to behold God].

They found Dagon’s head and hands cut on the threshold (1 Samuel 5: 4), a sign of despise; as those organs were treaded upon by feet. So is every thought and action, that is adversary to the will of God; they may show haughtiness for some time; yet their end will be humiliation before all.

‘Dagon’ is a name derived from the Hebrew word ‘Dag,’ namely (a fish) - a Philistine god, with human-like head and hands; while the torso is that of a fish. It was considered to be a god of fertility, as the sea teamed with fish. That god did not originally represent the national worship of the Philistines; but was a Semitic god, adopted by the Philistines after the Semitic

invasion of Canaan. The worship of the god 'Dagon' or 'Dagon' in the region of Mesopotamia, goes back to the third dynasty of 'Ur' during the 25 Th. Century B C; Its worship was known among the Amorites and the Assyrians. Jonathan destroyed the temple of Dagon in Ashdod, in the days of the Mecabians.

The Philistines brought the ark of the covenant into the house of Dagon,, the greatest of their gods as a sign of their victory, not only over the Israeli people, but over their God as well; assuming that Dagon has triumphed over the God of Israel, who brought them out of Egypt; Yet that boasting did not last long.

With pride and arrogance, the Philistines placed the ark of the covenant - being aware that it represents the divine presence - in the house of Dagon. So God spoke to them in the language they could understand; namely that of sickness and catastrophe; He had struck the people of Ashdod with tumors, and that of rats.

2- THE PEOPLE OF ASHDOD RAVAGED WITH TUMORS

“The hand of God was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and he ravaged them and struck them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory” (1 Samuel 5: 6)

Although the ark of the covenant is the cause of conquest and blessing to believers, if they lead a life of sanctity by the Lord, it would become itself, a cause of misery to non-believers. Here we remember the saying of Saint Paul the apostle : *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 1: 18); and, *“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and to others the aroma of life to life”* (2 Corinthians 2: 15, 16).

'Tumors' here mean a kind of plague that ravages the lymphatic glands and the thigh.

In the Septuagint version, it was mentioned that the region was uncommonly struck by rats that devoured its crops.

As the people of Ashdod felt the heaviness of God's hand on them and their god Dagon, they sent to the lords of the Philistines to seek their counsel, concerning what they should do with the 'Ark of the God of Israel'. Most probably, the lords of the 5 main cities: Ashdod, Gaza, Escalon, Gath, and Ekron, met and decided to send the ark to Gath with the assumption that moving it from the house of their god would cause God to lift up His wrath from them. They did not realize that it was not possible for the ark to stay in their midst, as long as Dagon or any other god occupied their inner hearts. They might have thought that what occurred in the house of Dagon was just a coincidence; That is why they intended to move the ark, to make sure of its actual role and capability.

'Ashdod,' might have meant (power). Its name nowadays is still 'Ashdod,' and is 19 miles south-west of 'Lid'; midway between Gaza and Jaffa. In the old times it was a city annexed to a port: one of the five great cities of Philistine; and a center of the worship of the god

‘Dagon’; Its walls were broken down by Isaiah, king of Judah (2 Chronicles 26); put under siege, then seized by Tertan - the Assyrian Commander, during the reign of ‘Sargon’ (Isaiah 20: 1); threatened by Amos (1: 8), Zephaniah (2: 4), and by Zechariah (9: 6).

Some of its inhabitants opposed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in the days of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 4: 7); and some of the Jews returning from captivity, who took wives from it, were severely punished by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13: 23, 24). The Mecabians invaded it twice during the second century B C; and in the second time they destroyed the temple of Dagon (1 Mk. 5: 68; 10: 84). In Ashdod, the Apostle Philip preached the gospel (Acts 8: 4).

3- THE PEOPLE OF GATH RAVAGED WITH TUMORS

‘Gath,’ a Hebrew word meaning a (winepress), was one of the 5 great cities of Philistine: Ashdod, Gath, Ekron, Gaza, and Ashkelon (1 Samuel 6: 17). Most scholars believe that its present day location is ‘Erak-El-Manshiah,’ 7 miles west of ‘Beth Gebrin’. It was one of the cities of the Anakim (Joshua 11: 22), where the giants were located (2 Samuel 21: 22; 1 Chronicles 20: 21), of whom ‘Goliath’ was the most famous (1 Samuel 17). Having been one of the fortified cities of the Philistines, it was seized by King David (2 Samuel 15: 18; 1 Chronicles 18: 1); then changed hands between the Philistines (1 Kings 2: 39), Judah (2 Chronicles 11: 8), Aram (2 Kings 12: 17), then Judah (2 Kings 13: 25), and again the Philistines, etc.

As the ark of God was taken to Gath, the plague was more severe, to let the Philistines realize that what happened to them was not a matter of coincidence, but a divine chastisement.

*“The hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction;
and He struck the men of the city, both small and great, and tumors broke
out of them”*

(1 Samuel 5: 9)

4- THE PEOPLE OF EKRON RAVAGED WITH TUMORS

The northernmost of the 5 great cities of the Philistines. Today, it is a small village called ‘Aker,’ on a hill, 12 miles away from ‘Jaffa’. At the beginning, it has been a portion of Judah’s inheritance; and was given later to Dan, then resealed by the Philistines. Its inhabitants worshipped ‘Baal-Zebub’ (2 Kings 1: 2); it was threatened by Amos (1: 8), by Zephaniah (2: 4), by Jeremiah (25: 20), by Zechariah (9: 5); and given by Alexander the Great to Jonathan as a reward for his conquest of Apollonius (1 Mk. 10: 89).

As the ark of God was carried to it against the will of its inhabitants, the hand of God was so heavy there, that *“the cry of the city went up to heaven”* (1 Samuel 5: 12); and they demanded the ark to be sent back to its own place.

5- A UNANIMOUS DECISION TO SEND THE ARK BACK

That decision was a testimony to God’s holiness and might. It is as though God used even their wickedness to enlighten them. From the beginning they were aware that He is a mighty God

who miraculously saved His people from the Egyptians (1 Samuel 4: 7, 8); yet they tried to challenge Him, to realize finally that they are helpless before Him. God realized what was said on the tongue of His prophet Isaiah: *“I am the Lord, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another”* (Isaiah 42: 8).

CHAPTER 6

THE RETURN OF THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

The ark of God remained in the midst of the pagans for seven months to confirm to all, that what happened to the idol Dagon, and to the people (the tumors and the destructive rats), was not a mere coincidence, but was actually a sign of God's wrath on the pagans. It was also to let the believers offer an honest repentance, truly yearning to enjoy the presence of the ark of God in their midst.

- 1- Returning the ark with a trespass offering 1 – 5.**
- 2- Returning the ark on a new cart 6 – 16.**
- 3- A testimonial stone in the field of Joshua 17 – 18.**
- 4- Striking the men of Beth Shemesh 19 – 21.**

1- RETURNING THE ARK OF GOD WITH A TRESPASS OFFERING

“The ark of God was in the country of the Philistines seven months”

(1 Samuel 6: 1)

We do not know how the Israelites felt about the events of those days; but it was most probably a feeling of weakness and humiliation, for the death of many including their two priests, and for their loss of dignity. Days, weeks, and even months, have passed with no news about the ark; yet God was working to confirm His ability of salvation. The pagans felt awe towards God; so they called their priests and diviners, saying, *“What shall we do with the ark of the Lord? Tell us how we should send it to its place?”* (1 Samuel 6: 2).

God used even the pagan priests and the diviners to testify to Him; and as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [The enemies themselves testified to him and their diviners expressed his voice).

The diviners were those who claim their ability to know future things through natural signs, like the flying of birds, the intestine of a slain beast, looking at a liver, at arrows, into the water in a glass, calling the spirits of the dead, reading the lines of a palm, or following the path of stars, etc.... Those customs have been common among the ancient eastern peoples, and still are in several eastern countries. Through divination, some people choose their spouses, or the time to go to war; something that is forbidden by the Holy Book (Leviticus 20: 27; Deuteronomy 18: 9 - 14; Jeremiah 14: 14; Ezekiel 13: 8 - 9).

The diviners' counsel, was not to send away the ark of God empty, but to return it with a trespass offering; proclaiming that they did Him wrong, and that what they are suffering is a chastisement, and a fruit of their trespass toward the Lord. As a material and symbolic payoff to what they did to His people, they requested that each of the 5 great cities should take part in that

offering, in order that the confession of guilt would be unanimous, and that the offering would be on behalf of the whole people.

It had been the custom of pagans, in order to get well, to present an image of the sick part of the body to the gods; That is why the diviners requested the offering of 5 golden tumors and 5 golden rats; Yet the people exceeded that, and presented a number of golden rats according to the number of fortified cities, and even the desert villages; for the plague had been general (1 Samuel 6: 18).

The pagans realized two facts:

a- That their trespass offering is not a bribe, for God could not be bribed by gold or silver; but it is rather a proclamation and a testimony to His glory saying: *“You shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, from your gods, and from your lands”* (1 Samuel 6: 5)

b- It was to no avail to harden their hearts, as did the Pharaoh of Egypt who perished (1 Samuel 6: 6); as the news of what occurred in Egypt 350 years before was widespread all over the nations of the Middle East.

2- RETURNING THE ARK ON A NEW CART

The Philistine made a new cart, took two milk cows which have never been yoked, hitched the cows to the cart, to carry the ark of God and the trespass offering. Although they shut their calves up at home, the two cows headed straight for the road to Beth Shemesh, went along the highway, bowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left; and the Lords of the Philistines went after them behind the ark of the Lord.

What a marvelous scene that testifies to God’s love for His people! However long has been the sojourn of the ark in the land of the enemies, God still yearns to dwell amid His people. He led the two milk cows, against their natural tendency to join their calves, to go straight toward the people of God. How amazing is God’s mercy toward us; He yearns to forget our iniquity, to rest and dwell in us!

The new cart and the two cows that were never been yoked, reveal how, even the pagans realize that God does not accept the wavering between the two sides; He wants the heart that carries Him, to be completely His; not to mix between the love of God and that of sin; or between the kingdom of God and that of the devil. And as the apostle Paul says: *“What communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? “* (2 Corinthians 6: 14). The scholar Origin says: [The kingdom of God is not to be set with that of evil. That is why, if it is our will to be under the reign of God, *“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body”* (Romans 6: 12); Do not obey its commandments, when it provokes our souls to do the works of the flesh (Galatians 5: 19); works that are foreign to God].

The pagans intended to make a new cart, and to take two milk cows that were never been yoked... We saw that in the statute of the *“red heifer without blemish,... on which a yoke has*

never come” (Numbers 19: 2); and how, the Lord Christ entered into Jerusalem, on a colt on which no one has sat (Mark 11: 2).

The priests and the diviners requested, that the cart with the ark of God, should be let to go free, to see if it would go up the road to its own territory in ‘Beth Shemesh’ - a city of priests on the border of Judah (Joshua 21: 16), 12 miles south-east of Ekron called ‘Eon-Shams’ nowadays.

3- A TESTIMONIAL STONE IN THE FIELD OF JOSHUA

If the cart represents the Church of the New Testament that embraces two groups: those of Jewish and of Gentile origin who all, by the Spirit of God, have become ‘new’ in the Lord, as though “have never been yoked,” Why did the cart head straight to the field of Joshua of Beth-Shmesh (1 Samuel 6: 18)?

St. Justin answers this, by holding a comparison between the entrance of the people into the land of Canaan, under the leadership of Joshua, and the entrance of the new cart with the ark of God into the field of Joshua, saying: [The two cows that have never been yoked, did not head to the place from which the ark was originally taken, but to the field of a particular man by the name of ‘Joshua’... a name derived from ‘Jesus’... which reveals that they were drawn by the power of the name, as it previously happened with the people, remaining from those who came out of Egypt, when they were led to the promised land, by him who carried that same name Joshua (Jesus).

The stone on which the ark of the covenant was set in the field of Joshua, remained as a testimonial for the future generations, to God’s work with His people and His care for them.(1 Samuel 6: 18).

4- STRIKING THE PEOPLE OF BETH-SHMESH

a- Those people were expected to fall on their faces once they see the ark of God, to offer repentance to God, and to call the priests and Levites to carry the ark in celebration. But they, disregarding the law, crowded around the ark so that fifty thousand and seventy men of them were struck dead. The Philistines, despite their ignorance, had honored the ark of God, more so than the people to whom clear statutes have been given concerning it. likewise, how often have we trespassed the sanctuaries of God, slothfully approached the divine sacraments, and disrespectfully listened to the word of God?!

b- The Book discerns between the 50, 000 and the 70, who were struck dead because they looked at the ark; probably because the 50, 000 were of the children of Israel, who came from everywhere to celebrate its return; while the 70 men were of the people of Bet-Shmesh alone. Some believe though, that the old Hebrew versions mentioned only the seventy.

The ark did not return to Shiloh, probably because it was utterly destroyed by the Philistines; as is clear from the excavations, as well as in the book of Jeremiah 7: 12.

The ark was taken from Beth-Shmesh to 'Kirjath Jearim' (City of forests), on the border of Judah and Benjamin, that was related to Judah. It was probably 'the village of grapes,' also known as 'Abaghosh,' 9 miles west of Jerusalem. The ark of the covenant remained there until king David moved it into the house of 'Obed-Edom, the Hittite (1 Chronicles 13: 5, 13; 2 Chronicles 1: 4).

CHAPTER 7

REPENTANCE IS THE WAY TO *Victory*

The prophet Samuel had been preparing the people for repentance for the last 20 years; and finally he called for a collective repentance from all the heart, for a complete return to God, and for a rejection of every foreign worship. Now after praying and fasting, and as Samuel was offering up a burnt offering on their behalf, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel;

“But the Lord thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel” (Samuel 7: 10)

The prophet Samuel was presented in this chapter, both as a judge, and a representative of the divine judgment, like Moses (Jeremiah 15: 1), and Joshua (Joshua 24; 1 Samuel 12), yet with a higher level of intercession.

This chapter is considered to be an introduction to the following one, that demonstrates the corruption of the royal system, set for the sake of human appearances.

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1- The ark of God in the house of ‘Abinadab’ | 1 – 2. |
| 2- The heartily and practical return and work for God | 3 – 4. |
| 3- Praying, fasting, and sacrifice offering | 5 – 9. |
| 4- The Lord, the Grantor of victory | 10 – 14. |
| 5- Samuel judging at several locations | 15 – 17. |

1- THE ARK OF GOD IN THE HOUSE OF ABINADAB

The ark of God invoked terror, not only in the Greater cities of the Philistines, but also in ‘Beth-Shemesh’. As for the inhabitants of ‘Kirjath Jearim,’ they realized that it represented the presence of God; a consuming fire for the apostates and deviants; but a keeper, and a secret of joy and comfort, to those who love him. That is why they came with joy, and brought it with respect into the house of ‘Abinadab,’ where it remained for a hundred years, until it was moved by the prophet David (2 Samuel 6: 1 - 4).

The word ‘Abinadab’ means (The father of generosity or nobility); as though it is not possible to enjoy the divine presence, unless the inner soul carries a kind of generosity in giving. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [There is nothing better in making us closer to God and to His likeness]. And St. Isaac, the Syrian says: [Give to the poor; then come to offer your prayers with daresness; namely, speak with God, as a son speaks to his father; as there is nothing to draw the heart closer to God like mercy].

The ark was put in a house on the hill, namely on a height; and Eleazar, son of Abinadab, whose name means “God supports” was consecrated to guard it. Most probably he was a Levite and not a priest.

The ark was in Kerijath Jearim, while the tabernacle was in Nob, with no ark; what implied that worship there, has been incomplete, a proclamation of the state of spiritual slothfulness and abasement, to which the people have reached.

The prophet Samuel kept going around among the people, to prepare them for a life of repentance, and for the return to God.

2- A HEARTILY AND PRACTICAL RETURN AND WORK FOR GOD

After the battle of Aphek, in which the two sons of Eli the high priest, and Eli himself died, the prophet Samuel started his calm and constructive work. He made his residence in Ramah, where some young men gathered together around him, to form the nucleus of the first school of prophets. During that period Samuel got married and begot two sons; he called the first “Joel,” meaning (Jehovah is God), and the second ‘Abijah,’ meaning (The Lord is my Father).

At that time, the ark of the covenant returned to Israel, and was put in Kirjath Jearim, while the tabernacle was moved to Nob, where the religious rites were interrupted. As for Samuel, he persisted on his calm and constructive work, on the individual level, and on his care for the youth; beside practicing a life of prayers. Through that persistent effort, hearts were opened with love for the Lord, and accordingly, with brotherly love and the spirit of unity. After 20 years for the ark of the Lord in Kireath Jearim, Samuel found the circumstances convenient to call for a collective repentance, and a return to God, and to reveal the secret behind the failure of the people, as well as the way to triumph. Samuel spoke to the whole house of Israel; namely to the whole congregation, saying:

“If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreth from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines”(1 Samuel 7: 3)

The secret of the weakness of man is his wavering between the two ways, and not returning to the Lord with all his heart, holding fast to the appearances of outer worship, while harboring in his depths a hidden god, like the ego, or love of the world, etc. The triumph necessitates from man, to sanctify his heart, to straighten his goal in life, and to cut off, by the cross of the Lord of glory, all what is foreign in his heart; so that the Lord would set in it His joyful heavenly Kingdom.

So the children of Israel put away every foreign worship, specially the ‘Baals’ and the ‘Ashtoreth’.

The ‘Baal’ means the (master) or the (lord), namely the proprietor of someone or something. It is not a proper name, but a title used for worship, under several and numerous forms and ways. Of these were wooden, stone, or metal statues, on which the image of the sun was carved (Isaiah 27: 9), being the greatest in nature, and the source of life. While the ‘Ashetoreth’ - the plural of ‘Ashetor’—and which was considered to be a spouse or a wife to the ‘Baal,’ was worshipped by the Philistines through statutes on which images of the moon or of

Venus were carved; and worshipped as well by several nations, under numerous images and names. Ashetoreth was considered to be one of three goddesses of fertility; its worship rites embraced defilements and a spirit of looseness; certain priestesses were dedicated to practice harlotry in its temples.

The Jews often fell to the worship of the Baal and Ashetoreth; and set statues on heights, under every green tree, and sometimes even in the temple of God itself. It happened in certain times that girls and married women practiced harlotry for the sake of these gods; and mothers offered their children as human sacrifices, by placing the child over the brass statue, red through intense heat, amid the high noise of drums intended to make it difficult to hear the screams of the tortured child!!!

That is what man does, when deviated from God, the source of his life, sanctity, and fulfillment!

3- PRAYING, FASTING, AND SACRIFICE OFFERING

Repentance, together with what is attached to it, of change of the inner heart, and worship, is a personal thing that touches the life of a believer, and his hidden relationship with God. meanwhile, it is, a group practice; as said by the prophet Samuel: “*Gather all Israel to Mizpah*” (1 Samuel 7: 5); and by the apostle Paul: “*If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it*” (1 Corinthians 12: 26); and by the evangelist Luke: “*There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents*” (Luke 15: 10); as his repentance would support many on earth, and would motivate them to repent with him; while, with every fall and concealed looseness, we do wrong the whole congregation.

The heartily repentance also came to carry apparent actions:

- a- Putting away all the foreign gods (1 Samuel 7; 4).
- b- A collective gathering in Mizpah to worship with one spirit (1 Samuel 7: 4).
- c- The prophet Samuel prayed to God on their behalf (1 Samuel 7: 5).
- d- Drawing water and pouring it out before the Lord (1 Samuel 7: 6).
- e- A collective fasting (1 Samuel 7: 6).
- f- A confession of sins to God before the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 7: 6).
- g- A need for a burnt offering to recon ciliate with God (1 Samuel 7: 9).

The prophet Samuel requested the people to gather together in ‘Mizpah,’ which means (Watching tower) - a city in Benjamin (Joshua 18: 26), thought to be ‘Tel-El-Nasbeh,’ excavated by Bade in the years 1926 - 1935, 8 miles north of Jerusalem, while some still believe it to be the homeland village of ‘Prophet Samuel,’ located 2935 feet above the sea level on the highest summits near Jerusalem, and 5 miles north-west of Jerusalem.

In it 'Saul' was chosen a king (1 Samuel 10: 17 - 21); it was fortified by king 'Asa' (1 Kings 15: 22); and in it 'Gedaliah' was killed (2 Kings 25: 23, 25; Jeremiah 40: 6 - 15); and the people gathered together in the days of Judah the Maccabean (1 Macc. 3: 46).

The prophet Samuel made prominent, the role of God in the life of His people; As they gathered together for repentance, they needed the hidden hand of God to work in them; so he says: "*I will pray to the Lord for you*" (1 Samuel 7: 5). Here, the role of the prophet Samuel, as a spiritual Shepherd, is likewise prominent; knowing that he would not be able to lead the people of God without praying; In other words, his leading role is based mainly on praying, in order that God Himself would be the hidden Leader, and the Guide, who works in His people to the benefit of His Kingdom, without deviation. That is why **St. John Chrysostom** says about the priest: [Whoever, through necessity, is called to be an ambassador, not on behalf of a single city, but of the whole world, would supplicate to God to forgive the sins of all, not only the living, but also those who departed... The priest, because he is entrusted over the whole world, and has become a father to all people, should, in his private and public prayers, raise supplications for lifting up wars and troubles everywhere, for peace and calmness for everyone, and for the healing of every sick].

"So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the Lord" (1 Samuel 7: 6)

What is this water which they drew and poured out before the Lord? Some believe it to be a reference to pouring out of the hearts in repentance before the Lord; according to the words of the prophet David: "*You people; Pour out your heart before Him*" (Psalm 62: 8); or a sign of admitting weakness, having become like water poured out over the earth, that could not be recollected except by a divine hand. Others believe it to be a confirmation of an oath; as they would not retract from what they pledged in their repentance, in the same way that water poured out on the ground could not be regathered; While still others see in that action, a reference to the great day of atonement (Leviticus 16), when the Spirit of God is poured out over believers, and would dwell in them.

As the prophet Samuel prayed for them, they shared his prayer by proclaiming their repentance, through pouring out water, together with fasting and confession; saying: "*We have sinned against the Lord*" (1 Samuel 7: 6)

At that time, the prophet Samuel used to act as a judge between them, not through authority, but after long and continuous prayers, and calm spiritual work followed by a collective repentance and a return to God. He laid down sound spiritual foundations, in order to act as a judge with a comfortable conscience, for an obvious spiritual goal, to the benefit of the Kingdom of God.

4- THE LORD: GRANTOR OF TRIUMPH

Together with every constructive spiritual strife, the evil one gets agitated; not for any fault on man's part, nor that committed by the congregation, but as a sign of the rejection of light by darkness; and the opposition of God's Kingdom by the devil.

The Lords of the Philistines gathered together and went up against Israel (1 Samuel 7: 7). The children of Israel, fearing of a repetition of what happened in Aphek (1 Samuel 4), as they were practicing repentance, under a sound spiritual leadership, asked the prophet Samuel not to cease to cry out to the Lord to save them... Samuel offered a burnt offering to the Lord, as a sign of complete surrender of the people's souls to the hand of the Lord. God responded through natural phenomena - thunder or an earthquakes - and granted triumph and conquest to Israel, who pursued the Philistines and drove them back as far as below Beth Car (meaning: house of sheep), west of Mizpah; thought to be 'Beth Karem' or 'Ein-El-kroum' nowadays.

With every spiritual growth, we encounter a new war that would lead up to our ultimate coronation, as long as we are in God's hand; according to the words of the apostle Peter: *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory, at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1: 6, 7).

Triumph had been realized at the same location, where defeat happened before, and where the ark of God had been captured (1 Samuel 4: 1); So Samuel set a great stone, and called it 'Ebenezer'; namely the (stone of help), to become a testimonial to the work of God in the life of His people who returned to Him. That memorial served to continuously renew the spirit of the people, to keep them from getting deviated from God; Through it, every believer remembered the secret of defeat, as well as of triumph; As at the same location, Israel lost the ark of the covenant, fell into shame and humiliation; they were also granted a conquest and triumph, by the mighty hand of God.

Jesus, the Lord of glory says: *"If these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out"* (Luke 19: 40)... Samuel set that stone to revive the life of partnership in whoever looks at it.

After having utterly enslaved Israel, the spirit of the Philistines was broken up; they never again entered into the territory of Israel to occupy, though, in isolated occasions, they attacked certain locations, and took some Israelites captives. Their defeat in Mizpah had been the beginning of successive defeats.

That conquest probably gave the chance to restore the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel, from Ekron to Gath; and also to restore peace between Israel and the Amorites (1 Samuel 7: 14); to give the chance to people to live, to a certain extent, in an atmosphere of calmness and peace.

5- SAMUEL JUDGING AT SEVERAL LOCATIONS

The prophet Samuel is considered to be the real spiritual reformer at that time when the worship of the 'Baal' came utterly to an end; in between the time when the royal system started, up to the beginning of the reign of King Solomon.... It is to be noticed that Samuel did not restore the glory of 'Shiloh,' nor set a central location of worship, but was judging to the people in various locations, like 'Bethel,' 'Gilgal,' and 'Mizpah'. The reason for that was probably because the people wrongly assumed that a central location for worship was the secret of strength, regardless of the inner renewal of the soul. Samuel intended to confirm that the secret of strength is the hidden relationship, in the heart with God, without disregarding the group worship, with the spirit of unity and love.

Things remained that way, until king Solomon established the only temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, by a divine command, to gather all together with one spirit around one temple for the Lord.

THE SECOND SECTION

KING SAUL

(1 SAMUEL 8 TO 1 SAMUEL 15)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1- Israel demands a king | 8. |
| 2- Saul chosen to be king | 9-10. |
| 3- War against the Ammonites | 11. |
| 4- Warning against rebellion | 12. |
| 5- Rejection of Saul | 13-15. |

THE BEGINNING OF THE ROYAL SYSTEM

The people demanded from the prophet Samuel to set a king for them like the other nations. Despite what that request implied of rejection of God's reign and of Samuel, God granted them their heart quest; a king was set for them, who succeeded for a certain time.

They wanted to be like other nations; Yet the royal system had various concepts: In Egypt, the Pharaoh was looked at, as a god, who returns to his domain after death. In Assyria and Babylon, a king - a civil as well as a religious head – though seen as a mortal being, was regarded, as beloved to gods. even if he erred, his word was considered to be a law that had to be obeyed. As for Israel, a king was considered to be a human being who should govern according to the grace of God, anointed by the high priest, but had no right to priestly work; The divine law was above all, and he had to submit to it and respect it. That is why, when Saul offered a burnt offering, when David took Uriah's woman, and when Ahab murdered Naboth the Jezreelite for his vineyard, they were all condemned and punished. King David also acknowledged the right of prophet Nathan to accuse him of trespassing.

The prophet Samuel anointed David a king, but he died before he later started his reign. David enjoyed the promise that his seed would eternally inherit the kingdom; and set the foundations on which the good kings were to down root their kingdom.

CHAPTER 8

ISRAEL DEMANDS A KING

The people were preoccupied with the appearances of greatness and luxury of the kings of the surrounding Gentile nations; and misunderstood that as glory and dignity, which they were denied. They made use of Samuel's old age and the perversion of his two sons who did not follow his ways, to demand from Samuel to set for them a king to judge them like all the nations (1 Samuel 8: 5).

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1- Demanding a king | 1 – 5. |
| 2- Samuel got offended by that demand | 6. |
| 3- God heeds the people's voice, with a forewarning | 7 – 9. |
| 4- Samuel forewarns the people | 10 – 22. |

1- DEMANDING A KING

Some may probably ask: If the people did not demand a king, Would God have set them a kingdom?

a- We do not find, for the royal system, a true root in the Mosaic law except what came in Deuteronomy 17: 14 - 20. That probably presented a prophecy about setting a royal system in the promised land; and certain advises to the people, in case they chose a king, and certain criteria to which the king is committed, in order to lead, as is fitting for a member of the holy congregation.

b- The fault was not in the demand for a king, but it was in hastening the events, and in misunderstanding the royal system. Timewise, God planned to set for them a king, "whose heart is like that of God"; He allowed for 'Ruth' to come from the Gentiles, from whose descent, David would come as a prophet and a king. If they have waited a little more, they would have got a much better bargain, than what they demanded; and they would not have got Saul, who, though good looking, caused them great misery.

Concerning their concept of the royal system, they wished for a king to lead their army, instead of Prophet Samuel, the man of prayer. The king they got, led to their destruction instead of their edification and triumph. They also wished for a king to reign over them, to be succeeded by his descendants; while in the judge system, they could choose a leader for the army, with no commitment to an inheritable royal system.

Samuel, the prophet and judge, grew old, and made his two sons, 'Joel' and 'Abijah' judge over Israel in Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways; they went astray seeking dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice (1 Samuel 8: 1); It was fitting for him to chose more straightforward judges.

Why did not God rebuke Samuel for his sons' perversion, as He did with Eli? That was probably because Eli was a high priest, under whose authority his priest sons committed such

horrible sins and iniquities, punishable by killing according to the law. As for Samuel's two sons, on the other hand, their perversion - taking bribes - could have happened later in their career; They might have started well, then perverted by the lure of money. Besides, those two judged in Beersheba, and not with their father in Ramah; And as the position of judgment was not inheritable, their appointment could have been according to the people's quest.

The objection of the elders of Israel against the perversion of Samuel's two sons, reveals a live conscience on their part; contrary to those in the days of Eli the high priest, who never objected against his sons' horrible iniquities.

Appointing his two sons to judge in Beersheba in the south, while Samuel himself judged in Ramah in the north, indicates that the authority of Samuel covered the whole country, from north to south; and that then stable conditions prevailed.

Every leader should be alert against the love of money and tendency to take bribes, that corrupted the hearts of those two judges, and caused them, their father, and the whole people great trouble.

2- Samuel got offended by that demand

Samuel counted that demand of the people, as a rejection of him as a judge; while God counted it as a rejection of Him personally as their King; saying to Samuel His prophet:

"Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they had not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Samuel 8: 7)

How great was Samuel's wisdom; As a man of prayer, he did not get furious, nor rebuked them, but he sought instead the counsel and guidance of God, who comforted him. It is amazing how God told Samuel to heed the voice of the people in all that they say to him; how He holds high the human freedom; and how He responds to the collective demands. Although He reveals the truth to them, forewarning them of the consequences of their vain demand, He does not force them to abide to a certain system, but makes sure they understand the truth with their complete freedom.

3- GOD HEEDS THE PEOPLE'S VOICE WITH A FOREWARNING

Heeding their voice, does not imply His pleasure with their demand, but as the psalm says: *"He shall give you the desire of your heart"* (Psalm 37: 4). If the desire of our heart is heavenly, we shall enjoy the blessing of heaven; and if, on the other hand, it is not for our own benefit or edification, God would allow it to happen, for the sake of chastisement, according to the words of the psalm: *"And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul"* (Psalm 106: 15).

Although God responded to their demand, He clarified to them two facts:

(1) The first fact is that any rejection of His men is a rejection of Him; saying: *"For they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me"* (1 Samuel 8: 7). And Lord Jesus says to His

disciples: “*Who hears you hears Me, and who rejects you rejects Me; and who rejects Me, rejects Him who had sent Me*” (Luke 10: 16).

(**St. Augustine**)

- ❖ It is becoming of you to obey your Bishop without hypocrisy, honoring God who so demands. Who does not do that, is not deceiving the seen Bishop, but he is actually mocking the unseen God. This action does not concern man, but concerns God who knows everything.

St. Ignatius of Antioch

(2) The second fact is that choosing the royal system was actually not for their benefit; He explained to them, what to expect, of oppression and persecution on the hands of kings.

4- SAMUEL FOREWARNS THE PEOPLE

The prophet Samuel spoke plainly and frankly to the people, revealing to them the harmful consequences of their demand of a king that could be summarized as follows:

a- Their sons would be forced into military service, not for the sake of the people, but for the personal benefit of the king, as servants to him.

b- Their daughters would work for him, his family, and his men as cooks and bakers.

c- The best of their fields, their vineyards, and their vintage, would be taken and given to his officers and servants.

d- They would be forced to serve his own land.

e- In that day, when they cry out, because of the king whom they have chose for themselves, the Lord will not listen.

The people did not listen to his advice, but insisted on their demand (1 Samuel 8: 19); So Samuel dismissed the meeting, and sent everyone to his own city (1 Samuel 8: 22).

And the whole people was sure that Samuel would manage the matter.

CHAPTER 9

SAUL'S ENCOUNTER WITH SAMUEL

As the people were persistent on their demand, God set for them 'Saul,' the son of Kish the Benjamite; a handsome young man,

"There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulder upward he was taller than any of the people" (1 Samuel 9: 2)

God said to His prophet Samuel:

"You shall anoint him commander over My people Israel, that he may save My people from the hand of the Philistines; For I have looked upon My people, because their cry has come to Me" (1 Samuel 9: 16)

1- Saul and his father's lost donkeys **1 – 5.**

2- His servant counsels him to encounter the seer **7 – 14.**

3- Samuel reveals his message to Saul **15 – 27.**

1- SAUL AND HIS FATHER'S LOST DONKEYS

As the people demanded the prophet Samuel to set a king for them, 'Saul,' whose name means (a request or desire), was chosen a king. God gave them a king according to the desire of their heart - a tall handsome young man, though his heart was not upright.. as **St. Augustine** says: [The people were given Saul a king, not according to the will of God, but according to their own will].

The Holy Book revealed and did not disregard the good sides of Saul; but it seems that wealth and dignity were too much for him, having revealed his twisted inner heart, and his care for world dignity and outer appearances that led to his rejection by God, and the deprivation of his descent of inheriting his throne.

This chapter began by giving the genealogy of Saul, whom God introduced to the people as a king according to the desire of their heart. The Book demonstrated that he was of the tribe of Benjamin, a descendant of the 600 who survived the war, and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon (Judges 20: 47). It was a very few numbered tribe because of the wars by the other tribes against it (Judges 20), yet a mighty one of considerable dignity. As for Saul himself, as mentioned, he was a handsome young man, *"There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward, he was taller than any of the people"* (1 Samuel 9: 2).

The Holy Book narrates the events that ended by his anointment as a king - events that may seem haphazard or through mere chance, and of no real value. Yet, the divine inspiration reveals to us how God, the Almighty, can use all events, however valueless they may seem, to realize a divine plan for our sake; nothing is ever haphazard! Here we find Saul set forth to look

for the lost donkeys of his father 'Kish'; and though he did not find them,, he got anointed as a king; We find his servant advise him to meet the 'seer' (Samuel), having in his possession one fourth of a shekel of silver; And we find Saul and his servant meet some young women going out to draw water; then with the seer himself...; God actually was behind all of these incidents, though they seemed haphazard, to realize His plan. I wish we believe that every thing that happens in our life - however valueless it may seem – happens according to the ordinance of God, who cares for sparrows, and before whom "*the very hairs of your head are all numbered*" (Matthew 10: 30).

St. Basil says: [The donkeys got lost, to find a king for Israel].

Saul was called to become a king, when the donkeys - that symbolically refer to ignorance - were lost. Therefore, in order for us to reign together with the Lord Christ, we have to uproot ignorance from our souls, and to enjoy the light of knowledge. Let the donkeys get lost from our inner house, to be replaced by the light of knowledge in our depths, to reign together with our Christ, the true light in order to say with king David: "By Your light, O Lord, we behold the light". St. Clement of Alexandria says that the Gnostic; namely, the one with spiritual knowledge: [would never be troubled by anything... would never fear death, having the good conscience and the readiness to behold the heavenly hosts].

Although losing the donkeys was something of little significance, Saul did his best to look for them, passing through the mountains of Ephraim, the land of Shalisha, the land of Shaalim, the land of the Benjamites, and finally the land of Zuph...; and after three days of after a useless search, Saul said to the servant: "*Come, let us return, lest my father cease caring about the donkeys, and become worried about us*" (1 Samuel 9: 5). These are good sides of Saul: his serious search for the donkeys, his care for the feelings of his father, then his seeking the advice of others (the servant)...; these are attributes that makes man worthy of getting a leading role, lest for the pride of his heart, that later spoiled everything.

'Shalisha' means (triple); a province in the mountain of Ephraim, south-west of Shechem; and the land of 'Shaalim' means the land of (foxes); also a province in Ephraim.

According to the Jewish tradition, Saul's servant was 'Doeg the Edomite,' who became later on, one of Saul's closest aids, who executed the priests of Nob, together with their women, children, oxen, donkeys and sheep (1 Samuel 22: 7 - 23).

2- THE SERVANT ADVISES HIM TO ENCOUNTER THE SEER

Saul had the intention to return, lest his father would cease caring about the donkeys and become worried about them; but the servant advised him to consult the man of God, to "*show them the way that they should go*" (1 Samuel 9: 6)

The Jews used to call the prophet "*a man of God*" (Joshua 14: 6; 1 kings 12: 22; Chronicles 11: 22); as he worked on introducing the people to God, through prayers, the divine commandment, guidance, and prophecy, He is also called "*a spiritual man*" (Hosea 9: 7),

working under the leadership of the Spirit of God; and “a seer,’ having the grace of knowing things of the future, as though through an open spiritual insight.

Some critics claim that this Book includes two different sources of thought - as we saw in the introduction -saying that it is obvious from the conversation between Saul and his servant, that the former is not aware of the name of the seer and his place; though he dwells not so far from him; as though Samuel is some obscure seer, not known even to those living near him. Yet in the same book, we see the prophet Samuel as a great prophet, and a prominent judge who controls and guides the whole people...How could this be possible?

This may be explained by the fact that Saul lived in his village, not caring much for political nor spiritual affairs going on in his time; and unaware of the prominent figures, like many of those who live in the villages; especially with no or little means of media facilities.

I recall in the year 1953, after the onset of the Egyptian revolution, a school teacher who worked in higher Egypt wrote to his family in Cairo saying: Here, there are people who believe that the country is still under the reign of King Foad! not aware of his death, the succession of King Farouk on the throne, and his dethronement by the July 1952 revolution!

Another instance was mentioned by the author of the interpretation of the first Book of Samuel (Center of Christian Publications), about the Head of the Church of Scotland, who was once invited to give a speech in a public gathering. He had been a prominent figure at his time; his name, news, and photos, were often published in newspapers. When he was introduced by the chairman of the convention, to the chairman of the city council, who was at the same time a member of that church, he inquired “Who is the man? “. We always find in every age, those who do not care to know, even the name of a prominent religious figure.

We notice that Saul’s servant had more information about the seer, his position of honor, and his dwelling place than his master; saying: “*He is an honorable man; all that he says surely comes to pass*” (1 Samuel 9: 6).

Moreover, we should not overlook the fact that Samuel, like Eli the high priest, were both different from previous or even contemporary judges, in that they were committed to spiritual and every day guidance, but not to any military role; something that deprived them of being famous among young people, who are always more interested in the news of wars, conquests, and heroic incidents.

Saul asked his servant:

“If we go, what shall we bring the man? For the bread in our vessels are all gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?” (1 Samuel 9: 7)

Although Saul was ignorant of the identity and the dwelling of the seer, he had been raised since childhood, on not going to the house of God, nor encountering the man of God, empty-handed. The custom had been for everyone to offer from his food, harvest, as well as his money. That had been also the custom of the early church; It is said about the father of St. Tekla

Hemanot, the Ethiopian, who was a priest, that he never entered the church empty-handed... Every soul that encounters God in love, carries in its depth the nature of giving; rejoices and gets fulfilled with every giving to others.

The servant had one fourth of a shekel of silver - a very insignificant sum of money – but they were not embarrassed to present it; as the nature and way of giving are more important than their material value.

‘Ramah’ or ‘Marathi’ - the city of Samuel - was located on two hills (1 Samuel 1: 1); That is why it is said,

“As they went up the hill to the city, they met some young women going out to draw water, and said to them, ‘Is the seer her?. And they answered them and said, ‘Hurry now, for today he came to this city, because there is a sacrifice of the people today on the high place” (1 Samuel 9: 11, 12)

If Ramah, that is set on two hills, represents the church of Christ, set on the two Testaments: the Old and the New, so it is fitting for every heart to forsake what is at the foot of the hill, and to ascend by the Spirit of God, through the word of God - the two Testaments - to live in Ramah, as a seer who enjoys an insight, open to the secrets of God and His heavenly glories.

As to those women, going out to draw water, they represent men of the two Testaments: the New and the Old, who, through prophecies and evangelic preaching, are pointing to Christ, who walks before us, cares for us, opens before us the way of truth, and passes over with us to Golgotha, to enjoy the secrets of His saving sacrifice. The women said to them:

“As soon as you come into the city, you will surely find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. For the people will not eat until he comes, because he must bless the sacrifice; afterwards those who are invited will eat”(1 Samuel 9: 13)

Enjoying going up to the church of Christ, we shall behold our Christ who offers His body, a sacrifice of love, fulfilling His people. We shall behold Him bless the sacrifice by His pure hands, offer His guests to eat, to get fulfilled, and to abide in Him.

As the two men went up to the city, there was Samuel coming out toward them, on his way up to the high place (1 Samuel 9; 15). Likewise, as we enjoy the membership of the church, we are carried by Him up to Golgotha (the high place), in order to enjoy the secret of the sacrifice, the grantor of reconciliation, and the fulfiller of the soul.

4- SAMUEL REVEALS TO SAUL HIS MISSION

The Lord had revealed to the prophet Samuel, the day before Saul came, all what concerned the anointment of the latter, as a king or a commander over the people of Israel, (1 Samuel 9: 15). It is to be noticed that the word ‘commander,’ came in Hebrew as (nagid), meaning a (chief) or (prince); though the talk about him here, is as a (king); and the anointment itself, implied granting him royalty.

The prophet Samuel offered Saul hospitality, and revealed everything to him; saying:

“But as for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not be anxious about them, for they have been found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on you and on all your father’s house?” (1 Samuel 9: 20)

Humbly, Saul responded saying:

“Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak like this to me?” (1 Samuel 9: 21)

Here, it is fitting for us to halt a moment, to realize the gifts of God to man, who goes up to Ramah, namely to the church, and who meets with Samuel, the symbol of Christ.

a- The prophet told Saul that he should stop worrying about the lost donkeys; a matter of no importance, compared to the gifts he was to be given; But he proclaimed to him that the donkeys were found, and that he is to gain all the desire of Israel. Had not Christ asked us not to care for anything but the Kingdom of God, then every thing else will be given him in abundance? God with His love grants us in this life a hundredfold (Matthew 19: 29), in addition to our enjoyment of the Kingdom of God.

Let us then forsake our worries about the lost donkeys to get from God instead, chariots and horses; and what is of greater importance - His heavenly Kingdom. Let us forsake the lowly earthly donkeys, to receive the heavenly chariot of God.

b- Then Samuel took Saul and his servant and brought them into the hall, the high room dedicated for the banquets of sacrifices, and had them sit in the place of honor among those who were invited; there were about 30 persons. And Samuel instructed the cook to set the thigh with its upper part before Saul (1 Samuel 9: 22 - 24). Anyway, whoever forsakes worries about the earthly matters, will go up as though to the heavenly banquet, will enjoy the heavenly food, and will receive fulfillment and double honor.

c- At dawn, on the top of the house, Saul enjoyed a secret talk with the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 9: 25, 26). Likewise, as we enjoy the heavenly food, we enter into a secret relationship with our Christ, meet with Him early at dawn on the top, ascending to heaven, to behold His divine secrets, and to listen to His private talk about setting us as spiritual kings (Revelation 1: 6; 5: 10).

CHAPTER 10

ANOINTING SAUL AS A KING

Saul was anointed as a king and was given all possibilities to live in the fear of God, a strong leader who consummate the divine will, freely and with no obligation.

- 1- Anointing Saul as a king 1.
- 2- Samuel tells Saul what will happen to him 2 – 8.
- 3- “*Is Saul also among the prophets?*” “ 9 – 13.
- 4- His encounter with his uncle 14 – 16.
- 5- Announcing his reign in Mizpah 17 – 26.

1- ANOINTING SAUL AS A KING

“Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head, and kissed him and said: ‘Is it not because the Lord has anointed you commander over his inheritance?’” (1 Samuel 10: 1)

The prophet Samuel was annoyed when the people demanded a king like other nations; but once God accepted their request, Samuel submitted to it. After pouring the oil on Saul’s head, he kissed him and said: *“Is it not because the Lord has anointed you commander over His inheritance?”*. He readily and humbly kissed him, teaching us the spirit of submission; and as the apostle St. Peter says: *“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of those who do good”* (1 Peter 2: 13, 14).

He anointed him by the flask of oil by which priests, prophets, and the kings are anointed to be counted as ‘the Lord’s anointed,’ being symbols of the Lord Christ, in whom, alone, the three positions are combined. In the old Testament, the priests were from the tribe of Levi alone; the kings were from the tribe of Judah (David and his seed); none would enjoy the two positions together.

How beautiful is what the prophet Samuel says to the newly anointed king: *“The Lord has anointed you a commander”*. What Saul had received was a divine free gift, and not because of his own worthiness or his self righteousness. He set him a commander over His people whom He called ‘His inheritance’. The whole earth is indeed the Lord’s; but His people is His inheritance and portion, that He treasures, and for whom He cares, the way man cares for his own inheritance.

2- SAMUEL TELLS SAUL WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO HIM

a- To go from there to Rachel’s tomb in the territory of Benjamin, where he would encounter two men who will tell him that the lost donkeys have been found, and that his father is worrying about him and the servant (1 Samuel 10: 2). He had to be proud of his tribe, although it

had become the smallest among the tribes because of the slaughter that was mentioned in the Book of Judges 20: 46. It was becoming of him to realize that 'Benjamin,' who was called by his mother Rachel, 'Ben-Oni❖,' namely (son of my grief), had become (son of the right hand) for his father Jacob. And in this he refers to the Lord Christ, who was the son of His mother's grief - the Jews who rejected Him- then sat on the right hand of the Father. In other words, it was becoming of for Saul, on his way to Rachel's tomb, to compare Benjamin who enjoyed sitting on the right hand of His Father, even though He grieved the hearts of many. But unfortunately, Saul was keen on pleasing men -his mother - and not God; to become among the sons of the left, and not of the right hand.

Rachel's tomb is about one mile north of Bethlehem (Genesis 35: 16 - 20), and about 4 miles far from the southern territory of Benjamin. As to 'Zelzah' mentioned here (1 Samuel 10: 2), it is probably located between Rachel's tomb and the southern territory of Benjamin.

The prophet gave him a sign, that he would encounter two men by Rachel's tomb, who would tell him that the lost donkeys had been found, and that his father was worried about him and the servant. Why? By this sign, he cast away from Saul's mind any doubt, that what was happening is only by chance. He, from the time he was anointed a king, should realize that God's hidden hand was working with him, even in simple things.

b- Then he would encounter three men by the terebinth tree of Tabor (1 Samuel 10: 3), going up to God at Bethel, carrying three young goats, three loaves of bread, and a skin of wine; who would greet him, who had known nothing of his anointment as a king, and would give him two loaves of bread. What does this mean? They did not give him a goat because he was not a priest; they were going up to the house of God in Bethel, to offer their sacrifices through the priests; and did not give him wine, as it was a kind of luxury; but gave him two loaves, namely just the day necessity for him and who were with him (the servant). It is as though, as a king, it was fitting for him to keep away from interfering with priestly affairs and from seeking luxuries, but to live caring only just about the necessities, subsist, he and his men, on plain bread, and concentrate on working on account of the people of God.

c- To come to the hill of God where the Philistine outpost was, to encounter a group of prophets; then the Spirit of God would come upon him, and he would prophesy with them (1 Samuel 10: 5, 6). Samuel is considered to be the founder of the school of prophets, from which the Jewish Synagogue system emerged, to provide the rabbinical education and the leaderships of the Synagogue (see Acts 3: 24; and compare 1 Samuel 10: 5 to 19: 20). He would encounter the prophets coming down from the height with stringed instruments, tambourines, flutes, and harps before them; and they would be prophesying, namely, praising God with joy and rejoicing (1 Samuel 10: 5).

We can say that Saul - as the first king of Israel – had been instructed by the prophet Samuel, directed after getting anointed, by the following basic principles, to be successful in his reign:

- To put to death his care for trivial valueless things (his visit to Rachel’s tomb), and not to worry about the lost donkeys.

- To go up with his heart, together with the three men to the house of the Lord, to enjoy the sacrifice (the goats), the spiritual food (the loaves of bread), and the life of joy (the skin of wine).

- not to surpass his limits, by practicing priestly work, namely offering sacrifices.

- To be content with the necessities, he and his men (taking the two loaves), and not to seek luxuries (not taking wine).

- To encounter the group of prophets, to share their joy and worship, to receive their counsel, and not to do any work before seeking their prayers for himself.

After presenting these three signs, that embraced the principles of successful life for the kings of Israel, Samuel said to Saul:

“Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you, and you will prophecy with them and be turned into another man” (1 Samuel 10: 6)

This is the great gift of God, to grant us His Holy Spirit - the gift of gifts - to dwell in us; to worship Him (to prophecy), and to have our nature renewed.

Who would change Saul from a simple farmer and a shepherd to a capable king, to care for thousands of the people of God, in place of donkeys and fields, except for the Holy Spirit of God? Thus, through the work of the Holy Spirit, our nature would be renewed in the water of Baptism and enjoy the continuous renewal, to carry the image of our Christ, the King of Kings.

- ❖ The Holy Spirit is the power of sanctification.

- ❖ It is called the Spirit of holiness, as It presents holiness to all. Every human goodness is offered through the Holy Spirit.

- ❖ Whoever actually acquires purity on a human level, and goes to get cleansed in the Baptism of God... the Holy Spirit would make of him a dwelling place; and His exalted power would clothe him.

Origen

- ❖ That is the grace of enlightenment; that our personalities would not stay as they were before being baptized.

- ❖ As we get baptized, we get enlightened; and as we get enlightened we become God’s children; and as children we become perfect; and as perfect we become immortal; as it is said: *“I said, ‘You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High’* “ (Psalm 82: 6).

St. Clement of Alexandria

3- “Is Saul also among the prophets”?!

Having been anointed, and, “*When he had turned his back from Samuel, God gave him another heart*” (1 Samuel 10: 9)

Though that heart got corrupted later on, having leaned upon human wisdom, in place of divine work.

All those signs came to pass that day: As Saul came to the outpost of the Philistines, he encountered the group of prophets, and the Spirit of God came upon him and he prophesied among them (1 Samuel 10: 10). People who used to know Saul since his birth, that he was not that religious, as they saw him - with no prior learning in the school of the prophets - praising among the prophets as one of them, said: “*Is Saul also among the prophets?* “; and it became a proverb, referring to the exalted work of God in the life of believers.

When Saul finished prophesying, he went to the height to worship God.

As we receive the Holy Spirit in us - that continuously renews our life - our heart is inflamed to worship, and our tongue is opened to praise. The scholar Origen says: [We cannot offer a prayer, unless God the Father throws His light on it, the Son acknowledges it, and the Holy Spirit works within us].

4- SAUL’S ENCOUNTER WITH HIS UNCLE

When Saul encountered his uncle at the height, or probably at home after his return, his uncle inquired about what the prophet Samuel said to him. He told him what he said about the lost donkeys, but kept that part about the kingdom to himself; probably because he counted that as a secret issue that ought not to be proclaimed until he was to be chosen by the people, and publicly enthroned.

5- ANNOUNCING HIS REIGN IN MIZPAH

“*Samuel called the people together to the Lord at Mizpah*” (1 Samuel 10: 17)

That is, he called the males of twenty years of age or more, to present themselves before the Lord at Mizpah; where he again rebuked them for demanding a king; then probably cast a lot and chose the tribe of Benjamin; and another on families, and finally on individuals to choose Saul the son of Kish, who was hiding among the luggage’s.

We do not know why Saul hid; was it out of a feeling of unworthiness, to evade the huge responsibility, or out of fear because of the people’s rejection of God and demanding a king?

God revealed his hiding place; and as they brought him to the people, they found in him the desire of their heart - his good looks and tall stature – and they shouted saying: ‘Long live the king!’,’ without any thanksgiving to the Lord.

The sons of Belial despised him, and, assuming that he is incapable of saving them, they brought him no present. That was probably because his tribe was the smallest, and his family was the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin... Anyway, Saul held his peace and kept silent (1 Samuel 10: 27); and by so doing, he spared the people a civil revolt because of him between

the tribes. His silence was considered an inner conquest, that was followed after one month, by an outer one, when he defeated 'Nahash' the Ammonite and his men.

Because silence, combined with wisdom, represents an inner triumph for the soul, it is often recommended by the saintly fathers.

If you love the truth, you should love silence. This will make you shine in the Lord as the sun, and will save you from the deception of ignorance. Silence will unify you with God Himself.

St. Isaac the Syrian

CHAPTER 11

FIGHTING AGAINST THE AMMONITES

Intending to humiliate the people of Jabesh Gilead, their elders resorted to Gibeon of Saul, upon whom the Spirit of the Lord came. When he heard their news, his anger was greatly aroused, gathered the people together, fought against the Ammonites and defeated them. That was a good start of his reign, for which he deserved the renewal of his kingdom in Gilgal where every one rejoiced.

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1- Threat by Nahash the Ammonite | 1 – 3. |
| 2- Zeal of Saul | 4 – 10. |
| 3- Saul refuses to execute the children of Belial | 12 – 13. |
| 4- Renewing the kingdom of Saul | 14 – 15. |

1- THREAT BY NAHASH THE AMMONITE

The king of the Ammonites was called ‘Nahash,’ namely (Hanash, or serpent); probably because they used to worship the serpent.

A little while after Saul was chosen a king, Nahash came against Jabesh Gilead. It is assumed that the Israelites demanded a king (1 Samuel 9), when they became aware of Nahash’s plans.

It was apparent from the shameful way by which Nahash treated the Israeli people how far the weakness of the children of Israel reached. Although the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead consented to make a covenant to serve him as slaves, he demanded as a condition to do that, to “*put out all their right eyes*” (1 Samuel 11: 2), to let that be a reproach to all Israelis. when their elders asked him to hold off for seven days, that they may send messengers to all the territory of Israel, hoping to find someone to save them, he, in great despise, consented to their request, being sure that, among all the tribes of Israel, there was no one who could save or support....

If ‘Nahash’ is a symbol of the ancient serpent that carried animosity against man since the beginning, the children of Israel represent the human nature that got completely corrupted, and have no more strength to resist the enemy. Nahash’s work was to enslave, to establish a kingdom of darkness with its law of violence and oppression. He put as a condition, to put out all the right eyes, and to spare the left eyes; and as **St. Augustine** says: [The right eye refers to spiritual insight and heavenly counsel while the left eye refers to seeking vain earthly matters. The work of the evil one is to destroy every spiritual insight that raises the heart to heavenly matters, and to bind our life to worldly and earthly matters. That is why, in the Coptic icons, the saints are shown with wide and open eyes, due to the fact that the children of God have an insight about both the heavenly and the worldly things prudent in managing their spiritual as well as their worldly lives. In these icons, the Lord Christ is shown on the cross with open eyes; for He, though died in the

flesh, He beholds both the heavenly and earthly matters with His divinity; cares for both heaven and earth. As to the wicked - the traitor Judas for example - he is shown sideways with only one eye visible, as he always seeks silver, more than his eternal salvation, looking to the worldly matters and not to the earthly ones.

Nahash the Ammonite (came down) on Jabesh Gilead; as though Jabish has been so low to be close to the dust of this world.. And as St. Jerome says, the believer, if he is flying high as an exalted bird, cannot be reached by the serpent crawling on the dust; But if that bird lands on the dust, it will be easy for the serpent to swallow it. When the serpent - Nahash - found the people of Jabesh in the mud of this world, it crawled to them in despise, realizing that nothing would save them from it.

If the word 'Gilead' means (a heap of testimony) or (rough), the word 'Jabesh' means (dry). The evil one or the ancient serpent can overcome the dry and rough soul; while the soul soaked with love and compassion in the Lord, would not give him any opportunity to find a place in it, nor to confront it.

'Jabesh Gilead' is a city on the mountain of Gilead east of the River Jordan thought to be 'Tel-Abu-Kharz,' north of the valley of 'Yabes' or 'Jabesh,' 9 3/8 miles south-east of Beth-Shan. It was destroyed by the Israelites, because its inhabitants did not come up to Mizpah to join them (Judges 21: 8).

2- THE ZEAL OF SAUL

The messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and told the news in the ears of the people. And all the people lifted up their voices and wept.

"Now there was Saul, coming behind the herd from the field; and he said, 'What troubles the people, that they weep?'" (1 Samuel 11: 5)

Saul was anointed by the holy oil to become 'the Lord's anointed' king of Israel; yet he did not still practice his royal work, probably for fear that dissension may happen among the people, on account of the rejection of the children of Belial; or for his feeling of his unworthiness and lack of experience waiting for a chance to be given by God.

Saul was a Benjamite; and the Benjamites were somehow related to the people of Jabesh Gilead because, after the massacre of Benjamin, the Benjamites took 400 virgins of them as wives (Judges 21: 1 - 4); So no wonder that the Benjamites showed compassion toward them. The Spirit of God came upon Saul, to practice, with zeal and courage, his royal work (1 Samuel 11: 6, 7). To provoke them to battle against the enemy,

"He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them out throughout all the territory of Israel" (1 Samuel 11: 7)

The people responded to his call, as God gave him favor in their eyes; and came out with one consent, numbering 300,000 of the children of Israel, and 30,000 men of Judah. Of little

experience in war, they assembled in Bezek, between Shechem and Bet-Shan, 7 miles from the Jordan.

Saul put the people in three divisions, and attacked the enemy in the morning watch, on three different fronts in an unexpected time. The enemy got up from their sleep, overcome by sleep and surprise, *“to be killed until the heat of the day; and it happened that those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together”* (1 Samuel 11: 11).

3- SAUL REFUSES TO EXECUTE THE CHILDREN OF BELIAL

The people demanded the prophet Samuel - who anointed Saul a king - to put to death the children of Belial; those who despised Saul; on account that Saul has realized a great and unexpected victory. The response from Saul to that demand was:

“Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has accomplished salvation in Israel”(1 Samuel 11: 13)

So Saul appeared as a proud king who refrained from killing people on the day of salvation counting the people’s joy as greater than any personal revenge.

If that is fitting for a king, how much is it so for a priest, to be long-suffering even toward his afflictors.

- ❖ The behavior of a priest toward those he is entrusted with, should be as a compassionate father toward his little children; He should not get troubled by their insults, strokes, and cries; and even if they mock or laugh at him.
- ❖ If the Bishop is of the nervous type; that will result in great disasters for him and his flock.
- ❖ There is nothing of more benefit to others, and that draws the hearts to God, more than the meekness of him, who is insulted, oppressed, and afflicted, who bears all that with a smiling face and great calmness, as though there is nothing wrong going on.

St. John Chrysostom

4- RENEWING THE KINGDOM OF SAUL

Saul was anointed a king in Mizpah (1 Samuel 10: 25), where the children of Belial, despising him were. But having conquered, the renewal of his kingdom was carried out unanimously in Gilgal, before the Lord; and there they made sacrifices of peace offerings; and everyone rejoiced greatly.

CHAPTER 12

SAMUEL FAREWELL ADDRESS

Samuel addressed the people of Israel with a farewell and frank address, asking them in it to testify before the Lord and His anointed, to his faithfulness to them, and to the fact that he never defrauded, oppressed, or received any bribe from the hand of any of them. He also reminded them of the Lord's blessings; and reproached them for demanding a king. Yet, he opened before them the door of hope in the Lord, who loves His people. He intended by all that to give a lesson to the new king.

- 1- Samuel proclaims his faithfulness 1 – 6.
- 2- God's dealings with them 7 – 11.
- 3- Their demand for a king 12 – 19.
- 4- Opening the door of hope before them 13 – 25.

1- THE PROPHET SAMUEL PROCLAIMS HIS FAITHFULNESS

The prophet Samuel demonstrated his faithfulness in his shepherding mission, by proclaiming before the Lord and His anointed, that he had heeded their voice in all that they said to him, and had set a king over them for nothing but his love for them. with a great confidence he says:

“Here I am. Witness against me before the Lord and before his anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received any bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you”(1 Samuel 12: 3)

He was asking the testimony of the Lord, who searches the hearts and knows the hidden thoughts, and also his anointed, namely Saul the king, that what he did with the people of God was not for the sake of outer appearances, but coming from deep love and inner faithfulness.

If Samuel was distressed because the people demanded a king for themselves, the king himself testified to his faithfulness in his care for the people; and that he never defrauded nor oppressed them.

What Samuel did here, was not a self defense, for nobody accused him of anything; but he intended by it to teach the new king a lesson. And as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [No one accused him; He did not utter that to justify himself; but he intended by it to instruct the king he anointed, to be meek and compassionate, under the pretense of defending himself... He uttered that to make of Saul a better king].

Everyone testified that Samuel was blameless, saying:

“You have not defrauded us or oppressed us, nor have you taken anything from any man's hand” (1 Samuel 12: 4)

That is how a spiritual leader should be: blameless!

- ❖ It is becoming of a priest to glitter, shedding light by his good behavior on all people in order to follow his example. But if that light turns to darkness, what would become of the world?!
- ❖ We are in need of good behavior, rather than beautiful words; of virtue, rather than speeches; of works, rather than talk...

St. John Chrysostom

He asked their witness to his faithfulness; and witnessed the king himself, the Lord's anointed, in the presence of God, who set Moses and Aaron, to bring their fathers out of Egypt (1 Samuel 12: 6). Joshua Ben Serach says: [Before getting into his ultimate long sleep, Samuel proclaimed his faithfulness before God and the people (46: 19).

2- GOD'S DEALINGS WITH THEM

After the people witnessed to his faithfulness, Samuel started to reproach them, demonstrating God's dealings with them; how He cared for them along the generations, how He kept on sending someone to save them, whenever they resort to Him in prayer. In Egypt, when they were oppressed by the Egyptians, they cried out to God, who granted them salvation on the hands of Moses and Aaron; and when they were humiliated by Sisra, the commander of Hazor's army; as well as the Philistines, and the Moabites, God sent them judges, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies, to dwell in safety (1 Samuel 12: 11). But now, when they saw Nahash coming against them, instead of crying out to the Lord to save them, they demanded a king, disregarding that God Himself is their King.

3- THEIR DEMAND FOR A KING

The prophet Samuel often spoke of that demand for a king, as a rejection to God Himself, who reigns over them, leads them, and never let them in need of anything.

He intended to make it clear to them, that although they were given a king, they should never lean upon human arm, but upon that of their true King, who has the history and nature in His hand. He confirmed that by a quick and a practical demonstration saying to them:

"Is today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the Lord, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking a king for yourselves" (1 Samuel 12: 17)

When the Lord responded to His prophet, and sent thunder and rain that day,

"All the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel" (1 Samuel 12: 18)

The people were in need of such a quick and practical lesson, in order to realize that God is the Almighty King of nature and of history.

Samuel demonstrated God's compassion toward His people who rejected His reign; Although He heeded their voice, He gave them the right of choice; saying:

“Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen, and whom you have desired,... If you fear the Lord and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the Lord your God. However, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord, and rebel against His commandment, then the hand of the Lord will be against you, as it was against your fathers” (1 Samuel 12: 13 - 15)

4- OPENING THE DOOR OF HOPE BEFORE THEM

Although Samuel firmly revealed to them their great sin by demanding a king for themselves,, as a compassionate father, he opened before them a door of hope for the great mercies of the Lord saying:

“Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the Lord,... For the Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name’s sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people” (1 Samuel 12: 20 - 22)

God - in His goodness - transforms even our faults, if we return to Him in repentance, to the glory of His Holy Name, and to our edification; as He did with Joseph’s brothers, when he transformed their wickedness to the glory of God, to the dignity of Joseph, to the fulfillment of Jacob and his children, and to establish for them a nation in Egypt.

God’s zeal for His people is not for the sake of their own righteousness, but for the sake of His love, and His Holy Name; That is what He always repeats and confirms :

“He saved them for His name’s sake, that He might make His mighty power known” (Psalm 106: 8)

“For My name’s sake I will defer My anger,... For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; for how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another” (Isaiah 48: 9)

If God is sending them salvation in every generation as for Samuel, he also bears all love to them; that is why he says:

“As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and right way” (1 Samuel 12: 23)

Concerning the prayers of a leader, particularly a priest, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [The priest, as he is entrusted over the whole world, and has become a father to all people, he raises to God in his public and private prayers, supplications for the sake of uplifting wars everywhere, for quenching the fires of riots, beseeching for peace and calm for every soul, and for cure for every sick...]. As to preaching, he says: [Whoever lacks the ability to present the right preaching, is not fit for the mission of a preacher; all qualifications can be found in any of his listeners... but what distinguishes him from them, is his ability to preach the word].

CHAPTER 13

SAUL EXTORTS THE PRIESTLY WORK

Saul foolishly used human wisdom (1 Samuel 13: 13), by extorting the priestly work, and offering a burnt offering to the Lord; for the people scattered from around him, and the prophet Samuel was late in coming; while the Philistines came down on him in Gilgal. Because of that, the divine decree was issued on the tongue of the prophet Samuel:

“Now, your kingdom shall not continue”(1 Samuel 13: 14)

- 1- The people of Israel overcome by terror** 1 – 7.
 - 2- Saul offers a burnt offering** 8 – 9.
 - 3- God rejects Saul** 10 – 15.
 - 4- Weakening of Israel** 16 – 23.
- 1- The people of Israel overcome by terror**

This chapter, in its Hebrew version, opened by the phrase: *“Saul was one year old when he became king; and reigned two years over Israel”* (1 Samuel 13: 1). It is obvious that there is some misunderstanding here; Some scholars assume that the word ‘forty’ was wrongly omitted before the word ‘year,’ and the word ‘thirty’ was wrongly omitted before the word ‘two’; namely, the text should be: *“Saul was forty years old when he became king; and reigned thirty-two years over Israel”*. Now if we add to this thirty-two (and plus) years, some seven years (and plus) - the interval between Saul’s death and the anointment of David as a king over all Israel (2 Samuel 4: 5; 5: 5) - we can say that the kingdom of Saul extended over forty years (Acts 13: 21).

In Samuel 9: 2, we see that Saul was a young man when he reigned; and here, we see his son Jonathan a man of war (1 Samuel 13: 2, 3). There has to be a time lapse of more than 20 years in between what was mentioned here and what was mentioned in the previous chapter. During that time Saul organized a small army of 3000 men, of which 2000 were with him in ‘Mishmash,’ (that means hidden) - the village of ‘Mishmash’ nowadays is 5 miles north of Jerusalem -; and 1000 with his firstborn son Jonathan in ‘Gibeah of Benjamin’ [‘Tel-El-Foul’ nowadays, 4 miles north of Jerusalem, east of the road from Jerusalem to Nables, the old hometown of Saul].

Jonathan attacked the garrison of the Philistines that was in ‘Grebea’ [It is still called by the same name, separated from ‘Mishmash’ by a valley 800 feet deep, with sloping sides]; and Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, to call the people together to him in Gilgal. The Philistine counted Jonathan’s attack against their garrison an insult; so they gathered together to fight against Israel, with 30,000 chariots, and 6,000 horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in ‘Mismash,’ to the east of ‘Beth Aven’ (the house of the idol or the evil). They probably did that to cut the way to Gilgal, so that Saul would not be able to come to help Jonathan.

As neither Saul, nor Jonathan, nor the people, thought of resorting to God to save them, they were overcome by fear and terror; they hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits; and some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead that only 600 men remained with Saul (1 Samuel 13: 15).

The people lost their hope, and were overcome by fear, not because of their few number, but for their loss of faith.

- ❖ When the mind is darkened, faith disappears; fear overcomes us, and we lose hope.
- ❖ The carnal man fears death, as a beast fears getting slaughtered.

St. Isaac the Syrian

2- SAUL OFFERS A BURNT OFFERING

When Saul saw that people scattered from him, the Philistine gathered together in Mishmash, and Samuel did not come within the days appointed, he said: “*Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me*”; and he offered the burnt offering (1 Samuel 13: 9). He assumed that the burnt offering is a sort of magic that brings victory; not knowing that it is a symbol of the true sacrifice; and that it should never be offered, except according to the statutes of the law, to realize the reconciliation with God. Foolishly, he dared to break the divine commandment, taking the circumstances as an excuse.

As a great altar like that of Gilgal could not have been without a priest, some believe that Saul made use of Samuel’s delay to extort the priestly rights beside the civil ones. His action implied violation, that, for a long time he planned to do, and just waited for the chance to do it.

[Saul became a bad example of overstepping the limits of man’s rank; In the apostolic laws, it is stated that, whoever acts without the Bishop’s consent, is acting in vain. Samuel said to Saul: “*You have done foolishly!* “ (1 Samuel 13: 13), offering the burnt offering without him. Uzziah, king of Judah, when he intended to practice priestly work, while not a priest, he became leprous, because of his transgression against the Lord; So would be the punishment of any layman who despises the Lord, who foolishly insults His priests, and extorts that glory for himself. We should follow the example of Christ, who did not give Himself the glory of becoming a High Priest, but waited for His Father to proclaim: “*The Lord has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek*” (Psalm 110: 4)].

[Now we exhort everyone of you, to commit himself to the rank to which he is assigned, and should not overstep his fitting limits; as ranks are not from us, but from God, who says: “*He who hears you hears Me; He who rejects you reject Me; and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me*” (Luke 10: 16; Matthew 10: 40; John 13: 20)].

He also became a bad example in his misunderstanding of worship; as God seeks obedience, rather than sacrifices and burnt offerings; It is said: “*Sacrifice and offering You did not desire..; In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure*” (Hebrews 10: 5, 6)

- ❖ Let us offer ourselves as sacrifices and burnt offerings to the Lord, who does not seek sacrifices of dumb animals.

Abbot Dorotheos of Gaza

If Saul could have waited for a little time more, Samuel would have arrived and offered a proper sacrifice that is accepted by God, instead of Saul's burnt offering that carried the smell of rebellion against God's commandments. Our need is to endure to the end, in order to be saved (Matthew 10: 22); and to wait till the fourth watch of the night, to behold Jesus walking on the sea to restore our peace (Matthew 14: 25).

- ❖ It is becoming of us dear brethren to be patient and persistent, so that as we enjoy hope in truth and freedom, we gain both of them.

St. Cyprian

3- GOD REJECTS SAUL

As Saul overstepped his limits, rebelling against the divine commandment, through offering a burnt offering, that should only be done by a priest and not by a king, the Prophet Samuel came to rebuke him, saying: "*What have you done?*" (1 Samuel 13: 11). But instead of admitting his transgression, he put the blame on Samuel, saying:

"When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Mismash, the I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplications to the Lord; Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering'" (1 Samuel 13: 11, 12)

If he would have judged himself, admitting his fault, the situation might have changed; but instead, he introduced himself as one of zeal for the people of God, and it was Samuel who should be blamed, for not coming within the days appointed.

- ❖ If we look carefully, we shall realize that all troubles come from not judging ourselves; something that would lead to confusion, rather than to comfort.

Abbot Dorotheos

The consequence of Saul's rebellion, beside justifying himself, and putting the blame upon others, was that he, and his descendants lost the kingdom; Samuel said:

"You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which he commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people"(1 Samuel 13: 13, 14)

St. Augustine comments on the phrase: "*The Lord would have established your kingdom forever over Israel*"; saying, [It may be understood from this that God has set Saul to reign forever; and when he rebelled, He broke His promise. God knew beforehand that Saul was going to rebel; Yet He set his kingdom to be a symbol of the eternal kingdom; So He added, "*But now,*

(*your*) kingdom shall not continue), which means that although the kingdom itself would be established, that would not be by that particular man.... “*The Lord has sought for Himself a man*”; meaning by that either David or (a symbol), “*the Mediator of the new covenant*” (Hebrew 9: 15) who was symbolized through the anointment done to David and his descendants].

St. Augustine goes on to say, that although the words of the prophet Samuel came at the beginning of Saul’s reign, Saul remained a king for 40 years - the same duration of David’s reign over Israel. However the kingdom lasted, not within the descent of Saul, but within that of David, of whom the Lord Christ came to reign forever. That man (Saul) symbolically represented the people of Israel who were to lose the kingdom, whereas our Lord Jesus Christ reigns spiritually and not physically].

Here is the first reference to David and his reign over Israel with a comparison between him and Saul. David had his own transgressions, yet he transgressed through human weakness. As a man of faith, obedience, and love for God; when he transgressed, he hastened, by his tears, to confess without justifying himself. And when the people of Israel were to be punished as a result of David’s fault, he humbly entreated God to let the punishment be on him, and on his household, and not on the people. What an amazing love! As for Saul, on the other hand, his transgression had been a kind of mutiny and rebellion; and when confronted with it, he tried to justify himself and his behavior.

4- THE WEAKENING OF ISRAEL

“Saul, Jonathan his son, and the people who were present with them remained in Gibeath of Benjamin. But the Philistines encamped in Mishmash” (1 Samuel 13: 16)

The Philistines came to the passes of Eglon and Beth Horon, took over a part of the rim in the middle, and extended eastward to Mishmash; and by that they were separated from Saul by a narrow and deep valley, having isolated Benjamin from the north and the middle. Their regiments had thus extended to the north, the east and the west, leaving Saul isolated in the south, with no authority over Israel.

Although He allowed the Philistines to devastate, God was compassionate toward His people; If the enemy would have come at the beginning to Gilgal, they would have struck Saul and the 6000 men with him, then Jonathan and his little company; and would have taken over all of Israel.

The Philistine humiliated Israel, by not allowing any blacksmith to be found throughout the land, lest the Hebrews make swords or spears; All the Israelites would go down to the Philistines to sharpen each man’s Plowshare, his mattock, his ax, and his sickle. It is a painful portrait of the work of sin in the life of man; destroying all his energies and capabilities, and taking him down to humiliation.

CHAPTER 14

THE CONQUEST OF JONATHAN

Jonathan could not stand to see how his people lost their dignity; and believing that,
“Nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few” (1 Samuel 14: 6)

Jonathan, with his armorbearer, went over the narrow and deep valley, and found favor in God’s sight to realize conquest. Yet, because of his father’s hasty decrees, Jonathan fell under curse, because he tasted honey in the middle of the day. Saul put the people under oath, saying, *“cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies”* (1 Samuel 14: 24).

1- Jonathan crosses over to the Philistines 1 – 15.

2- Saul goes to war 16 – 23.

3- Jonathan breaks his father’s oath 24 – 31.

4- The people eat the meat of beasts with the blood 32- 35.

5- The people rescue Jonathan’s life 36 – 46.

6- Continuous conquests 47 – 52.

1- JONATHAN CROSSES OVER TO THE PHILISTINES

The two armies confronted one another: The Philistines at the northern sharp rock ‘Bozez,’ meaning light, facing Mishmash; and Saul with his men at the southern sharp rock ‘Seneh,’ opposite Gibeah with a narrow but very steep slope in between them, that no one can cross over save a mountain goat, or someone crawling on his hands and knees. Each army was watching the other, while the Philistines were busy devastating the land of Benjamin.

Jonathan was zealous for his people; and contrary to his father, he was an upright man, who loved the truth, whatever the cost would be, and faithful in his relationships with others. In his faith, he proceeded to act without telling his father, for fear that he would stop him. Saul at that time was confused, and many of the people, in their terror, escaped, leaving the king with only 600 men who did not know what to do.

Saul was in the outskirts of Gibeah (1 Samuel 14: 2), namely, outside the city, probably in the wilderness close to Gibeah. ‘Ahijah’ - probably ‘Ahimalech,’ bearing that name out of respect to the name of God, [‘Ahijah’ means the (brother of the Lord), while ‘Achimalech’ means the (brother of the king)] - was in ‘Shiloh,’ wearing the ‘ephod,’ namely, the priestly garment (Exodus 28: 6), in his residence, because there was no more service in the tabernacle, after the Philistines took away the ark of God (1 Samuel 4).

Jonathan could not stand that shameful situation, and believed that God is capable of realizing his promises to His people, and would work for them

“for nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few” (1 Samuel 14: 6)

His young armorbearer, sharing his faith, supported him in his intentions, demonstrating the importance of faithful friends in partaking of our spiritual strife, and accompanying us on our way, on the contrary of wicked friends who make man lose hope and bring him down to perdition.

❖ There would be the exaltation of joy, when we enjoy God, in security and brotherly unity.

St. Augustine

Jonathan said to his armorbearer:

“Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us. For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few” (1 Samuel 14: 6)

Jonathan was aware of his weakness, but he delivered it in the hands of God to consummate His will, believing that He would mightily work in the life of His people. According to the apostle Paul: *“through faith they subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of aliens”* (Hebrew 11: 33, 34).

❖ The weapon of the heart is faith in Christ

❖ By faith of the mind, man would be as though he is actually dwelling in God’s kingdom.

St. Isaac the Syrian

Jonathan set a sign: that if the Philistines said to them *“Come up to us,”* then they would go up, for the Lord had delivered them into the people’s hand. Actually when Jonathan and his armor-bearer showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines, they sarcastically said: *“The Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden”*; then they called to the two men, *“Come up to us, and we will show you something,”* intending to kill them. Although they addressed them in sarcasm, Jonathan considered it to be a sign from heaven, firmly believing that the enemy would experience, after their arrogance, a definite fall.

As it was impossible to climb the rock upright, Jonathan and his companion did that crawling on their hands and knees, in a degrading and dangerous way. Here, God put terror in the hearts of the enemy, who assumed that the two men were being followed by a great army; so they fled. The two men killed 20 of the enemy within an area of about half an acre of the land, while many others fell to their death on the deep narrow slope. The enemy actually struck themselves by themselves; and *“there was a very great trembling”* : an allegoric form of speech that may either refer to the extent of their terror, or to an earthquake that probably happened.

Thus, Jonathan climbed up crawling on his hands and knees, leaning on God in faith, to scatter before him the mighty and haughty armies.

2- SAUL GOES TO WAR

Saul and his men were in the outskirts of Gibeah (1 Samuel 14: 2), when they saw the multitude of the army of the enemy melting away, going here and there. Astonished for what he saw, Saul commanded his people to call the roll to see who was missing, to discover surprisingly that it was Jonathan and his armorbearer. Saul said to Ahijah the priest to ask God through the ephod (according to the Septuagint version). Now it happened that while Saul talked to the priest, the noise from in the camp of the Philistines continued to increase; that Saul became impatient and instructed the priest, saying:” *Withdraw your hand*” (1 Samuel 14: 19).

This behavior reveals the heart of Saul. Although he had several good points, he was impatient, and leaned upon his own thoughts... He asked the Lord; yet before getting His response, he hastened to act; He was not upright in his heart. In his haste to have a swift conquest over the enemy, he made a decision that led his son to fall in violation, having placed the people under oath, saying:

“Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies” (1 Samuel 14: 24)

Saul erred in that action, counting the conquest as the fruit of only work and effort; not putting faith into consideration; contrary to his son Jonathan, who did not stop working, and put himself to danger, yet through faith in God the Grantor of conquest. His second fault was that he did not give any consideration to the needs of his men who could not strive while weak with hunger. Moreover, his lack of an upright heart was revealed in saying: “... *on my enemies,*” counting them as his personal enemies... pride and haughtiness of heart!

3- JONATHAN BREAKS HIS FATHER’S OATH

Saul’s oath could have led to the death of his son Jonathan, the believer who rescued the people; and also caused the exhaustion of his men, whom God provided, in the wilderness, with honey to eat.

Jonathan having not heard of his father’s oath, stretched out the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in a honey-comb, and put his hand to his mouth; his countenance brightened after hunger and exhaustion. Being told of his father’s oath, he said:

“My father had troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of that honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?” (1 Samuel 14: 29, 30)

By hasty decisions that come out of a heart which is not upright, man loses much, through depriving himself of God’s gifts to him; and losing the chances given to him by the Lord.

4- THE PEOPLE EAT THE MEAT OF BEASTS WITH BLOOD

As a result of Saul’s hasty decision, the people were overcome by hunger and exhaustion;

“ So they rushed on the spoil, and took sheep, oxen, and calves, and slaughtered them on the ground; and ate them with the blood” (1 Samuel 14: 32)

Saul, counting that as a treason against the Lord, ordered his men to roll a large stone to slay the animals on it; and as the sacrifices would be higher than the ground, all the blood would spill before eating them. The people obeyed his order.

5- THE PEOPLE RESCUE THE LIFE OF JONATHAN

Saul built an altar to the Lord; and sought the counsel of God, most probably through Ahijah the priest, whether to go down after the Philistines; But as God did not answer him that day, he assumed that there was a sin among the people. So hastily he vowed:

“For as the Lord lives, who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die” (1 Samuel 14: 39)

The lot came on Jonathan, who admitted what he had done, without fearing death. But the people could not accept the idea of putting Jonathan to death, who, by his faith and courage challenged death to save his people from their enemies. And Saul consented due to the insistence of the people.

6- CONTINUOUS CONQUESTS

“Saul established his sovereignty over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side; against Moab, Ammon, Edom, against the king of Zobah, and against the Philistines; Wherever he turned, he harassed them. (1 Samuel 14: 7)

“Now there was fierce war with the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him for himself”(1 Samuel 14: 52)

Although Saul was not upright in heart, and had been hasty in his decisions, he had zeal and courage; did not stop striving; and took every strong and valiant man to his army.

This is a live portrait of spiritual leadership, that do not stop striving; who takes every soul to work for the kingdom of God. A successful leader is the one who directs all energies to work; who does not concentrate the service on himself, but knows how to encourage every soul and to support every hand to spiritual strife.

CHAPTER 15

THE REJECTION OF SAUL

God commanded Samuel to tell Saul to fight Amalek, as God had granted him victory over them; yet he was to be committed to utterly destroy all that they had, and not to spare any man or beast... But Saul did not abide to that commitment; he did not kill ‘Agag’ the king of Amalek, but took him alive, and spared the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, and the lambs except for every thing despised and worthless which he utterly destroyed, presenting human excuses for his rebellion. The divine decree came to reject Saul, and to take away the kingdom from him, for which Samuel grieved.

- 1- A divine command to fight against Amalek 1 – 5.
- 2- Saul’s conquest and rebellion 6 – 9.
- 3- Samuel reproaches Saul 10 – 23.
- 4- Samuel returns with Saul 24 – 31.
- 5- Samuel isolates himself from Saul 32 – 35.

1- A DIVINE COMMAND TO FIGHT AGAINST AMALEK

Many years have passed between the events of the previous chapter, and those of the present one. After having only 600 men under his command, Saul has now a great army under the leadership of his uncle ‘Abner the son of Ner,’ of 200,000 men from Israel, and 10,000 from Judah. He enjoyed successive conquests over Moab, Ammon in the east, Edom in the south, and the kings of Zobah in the north, etc.

During that period, it seems that Saul’s behavior was tainted with rebellion and deviation from God’s commandments, for which the prophet Samuel, as a man of God, who anointed Saul kept on warning him; and now, he is offering him a last chance: to grant him victory over Amalek, but he has to kill both man and beast. Samuel said to Saul:

“The Lord sent me to anoint you king over His people. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the Lord” (1 Samuel 15: 1)

It is as though Samuel is reconfirming to Saul that he was the one who anointed him a king by a divine command; therefore he ought to listen to his counsel, heed the voice of the words of the Lord, and not to live in rebellion. That was actually an ultimatum to Saul.

He instructed Saul to fight against Amalek, and to destroy every thing he had as the conquest he got was not his own, but was gift from God, previously proclaimed by Him 400 years ago. *“The Lord has sworn: The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation”* (Exodus 17: 8 - 16). God never forgets His promises, but realizes them in due time. God granted Saul that conquest, yet commanded him to destroy every thing Amalek had... That condition may seem a kind of harsh on man, and a waste of resources; Yet Amalek was utterly

corrupted: a congregation of savage thieves, who used to commit horrible crimes, and to practice abominations.

Man often wonders: why did God allow the destruction of heathens in the Old Testament, and sometimes, even of animals? It was something that surely troubled many people! Yet if they come to comprehend the concept of the eternal glory, and the inheritance set by God for His believers beside comprehending the extent of the horror of sin, they would better grieve over the behavior of humanity, and its rush toward abominations, that brings them up to eternal perdition. When all men eventually die, and the whole world disintegrates, then we shall realize that the death of the flesh and destruction of possessions and resources, are just trivialities of no value, compared to the eternity of man and his enjoyment of heavenly glories.

Saul heeded the counsel of the prophet Samuel, gathered the people together and numbered them in 'Talaim' - probably means 'Telem,' that was mentioned in the Book of Joshua 15: 24, south of Judah. 'Talaim' means (little lambs).

2- SAUL'S VICTORY, AND HIS REBELLION

Saul entered a serious test as a last chance to assess his situation in the hope that he would turn from the deviation of his heart, and unconditionally obey the Lord.

Saul demanded from the 'Kenites' - a peaceful Midianite people - to depart, and get down from among the Amalekites, lest they would be destroyed together with them. The Kenites had done a favor to Israel (Exodus 18; Numbers 10: 29 - 32), accompanying them to Jericho (Judges 1: 16); then dwelt in the land of the Amalekites south of Judah. Of the Kenites are Jethro, Moses' father-in-law (Judges 1: 16), 'Jael,' who killed 'Sisera' (Judges 4: 17); and the 'Rechabites,' commended by the Lord (1 Chronicles 2: 55; Jeremiah 35: 6 - 10). As the word 'Kenites' means (Ironsmiths); so some believe them to be a congregation of nomadic ironsmiths in the region of minerals in the valley of 'Araba'.

After the departure of the Kenites, Saul attacked the Amalekites from 'Havilah' all the way to 'Shur,' which is east of Egypt (1 Samuel 15: 7).

'Havilah' is a Semite name that means (sandy). We should distinguish between 'Havilah,' embraced by the River 'Pishon,' going out of Eden, a region rich in gold, aromatic resin, and precious stones (Genesis 2: 11, 12) - that is east of the land of the Amalekites, and 'Havilah,' that is north of 'Sheba' in Arabia (Genesis 10: 29; 25: 18).Sheba'.

'Shur' means (wall) or (castle), south of Palestine; particularly south of 'Beer Lahai Roi' (Genesis 16: 7; 25: 18); through which the children of Israel marched three days after crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15: 22); sometimes called the 'Desert of Etham' (Numbers 33: 8), facing Egypt eastward; It is called 'Shur,' as it represents a strong wall around the roads coming out of the north west of Egypt, protecting Egypt against the attacks that may come from the east.

Saul conquered Amalek, yet he came back defeated by his 'ego,' having not heeded the voice of the Lord. He killed everyone of the enemy, but spared 'Agag' [probably a title of the

kings of Amalek, like ‘Pharaoh’ was for the kings of Egypt]; destroyed the worthless sheep, but kept the best of them. He might have spared Agag to satisfy his own arrogance, or he had compassion on him for being a king, albeit a king on a congregation of thieves; whose sword has made women childless (1 Samuel 15: 33). He spared the best of sheep, on pretense of offering sacrifices to the Lord, when his real motive was his personal benefit.

3- SAMUEL REPROACHES SAUL

The Lord revealed to Samuel why He rejected Saul saying:

“I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not performed My commandments”(1 Samuel 15: 11)

It grieved Samuel to see Saul failing to benefit from the divine opportunity that was offered to him. Deciding to reproach him,

“He cried out to the Lord all night” (1 Samuel 15: 11)

How pure was Samuel’s heart, spending the whole night praying, so as not to reproach Saul of his own accord; He was grieved and mourned for him, until the Lord said to him:

“How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?” (1 Samuel 16: 1)

Samuel was prominent as a living example of the spiritual leader; We see him firm, yet compassionate. In his firmness he could not bear to see Saul’s persistence on breaking the divine commandment; he was grieved (1 Samuel 15: 11), and addressed Saul very frankly; and in his compassion, he cried out to the Lord all night, praying and mourning over the fallen king.

The Church is in need of such firmness, together with compassion, in the life of a spiritual shepherd!

❖ Slothfulness with sinners is not a virtue, but weakness; It is not love nor meekness, but negligence; It is actually a crime against those souls, leading to their perdition, without an effort to draw their attention to their serious destiny.

St. Augustine

❖ There should be real sound measures for our words and preaching, so as not to sound too lenient, nor too harsh.

St. Ambrose

❖ Who tends to a flock of sheep should neither be a lion nor a goat.

St. John Climacus

As to love, compassion, and continuous prayers for the sake of those ministered, it is said:

❖ There is nothing more beloved to me than you not even light!

Your salvation is very dear to me much more than light itself!

❖ If possible, we would open up our hearts for you, to look and see how they are spacious enough to accommodate all of you: men, women, and children; So is the power of love, making the soul more spacious than heaven itself.

St. John Chrysostom

Whereas Samuel had been a true leader, who worked with God's Spirit, Saul on the contrary, was not fit for leadership, as he cared only for himself; He went to the Carmel and set up a monument for his victory over Amalek (1 Samuel 15: 12); and when Samuel came to him early in the morning, he, intending to commend himself in an indirect way, said to him:

"Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (1 Samuel 15: 13)

He covered his rebellion with sweet words, that did not deceive the prophet Samuel, to whom the Lord had revealed every thing.

In Gilgal, the people enthroned Saul a king before the Lord (1 Samuel 11: 14); In the same city, Samuel rebuked him for his rebellion and warned him (1 Samuel 12: 14); and in it also, came the last reproach, and the proclamation of taking away the kingdom from him and his offspring.

Samuel asked him:

"What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" (1 Samuel 15: 14)

To that Saul offered as an excuse for his rebellion:

"For the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord (your) God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed" (1 Samuel 15: 15)

Instead of admitting his transgression, he put the blame on the people: that they were the party responsible for sparing the best of the sheep. How easy it is for man to put the blame on others; as did Aaron when he made the golden calf (Exodus 32: 21 - 24); and Pilate as he justified his trial of the Lord Christ; Actually, as Aaron's heart went astray, and Pilate feared for his post, so also Saul loved the spoil.

Saul repeatedly accused the people for rebellion, but gave them an excuse, and described himself as obedient to the Lord. While saying *"the people took the plunder..."* (1 Samuel 15: 21), he adds, *"and the rest we have utterly destroyed"* (1 Samuel 15: 15); counting himself among those who obeyed the divine commandment (We have utterly destroyed). And more clearly, he says:

"But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites; But the people took of the plunder" (1 Samuel 15: 20, 21)

Look at the way he spoke to the prophet Samuel, justifying the sparing of the best of the sheep and oxen: *"to sacrifice to the Lord your God"* (1 Samuel 15: 15). He did not say: "to the Lord (our) God," but said: "to the Lord (your) God"; as though he says, what we spared was not for ourselves, but for the Lord (your) God!

Saul gave an excuse for the people's rebellion: "*to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal*", to which Samuel responded:

"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?! Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Samuel 15: 22, 23)

God prefers obedience and compassion to sacrifices and burnt offerings; The psalm says

"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened; Burnt offering and sin offering, You did not require" (Psalm 40: 6)

On this, **St. Irenaeus** comments: [So (David) teaches them, that God asks for obedience that provides them with security, rather than sacrifices and burnt offerings that do not bring them up to justification].

We can say that the cause of Saul's perdition, is his losing of the spirit of discernment; he rushed to darkness, offering several excuses for his erroneous actions. That is why father Moses in his debate with **St. John Cassian**, concentrates on discernment as a way to the kingdom of God. Among his words: [No body can doubt, that when 'judging things' in the heart is erroneous, namely, when the heart is filled with ignorance, our thoughts and actions - which are fruits of discernment and meditation - are in the darkness of the great sin... The one who was, in God's sight, worthy of becoming a king over His people, fell from his kingdom, because of his lack of 'the eye of discernment' (Matthew 6: 22, 23), that caused his body to become full of darkness.... He assumed that his burnt offerings were accepted by the Lord, more so than his obedience to the words of Samuel; thinking that by that he would get the favor of the divine greatness].

4- SAMUEL RETURNS WITH SAUL

Although Saul said : "*I have sinned*" (1 Samuel 15: 24),, at the same time he cast the blame on the people, saying: "*because I feared the people and obeyed their voice*". His repentance was not genuine, as he did not say that, out of fear of God, but to find favor in Samuel's eyes, to return with him, to honor him before the elders of his people; saying:

"I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord your God" (1 Samuel 15: 30)

In haughtiness, he refers the people to him: "*my people,*" and not to the Lord.

5- SAMUEL ISOLATES HIMSELF FROM SAUL

Samuel asked them to bring him Agag, king of Amalek; and as Samuel was known for his gentle nature, Agag came to him rejoicing, saying: "*Surely the bitterness of death is past*" (1 Samuel 15: 32); to which Samuel responded: "*As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women*" (1 Samuel 15: 33).

Agag represents the voracious sin, whose victims are all strong; that is why his execution refers to uprooting every sin and corruption; and every slothfulness with him carries a symbol of slothfulness with sin itself. That is what the apostolic law makes clear, as it seeks from the priest two things:

a- Not to disregard sin, nor to be slothful with the sinner; as Saul did with Agag, and Eli the high priest with his two sons (1 Samuel 2).

b- Not to interfere in what does not concern us, particularly in things related to Clergy and the sanctities; as 'Uzza' did with the ark of God (2 Samuel 6).

The chapter ends by saying:

"The Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel"(1 Samuel 5: 35)

The Book mentions 'regret' to God; not that God changed His mind, but to speak to us by the language we understand... With his rebellion against the Lord, Saul fell under the divine justice, became rejected and was deprived of the gift that God granted him.

St. Gregory of Nyssa says: [The Holy Book often attributes to God things that are fitting to our minds, to understand].

Changes happen from our side, and not from that of God - the unchangeable. God in His love wishes all to be saved; But if man persists on evil and does not repent, he would lose the promise of God who wants his salvation. Thus, God longed to grant success to Saul, yet Saul persisted on rejecting God's love, and took himself away from the circle of divine mercy; he persisted on rebellion, to lose the divine promise; God appeared, as though to have regretted His promise to Saul; as He would never realize it to him compulsively.

THE THIRD SECTION

KING DAVID

(1 Samuel 16 to 1 Samuel 31)

| | |
|--|----------|
| 1- Anointing David as a king | 16. |
| 2- David and Goliath | 17. |
| 3- Saul's prejudice against David | 16 – 20. |
| 4- David the fugitive | 21. |
| 5- In the cave of Adullam | 22. |
| 6- Saul pursues David | 23 – 24. |
| 7- David and Abigail | 25. |
| 8- David, the lover of his enemies | 26. |
| 9- David's escape among the heathens | 27. |
| 10- Saul consults a medium | 28. |
| 11- Saul fighting against the Philistines, and his death | 29 – 31. |

CHAPTER 16

DAVID ANOINTED AS A KING

David's life as a king and a prophet occupies a great space in the Holy Bible, more than any other king or prophet. His life had been characterized by continuous growth: faithfulness in his youth, in Saul's palace, and in his own kingdom; and when he happened to fall into sin, he managed to rise by repentance.

1- Anointing David among his brothers 1 – 13.

2- David refreshes Saul's spirit 14 – 23.

1- ANOINTING DAVID AMONG HIS BROTHERS

Samuel, Persisting on his grief for what happened to Saul, as a result of his spirit of rebellion, whose fruit, he and the people would suffer, was told by The Lord:

“How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided myself a king among his sons” (1 Samuel 16: 1)

Samuel had for long prayed for Saul's repentance, and for his return to God. Samuel was known for his big heart, and his persistence on raising prayers, for the benefit of many, except Saul, who refrained from repenting his erroneous ways. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [The prayers of saints have very great power, on condition of our repentance and doing good. Even Moses, who saved his brother beside 600,000 men from the wrath of God, that was about to befall them, had no power to save his own sister (Exodus 32; Numbers 12)].

By a divine command, Samuel stopped mourning, to have his heart filled with divine comfort. God transformed the evil of Saul into something good; He ordered Samuel to fill his horn with oil to anoint the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, as a king.

When the world gets dark in the sight of men, In the last watch of the night, God transfigures amid his disciples, to grant them what is beyond their imagination. As the children of Israel lost their hope, and Samuel kept on crying and mourning, the Lord said to him: *“I have provided myself a king among his sons (sons of Jesse) “* (1 Samuel 16: 1) God saw what men could not see; He saw among the sons of Jesse, a blessed son, whom He would dedicate to Himself, and would set as a king over His people; who would be capable of working amid the darkness that then prevailed. Therefore, we should realize that God has got certain persons, whom He chooses to work for His kingdom, and whom He would Himself support.

Samuel was apprehensive for his safety, having been aware of Saul's foolishness and aggression; but the Lord planned for him to take a heifer with him and say, *“I have come to sacrifice to the Lord’,”* and at the same time, to anoint David as a king...; the first part of the plan was to be carried out publicly, while the second part was to be carried out in secret. By that

Samuel would not need to lie, if he was asked about the reason for his coming to Bethlehem; but would reveal only a part of the truth.

Why was the sacrifice offered in Bethlehem publicly, while David was anointed secretly amid his brothers (1 Samuel 16: 13)?

a- To spare Samuel getting killed by Saul, as we said.

b- The time was not yet ripe to declare David a king, as he would not reign except after the death of Saul. Nevertheless he was given the anointment as a divine grace, to support him to work in preparation for his reign.

c- For the sacrifice refers to the cross (The sacrifice of the Lord Christ); whereas the reign, although it began by the cross - as the Lord reigned on a tree - yet that was consummated by His resurrection and His ascension to heavens, to reign and to grant us to reign together with Him by His Holy Spirit. The crucifixion took place publicly on the mountain of Calvary, so that no man could find an excuse not to believe in the free salvation given by the Lord; whereas resurrection and ascension, are two things that represent a glory that is granted only to those close to Him, who have accepted the cross in their life.

Let us then get publicly slain, together with Christ every day, in order to have Him reign secretly over our hearts; Let us suffer with Him publicly, to be glorified with Him in secret.

The prophet Samuel came to Bethlehem, meaning (House of the bread); about 6 miles south of Jerusalem, in the land of Judah. While the elders of the town trembled at his coming, for fear that they might have transgressed in something, Samuel was rejoicing in his depths because of the coming anointment of a king to the Lord. In that city, the Lord Christ was to be born - the King of Kings - for the terror of Herod and his men, but for the rejoice of heaven, together with the believers, as He was to come for the salvation of the world. What would terrify some, would be the cause of joy to others.

Why was David chosen, while he was the youngest of his brothers?

a- The Lord said to the prophet Samuel, as he wanted to anoint the oldest son 'Eliab' {most probably Elihu who later on became a chief over the tribe of Judah}:

"Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16: 7)

And as St. Clement of Alexandria says: [The handsome in appearance was not anointed but he who was handsome in his soul].

The Lord chose him for his inner purity and the beauty of his soul, rather than for his outer appearance. The Lord had previously given Israel, a tall and a handsome king, according to their demand; But now He is giving them a king according His own heart.

So Jesse paraded his seven sons before Samuel {among whom were 'Abinadab' and 'Shammah', who was called 'Shimeah' in 2 Samuel 13: 3}; the Lord did not choose any of them.

Finally he called the youngest son who was tending to the sheep (1 Samuel 16: 11) to be anointed a shepherd over the sheep of the Lord.

b- David who “*was faithful over a few things, was made ruler over many things*” (Matthew 25: 21). Because he was the youngest of Jesse’s sons, he was disregarded by his father (1 Samuel 16: 11), and despised by his brothers (1 Samuel 17: 28). But God saw in him the faithful heart that was worthy of leading His people. For example, he learned from tending the sheep, to love every single one of his father’s flock; and to boldly defend them against the wild beasts (the lion and the bear) (1 Samuel 17: 34). During his keeping the sheep he learned to play the harp, a talent used by God to introduce him to king Saul; He enjoyed nature, to praise God with spiritual psalms; He also learned to strike with the sling, to help him kill the mighty ‘Goliath’.

c- David was the eighth and the youngest among his brothers. Being the eighth refers to the heavenly life (as the number 7 refers to time -7 days of the week - and the number 8 to beyond the time); as though he symbolized the Lord Christ, the heavenly King who became the last, having “*made Himself of no reputation*” for our sake (Philippians 2: 7), occupied the last row, in order to embrace all in Him, and to bring them with His Holy Spirit to the bosom of the heavenly Father.

d- The word ‘David’ is probably derived from ‘dod,’ that means (love) or (beloved). God sets from those beloved by Him, who respond to His love, kings to inherit, together with Him, His Kingdom. Without love, a believer would never enjoy eternal life.

e- **St. Augustine** sees in choosing the young David, and not another one of his brothers, a symbolic act for choosing the Gentiles as members of the Church of the New Testament, to reign in the Lord, and not the Jews who preceded them in knowledge, but rejected the faith. It is as though the Gentiles, are David, the youngest of his brothers, who received the grace of royalty from God, and not his older brothers. And as the Lord Christ Himself says: “*So the last will be first, and the first last*” (Matthew 20: 16). In the same way, Abel was preferred to Cain his older brother; Isaac to Ishmael; Jacob to Esau his twin brother; and also Perez to Zerah (Genesis 38: 29).

The choice of David, the youngest among his brothers, as a king, symbolized the Person of the Lord Christ, who occupied the last row of mankind, became a servant for our sake, so as, by the cross, He would reign in our hearts. He is the second Adam, who reigned instead of the first Adam (Romans 5), to become the head of humanity capable of lifting it up and renewing it.

2- DAVID REFRESHES SAUL’S SPIRIT

While we hear about David:

“*The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward*”(1 Samuel 16: 13),

We hear about Saul:

“The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him”(1 Samuel 16: 14)

The Spirit of the Lord came upon David, the same way it *“hovered over the face of the waters”* (genesis 1: 2), to create from the void and formless earth, a beautiful world full of life. David therefore enjoyed the Spirit of the Lord, that granted him the grace of royalty - the wise leadership of the people of God - so as not to work on his own, but in the Lord. In the New Testament, the Only begotten Son sent His Holy Spirit, to grant us son hood to God the Father, and to renew our nature, sanctifying it, to become according to the image of the Son and like Him.

❖ It is possible for man to partake of the divine nature, but only through the Spirit.

St. Cyril the Great

❖ Once more the Spirit is called *“the Spirit of holiness and renewal”*...; the apostle Paul writes: *“His Son Jesus Christ our Lord... is declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead”* (Romans 1: 4); and also says: *“You were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Corinthians 6: 11). He wrote to Titus, saying: *“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life”* (Titus 3: 4 - 7).

He is the One who does not become holy by any other, nor is he a partner in holiness; but He is Himself, the Grantor of fellowship; and in Him all creation becomes holy.

The Spirit is also called the Grantor of life: *“He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you”* (Romans 8: 11)

St. Athanasius the apostolic

St. Basil the Great presents Saul as an example of him who rejects the Spirit of God in him; as the Book says: *“The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and a distressing Spirit from the Lord troubled him”* (1 Samuel 16: 14). St. Basil says: [The Spirit is always present in those who are worthy of it; working according to need: either through prophecies, healing, or any other miracles...; and the Spirit will not stay in those who- because of their lack of steadfastness - reject the grace they got; as for example Saul, and the 70 elders of the children of Israel, except for ‘Eldad’ and ‘Medad’ (Numbers 11: 25, 26)].

St. Jerome says in his ninth homily on the psalms: [God withdrew, so a distressing spirit troubled Saul].

We should not get confused by the phrase: *“A distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him”* (1 Samuel 16: 14); as that does not mean that the distressing spirit is coming from the Lord;

or that what befell Saul was from the Lord; The apostle James says: “*God can not be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone*” (James 1: 13). Saul, rejecting the Spirit of the Lord, set himself a dwelling place, decorated and ready, with no hindrance, for the distressing spirit; so the Lord forsook him to himself.. He gave him his heart’s wish. With the same meaning, the apostle Paul says: “*Therefore God gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves..., For this reason God gave them up to vile passions..., and even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting*” (Romans 1: 24 - 28). When man persists on rejecting God, and on delivering himself to evil, God forsakes him, namely, gives him up to the lusts of his will God will allow to chastise him.

Saul’s servants advised him, to seek out a man who would be a skillful player on the harp, to let him refresh his soul; and they actually brought David, the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who was skillful in playing the harp,

“*a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person; and the Lord is with him*” (1 Samuel 16: 18)

What is that harp that makes man refreshed and well, and lets the distressing spirit depart from him (1 Samuel 16: 23), but the word of God in the New and Old Testaments; including the (strings) of law, prophecies, praises, gospels, and apostolic writings, etc.... The scholar Origen says: [The Holy Book is God’s one, integrated, and harmonious instrument, that provides, through various tunes, the one voice of salvation, for those willing to learn; That harp which nullifies and resist the work of every distressing spirit; like when David calmed down the distressing spirit that was troubling Saul]. David appeared as a man of valor, fighting with no weapon to protect the sheep under his care; as a man of war; although he never practiced that sort of life, his natural capabilities qualified him for it; as he was prudent in his speech and sweet in his psalms; and a handsome person. Yet his most prominent attribute was that “*the Lord was with him*”; that was the true secret of his power.

CHAPTER 17

DAVID AND GOLIATH

The people longed for a tall, strong, and handsome king, like those of other nations; And now that man was standing with his men trembling in horror before the mighty Goliath until God was glorified by the short David, who did not know how to use a war weapon, except for a simple sling. He conquered, not by a sword nor a spear, but in the name of the Lord of hosts.

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| 1- Goliath terrifies Saul | 1 – 15. |
| 2- David goes to see if it is well with his brothers in the camp | 16 – 25. |
| 3- David kills Goliath | 26 – 54. |
| 4- Saul gets to recognize David | 55 – 58. |

CONNECTING CHAPTERS 16 and 17 TOGETHER:

Some critics find difficulty, to connect between the events that came in the two chapters 16 and 17; They wonder how Saul got to know David as a musician, a man of valor, and a man of war (1 Samuel 16: 18), then did not recognize him, as he presented himself to fight Goliath? How was he an armor bearer for Saul (1 Samuel 16: 21), then could not walk with the military outfit (1 Samuel 17: 38, 39)? How come that Abner, the commander of Saul's army, could not recognize David (1 Samuel 17: 55-58)? We can explain these points as follows:

a- David was called as a musician boy to play his harp to refresh Saul's soul; and once Saul got better, the boy returned to his father's house, to resume his duties keeping sheep for several years, until he became a young man. That is why Saul could not recognize him after all those years, especially under those embarrassing circumstances before Goliath, that made him promise whoever conquers that mighty man to be his son-in-law.

b- Forgetting about David is natural, considering Saul's mental condition.

c- Not recognizing David by Abner is also natural; As the commander of the army, he could not be interested in a musician boy, who, before many years, happened to come to Saul's palace for some private business of the latter.

d- Calling a boy like David a man of valor and a man of war, was probably on account of his killing a lion and a bear to protect his sheep; He was known for his early signs of strength.

e- Saul had him as a personal guard, for the duration he played music for him; He might have got some training on the use of the sword, but he was not accustomed to wearing the heavy military outfit; that is why he found it difficult to use it as he was about to fight Goliath.

1- GOLIATH TERRIFIES SAUL

Now, the Philistines gathered their armies together to battle, and encamped on a mountain between Sichoh and Azekah, in Ephes Dammim; while Saul and his men encamped in the valley

of Elah (1 Samuel 17: 1 - 3). Each of the two armies stood on a mountain, with a valley between them. Every day, a champion - the mighty Goliath, who was six cubits and a span tall - went out from the camp of the Philistines, to defy Saul and the armies of Israel, challenging any of their men to fight him.

Sochoh, Soko, or Shokoh, a Hebrew word meaning (a thorny fence), is the name of two locations, known nowadays as 'Kherbet El Showeika'. The first is 9 miles far from 'Beth Gebrin,' and 14 miles south-west of Jerusalem; that curves with the valley of, westward, to become 'the valley of Sant' namely of (Acacia); while the other location, carrying the same name, is 10 miles south- west of Hebron, also a city in Judah.

'Azekah' is a Hebrew word, meaning the (plowed land), near Sochoh, to which Joshua chased the kings who attacked Gibeon (Joshua 10: 10, 11), where God destroyed their armies, casting down large hailstones from heaven on them. It was mentioned in Nehemiah 11: 30, and called nowadays Tel-Zechariah.

'Ephes Dammim' or 'Phes Dammim' (1 Chronicles 11: 13), a Hebrew word, meaning (Territory of Dam or of blood), probably was so called because of the fight between the Philistines and the children of Israel at that location. Nowadays it is called 'Beth Fasd' or of bleeding, located probably at 'Damom,' 4 miles north-east of Sochoh.

The two armies stood on two facing hills with a valley in between; while Goliath who was more than 6 cubits tall (A Hebrew cubit is about one and a half foot), namely about 9 3/4 feet had a bronze helmet on his head, and was armed with a coat of nail, weighing about 33 pounds, bronze greaves on his legs, and a bronze javelin between his shoulders... He kept on defying the armies of Israel, and challenging anyone to fight him, crying out:

"Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us" (1 Samuel 17: 8, 9)

Saul and his men were overcome with terror before that situation. Some believe that Goliath took that stand as a way out of a problem facing the two armies: The army that was to descend to the valley to cross over to the other army, would get itself into an inferior position, vulnerable to attack by the other army on the higher position. As each of the two armies was reluctant to take this risk, that was what made Goliath challenge anyone to a personal fight, instead of any of the two armies crossing over to the other.

That situation remained for the duration of 40 days, until David the son of Jesse came over to see if it was well with his older brothers: Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah, who followed Saul to war.

2- DAVID GOES TO SEE IF IT WAS WELL WITH HIS BROTHERS IN THE CAMP

Caesarius, Bishop of Arles, presented us with the following allegoric interpretation of the episode of David and Goliath, according to **St. Augustine**: [When Jesse sent his son David to see if it was well with his brothers, he was in that, a symbol of God the Father: Jesse sent David to look for his brothers; and God sent his only-begotten son, of whom it was said: *“I will declare Your name to My brethren”* (Psalm 22: 22). Christ truly came to look for His brethren saying: *“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Matthew 15: 24).

Jesse said to David his son:

“Take now for your brothers an ephah of this dried grain and these ten loaves, and run to your brothers at the camp” (1 Samuel 17: 17)

The ephah, brethren, is three measures, in which we understand the secret of Trinity, that Abraham clearly did, when he was qualified to realize the secret of Trinity in the three Persons under the terebinth tree at Mamre, and asked Sarah to kneed three measures of fine meal (Genesis 18: 6). Jesse gave his son David the same three measures of grain. In the ten loaves we recognize the ten commandments of the Old Testament. As David brought with him three measures of grain and ten loaves, to look for his brothers in the camp; so also Christ came with the ten commandments of the law, and the secret of the Trinity, to set mankind free from the devil].

3. DAVID KILLS GOLIATH

David came to look for his brothers - from his father and mother - bringing with him the three measures of grain and the ten loaves of bread; But when he saw his brethren – the children of God - in an embarrassing situation, with an uncircumcised Philistine defying them, he began to inquire:

“What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”(1 Samuel 17: 26)

“Now Eliab his older brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab’s anger was aroused against David, and he said: ‘Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle’” (1 Samuel 17: 28)

David’s response was simple and full of wisdom saying:

“What have I done now? (Can’t I even speak?)” (1 Samuel 17 28)

He did not argue with him, as he was a man of faith and action; and it was a time of action!

St. Augustine says: [The older brother of David- the symbol of our Lord - rebuked him to represent the Jewish people who did the same to our Lord Christ, who came for the salvation of mankind, insulting Him with several accusations. Can't you see in the words uttered by David's older brother, some similarity to what the devil said to Christ, who left the 99 sheep, to seek the one lost sheep, to get it back to the sheepfold, after setting it free by the rod of the cross, from the hand of the spiritual Goliath; namely from the power of the devil. When David's older brother asked Him, why he left those few sheep in the wilderness, he uttered the truth, yet with an evil and arrogant spirit. Jesus left the 99 sheep to seek the one lost sheep, and to get it back to its sheepfold; namely to the company of angels.

Having been anointed by the blessed Samuel, before coming here, he killed a lion and a bear with no weapon, as he himself told king Saul. The lion and bear, both refer to the devil, who dared to attack some of David's sheep; to get strangled by him. What we are reading, dear brethren, is allegoric: What is symbolized by David, has been realized in our Lord Jesus Christ, who has strangled the lion and the bear, when he descended into Hades to liberate all the saints from their claws. Listen to the supplication of the prophet to the Person of our Lord: "*Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth*" (Psalm 22: 20, 21).

As the strength of the bear is in its claws, and that of the lion in its teeth, so the devil is symbolized by these two beasts. That is why it is said of the Person of Christ, that He saves His Church from the hand; namely, from the strength and mouth of the devil.

David came to find the Jewish armies camping in the Terebinth valley to fight against the Philistines; as Christ - the true David - had to come to lift mankind up from the valley of sin and tears. They stood in the valley confronting the Philistines. They were in a valley, because the weight of their sins brought them down. Anyway, they stood there, not daring to fight against the enemy. Why didn't they dare to do that? Because David, the symbol of Christ, had not yet come, That is true, dear brethren. Who dares to fight against the enemy, before our Lord Jesus Christ sets mankind free from his authority? Now, the word 'David' means (strong hand). Who is stronger, brethren, than Him, who has overcome the whole world, armored with the cross, and not with a sword?!

The children of Israel stood for 40 days before the enemy. Those 40 days refer to the present life, during which Christians do not stop fighting against Goliath and his army; namely, against the devil and his angels {The figure 4 refers to the 4 seasons of the year; and 10 to consummation of time}.

It is impossible for us to defeat, unless Christ - the true David - descends with His rod; namely the secret of the cross. Indeed, dear brethren, the devil had been free before the coming of Christ; but by His coming, what was mentioned in the bible was realized, that, "*No one can enter*

a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man; and then he will plunder his house" (Matthew 12: 29). For that goal Christ came and bound the devil.

Someone may ask: If the devil is already bound, why does he still have authority?

Actually, dear brethren, he has a great authority, but on his lukewarm, negligent followers, who do not truly fear God. He is bound, like a dog, with chains; thus can't bite except the soul that connects to him by its free will, through its leaning on the (ego), which is a dangerous thing. Now brethren, you see how stupid of man to be bitten by him, who is just like a dog bound by chains. Don't keep company with the devil through loving the lusts of this world, to keep him from daring to bite you. He can disturb you by his barking; yet he can never bite you, without your consent; He cannot harm you by force, but through seducing you; He can not get our consent by force, but seeks it.

David came to find the people preparing for battle against the Philistines; yet nobody dared to enter alone into the battle. The symbol of Christ (David) went to battle, carrying only a staff in his hand against Goliath. By that he positively refers to what was realized in our Lord Jesus Christ - the true David - who came and carried His cross to fight the spiritual Goliath; namely, the devil.

Take notice brethren, where the blessed David hit Goliath: in his forehead (1 Samuel 17: 49), that was not marked with the sign of the cross. As the staff symbolizes the cross, the stone that hit Goliath symbolizes our Lord Jesus; as He is the living stone, of which was said: "*The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone*:" (Psalm 117: 22).

David standing over Goliath, and killing him with Goliath's own sword, refers to the fact, that when Christ comes, he will overcome the devil with his own sword. Indeed the devil, by his shrewdness and oppression that he has exercised against Christ, has lost his authority over all believers in Christ.

David put Goliath's armor (war instruments) in his tent; As we were instruments in the hand of the devil, the apostle Paul says: "*For just as you presented your members as (instruments) of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as (instruments) of righteousness*" (Romans 6: 13). Indeed Christ has put the armor of His enemy in His tent, when we, who were a dwelling place for the devil, have become worthy to become a temple for Christ, to dwell in us. The apostle confirms that Christ dwells in us by saying: "*That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*" (Ephesians 3: 16, 17). The apostle also confirms that we as well dwell in Christ, saying: "*For as many as many of you as are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ*" (Galatians 3: 27). And our Lord Jesus says to his disciples in the Bible: "*I am in the Father, and you in Me, and I in you*" (John 14: 20).

It is true that Goliath having been hit in his forehead, and not in any other place, symbolizes something that happens to us. As the one baptized is marked with the sign of the cross on his forehead, that would be a hit against the spiritual Goliath, a defeat to the devil. He

bears on his forehead the anointment of the Spirit; as though he is marked with the words: “A Sanctuary for the Lord”; through which he will enjoy the graces of the Lord Christ, that sanctifies the thought (the forehead), as an entrance to the inner life of man.

Through the graces of Christ, the devil is driven out of our hearts; That is why, through His help, we try not to receive the devil in us again, through our will, by our evil deeds, and our corrupt thoughts; because in that case (if we receive him), in us will be realized what is written: *“When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says: ‘I will return to my house from which I came’. And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last stare of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation”* (Matthew 12: 43 - 45).

Now, having by Baptism, got rid of all wickedness, through no worthiness on our part, let us, through the help of God, strive to get filled with spiritual blessings. Whenever the devil intends to drag us, he would find us filled with the Holy Spirit, and committed to good works; and to us, the words: *“He who endures to the end will be saved”* (Matthew 10: 22) apply.

The two heroes confronted each others face to face; One of them a real man of war, a man of valor, who depended on his natural capabilities, his past experience, and his strong armor; and the other a young man with no war experience, who did not have except a staff, five smooth stones from the brook, and a sling in his hand; Yet he had a mighty faith, by which he could defeat any enemy. They fought, to have the first destroyed and killed, and the other triumphed and glorified.

The secret of Goliath’s defeat was, that he was not aware that he had a certain point of weakness that he could not avoid: that his forehead was bare. It is as though, in every human possibility, whatever intact it may appear, there will be a gap that may lead to its failure.

Goliath could not realize, that although the sword and spear were not able to destroy him, a dog sling could shake his whole being!

Goliath did not know that there was an end to his pride; For 40 days he stood defying the Lord of hosts, but God prepared a young boy to humiliate that mighty man... That is what happens again and again along the generations. Every haughty man, who assumes that he is able to destroy the Church and to wipe it out of existence, has been himself destroyed, and the Church has remained living and strong!

The secret of David’s strength was hidden in the Lord of hosts; He was not a party in the battle, but just an instrument in the hand of God. The battle was actually between God and the devil; that is why the conquest comes from God Himself; saying:

“You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied....; Then all this

assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; For the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands" (1 Samuel 17: 45 - 47)

Now, let us ask: What is the secret of David's triumph in his fight against Goliath?

a- His outer triumph over Goliath, was probably due to his inner triumph. When his father instructed him to go to see if all is well with his brothers, and to bring back (some assurance) from them (1 Samuel 17: 18), the Book says:

"David rose early in the morning,... and went as Jesse has commanded him" (1 Samuel 17: 20)

Man's obedience to his parents and his spiritual fathers in the Lord, is an inner triumph over his own will, to be followed by outer conquests and triumphs. Many have been defeated externally, because of their internal defeat. David, with joy and without hesitation, obeyed his father, and hastened in the early morning to go on his way. He also triumphed internally, when he calmly and prudently, confronted his older brother's anger.

b- David realized that every conquest was to the account of God Himself and His Church; and every defeat would be an insult to God and His Church. Although he asked: *"What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine,"* he added saying: *"and takes away the reproach from Israel; For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"* (1 Samuel 17: 26). He considered the battle to be between God Himself and the devil.

He probably asked about the wage, for the mere sake of curiosity; but there would undoubtedly be no wage high enough to draw the heart of any man to confront such a mighty man like Goliath, before whom the king and all the men of war, including David's older brothers, were terrified... David felt the zeal of the Lord of hosts; and realized that God Himself grants the conquest to be glorified among His people. By this thought David entered the battle, hidden in God.

c- St. Ambrose believes that the secret of David's triumph, was that he did not initiate the war, but it was Goliath who did; while he was driven into it, motivated by his spiritual zeal.... He did not carry Saul's weapon, but only his own sling and staff... He entered the battle after consulting the Lord. He says: [David had never initiated a war, that he was not driven into it... His strength depended on his own arms, and not on the weapons of others... He never entered a war, without consulting God].

These 3 properties must be characteristic of all of us.

d- St. Ambrose also believes that David triumphed because he presented himself for the sake of his people; He sought what is other's, giving himself to their account; saying: [David followed the example of the prophet Moses, Like him he was chosen from among his people to lead them. He was meek, gentle, and humble in spirit; He was as well a man of strife, and ready for giving love. Before ascending the throne, David offered himself for all; and as a king, he presented himself as equal to everyone of his subjects, in fighting and in bearing troubles. He was

valiant in battle, compassionate in judgment, patient before insults, ready to bear the faults of others; He was dear to all, despite the fact that he had been a young man, when he was chosen to reign on them; and when he grew old, his people asked him not to join the battle, preferring to go through danger for his sake, than for him to go through danger for theirs. Because he performed his duty toward his people, he got them attached to him with their complete free will. When dissension happened among his people, he preferred to live in Hebron, as though in exile (2 Samuel 2: 3), rather than to reign in Jerusalem. And when he admired the courage of 'Abner', although he was on the side of his opponents, and a promoter of aggression, he did not despise him when he came to seek peace, but treated him with respect, and made a feast for him and his men (2 Samuel 3: 20); and when he died through treason, he mourned him bitterly.

4- SAUL GETS TO RECOGNIZE DAVID

Saul did not recognize David, although the latter used to play the harp for him in his youth (1 Samuel 16: 22, 23); He forgot all about him, because of his mental condition, that caused him to lose his memory, and to be moody. David's appearance probably also changed as he grew older. Some people believe that Saul pretended not to recognize David, out of envy, and to keep him under surveillance.

CHAPTER 18

SAUL FEARS DAVID

Saul, who once “loved David greatly, and made him his armor bearer” (1 Samuel 16: 21), began to envy him, as he saw him succeed in every thing he did (1 Samuel 18: 5), and became glorified more than him (1 Samuel 18: 7); For “the Lord was with him, but departed from Saul” (1 Samuel 18: 12). Now, he, in vain, is trying to get rid of him.

- 1- A covenant between Jonathan and David** **1 – 5.**
- 2- Glorifying David more than Saul** **6 – 8.**
- 3- Saul tries to kill David** **9 – 16.**
- 4- David becomes Saul’s son-in-law** **17 – 30.**

1- A COVENANT BETWEEN JONATHAN AND DAVID

Saul promised to give his daughter in marriage to whoever would kill Goliath, and take away the reproach from Israel; Yet when David realized his demand, Saul did not fulfill his promise, and gave his older daughter ‘Merab’ in marriage to ‘Adriel the Meholathite’; and instead of honoring David, he began to envy him, and to seek to get rid of him some way or another. He deprived him of the reward he promised him; yet the Lord did not forget David, but granted him more abundantly than what Saul promised him:

- a- Jonathan, the son of Saul, loved David as his own soul (1 Samuel 18: 1 - 4).
- b- David succeeded in every thing he did, to be admired by all the people and by Saul’s men (1 Samuel 18: 5).
- c- Women came out of the cities of Israel to sing and dance, giving David more dignity than they gave Saul (1 Samuel 18: 6, 7).
- d- A distressing spirit came upon Saul, to become in need of David’s music to refresh him (1 Samuel 18: 10 - 12).
- e- Saul deprived David of marrying his daughter ‘Merab’; yet ‘Michel,’ his other daughter loved and married him, and protected him against her father (1 Samuel 18: 20 - 30).

In other words, although the world opposes the children of God, assuming that, in its authority, it can deprive them of the fruit of their righteousness and strife, and that it

is capable of humiliating them; but “*The scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity*” (Psalm 125: 3). God, Himself would more abundantly grant them their reward. **St. Augustine** says: [In the present time, the righteous indeed suffer to a certain extent; and the scepter of wickedness, rests for sometime on the land allotted to the righteous; yet that will not last for long. Christ will come and gather all the nations before him (Matthew 25: 32, 33). You will see several slaves among

the sheep, and several masters among the goats and the other way round... For not all slaves are good, and not all masters are wicked].

Let us get back to the first gift that God gave to David to make up for the promise broken by Saul; namely, Jonathan's amazing friendship, rarely heard of in history, not even in novels and fiction. Jonathan, Saul's son, had been a brave man of valor, greatly admired and beloved by the people (1 Samuel 14: 1 - 15). Although he had been the crown prince, he loved David, who got more favor in the sight of the people, as well as of the members of the royal court, more than his own father. His father warned him that David might take away the kingdom from him; yet his love, and friendship, were in his eyes, greater than any kingdom. His friendship to David in the Lord, has been in his eyes, more valuable than his obedience to his father outside the Lord! It was said that "*the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his soul*" (1 Samuel 18: 1). Jonathan expressed his inner love for David, of which man can be deprived, even within his family relationships, by giving him the robe that was on him, his sword, bow and belt. He gave him his robe of honor, that he ordinarily wears, as well as his war armor; as a sign of their attachment under all circumstances: in war as well as in peace.

The history of the Church presents us with living portraits of friendship in the Lord, through which certain saints were bound together during their spiritual strife, and enjoyed together the fellowship of love in the Holy Trinity.

❖ Friendship could not be strong, unless you attach yourself to your friend, by that kind of love, poured by the Holy Spirit that is given in us.

St. Augustine

❖ As those who sit close to the sellers of spices and fragrances, gain some of their fragrance, so we should likewise get close to the wise, teachers, and persons of virtue, in order to follow their example in goodness.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ He who gets attached to men of God, will get rich in God's secrets; while he who gets attached to the ignorant, and the proud, will get separated from God, and will be hated by his fellow men. There is nothing that inserts purity in our souls, like the company of those people, pure in heart; such friendships would awaken the soul to life. Friendship with active saints, will fill you with God's secrets.

St. John Saba

❖ If you can not personally be rich with God, get attached to him who is, in order to get as happy as he is, and to learn how to walk according to the Bible.

2- GLORIFYING DAVID MORE THAN SAUL

After killing Goliath, together with many of the Philistines, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, joyfully singing and dancing to meet the returning warriors, with tambourines and other musical instruments, saying:

“Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (1 Samuel 18: 7)

In stead of being happy for David’s achievement, Saul was very angry and displeased, and *“eyed David from that day forward”* (1 Samuel 18:9).

3- SAUL TRIES TO KILL DAVID

Under the influence of anger and envy, Saul sought to get rid of David, who saved him from his enemies, turning to be an ill-famed bad example. In the apostolic law, it came: [Do not hasten to anger, envy, foul temper, etc., so as not to end up like Cain (Genesis 6), of Saul (1 Samuel 18), and of Joab (2 Samuel 3: 20)].

Through envy, Saul lost his inner peace, and tried to kill David by any means, even after falling in David’s hands, who refrained from harming him; He even tried to kill his son Jonathan, who tried to defend his friend (1 Samuel 20: 22); killed the priests (1 Samuel 22), and struck ‘Nob’ the city of priests with the edge of the sword (1 Samuel 22: 19).

What did envy do to Saul and David?

A distressing spirit from God came upon Saul, that made him lose his peace and his mind inside the house; while David, filled with peace, he poured it even over Saul himself, as he played his music to refresh him.

There was a spear in Saul’s hand, as though a scepter of the kingdom; and through envy, he cast it twice toward David to kill him, but God saved David (1 Samuel 18: 11). Although David had neither the power nor the weapon to oppose Saul, yet Saul was afraid of him. He felt inferior to David, and his throne shook before that pure young man. Thus, envy would harm him who envies, and not him who is envied! It makes him lose what is inside and outside him, of graces, blessings, and capabilities.

- ❖ Tell me, you who envy others: Why do you envy your brother? Is it because of the earthly blessings he has got? Are they not from the Lord? It is thus obvious that, by your envy, you make God the object of your animosity’; as He is actually the Grantor of that gift. Can you see now the extent of the evil you are committing, and how you are gathering for yourself a crown of sins?! and can you see the pit of revenge you dig for yourself?!
- ❖ The adulterer gets a temporary pleasure during his act, then he rejects it... But he who envies, tortures himself, even if he is not harmed by the other party; That is why the sin of envy is the worst and most horrible of sins.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Envy often alienates wives from their husbands, who forget the good statement of their father Adam: *“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh”* (Genesis 2: 23). Envy has even destroyed great cities, and strong nations.

St. Clement

Through envy, Saul removed David from his presence; Yet, because he feared the anger of the people and even of the members of his own court, who loved him, he made him captain over a thousand, hoping that he would eventually die in war. David, on the other hand, behaved wisely in all his ways, and the Lord was with him; How wonderful is the phrase:

“All Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them” (1 Samuel 18: 16).

People like to see their leader going out and coming in before them, and not confined to his own quarters surrounded by a hallow of worldly glory and vain dignity, and by compliments of hypocrites. They like to see him partaking of their life with all its troubles and sufferings; to see him put his life in danger for their sake.

What was said here about David carried a shadow of what had been realized in the Person of the Lord Christ (the Son of David). He was loved by all Israel and Judah; namely, by men of the two Testaments: the Old (Israel) and the New (Judah). All of them looked at Him as the Hope of nations and the Savior of the world; who would recon ciliate humanity with heaven. As to the saying that he *“went out and came in before them”*; The Lord Christ (went out) to the world to dwell among us; He became the Son of Man to carry us in Him, to renew our nature, to heal our ailments, to fulfill all our needs, and to uproot the devil and all his works, out of us. When He was told: *“Everyone is looking for you,”* He said to them: *“Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth”*; and he was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons” (Mark 1: 37 - 39).. He also said: *“For I proceeded forth and came from God”* (John 8: 42); *“I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world. Again I leave the world and go to the Father”* (John 16: 42); *“They have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me”* (John 17: 8).

He is *“The Sewer who went out to sow”* (Matthew 13: 3), His life in us, to carry Him in our depths by His Holy Spirit, the secret of our renewal and sanctification, in order that we are lifted up with Him to His heavens, and inherit the everlasting glory; and there, we would eternally enjoy the Father’s bosom.

He also went out of Jerusalem to get crucified on the Mount of Calvary so that *“when He is lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Himself* (John 12: 32).

And as he went out to us, so also He returned to enter, with our nature into His heaven; as He was risen, and ascended to His heavens, *“To raise us up together, and to make us sit together in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 2: 6).

In short, that is the way of His Kingdom: He went out and came in, to reign in us and we to reign together with Him; *“Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach”* (Hebrew 13: 3), that He would enter with us in Him, to enjoy His glory, and to reign forever.

4- DAVID BECOMES SAUL’S SON-IN-LAW

According to Saul’s promise, it was David’s right to marry his older daughter ‘Merab’; But Saul asked him, as a condition, to fight the Lord’s battles; namely, the battles commanded by the Lord; He thought, *“Let my hand not be against him, but let the hands of the Philistines be against him”* (1 Samuel 18: 17, 18). To this David humbly said to Saul: *“Who am I, and what is my life or my father’s family in Israel, that I should be son- in-law to the king?”* (1 Samuel 18: 18). He tried by that to quench the fire of envy in Saul’s heart; although David, who was anointed a king by the prophet Samuel, secretly among his brothers, could boast to Saul that he has killed Goliath, and saved the people of God.

David humbled himself before Saul, who broke his promise to give him Merab in marriage; and gave her instead to ‘Adriel the Meholathite’ (that means: God is my support); who was called “Meholathite” in reference to ‘Abel Mehola,’ meaning (Place of dancing), in the valley of the Jordan (1 Kings 4: 12). Nowadays it is thought by some to be where ‘Ein-El-Holwa’ is located, 9 1/2 miles south of Bissan.

Michel, Saul’s daughter, loved David (1 Samuel 18: 20); yet not as much as Jonathan. After marrying David, Saul gave her to ‘Palti, the son of Laish’ (1 Samuel 25: 44); Yet when David reigned, he got her back (2 Samuel 3: 12 - 16). She criticized David when she saw him leaping and whirling before the ark of the Lord, and despised him in her heart about which David rebuked her on account that her feelings did not demonstrate zeal toward the Lord (2 Samuel 6: 16 - 23).

Shrewdly, Saul commanded his servants to communicate with David secretly, concerning his marriage to Michel his younger daughter. Saying that he is poor and lightly esteemed man; and unable to pay the dowry of a king’s daughter, he was told that “the king does not desire any dowry, but 100 foreskins of the Philistines, within a certain period of time. Saul thought to make David fall by the hands of the Philistines; but David and his men killed 200 men before the designated time, and married Michel who loved him. Saul seeing that the Lord was with David grew more afraid of him, and became his enemy continually.

CHAPTER 19

MICHAL RESCUES DAVID

Now, Saul began to fall apart; He spoke to Jonathan, his son, and to all his servants that they should kill David (1 Samuel 19: 1); then swore by the Lord, that he would not be killed, after Jonathan interceded for his friend. Yet David's conquest of the enemies, inflamed Saul's envy anew to try to pin David to the wall with the spear; and when he failed, he sent messengers to David's house to watch him and to kill him in his bed but his wife Michel rescued him. Finally David resorted to the prophet Samuel in Ramah, to go together to 'Ninth'; and there, Saul came with his men, to prophesy.

We can say that God, in vain, used every possible way to put an end to Saul's folly and selfishness; He spoke to him through his son Jonathan, his daughter Michel, David's wife and finally through the prophets.

- 1- Jonathan intercedes for David** 1 – 7.
- 2- Saul sends messengers to kill David** 8 – 11.
- 3- Michel saves David** 12 – 17.
- 4- The prophets cause Saul's plan to fail** 18 – 24.

1- JONATHAN INTERCEDES FOR DAVID

David was successful in everything he did, because the Lord was with him; That is why all the people loved him, particularly the members of the royal court, Jonathan the son of Saul, and his sister Michel, David's wife; while Saul himself was so filled with envy and hatred, that he insisted on killing him one way or another. Pride was growing in Saul's heart, while in that of David, humility was growing; the name 'Saul,' along the generations, came to represent haughtiness and arrogance, while the name 'David,' on the contrary, represented humility.

The apostle 'Paul' was once called 'Saul' when He was full of pride, then became humble. His name was 'Saul,' like that arrogant king who persecuted David during his reign (1 Samuel 18: 39); then was changed to 'Paul' (1 Corinthians 1: 1), meaning (the least), who considered himself the last of all in the Church, after having arrogantly persecuted the innocent Christians. When his name was 'Saul,' he was arrogant and proud; and as it was changed to 'Paul,' he became humble and the least of the apostles (1 Corinthians 15: 9; Ephesians 3: 8).

St. Augustine

Some people may wonder: How Saul got abased to such an extent; to use every means to kill David though he had been granted the grace of prophecy (1 Samuel 10: 11)?

Indeed Saul was granted 'Prophecy' as a divine gift, in order to experience the life of praise and worship, being the Lord's anointed; Yet, as he did not harbor humility and love in his

heart, he lost every goodness, opposed David, and even rebelled against God Himself, and broke his commandment.

Don't marvel at this! That is why the saintly fathers concentrate on acquiring love, as a fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit in us, to live by the Lord, and not to lose our salvation. The other gifts, even that of Baptism, would not be capable of supporting us without love.

❖ Gaining Baptism is possible, even for a wicked person; so also the gift of prophecy. A wicked man can have communion in the Body and Blood of the Lord; That is why it is said: *"Whoever eats this bread and drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord"* (1 Corinthians 11: 27 - 29). An evil person can bear the name of Christ and be called Christian; Yet, it is said of him: *"He profaned My holy name"* (see *Ezekiel 36: 20*). But it is not possible to have love, and be evil! As love is a special gift.

St. Augustine

Saul, as one with authority, assumed that he is capable of getting rid of David; But God gave David a way out: He opened the heart of Jonathan, the son of Saul, with a strong love to David to the extent that he gave away some secrets of the kingdom; He disregarded his body relationship to Saul, and told David that his father is intending to kill him that he should be careful, and should wait until Jonathan knows the matter, and tries to reconcile them.

We marvel to see such true bond of friendship between two competitors on the throne of a kingdom: Jonathan, was born to reign, while David was called to reign. Although both of them were heroes and great commanders in the army, their look at each other was one of admiration and appreciation, with a true love even to death. Jonathan defended David, until his father rebuked him and even tried to kill him. Jonathan helped David to flee (1 Samuel 20); How beautiful were the words:

"Then Jonathan, Saul's son arose and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hands in God; and he said to him: 'Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that. So the two of them made a covenant before the Lord'" (1 Samuel 23: 16 - 18)

In the beginning, Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to his servants, that they should kill David (1 Samuel 19: 1); Having warned David, Jonathan invited his father to walk with him in the field, intending to talk to him secretly, to try to reconcile him with David; drawing his attention to their need for the service of such a good and brave man for the sake of their kingdom; Saul responded and vowed before his son that he would change his attitude; Yet that was only temporarily.

Jonathan, from the beginning, could have told David to flee from Saul's face, but he counted that as a great loss for the kingdom, as well as for him personally, as he loved David as himself.

David resumed his duties, once Saul responded to the true and honest voice of his son. And then there was war again. David went out and fought with the Philistines, and struck them with a mighty blow, that they fled before him. (1 Samuel 19: 8). His reward was that Saul's heart got filled with envy, and his spirit was overcome by an evil spirit.

2-SAUL SENDS MESSENGERS TO KILL DAVID

Saul tried to kill David with the spear, but he fled before him; So he sent messengers to his house to watch and kill him in the morning (1 Samuel 19: 11). For that, the prophet David sang his fifty-ninth psalm (according to the Septuagint version) saying:

“Deliver me from my enemies, O my God; Defend me from those who rise up against me; Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloodthirsty men. For look, they lie in wait for my life; the mighty gather against me,... Awake to help me, and behold!... At evening they return, they growl like a dog, and go all around the city...” (Psalm 59: 1 - 6)

St. Augustine in his interpretation of this psalm, believes that Saul's action, is a symbol of what the priests and the Pharisees have done with the Lord Christ. As Saul sent messengers in the morning to David's house to watch and kill him, So the rulers of the Jews paid a bribe to the soldiers guarding the Lord's tomb, to say in the morning, that His disciples came by night and stole His body. By that they wanted to (kill) the Lord a second time, namely, to destroy the faith in Him; but they failed.

In the fifty-ninth psalm, the prophet David likens Saul's messengers watching and trying to kill him, to one dog going around the city, as if not to kill but to protect. So God does with those who fear him, transforming evil into good. Saul sought to kill David, yet the latter was rescued by Michel the daughter of Saul whom God used as a way to confirm his care for him. In the same way, when the rulers of the Jews bribed the soldiers to (kill) the news of Christ's resurrection; their action was transformed into a confirmation of the resurrection; as it is against logic to believe that the disciples, overcome by fear, could go by night to the sealed, heavily guarded tomb, to steal the body of the Lord. What the guards claimed, became a confirmation that the body was not in the tomb, which confirmed His resurrection.

3- MICHEL SAVES DAVID

Michel probably heard from her father's household, about the issue of the messengers; and as she dearly loved her husband, she planned for his rescue;. As her house was probably by the wall of the city, she let David down through a window to start a new stage of his life that carried valuable experiences. He entered into a life of passion, to live among the oppressed and fugitives, with no place to settle down. It is as though, God was preparing him to practice the royal life, not that of authority and glory, but that of ministry and care, particularly to the fugitives and oppressed. In that, David was a symbol of the Lord Christ whose love for mankind, let Him descend from heaven, as though from His home, to wander in the wilderness of this

world, with no place to rest His head; He lived as a fugitive; and was tempted, to be able to help those who are tempted.

Michel used deceit and lying to save David: She took an image (idol) and laid it in the bed, put a cover of goat's hair for his head, and covered it with clothes (1 Samuel 19: 13). That idol, in the same size of man, David knew nothing about, Michel probably hid in her house, not to worship it, but as an omen to get pregnant and to have a son. She also lied saying that David was sick; and when admonished by her father, saying: "*Why have you deceived me like this, and sent my enemy away, so that he has escaped?!*," She lied, saying: "He said to me, '*Let me go! Why should I kill you*'" (1 Samuel 19: 17).

4- THE PROPHETS CAUSE SAUL'S PLANS TO FAIL

David fled and went to Samuel at Ramah, and he and Samuel went and stayed at Ninth, meaning (a dwelling place). Samuel left his own house and stayed with David, probably to protect him from Saul, not by a sword or spear, but by God's work and his spiritual authority, having been the founder and chief of the school of prophets; and also the one who anointed both kings: Saul and David.

David probably came to join his teacher; assuming that Saul may probably give consideration to the location and its chief. But Saul, whose heart was filled with envy and hatred, did not reconsider his plans, nor went by himself to consult Samuel, but sent messengers to bring David to kill him. When those messengers reached the location, influenced by the spiritual atmosphere, they forgot every thing about their mission; the Spirit of God came upon them, and they prophesied; namely, partook of praise and worship with the prophets.. When Saul was told, he sent other messengers, thinking that the first messengers were ashamed of Samuel, and again others who likewise prophesied. Instead of learning the lesson, Saul went to Ramah by himself, and came to the great well that was at 'Sechu'; and there God was likewise glorified: His Spirit came upon Saul in Ninth, and prophesied. Greatly influenced by those praising God by such marvelous music, Saul stripped off his robe and his military armor, and laid down in his white attire, all that day and all that night praising and singing. All those who saw him said: "*Is Saul also among the prophets?!*" (1 Samuel 19: 24).

God wanted to confirm that He is the God of the impossible, who is capable of transforming Saul's heart, filled with hatred, into one enflamed with yearning to worship and praise; stripped of clothes of glory and dignity; Yet He did not force him to it, but left it to his free will; That is why he soon returned to his evil nature.

Some scholars assumed that David and Samuel had mocked Saul, as they saw him (naked) all that day and all that night; Yet it was the other way round: Those two prophets glorified God for His work with Saul, though temporary. That scene left such an effect on David's heart; that he commended him together with his son Jonathan, saying: "*Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives*" (2 Samuel 1: 23). That is what

remained in David's heart concerning Saul; He forgot his envy, hatred, oppression, and plans to kill him, to think of him as the one beloved and pleasant, who praised God among the prophets.

CHAPTER 20

JONATHAN SAVES DAVID

Saul's actions revealed his very shaken psyche, having realized that his throne started to fall apart: his son, the crown prince, supports David; his daughter Michel saves him; and even the prophets stand by his side... And now David encounters Jonathan, representing the chief officer of the royal court, to admonish him for his father's actions. In great honesty, Jonathan revealed what was in his father's heart, made a covenant with David before the Lord and advised him to escape, after they kissed one another, weeping bitterly.

- 1- David admonishes Jonathan** 1 – 11.
- 2- Jonathan consummates David's plan** 12 – 23.
- 3- Jonathan explores his father's heart** 24 – 34.
- 4- Jonathan saves David** 35 – 42.

1- DAVID ADMONISHES JONATHAN

David realized that Saul insisted on killing him, having sent three missions, and come by himself, for no other reason except to get rid of him; But God saved him. David fled from Ninth to Ramah, and came to his close friend Jonathan to seek his advice. The events of this chapter came to reveal to us the unique personality of Jonathan as far as love and loyalty are concerned. Having realized that David, whom he loved as his own soul, was certainly going to get the throne of his father (1 Samuel 20: 14 - 17), he revealed his acceptance of God's will with joy, advised his friend to escape from his father's hand, and did his best to the account of him, who is going to inherit his own father. The events also reveal more about the aggressive personality of Saul, whose hatred moved him to try to kill Jonathan, his own son, because he supported his friend.

David came to Jonathan, to seek in him the loving heart, to admonish him for his father's behavior, and to seek his advice and support. Indeed the one who sat on the throne, wanted to kill David, but God opened up the heart of Jonathan, the closest to Saul, to love David, and to plan for him through the royal court... Thus, whenever evil tries to close a door, other doors are opened before us.

“What have I done? What is my iniquity, and what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?” (1 Samuel 20: 1)

David tried to justify himself, asking Jonathan to kill him himself, if he found iniquity or treason in him; as he would prefer to die justly by the hand of Jonathan his friend, to die unjustly by that of Saul or one of his servants (1 Samuel 20: 8 - 10).

Although David was honest with everyone, he encountered several troubles and oppressions, that he expressed in his seventh psalm, saying: *“O Lord my God,... Save me from all those who persecute me; and deliver me, lest they tear me like a lion, rending me in pieces, while*

there is none to deliver. O Lord my God, If I have done this: If I have iniquity in my hands, If I have repaid evil to him who was at peace with me, or have plundered my enemy without cause, Let the enemy pursue me and overtake me; Yes, let him trample my life to the earth, and lay my honor in the dust” (Psalm 7: 1 - 5).

David speaks in the pleural, saying: “Save me from (all those)...,” then proceeds in the singular, saying: “Lest they tear me like (a lion)...”; That is because, although those oppressing and pursuing him are many, it is only one who is behind them - the Devil, according to St. Basil.

Some saintly fathers believe that David’s words to Jonathan, as well as those in the seventh psalm, where he justifies himself, saying: “*What have I done, and what is my iniquity?*,” and: “*If there is iniquity in my hands,*” all were symbols of the Lord Christ, who, although he is alone without sin, yet, the devil has tried like a lion to devour him on the cross. But the enemy was destroyed, and Christ was risen, to lift up his believers with him.

❖ “*O Lord my God, If I have done this”* (Psalm 7: 3):

“*The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in me*” (John 14: 30).

“*If there is iniquity in my hands*” :

“*Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in his mouth*” (1 Peter 2: 22).

“*If I have repaid evil to him who was at peace with me*”:

“*They cried out saying: Crucify Him, Crucify Him*” (John 19: 6).

“*Let the enemy pursue me, and overtake me*” :

“*The last enemy that will be destroyed is death*” (1 Corinthians 15: 26).

“*Yes, Let him trample my life to the earth*” : It is not possible to trample life to the earth. “*And lay my honor to the dust*”... The Psalmist supplicates for the sake of his enemies, for God to be glorified in their earth, when they stop their animosity, and God is glorified in them.

St. Jerome

Anyway, as the soul walks in the way of perfection, through its enjoyment of the new life in Christ, the only perfect One, it would be exposed to wars from every side, incited by the evil one against it; Yet it would gain victory and conquest. And as said by **St. Augustine**: [Every war and every animosity will be defeated, for him who became perfect; to have no other enemy but the envious devil... The apostle says: “*Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Peter 5: 8). That is why, after the Psalmist spoke in pleural, saying: “*Save me from (all those) who persecute me,*” he says in the singular: “*Lest they tear me like (a lion)*” (Psalm 7); having known the real enemy of the perfect soul].

David openly proclaimed his great fear of Saul, saying:

“*But truly as the Lord lives, there is but a step between me and death; So Jonathan said to David, ‘Whatever you yourself desire, I will do it for you’*” (1 Samuel 20: 3, 4)

That is how “*love does not seek what is hers, but what is other’s*”

David advised Jonathan on how to reveal what is in his father's heart; He did that with the spirit of meekness and humility, not abusing Jonathan's love for him; He said to him, "*Let me go*" (1 Samuel 20: 5); as in the absence of Saul, David took his orders from Jonathan, and submitted to him. Before departing, David fell on his face to the ground, and bowed down three times (1 Samuel 20: 41); a sign of respect to him, as the son of a king, and out of gratitude.

His advice was, briefly, for David to fail to sit with the king to eat on the new moon for three days, on pretense that his brother 'Eliab' asked him to attend the family's yearly sacrifice; to which Jonathan gave him the permission to do. That was to see what the reaction of the king would be: If he consented, that would indicate his good intentions; but if he got mad, that would indicate that he determined evil against David.

2- JONATHAN CONSUMMATES DAVID'S PLAN

In a form of prayer, as it was the custom sometimes, Jonathan vowed, saying:

"The Lord God of Israel is witness! When I have sounded out my father sometime tomorrow or the third day, and indeed there is good toward David, and I do not send to you and tell you, may the Lord do so and much more to Jonathan..." (1 Samuel 20: 12, 15)

He confirmed that if his father's intentions were good, he would send him a messenger to tell him the good news, and to let him return to resume his work in the royal court; But if it was the other way round, he himself would personally come to inform him, for the sake of David's safety. He prayed for him to go in peace and in God's care, until it was time for him to reign; then added:

"May the Lord be between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever" (1 Samuel 20 : 42)

As it was the custom for a new king, to kill the king he replaced, together with all his descendants, to avoid any chance of rebellion by anyone of royal descent (1 Kings 15: 29; 16: 11). Actually, David kept that promise (2 Samuel 21: 7).

3- JONATHAN EXPLORES HIS FATHER'S HEART

Jonathan explored his father's heart on the second day of the banquet. On the first day, the king assumed that David did not attend because something had happened to him to make him unclean; But on the next day, when he asked Jonathan about the reason behind David's absence, Jonathan told him that David asked his permission to go to Bethlehem, at the request of his brother to partake of his family's yearly sacrifice; Here, Saul's anger was aroused against Jonathan, and he said to him:

"You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have sided with the son of Jesse, to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you shall not be established nor your kingdom. Now therefore, send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die" (1 Samuel 20: 30, 31).

By this insult, Saul did not mean to insult his son's mother but to insult his son himself.

And when Jonathan tried to defend David, Saul cast a spear at him, to kill him, by which Jonathan knew for sure that it was determined by his father to kill David. What did Saul mean by such horrible insult to Jonathan?

❖ You are a son of a harlot, mad for men, who chases the passersby.

You are a miserable, fainthearted, hermaphrodite; with no sign of manhood; living in your own shame and in that of your mother.

Now what happened to Jonathan? Did he get grieved by what he heard; Did he hide his face in shame, and forsake his friend? No, on the contrary, he considered his friendship to be an adornment.

One of them - Jonathan - was a king and the son of a king; and the other - David - was a fugitive; Nevertheless the first one did not get ashamed of his friendship.

St. John Chrysostom

Saul, finding no proper response to Jonathan's defense of David, cast a spear at him to kill him. That is the spirit of evil, that persecutes the truth and whoever utters it, using violence and authority. When the Jews could not argue with the Lord Christ - the Truth itself - "*They took up stones to throw at him*" (John 8: 59); And when they "*could not resist the wisdom and the spirit with which Stephen spoke,*" they stoned him (Acts 6: 9 - 15).

Anger clouded the eyes of Saul; he did not find how to answer his son, except by casting a spear at him to kill him; together with the most horrible insults.

❖ If you discovered the existence of scorpions and serpents in your house, would you not do your best to get rid of them, in order to live in peace at your homes?! However, here you are aroused with anger; and the anger takes root in your hearts, and creates in them the scorpions and serpents of hatred. Yet, you are not purifying your hearts, the dwelling places of God!!

St. Augustine

❖ Anger is a kind of madness; Whoever acquires it for himself, would get confused and would be like wild beasts.

St. Eughris

❖ If man acquires all goodness, but has hatred in his heart toward his brother, he is a foreigner to God.

St. Pachomius

4- JONATHAN SAVES DAVID

Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, with a little lad with him, so that no one would doubt where he was heading, but would assume that he was training on arrows casting. Then he said to the lad, '*Now run find the arrows which I shoot*'; *As the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him,... and cried out after the lad and said, 'Is not the arrow beyond you?...Make haste, hurry, do not delay'* " (1 Samuel 20: 35 - 38). That was a sign to

David who was hiding in the field, that danger was chasing him, and that he had to escape. Jonathan gave his weapons to his lad, to carry them to the city; and as soon as the lad had gone, David arose, fell on his face to the ground, and bowed down three times, a sign of appreciation and of gratitude to Jonathan who cared for his life. The farewell was hot, they kissed one another and wept together, to separate with no further encounter on this earth. When David went on weeping, Jonathan said to him: “*Go in peace, since we have both sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, ‘May the Lord be between you and me, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever’*” (1 Samuel 20: 42). By that they departed, according to the flesh; while their hearts love increased.

How sweet is love, and how valuable! There is nothing that can destroy it, not even death! It is our everlasting treasure; The apostle Paul says: “*Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away*” (1 Corinthians 13: 8).

CHAPTER 21

DAVID THE FUGITIVE

What a painful portrait of David the fugitive! He left every thing and fled with no sword nor bread. Having made no plans, and not consulted the Lord, he became confused: He came to 'Nob,' a city of priests; and because of him, the priests were killed and the city was destroyed. He headed to Gath, where he was counted as a spy; so he pretended to be insane, to save his life. These were moments of weakness, that mighty man of faith went through.

1- David in Nob 1 – 9.

2- David in Gath 10 – 15.

1- DAVID IN NOB

It is amazing, how that man, before whom the heathens trembled, for whom women sang: *“Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands”* (1 Samuel 18: 7) and who gained the admiration and love of the king, his son, his daughter, his leaders, and his whole people... would flee before the rejected king.. The hour of bitter temptation, that every believer is to go through, has come; when he feels that he is lonely, with nobody to support him, or to share his feelings.

David came to 'Nob,' north of and close to Jerusalem (Isaiah 10: 32); It was counted as a city of priests, though not included as one in Joshua 21. It was so counted, because the tabernacle of the meetings had been moved to it after the devastation of Shiloh. There, he met 'Ahimalech' the priest - probably 'Ahija' the son of 'Ahitob' (1 Samuel 14: 3), or his brother and his successor in priesthood. He was a good man; a son of a grandson of Eli the high priest, whose house was condemned to destruction by the Lord (1 Samuel 3: 13 - 14).

When the Lord Christ mentioned that episode in Mark 2: 26, He said that it happened during the days of 'Abiathar,' the son of 'Ahimalech' the high priest (1 Samuel 22: 2), who ministered as a high priest together with his father.

Although David was accompanied by some followers, 'Alimalech' thought that David was traveling alone, for his high position in the royal court gave him the right of a more dignified company. This situation probably confused Alimalech, because of what he heard that Saul was seeking to kill David which made giving him hospitality a great offense that might bring on him the king's wrath.

David was so desperate, that he resorted to deceit and lies to justify his situation before Alimalech saying to him:

“The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, ‘Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you’. And I have directed my young men to such and such place”(1 Samuel 21: 2)

David was a man according to God's heart; yet, in his moments of weakness he misbehaved. His deception led to serious consequences (1 Samuel 22: 18, 19).

David asked for the holy showbread (Leviticus 24: 5 - 9), which the priests used to set fresh on the holy table every Sabbath before the Lord, and eat the old bread. although it was not lawful to eat except for the priests, Alimalech offered it to David and his men, if they, at least, had kept themselves from women; on account that they were hungry, and there was nothing else to offer them.

The Lord Christ used that episode to confirm to the Jews, that it was all right for the disciples to pluck the heads of grain, to rub them in their hands, and eat them on the Sabbath (Mark 2: 25; Matthew 12: 3, 4; Luke 6: 3 - 5).

St. Cyril the Great says: [Although David violated the law by his act, to us he remains to be a dignified saint and a prophet... We should know that the showbread mentioned here, symbolizes the bread that comes down from heaven, that we see on the holy tables in the Churches; and that all the tools on that table, we use in that holy sacrament, are all symbols of the exalted divine treasures].

David did not do that, out of slothfulness or negligence of the commandment, but because he had no other way. His behavior carried a symbol; as the Gentiles would get to enjoy, not the showbread, but the body of the Lord Christ, the bread coming down from heaven, as a source of real fulfillment to the soul.

When David asked Alimalech if he had any weapon on the premises, he gave him the sword of Goliath, whom David killed in the valley of Elah, that had been wrapped in a cloth (probably the robe of Goliath), behind the ephod, for safe keeping. David said to the priest: *"There is none like it, give it to me"* (1 Samuel 21: 9). Seeing that sword, gave assurance to the soul of David; He remembered how he, as a boy, confronted the mighty Goliath with all his armor, with nothing more than a sling and five smooth stones from the valley, defeating him by the name of the Lord.

In Nob, there was one of Saul's servants: 'Deog,' an Edomite - probably the lad who was accompanying Saul as he was looking for the lost donkeys of his father (1 Samuel 9: 3) - detained before the Lord (1 Samuel 21: 7), maybe to fulfill a vow or for purification. David, feeling the danger of the presence of 'Deog,' hastened to depart from there that same day. It came to pass that 'Deog' told Saul about what happened, and incited him, not to kill Alimaleh alone, but all the priests, together with their women, children, and beasts. **St. Augustine** believes 'Deog' to mean (initiation), and 'Edom' to mean (dust) or (earth)... as though representing someone with an earthly, and not a heavenly, initiation, that corrupts the ministry of the Lord.

2- DAVID IN GATH

David fled to Gath, the city of the mighty Goliath whom he killed; and here he comes carrying the sword of their hero. As there were in the city, numerous widows and orphans, as a

result of David's action, it was impossible for the people of Gath to give David hospitality as a fugitive of Saul; but they counted him as a spy on them, and intended to kill him. Now David was very much afraid of 'Achich' the king of Gath - one of the titles of the kings of the Philistines - that he resorted to feign insanity; as there were certain privileges enjoyed by the insane, like not being punished for their actions, on the assumption that they harbor a spirit that should be feared.

What a miserable scene! To behold the mighty David, the pious man of God, becoming weak in faith to the extent of feigning madness; scratching on the doors of the gate; namely, writing in an unintelligible way; or, according to the Septuagint version, banging (drumming) on the door; beside letting his saliva fall down on his beard (1 Samuel 21: 13), which was a sure sign of madness in the east, because of the dignity given to the beard in those days. The man of faith used a human way to save himself!!

Although David saw himself in Gath as helpless, as a dumb 'silent dove in a distant land,' and resorted to a shameful human way to save himself, his heart was lifted up toward God, as he proclaimed in his fifty-sixth psalm. That psalm started with the introduction: [When David was captured by the Philistines - the 'Alluphyli,' meaning (the strangers), in 'Gath,' meaning (wine-press)]. **St. Augustine** comments on this introduction, saying, that what occurred was a symbol of what was realized with the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David, Who was captured by the (non-believer strangers) to pass through the press of the cross:

[How was He taken to 'Gath'?

His body, namely, the Church, was taken to the press.

What was in the press?

The grapes, while still on the grapevine, do not give juice; but when cast in the wine-press, and squeezed, they look as though put to damage; but would give sweet juice.

I wish the saints who suffer, being pressed by strangers, would comprehend this psalm, and utter its words.

"Be merciful to me O God, for man would swallow me up" (psalm 56: 1). Do not be afraid that man would swallow you up (press you); You will produce juice; you will produce wine!

"Fighting all day he oppresses me" (Psalm 56: 1);

"All day" means (always and forever)... No one should say to himself: There were oppressions in the times of our fathers; but not anymore in our days. If you Assume that you are not suffering oppression; that indicates that you might have not started to become a Christian. Here we hear the voice of the apostle, saying: *"All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"* (2 Timothy 3: 12). If you are not suffering persecution for the sake of Christ, beware lest you might not have started living by piety in Christ. When you do, be ready to get pressed in the vine press; So do not be dry, lest you would produce no juice!].

Having been saved by God from Abimelech - after feigning madness - David set forth praising the Lord who saved him saying:

“I will bless the Lord at all times;... My soul shall make its boast in the Lord. The humble shall hear of it and be glad.... I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and deliver them. Oh, taste and see that the lord is good;... The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken... The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned” (Psalm 34).

St. Augustine comments on the prophet David’s behavior before the king of Gath - according to the Septuagint version - “He *banged (drummed) on the doors of the gate of the city*” (1 Samuel 21: 13); saying: [He (drummed); as the drum does not produce sound, unless the leather is firmly stretched on its frame; David drummed, to indicate that Christ had to be crucified... What are those “doors of the city,” but our hearts that are closed before Christ; He who by the drum of His cross, will open the hearts of those fallen under death].

CHAPTER 22

IN THE CAVE OF ADULLAM

Having departed from Gath, David came to the cave of 'Adullam'; where, "Everton in distress, everyone in debt, and everyone discontented, because of the corruption of Saul's reign, found in David a refuge, and a commander; those who, in Saul's sight, were counted as dangerous refugees, attached themselves to David, to become later on, men of valor, in the service of the new kingdom.

Their attachment to David inflamed Saul's hatred, and incited him to kill all the priests in the city of Nob - except for 'Abiathar' the son of Achimelech - who offered David bread and a sword, unaware of the situation between Saul and him.

- 1- David in the cave of Adullam 1 – 4.**
- 2- David goes to Judah 5.**
- 3- Saul kills the priests of Nob 6 – 22.**
- 4- Abiathar the priest saved 23 - .**

1- DAVID IN THE CAVE OF ADULLAM

It was difficult for David who saved his people of their enemies, to stay away from his country, as an outlaw, especially after God allowed the people of Gath to conspire to kill him. He started to head toward Judah, albeit in some fear. He came to a cave, not far from the old Canaanite city of 'Adullam,' where he hid, until joined by his parents and brothers, beside many of those afflicted, to find in him their refuge.

'Adullam' is a Hebrew word, meaning (refuge), where the Canaanites dwelt in the days of Jacob (Genesis 38: 1, 2); one of the cities that became a portion for the tribe of Judah; between 'Jarmuth' and 'Socoh' (Joshua 15: 35). Some believe it to be the new 'Ein-El-Maa'; formerly known as 'Eid-El-Maa,' 12 miles south-west of Bethlehem, in the valley of Elah, where there are still about 15 huge caves, one of which is that of 'Kreton' valley close to Bethlehem, in which David and his men dwelt (160 meters long).

Some believe that the situation of David in the cave, and after that in the forest of 'Hereth' (1 Samuel 22: 5), symbolize that of the Lord of glory, as He came, incarnated, to the (cave) of this world:

- a- Saul - the rejected king - was reigning over the people; a symbol of the ruler of this world - the devil - who reigned on the hearts of many (John 14: 30).
- b- The reign of David was concealed, despite being anointed with the holy oil; and the kingdom of Jesus the, Lord of glory, is likewise concealed in the hearts, not recognized except by those who believe in Him and submit to Him.

c- Around the king, all those in distress, everyone in debt, and everyone discontented, were gathered; In the same way, around the Lord Christ, all the afflicted, the sinners, the tax-collectors, and adulterers, gathered together, to find in him a fulfillment to their debt, a renewal of their nature, and the sweetness of intimacy.

d- The hope of those gathered together around David, was to see him reign as a king, so are we, looking forward to the coming of the Lord to reign forever.

e- As David embraced Abiathar the son of Achimelech who came to him to tell his bitter story; Likewise, the Lord of glory receives every soul that escapes to take refuge in him, to keep it safe (1 Samuel 22: 23).

f- David came to hide in the cave; and the Lord Christ the Word of God came hidden in His Manhood (humanity).

When David escaped from Saul to the cave of Adullam, he wrote a golden psalm (57), in which he says:

“Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in you; and in the shadow of your wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by. I will cry out to God Most High, to God who performs all things for me. He shall send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who would swallow me up” (Psalm 57: 1 - 3)

David fled from the face of Saul to hide in a cave; and this was a symbol of what the Lord Christ did, as said by **St. Augustine**:

[What does hiding in a cave mean?... It means hiding in earth; as whoever flees to a cave, covers himself with earth to become inconspicuous. As to Jesus, He carried earth... received a body taken from earth; in which he hid His Deity; *“For had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”* (1 Corinthians 2: 8)... Jesus did that to flee from the face of the evil one (symbolized by Saul) in a cave. We can understand a cave as a place underground. Positively, as confirmed to all, His body of Jesus was placed in a tomb hewn in a rock. That tomb was the cave to which he fled from the face of (Saul). The Jews persecuted Him even after His body was placed in a cave... Even after He died on the cross, they stabbed Him with a spear (John 19: 34). But when He was placed in a cave, they could do nothing more to the body; and as the Lord was risen without harm or corruption from that place, he fled to from the face of (Saul), symbolizing the evil one, He proclaimed Himself to His elects (the apostles), who touched Him after His resurrection, and believed (Luke 24: 39), realizing that (Saul’s) persecution had not benefited the (persecutors)].

St. Jerome says: [The cave symbolizes the world; its dim light can not be compared to the light of the coming world; Nevertheless, by the coming of the Lord to the world, He brought to it light, being Himself the Light]. [As David entered the cave fleeing from the face of Saul; the Lord came to the world and took on Himself its afflictions].

I wish we likewise, having our souls embittered under the reign of Saul, namely, having fallen under the authority of the Devil, take refuge in the Son of David, hidden in the cave; He who came to our world to give it light by the glory of His hidden deity, to grant us the inner enlightenment, in place of the darkness, to offer us the new life, instead of the death that reigned over us.

Let us resort to our Christ, who came to the cave of our nature, to take away our fear, to find Him close to us, dwelling in our midst to renew our nature in Him, and to sanctify and glorify it by the splendor of His glory.

Let us join the Son of David in the cave, to find, gathered around Him, the afflicted and embittered souls; That is the way to the Kingdom and the glory, to share with those who suffer, their sufferings; to accept dwelling in the dark cave, to enter through it into the splendor of the inner kingdom. There is no salvation outside the narrow door and the rugged way, unless our Christ passes through them.

Finally, David transformed all those energies, that seemed lost and opposed, into valuable assets for the edification of his new kingdom, after the destruction of that of Saul. Let us then, come to the Son of David in the cave, with our energies, that we sometimes consider to be destructive to us - our emotions, feelings, and capabilities - for Him to receive, and to sanctify by His Holy Spirit, to turn them into constructive energies to the account of His new kingdom.

The men who gathered together under David's command, were about 400 men, a number that carries an allegoric meaning: the figure 100 refers to the consummation of the number of believers; while the figure 4, refers to the four corners of the world, and to the flesh taken from earth (4 corners). It is as though, that, as we encounter our incarnate Christ in the cave, the world as well as the flesh, would transform into a blessing for us; so that we see in the world, and in the flesh, nothing but goodness; as they are the good creation of God. St., Clement of Alexandria says: [God loves every thing He created]; [God does not hate anything, and does not harbor animosity against anything].

2- DAVID GOES TO THE LAND OF JUDAH

“Then the prophet Gad said to David, ‘Do not stay in the stronghold; Depart and go to the land of Judah. So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth”(1 Samuel 22: 5)

This is the first time we hear of the prophet Gad: here, and until the end of David's days, when the latter carried out a census of the people (2 Samuel 24: 11 - 15). He helped to organize the musical service in the house of the Lord (2 Chronicles 29: 25); and was one of the historians who wrote a record of the events that happened during David's reign (1 Chronicles 29: 29).

It seems that Gad was one of the students of the prophet Samuel in the school of prophets; and that Samuel instructed David to have Gad, the prophet or seer, as his companion. Here he was advising David not to stay in the stronghold, that was in Moab, but to go to the land of Judah, where he would encounter troubles, for the sake of the people of God. That proved to be,

both for his own good, and for the edification of the people of God; as he saved the inhabitants of 'Keilah' from the Philistines (1 Samuel 23: 1, 2); and defended the cities of Judah (1 Samuel 27: 8 - 11). By that he became famous, and gained the trust of the people of Judah; and when Saul died, he was there, ready to succeed him.

The call was to depart from the stronghold and to go to the rugged forest of 'Hereth' south-west of Bethlehem. It is a call to forsake the safe human strongholds, and accept the rugged way of the cross - that of the kingdom and glory. **St. John Chrysostom** says: Suffering is our teacher; We do not bring it on ourselves, but we courageously bear it, if we have to face it; as it is a source of much goodness]. {Do not covet a life, that is free of afflictions; as that, is not for your own good].

3- SAUL KILLS THE PRIESTS OF NOB

As David and his men returned to Judea, news of their return went around, and became very popular among the masses, something that stirred Saul's envy anew. He was very depressed, feeling that David's only interest was to destroy his kingdom, and that all those around him, were interested in nothing but to betray him for the sake of a reward; Even his own son and the heir of his throne was standing against him.

As Saul dwelt in Gibeah under a tamarisk tree in Ramah {not in the city of Ramah itself, but on a height there] with his spear in his hand, and all his servants standing around him; He started to rebuke them, saying:

"Hear now, you Benjamites! Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds?" (1 Samuel 22: 7)

These words revealed how unwise Saul had been; Although he was a king over all Israel, he chose his whole court, as well as his highest officers from his tribe alone; hence he said to them: *"Hear now, you Benjamites"*. That is a painful portrait that reveals a selfish leadership, that cares only for itself, and not for the whole people. What a difference from the prophet Moses, who chose Joshua as his disciple and heir of his leadership, and not one of his own children.

How beautiful are the words of **St. John Chrysostom**, whose heart selfishly harbored fatherhood for all: [Your congregation is my crown; Every one of you - in my sight - equals the whole city].

Saul, for his lack of faith, probably feared to surround himself with non-Benjamites, lest someone would rob the kingdom from him and his descendants after him. There is no doubt that such behavior had created much bitterness in the hearts of the elders of the other tribes.

Because of envy, Saul could not even utter David's name, but called him "the son of Jesse"; and because of his greed and love of vain glory, he intended to convince his servants that the son of Jesse was going to deprive them of their fields, their vineyards, and their high

positions... In that he was following the lead of the evil one, who entices humanity to evil, through material things and worldly dignities.

Saul was so obsessed, to assume treason in all his servants, Accusing them, he says:

“All of you have conspired against me, and there is no one who reveals to me that my son had made a covenant with the son of Jesse; and there is not one of you who is sorry for me or reveals to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie on the wait, as it is this day” (1 Samuel 22: 8)

When man loses his relationship with God, the Source of peace, he sees all people around him as enemies; he flees in seven roads with nobody after him... It is his inner thoughts that chase him and scatter his energies. While he, who enjoys peace with God, would harbor peace in his heart, and peace with his fellow men, and would not fear even his opponents.

Does the Edomite, trying to justify himself and his colleagues, as they all were terrified to be killed by Saul, put the responsibility on the high priest, saying:

“I saw the son of Jesse going to Nob to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the Lord for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine” (1 Samuel 22: 9, 10)

Although he said the truth, he distorted it by cutting it short; He did not mention the conversation between Ahimelech and David; and portrayed Ahimelech as a traitor to Saul. He should have mentioned that Ahimelech assumed that David was on an important errand for the king; and that he intended by what he did to be of service to Saul himself.

Then the king sent for Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father’s house, the priests who were in Nob, to have them all killed; The same thing ‘Haman’ did, when he, in revenge against ‘Mordecai,’ intended to have all the Jewish people killed together with him (Esther 3: 6).

Saul spoke to Ahimelech in an insulting way, saying: *“Hear now, son of Ahitub...”*, although the priest addressed him with respect and reverence, saying: *“Here I am my Lord”*

Ahimelech countered the accusation against him, saying:

a- He did not deny that he provided David with bread and a sword, and asked the Lord for him; yet he so did, because of what he knew of David’s faithfulness, his relationship as a son-in-law to the king, and his position and dignity in the royal court; saying:

“And who among all your servants is so faithful as David, who is the king’s son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honorable in your house?” (1 Samuel 22: 14)

A question, by which he intended to defend himself. yet at the same time, that implied a reproach to Saul, who was known to be unstable, in both his friendship and animosity, defying every reason.

b- That he knew nothing of what happened between Saul and David, little or much.

Saul had nothing to answer him; but he as usual, in haste, and without consulting anyone, issued his unjust verdict: *“You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father’s house”* (1 Samuel 22: 16). He ordered the guards to execute his verdict; but they would not lift their hands to strike the priests of the Lord. But Doeg the Edomite turned and struck the priests, and killed on that day 85 men who wore a linen ephod; then went to their city - Nob - and struck with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and nursing infants, oxen, donkeys and sheep; a horrible scene, that tainted Saul’s history forever.

Saul did not devastate a city of the enemy, but one of his people’s own... That is what sin does in the life of man; it destroys his inner life, corrupts his energies and capabilities; and turns him into an enemy and opponent, even to himself.

Anyway, God’s words, concerning the household of Eli the high priest, were now realized (1 Samuel 2: 31); as Ahimelech and the priests, descendants of Eli were killed.

4- ABIATHAR THE PRIEST SAVED

It seems that Abiathar, one of the sons of Ahimelech, did not go to Saul with his father and relatives, but stayed to guard the tabernacle; and when he heard of what happened to his folks, he escaped and fled to David, before the arrival of Doeg the Edomite (1 Samuel 22: 20). When Abiathar told David what happened, David’s response was:

“I have caused the death of all the persons of your father’s house. Stay with me, do not fear, for he who seeks my life seeks your life; but with me you shall be safe” (1 Samuel 22: 23)

One of David’s pious attributes was admitting his fault, and putting the blame on himself rather than on others. He could have said that he did not know of the presence of Doeg the Edomite, when he went to Ahimelech; and that he did not expect that Saul would dare to kill the Lord’s priests...; He could have condemned both Saul and Doeg for their violence...; But David with humility said: *“I have caused the death of all the persons of your father’s house”* How sweet it is for man to say by his own tongue and the depths of his heart: “I did wrong”. There is nothing more noble than to put the blame on oneself; and there is nothing worse than putting it on others. So David condemned himself and tried to make it up for Abiathar, by embracing and protecting him; So he became to him, both a prophet and a priest.

The saintly fathers - by biblical thought - cared to train the believers on condemning themselves and not others.

❖ If man does not dare to blame himself; he would not hesitate to blame even God Himself.

Abbot Dorotheos of Gaza

CHAPTER 23

SAUL PURSUES DAVID

When the enemies attacked 'Keilah,' its people looked at David and his few men (about 600 men) as their refuge; while disregarded Saul the official king with all his army, having lost their confidence in him. Many realized that David, the fugitive, worked for the sake and edification of the holy congregation; and that Saul did not care except for opposing David and chasing him without any reason; The wicked do not stand the children of God. Scholar Tertulian says: [The world does not stand the Church, so it persecutes it; while the Church loves the world and serves it.

- 1- David saves Keila** 1 – 13.
- 2-David in the wilderness of Ziph** 14..
- 3- A covenant with Jonathan** 15 – 18.
- 4- Saul pursues David** 19 – 29.

1- DAVID SAVES KEILAH

David heard that the enemy attacked Keilah, a city in the valley of Judah, close to the territory of the Philistines (Joshua 15: 44), about 3 miles away from the cave of Adullam, and 3 1/2 miles north-west of Hebron; called nowadays Kherbet- Keilah.

The word Keilah in Hebrew means (a fortress) or (surrounded by a wall).

Saul did not move, probably because he was unable to protect his kingdom against the enemy as all his mental, psychological, and military energies, were wasted on planning to kill David. As a result of the anger that clouds the eyes; man sees his friends and helpers as enemies who should be opposed and got rid of; but forgets about the real enemy who destroys his life.

David's heart was inflamed with love for his brethren; So he inquired of the Lord - probably through Gad the prophet or Abiathar the priest - if he should go and attack the Philistines to save Keilah; and God's response was positive. But, for his men were hesitant because of their few number, he inquired again of the Lord to make sure; and God's response was the same. So, he and his men went and fought against the Philistines, struck them with a mighty blow, saved Keilah, and enjoyed a great spoil.

Now David and his men realized why the Lord commanded them to depart from the stronghold, and to go to the land of Judah; as they were used by the Lord to save His children, thus preparing the way for David to reign.

Saul lost all discernment and wisdom; He should have used the chance of David's victory over the enemy, to be reconciled with him, to gain his support against the enemy; But, on the contrary he assumed that God rejected David saying:

“God has delivered him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars”(1 Samuel 23: 7)

He counted David’s entrance into Keilah, the fortified city (Joshua 11: 13), as a divine break given by the Lord to deliver his enemy into his hand. His saying “delivered him” in Hebrew implies that he became rejected by the Lord as a foreigner.

It is something serious for man to lose the spirit of wisdom, to see things distorted and contrary to the truth. How would it be, if the spiritual leader loses that spirit, to cast himself, as well as Christ’s flock into perdition instead of security?. That is why **St. John Chrysostom** believes that a priest should be prudent and knowledgeable in various fields; not less than those under him; and to be at the same time free of the world, more so than the monks of the wilderness.

Saul assumed that David would never escape from his hand having been shut in by the Lord; either the city will fall under siege, or its inhabitants will deliver him. He did not realize that the Lord, who granted David victory over the mighty Goliath, by a tiny smooth stone, was also able to save him. Saul called to himself all the men of war; while David resorted to the Lord, asking Abiathar to bring him the ephod - that was used when the priest used to enter into the sanctuary before God (Exodus 28: 29), and at inquiring something of the Lord concerning a certain issue (Exodus 28: 30). Inquiring of the Lord, David knew that Saul would seek to come to Keilah, and that the men of Keilah would deliver him to his enemy.

How amazing is God’s exalted care for us: He granted David the victory over the enemy to save the city of Keilah; Yet He commanded him to escape from that same city, to avoid getting killed by Saul, who was far weaker than the enemy. Why?

a- To let David realize that his victory was from the Lord; By Him he would conquer the strong enemy; but alone by himself, he would be helpless before the weak Saul... It is as though God meant for David to stay humble forever.

b- To keep David from fighting against Saul and his army by which he would be an adversary to his own people, a disgrace for him. God, in His care, commanded David to go to Keilah to fight; and with that same care, he commanded him to depart from it, to live together with his men in the wilderness as fugitives; as it is said:

“They arose and departed from Keilah, and went wherever they could go” (1 Samuel 23: 13)

God in His care, grants us sometimes, conquest and victory; and by this same care, He opens before us a gate to escape danger.

2- DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS OF ZIPH

The honest shepherd got away from the laborer, who cared only for his own benefit, even at the expense of his flock. The Ziphites were also ready to deliver David; and, having told Saul

about his hideouts in the wilderness of Maon and Saul starting to search for him, God allowed it for the Philistines to invade the land, in order to distract Saul from his search for David.

We may give an excuse to the inhabitants of Keilah, having been a small city, unable to stand before Saul and his army; But as for those of Ziph, who feared David, and told Saul about his hideouts in some natural strongholds, they could have demanded from David to depart from their land, rather than to betray him.

‘Ziph’ was a city in the mountains of Judah (Joshua 15: 55), close to a wilderness and a forest, fortified by ‘Rehoboam’; called nowadays ‘Tel-Zeif,’ a plateau elevated 2882 feet above the sea level; 4 miles south-east of Hebron.

As the Ziphites came to Saul to say: “*Is David not hiding with us?!*,” David uttered his fifty-fourth psalm:

“Save me, O God, by your name, and vindicate me by your strength. Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers have risen up against me, and oppressors have sought after my life. They have not set God before them” (Psalm 54: 1 - 3)

St. Augustine believes that the word ‘Ziph’ means (adorned) or (flowering); as though those who betrayed David, were like grass, that would grow and flower, but would soon wither. The Ziphites assumed that they flowered or flourished by their treason to David; but their plan failed and they perished, while David got out of afflictions, a conqueror and victorious.

- ❖ Their treason neither benefited them nor harmed David.
- ❖ David was hiding at the beginning; while his enemies were flourishing.

Behold the hiding David in the apostle’s words, concerning the members of Christ: “*For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God*” (Colossians 3: 3). They were hiding (hidden in Christ); so when will they be flourishing? He says: “*When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*” (Colossians 3: 4). Then, those “hidden in Christ” will flourish, while the Ziphites will wither.

Behold to which flower is the Ziphites compared: “*All flesh is grass; and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field*” (Isaiah 40: 6). What will be the end? “*The grass withers; the flower fades*” (Isaiah 40: 7). What will be the end of David? Behold what is said after that: “*But the word of our God stands forever*” (Isaiah 40: 8).

Do you want to be like the Ziphites? They flourish in the world, but fade and wither in eternity, to be cast in an everlasting fire; Would you wish to be like that?!

Your Lord was hidden here; and so were the saints; as their goodness is hidden inside the heart, where faith, love, and hope, are; where their treasure is... All those good things are hidden; so is also their reward.

3- A COVENANT WITH JONATHAN

The last encounter between David and Jonathan, took place in the midst of those hard times (1 Samuel 23: 15 - 18). Jonathan remained true in his love and loyalty to his friend David, risking his life to see him, at a time when Saul's hatred was at its maximum.

It was impossible for Jonathan to offer anything to his friend; However, coming to him alone in secret, he offered him his love, that is beyond evaluation. He proclaimed to him that his only weapon was the company and promises of God, asking to become next to him, when the time would come for him to reign over Israel; In joy and pleasure, he said to him:

"Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you; Even my father Saul knows that" (1 Samuel 23: 17)

They renewed their covenant before the Lord, and departed not to meet again in this world.

Jonathan died before David ascended the throne of Israel. It was to be very difficult, not on Jonathan, but on David himself, to take the throne from such a loyal friend, who was ever ready to sacrifice his life for him.

We do not know, what would have happened if Saul died alone, to leave David and Jonathan, the loving friends, who would never compete for the throne... But God allowed it for David to be spared of such difficult situation.

4- SAUL PURSUES DAVID

We do not know why the Ziphites betrayed David; Was it out of their fear of Saul? They could have asked David to depart of their territory, to spare them any conflict with the king; Or had they done that out of hatred toward David?

They informed Saul that David was hiding in the strongholds in the woods, in the hill of Hachilah (meaning dark or depressing); called nowadays "Bekin"; a height over the wilderness, from which man can see the mountains of 'Ein-El- Gedi,' the Dead Sea, and the mountains of Moab.

Saul was very pleased for what they did, counting it as something from the Lord, who showed him compassion against David's assumed oppression; So he said to them:

"Blessed are you of the Lord, for you have compassion on me" (1 Samuel 23: 21)

So corrupted was his insight, to count himself as the oppressed party, and David as the oppressor; that he was the subject of the Lord, and David was the one rejected by Him; Therefore they were blessed for their compassion on the oppressed subject of the Lord

He asked the Ziphites to search for David's footprints on the sand as they might do with a wild beast they chase.

As the Ziphites, followed by Saul and his men, set forth searching for David, David set forth to the wilderness of Maon {called nowadays ‘Maen,’ 8 miles south of Hebron (Joshua 15: 55); It was the dwelling place of Nebal (1 Samuel 25: 2). The word ‘Maon’ means a (dwelling place).

Saul went to one side of the mountain, while David went to the other side, and in between them was a rugged rocky domain, that was very difficult to cross. They were watching one another, but Saul could not reach him except by a long way around. He sent one party in one direction, and another in the other, in order to give David no chance to escape; Yet God granted him a way out; as a messenger came to Saul to say:

“Hasten and come; For the Philistines have invaded the land” (1 Samuel 23: 27)

It is said that the enemy had invaded his personal land; or else he would not have moved against them. It was called ‘Sakhret- El-Zelicat’ (the sliding rock); as there Saul slide, that is to say, stumbled, and so did not catch David.

David ascended from there to dwell in ‘Ein-Gedi,’ in some natural strongholds of rocks and caves; previously called ‘Hazon Tamar’ or (Strongholds of Tamar) (Genesis 14: 7; 2 Chronicles 20: 2), on the west bank of the Dead Sea, 35 miles away from Jerusalem, and one mile from the Dead Sea; with about 400 feet high above sea level. It is still called ‘Ein Gedi’ to this day, as it has a rich flowing spring, whose waters falls from up high, over a rocky mountain, before it goes down to a fertile land.

CHAPTER 24

DAVID'S DECENCY TOWARD SAUL

While Saul was collapsing before himself and before others, David, on the other hand was increasing in glory; and probably his strength had been most obvious when Saul fell into his hand while pursuing him. And while David's men counted it the proper time for Saul to die, and for David to reign (1 Samuel 24: 5), David, on his part, found it a unique chance to realize the Lord's commandment; so he only cut off a corner of Saul's robe; and, "*It happened afterward that David's heart troubled him because he had cut Saul's robe*" (1 Samuel 24:: 5). David stood humbly but firmly, to reproach Saul for pursuing him; and then, Saul felt that David was destined to get the kingdom.

1- David in the cave of 'Ein Gedi' 1 – 15.

2- Saul gets smaller in his own sight 16 – 22.

1- DAVID IN THE CAVE OF 'EIN GEDI'

David escaped to the stronghold of 'Ein Gedi' though it was only about 200 meters away from the Dead Sea; access to it was not without great danger. It was a place populated by Syrian goats; therefore, this maybe where it got its name.

When Saul returned from following the Philistines who invaded his own personal land, he resumed his bitter chase of David; So he set forth, with 3000 men, to the wilderness of Ein Gedi, to the rocks of the wild goats.. These are rugged rocky terrain that could be reached

only by wild goats. He insisted on going through all those hardships in order to get rid of David. He came to a sheepfold by the road, where there was a big cave, and went into it to attend to his needs. David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave (1 Samuel 24: 3). As the cave was dark, he could see nothing; while David and his men, who were inside and their eyes adapted to the darkness, saw and recognized Saul as he entered the cave. David's men urged him to avenge himself against Saul, while alone in the cave, to seize the kingdom by force; saying that that opportunity was from God; They said to him:

"This is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you'" (1 Samuel 24: 4)

However, David rejected their advice. As the prophet Samuel said to Saul: "*The Lord has sought for himself a man after his own heart*" (1 Samuel 13: 14); and, "*The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you*" (1 Samuel 15: 28); It is obvious that God did not call David to deal with Saul as an enemy but chose him a king in his place, because of the purity of his heart, and because he was better than Saul, and would treat him as a friend.

It seems that David and his men waited for Saul to fall asleep in a corner of the cave, before David arose to cut off a corner of Saul's robe. But it happened afterward that David's heart troubled him because, by this act, he did wrong to the Lord's anointed. **St. Augustine** says: [By saying to his men, 'The Lord forbids that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed,' David demonstrated a great consideration to what the shadows of the future things symbolize].

David saved Saul from the hands of his men who sought to kill him; then waited until Saul came out of the cave, then followed him to call humbly after him: "*My Lord the king!* ", and when Saul looked behind him, "*David stooped with his face to the earth and bowed down*" (1 Samuel 24: 8). How amazing! Saul the wicked, forsakes all the kingdom's affairs, to concentrate his efforts on killing David; while David saves his life, honors him by bowing down to him, he who does not deserve to be honored.

David the prophet, humbly bows down before a rejected king, to break his pride; while many people are reluctant to bow down before the icons of saints to give them honor - Bowing down to worship is only offered to God.

By his humility, David was exalted in the sight of both God and men; He said to Saul:

"After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea?" (1 Samuel 24: 14)

Abbot Dorotheos says: [Humility saves us from all the tricks of the enemy... There is nothing stronger than humility;... Indeed brethren, blessed is he, who is truly humble].

Together with great humility and contrition, even before a rejected king, whom, he knew for sure that he will eventually replace, we see him as well, firm, frank, and brave. He did not show himself up to Saul inside the cave, where he had the upper hand on him, but after he left it, to prove to him that he had no fear of his sword or spear. Frankly, he revealed to him the deception of his counselors who claimed that he sought his harm; and revealed to him that he did not fear him, and would let the Lord judge between the two of them:

"Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Indeed David seeks your harm?' Look, this day your eyes have seen that the Lord delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and someone urged me to kill you, but my eyes spared you, and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my Lord, for he is the Lord's anointed... See that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it. Let the Lord judge between you and me, and let the Lord avenge me on you. As the proverb of the ancient says, 'Wickedness proceeds from the wicked'; But my hand shall not be against you" (1 Samuel 24: 9 - 13)

He got the opportunity to avenge himself, but refrained from stretching his hand against the Lord's anointed; Because his heart was not wicked to produce evil, David left the matter to

the judgment of the Lord who would allow the wicked to lay their hands on Saul to avenge himself..

We praise the person of the prophet David, about whom **St. John Chrysostom** said: [David lifted himself up above the old law, and came close to the apostolic commandments] as though he practiced the biblical commandment concerning the love for enemies, even while under the law. And St. Ambrose says: [What a pious behavior by David, who spared the life of his enemy, on whom he had the upper hand to harm him! How much did that benefit him when he reigned, demonstrating to all his subjects, how to be faithful to their king, and how they should respect and honor him].

2- SAUL GETS SMALLER IN HIS OWN SIGHT

Saul, the murderer of priests, for no reason but the envy and hatred that filled his heart, could not bear to hear the voice of David, so full of humility, or to face such amazing delicacy. He got smaller in his own sight; and we see:

a- In response to David's humility and meekness, calling him "*My Lord the king*" and, "*My father*" (1 Samuel 24: 1), Saul said, "*Is this your voice, my son David?*" (1 Samuel 24: 16) though most of the time he could not utter his name, but used to call him, "*Son of Jesse*" (1 Samuel 22: 7; 8; 13).

For the first time, he called him a son as he felt unworthy to be called a father by David.

b- The mighty Saul who came with 3000 men of war, lifted his voice and wept! He felt very weak and very mean, so he cried out fervently; He felt that the world around him grew narrower, and that he put himself in a trap and a snare with nobody to save him!

c- Saul confessed his wickedness; He, who previously spoke to the Ziphites as though he was the one oppressed by David (1 Samuel 23: 21). Now, comparing himself to David, he says:

"You are more righteous than I; For you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil;... For when the Lord delivered me into your hand you did not kill me" (1 Samuel 24: 18)

d- Saul realized that the kingdom of Israel would be taken away from him,

"Now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hands. Therefore swear now to me by the Lord, that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father's house" (1 Samuel 24: 20, 21)

It became confirmed to him that what he heard from the prophet Samuel would be realized (1 Samuel 15: 28).

CHAPTER 25

DAVID AND ABIGAIL

In the last chapter, the violent Saul fell into the hand of the meek and humble David, who refrained from doing him any harm. And now, as the silly Nabal refused to offer a gift to David's servants who guarded his sheep, and reviled them; David intended to avenge himself against him (human weakness!); But the Lord sent him a wise woman to keep him from doing that, and the prophet listened to her advice (meekness!).

- 1- Death of the prophet Samuel** 1.
- 2- The folly of Nabal** 2 – 13.
- 3- The prudence and wisdom of Abigail** 14 – 31.
- 4- David praises Abigail** 32 – 35.
- 5- David marries Abigail** 26 – 44.

1- DEATH OF THE PROPHET SAMUEL

After a long life of strife - Samuel was called when he was 12 years of age; and faithfully ministered to the Lord and His people, until he became 90 years old – Samuel died. The Israelites gathered together and lamented him, as they did for the prophet Moses (Deuteronomy 34: 8); and buried him in Ramah, on the heights of Benjamin; most probably in the backyard or in the garden of his house as it was not possible to bury him inside the building itself, as that would be against the statutes of the law (Numbers 19: 16).

Did David meet with Saul and Jonathan As it was the custom to proclaim a general amnesty on such important occasions? David came to bid his mentor, spiritual father, true friend, and support, the final farewell. Most probably he could not have much contact with Saul except within the limit of the funeral formalities.

2- THE FOLLY OF NABAL

After the funeral, David went down to the wilderness of Paran (1 Samuel 25: 1); a wide wilderness almost without inhabitants; south of Judea, bordered eastward by the land of Edom, southward by the wilderness of Sinai, and westward by the wilderness of Shur.

It was mentioned in the Septuagint version, that he went to 'Maon,' one mile from the Carmel, and eight miles south of Hebron.

The presence of David and his men in that region, was a source of peace and assurance, particularly for the shepherds, who were continuously exposed to the attacks of the Amalekites and the Philistines, beside those of the wild beasts.. David and his men were like a wall protecting the pasture lands, among which were those of Nabal who was very rich, having 3000

sheep and 1000 goats. His shepherds expressed how they were indebted to David and his men for protecting them saying:

“The men were very good to us, and we were not hurt, nor did we miss anything as long as we accompanied them, when we were in the fields; They were wall to us both by night and day, all the time we were with them keeping the sheep” (1 Samuel 25: 15, 16)

His name ‘Nabal’ means in Hebrew (foolish) (Psalm 14: 1). And as his wife ‘Abigail’ said about him to appease the anger of David:

“For as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him” (1 Samuel 25: 25)

How unfortunate that wife was, being married to such an idiotic man; She, bitterly, had to admit his folly, to save him and herself, and to save David from the consequences of his anger and his tendency to avenge himself. I wish that we, likewise, admit our folly before the Son of David, the Savior of our souls, the ‘Wisdom’ itself, to let Him dwell in our hearts, to uproot the darkness of folly from our depths.

The wise Solomon, in the book of proverbs, warns us against folly; saying:

“A wise son makes a glad father; But a foolish son is the grief of his mother...Wise people store up knowledge; But the mouth of the foolish is near destruction....To do evil is like sport to the fool; But a man of understanding has wisdom” (Proverbs 10)

Unfortunately, that foolish man was a descendant of ‘Caleb’ who dwelt in Hebron and its neighborhood (Joshua 15: 13); namely he came out of an honorable offspring; Yet that heritage did not give him credit; as of him it was said: *“The man was harsh and evil in his doing”* (1 Samuel 25: 3).

David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was sheering his sheep (1 Samuel 25: 4); and that was counted as time for joy, food, drinks, and abundant giving; So David sent to Nabal, saying:

“Peace be to you, peace be to your house, and peace to all that you have. Now I have heard that you have shearers. Your shepherd were with us, and we did not hurt them, nor was there anything missing from them all the while they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever comes to your hands to your servants and to your son David” (1 Samuel 25: 6 - 9)

David sent to Nabal politely and meekly, like a son asking from his father; and instructed his messengers not to add anything more to his words, to avoid any probability of a wrong word that could be attributed to David.

Nabal indecently and roughly responded to that nice message; disregarding the real and well-known reason behind David’s situation; and counted him as rebellious against his master the king for which he deserved nothing good as an outlaw (1 Samuel 25: 10. 11).

His response revealed his greed saying:

“Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?” (1 Samuel 25: 11)

When David heard what Nabal said to his servants, he got very angry, and commanded them to gird on their swords, which he also did. 400 men went with him, and 200 stayed with the supplies.

David, who was known for his self-restraint and humility, now in some moments of weakness, was about to commit a crime, that would have grieved his heart for the rest of his life; and would have been an offense to his people when the time came for him to reign.

3- THE PRUDENCE AND WISDOM OF ABIGAIL

If the folly of Nabal was about to get him to perdition, the wisdom of his wife Abigail appeased the anger of David, kept him from avenging himself, and prevented the certain destruction that was to befall her man and herself by David’s men; and qualified herself as well to become the wife of David, the prophet and king.

“She was a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance” (1 Samuel 25: 3)

She was filled with wisdom, that was reflected on her features, to give her a beautiful appearance.. There are many good looking women, but without wisdom, they lose the value of their beauty, that can lead into the destruction of their personality and life.

We need to have wisdom as a nature in our inner being, combined with our outer beautiful appearance; namely, we need to carry the sanctity of the inner man, as well as the sanctity of the body, with its feelings, emotions, and all its energies. This wisdom (or understanding and knowledge) is a divine gift.

- ❖ The Holy Spirit, with all kinds of faculties, grants some people a word of wisdom.
- ❖ Through the leadership of the Spirit, man comes to the knowledge of all things.
- ❖ *“Send your light”* (Psalm 43: 3). That light, sent from the God the Father to the minds of those called to salvation, is the understanding through the Spirit; that guides those who are enlightened by God.

Origen

- ❖ There is no knowledge without faith; and no faith without knowledge... God the Son is the true teacher.

St. Clement of Alexandria

Abigail is a Hebrew word, derived from two syllables that mean: (father or source), and (joy)... Wisdom is the source of true joy, not only for the wise man, but also for his family, and for all those around him. The wise Solomon says: *“A wise son makes a glad father, and a foolish son is the grief of his mother”* (Proverb 10: 1) *“Wisdom is better than power, and the wise is better than the mighty”* (Wisd. 6: 1)

The Holy book tells us that wisdom is not only a divine gift, but is also a divine Hypostasis (Iconum), who deals with us, and we with Him, in an interactive personal relationship:

a- Wisdom as a Creator: *“What is more valuable than wisdom, the Creator of all?”* (Wisd. 8: 5).

b- Wisdom cries out and loves: *“Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding lift up her voice? She takes her stand on the top of the high hill, beside the way, where the paths meet...I love those who love me; and those who seek me diligently will find me.... I was beside Him, as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before him”* (Proverbs 8: 1, 2, 17, 30) *“Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars; She has slaughtered her meat, She has mixed her wine, She has also furnished her table... Come eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mixed”* (Proverbs 9: 1 - 5) We unite with her, and she makes of us friends to God: *“I loved her, sought her since my youth, and wished to have her as my bride; I became enslaved to her beauty... and decided to have her as a spouse...”* (Wisd 8: 2, 9)

“In every generation, it dwells in the saintly souls, to provide lovers of God and prophets; As God does not love except him who dwells with the wisdom” (Wisd 7: 27, 28) The young men knew that Abigail was wise, contrary to her man, the foolish Nabal; that is why one of them came to tell her what had happened saying: *“Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master; and he reviled them. But the men were very good to us, and we were not hurt, nor did we miss anything as long as we accompanied them, when we were in the fields. They were a wall to us, both by night and by day.... Now therefore know and consider what you will do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his household. For he is such a scoundrel, that one cannot speak to him”*(1 Samuel 14 - 17)

This frank and polite speech by the young man, in which he described her man as a scoundrel, revealed two sides in Abigail’s life: that everyone trusted her, and her good sense and her concern for everyone; That is why the young man did not hesitate to call her man a scoundrel; being sure that she listens well and with wisdom to every word, without haughtiness nor arrogance; something that many people lack in their dealings, not only with their subordinates, but even with their own children.

That speech, also reveals the role played by David and his men in the province; as protecting 3000 sheep and 1000 goats in a vast area of the wilderness, prone to the attacks of violent enemies as the Amalekites, the Geshurites, and the Girzites (1 Samuel 27: 8), was not an easy task.

David, realizing that God is his Wall and refuge, was always keen on making himself a wall to others; repaying God’s love by his own love to His creation beloved to Him; namely to mankind.

As God is a Wall to us, protecting us against the strikes of the enemy, and covering our weaknesses, so, it is becoming of us to be a wall to others, to support the weak in spirit (2 Corinthians 11: 29; Romans 15: 1; 1 Thessalonians 5: 14); to cover their weaknesses with love; and not to judge them. Father Dorotheos says: [In short - as I previously said - It is fitting for everyone to help others as much as he can; as, as the more man unites with his neighbor, the more he unites with God].

Having heard what the young man had to say, she did not tell him off, for interfering in what did not concern him; nor for calling her man a scoundrel. She did not discuss the issue; but, because there was no time but to act wisely and swiftly, she made haste and took 200 loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five seahs of roasted grain, 100 clusters of raisins, and 200 cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys. She commanded her servants to go on before her; and she did not tell her husband Nabal of her intentions.

David, in his fury was addressing his men, and vowing:

“May God do so, and more also to the enemies of David, if I leave one male of all who belong to him by morning light” (1 Samuel 25: 22)

Yet she with her wisdom, brought before her a material present of goods (Proverbs 17: 8), offered humility, dismounted from the donkey, fell on her face before David, bowed down to the ground and offered as well *“a soft answer that turns away wrath”* (Proverbs 15: 1) saying to him: *“On me my Lord, on me let this iniquity be! And please, let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant. Please, let not my Lord regard this scoundrel Nabal. For as his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name, and folly is with him. But I, your maidservant, did not see the young men of my Lord whom you sent. Now therefore my Lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, since the Lord has held you back from coming to bloodshed, and from avenging yourself with your own hand,... Please forgive the trespass of your maidservant. For the Lord will certainly make for my Lord an enduring house, because my Lord fights the battles of the Lord, and evil is not found in you throughout your days. Yet a man has risen to pursue you and seek your life, but the life of my Lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living of the Lord your God; and the lives of your enemies He shall sling out, as from the pocket of a sling. And it shall come to pass, when the Lord has done for my Lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you ruler over Israel, that it will be no grief to you, nor offense of heart to my Lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my Lord has avenged himself. But when the Lord has dealt well with my Lord, then remember your maidservant”* (1 Samuel 25: 24 - 31)

What a wise woman, and what a sweet speech! She revealed her inner Spirit, characterized by humility; and started to admit her trespass or sin, that she did not commit through her own will, but through being the wife of such a foolish man, who through his misbehavior had done wrong to the whole household. Politely apologized that she did not see the

young men sent by David, to give them of the goods that God gave her. She was characterized as well by faith; counting Saul as rejected, calling him (a man) and not (a king); while looking at David as a ruler and a king, on his way to ascend to the throne. She was also characterized by wisdom, politely drawing David's attention to the following:

a- It was fitting for him to disregard a man like Nabal... as David was too exalted and too great to stretch his hand to someone like him.

b- That God sent her to keep him from avenging himself; as he was a public man of a great soul, who worked for the whole congregation, and not for himself.

c- That Saul had risen to fight him; yet God kept his life as though in a bundle of those living with the Lord God; while the life of his enemies, would be thrown out, as though from the pocket of a sling; So why should he defend himself now?

d- He was entrusted to fighting the Lord's battles; so it was not fitting for him to preoccupy himself with such worthless things.

e- He would eventually reign over all the people; So let him act as a king who cared for his people, and not to offend them by avenging himself.

f- When he would get that honor and reign, she asked him to remember her...As though she was telling him that the eyes of all, were on him as a king, expecting everything good from him; so he should not preoccupy himself by anything else.

We can say that God allowed Abigail to intercede, in order to keep David from sinning for two reasons:

a- David the pure in heart, had suffered the persecution of Saul several times; That is why, once he started to show weakness, the Lord hastened to speak to him in one way or another. Abigail did not come by chance but through a divine ordinance; The Lord looking at his heart and long-suffering, did not wish him to fall.

b- Through his humility, David did not hesitate to accept the advice of others, as long as it came from a sound spiritual thought. Here, David's wisdom mingled with that of Abigail, having accepted her advice, he praised her, and put it into effect, despite the vow he had uttered before his men. Father Joseph says: [David preferred to break his word, rather than to keep it through violence].

4- DAVID PRAISES ABIGAIL

David felt that what Abigail did, was a divine message, full of wisdom; so he said to her” *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me... I have heeded your voice and granted your request”* (1 Samuel 25: 32 - 35)

I do not know: Should I praise Abigail who kept such a great man from committing a crime, or should I praise David, for receiving the advice and praising her? If he was a disciple under the pious prophet Samuel, it was claimed that she had been likewise; So both of them had the Spirit of wisdom, mingled with humility.

I wish we follow David's example, who did not lean upon his personal advice but accepted that of others.

- ❖ It is impossible for someone who holds fast to his personal judgment and thought, to deny himself.
- ❖ Whoever does not hold fast to his own will, would always get his wish. Apparently, he may look as though he does not have his way; but - whatever the situation is - he gets enough fulfillment, and would discover before himself, that what happened, has actually realized his will.
- ❖ I know that no monk shall fall, except he who holds fast to his own counsel. There is nothing more regretful, nor more dangerous, than, for man to be his own counselor.

Abbot Dorotheos

- ❖ David's men got ready to take revenge against Nabal; but Abigail changed that situation by her supplications. From this we realize that we should not only listen to good supplications in the right time, but also to be pleased with them. That is what David did, having been pleased with her, who interceded with him, he also blessed her, because she kept him from avenging himself.

St. Ambrose

As much as Abigail was wise in her talk, David had the listening ear; and as said by the wise Solomon: *"Like an eardrop of Gold and an ornament of fine gold, is a wise reprove to an obedient ear"* (Proverb 25: 12); And as said by David himself: *"Let the righteous strike me; it shall be kindness. And let him reprove me; it shall be as excellent oil"* (psalm 141: 5).

5- DAVID MARRIES ABIGAIL

The story ended by the death of Nabal after about 10 days by a heart stroke probably caused by depression after which David took Abigail as his wife.

Abigail returned home to find her man Nabal holding a feast like that of a king (1 Samuel 25: 36); spending profusely on it, while refusing to give little to those who needed it the most. He assumed that such feast would make him happy; yet getting very drunk, he became more foolish, and less happy.

Hearing about the death of Nabal, David realized that the hand of God was working to strike him who did him wrong without any cause. He sent to ask Abigail to be his wife to which She, promptly, humbly, and without hesitation gave her consent. She arose, bowed her face to the ground, and said:

"Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord" (1 Samuel 25: 41)

She accepted him as her husband during his time of affliction, to accompany him during that of glory.

David's marriage to Abigail came after the death of the prophet Samuel, as well as her foolish husband Nabal.... This marriage represents the union of the Lord Christ with His Church - the true Abigail; In Him it became the source of inner joy.. Abigail could not get united to her heavenly Groom, before the death of the prophet Samuel; namely after the consummation of the law and the prophecies of the Old Testament, in order to live, not under the law, but in the freedom of grace. It got united with its new Groom after the death of its foolish old man; namely - the pagan worship; as the Church came from among the pagan nations.

Let us die to the literacy of the law and let us reject Nabal from our life in order to accept the Son of David as a true Groom, to flood us with His grace, to get filled with His Holy Spirit, abundantly and incessantly; saying: *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water"* (John 7: 37, 38).

CHAPTER 26

DAVID REFRAINS FROM KILLING SAUL

Saul kept chasing David, despite having once fallen in his hands, and despite the covenant he made with him (1 Samuel 24); David kept forgiving him, leaving the matter in God's hand. David was more and more glorified, when he forbade Abishai to stretch his hand against Saul; when he reproached Abner the commander of Saul's army, for not guarding his master's life; when he returned Saul's spear and jug of water to him; and when finally with humility he said to him:

"The king of Israel has come out to seek a flea" (1 Samuel 26: 20)

1- David refuses to kill Saul 1 – 12.

2- David rebukes Abner 13-16.

3- David admonishes Saul 17 – 20.

4-Saul collapses before David 21- 25.

1- DAVID REFUSES TO KILL SAUL

For the second time, the Ziphites came to Saul to betray David, who was hiding in the hill of Hashilah which is opposite Jeshimon.

Some scholars claim that the episode mentioned here, is a repetition of the same one previously mentioned in Chapter 24; Yet, as we said in the introduction to the book, despite the similarities in certain aspects in the two episodes, there is an obvious difference in the details.

For the second time, the Ziphites betrayed David. Saul set forth to the wilderness of Ziph, forgetting the kindness that David offered him, as he fell in his hand and David spared his life. He forgot how he got smaller in his own eyes before David's kindness and humility, and how he cried out and wept, asking David to make a covenant with him. Now, his wicked heart drew him as usual to treason; something that David found it difficult to believe, because of the covenant they made in the same wilderness of Ziph. David did not escape from the wilderness, but sent out spies to make sure that Saul actually did come (1 Samuel 26: 4).

When David knew for sure that Saul had broken the covenant and came with his men to seek him, he did not panic, but with an extraordinary courage, he took with him Abishai the son of Zeruah and Achimelech the Hittite, and headed to where Saul encamped, to see him sleeping on a hill behind a sill of stones, surrounded by all his men who were likewise overcome by their human weakness, to stay on watch over their master.

Abishai was the son of Zeruah, David's sister from his mother; as it seems that Jesse's wife was previously the wife of Nahash king of the Ammonites (2 Samuel 17: 25), who begot for him Zeruah and Abigail, before Jesse got married to her to give him David and his brothers. The word 'Abishai' means (The father, or the source of gift).

“God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth, and I will not have to strike him a second time” (1 Samuel 26: 8)

So Abishai said to David, assuming that the sleepiness that had befallen on Saul and his men, was not something natural, or out of physical need, but was according to a divine will, to deliver Saul into David’s hand to kill him. As for David, he again refused to stretch out his hand against the Lord’s anointed, though he broke the covenant, was filled with envy and hate, and was seeking his blood. He, likewise forbade Abishai from stretching out his hand against Saul, saying to him:

“As the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord’s anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that are by his head, and let us go” (1 Samuel 26: 10, 11)

David succeeded in confronting Saul’s animosity with kindness; and it so occurred that Saul, eventually died, but not by David’s hand. David enjoyed a soul spacious with love, to become a living example of love. St. Gregory says: [The Holy Book teaches us that Noah was righteous, Abraham was faithful, Moses was meek, Daniel was wise, Joseph was pure, Job was blameless, and David had a spacious soul].

David succeeded to keep himself from being angry with Saul, but directed his anger against the devil who incites troubles. And as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Although Saul fell again into David’s hands, David did not act motivated by anger; He did not cast a spear against him; but his revenge was against the devil].

St. Ephram the Syrian says: [I wish man shows mercy toward his persecutors, as David did with Saul].

St. Ambrose believes that David’s response was a great act of a faithful sacrifice; In his view righteousness is better than security. [Anyway, he did not give his security the priority over his righteousness. Even, when he got another chance to kill the king, he did not use it to gain security in place of fear; nor to get the kingdom instead of exile].

St. Jerome speaks about Saul’s persistence on chasing David to get rid of him, and about David’s persistence on long-suffering, saying: [*“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard its spots?”* (Jeremiah 13: 23)... That was also said by David in his seventh psalm; namely that as the Ethiopian cannot change his skin, so Saul also could not change his nature. {He fell twice into my hand, and I could have killed him and shed his blood; but I wanted to overcome his evil with kindness; Yet his wicked will prevailed as the Ethiopian can not change his skin}. Finally, what does David say? “O Lord my God, If I have done this; If there is iniquity in my hand (Psalm 7: 4); If I have repaid my friend with evil...”; Notice what he says: I have repaid evil with good, while Saul repaid good with evil].

David's heart was open and spacious to bear Saul's animosity with long-suffering, to be supported by God; It is said:

"So David took the spear and the jug of water by Saul's head, and they got away; and no man saw it or knew it or awoke; for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen on them" (1 Samuel 26: 12)

2- DAVID REBUKES ABNER

Then David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of a hill afar off; a great distance being between them, as he trusted him no more. From there he called out to Abner, the commander of the army and the personal guard of Saul, politely rebuking him, saying:

"Don't you answer Abner?" (1 Samuel 26: 24); as though he is saying to him "Are you still sleeping?". As it was dawn, Abner was troubled, that someone dared to disturb the king by his loud voice, and to address him so boldly; so he asked him: "Who are you, calling out the king? " (1 Samuel 26: 24).

David did not expect to find Abner sleeping at such time, without assigning some guards to watch over the sleeping king; That is why he talked to him sarcastically, as though he was not man enough, and was worthy to die; saying:

"Are you not a man? And who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your Lord the King? For one of the people came in to destroy your Lord the king. This thing that you have done is not good. As the Lord God lives, you are worthy to die, because you have not guarded your master, the Lord's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is, and the jug of water that was by his head"(1 Samuel 26: 15, 16)

Abner could not answer David, but Saul recognized his voice.

3- DAVID ADMONISHES SAUL

Saul was very impressed by David's action; but for a very short time as usual; That is why, when Saul said to him:

"I have sinned. Return my son David. For I will harm you no more, because my life was precious in your eyes this day" (1 Samuel 26: 21)

David did not believe him, but went on his way, and Saul returned to his place (1 Samuel 26: 25).

When Saul said, *"Is this your voice, my son David? "* (1 Samuel 26: 7), David politely rebuked him, saying:

"It is my voice my Lord, O king, Why does my Lord thus pursue his servant? For what have I done, or what evil is in my hand? Now therefore, please, let my Lord the king hear the words of his servant. If the Lord has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering; but if it is the children of men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, 'Go serve other gods'. Now therefore, do not

let my blood fall to the earth before the face of the Lord. For the king of Israel has come out to seek a flea, as when one hunts a partridge in the mountains”(1 Samuel 26: 17 - 20)

This response reveals the pure depths of David’s heart, from several sides, of which:

a- The persistent persecution of Saul, did not affect David’s humility before him; He kept calling him: “*My Lord, O King*”; while calling himself: “*A flea*”... The victorious conqueror calls himself “ a flea”; while calling the falling and defeated, “*My Lord*”. David’s humility was the secret of his strength! Success made him more humble; and humility granted him more success!

He likened Saul’s chase after him to a hunter doing his best in the mountains to catch a partridge (a small bird).

b- David was able to say with courage: “*What evil is in my hand?* “... I wish we do not fall to evil so as to be able to talk courageously with the spirit of conquest; as evil normally deprives man of courage.

c- David presented Saul with two probabilities: The first, that God allowed Saul to be stirred against him, as a chastisement for sins David committed and for which he was ready to offer a sin offering, confessing his weaknesses and iniquities; and the second probability was that some people stirred Saul against David for which they deserved to be cursed before the Lord.

d- By saying “*They have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying: ‘Go serve other gods’* “, he revealed the inner bitterness of his soul, because of his deprivation of sharing with his people in prayer, praise, and all the worshipping rituals. Those who stirred Saul against him, intended to deny him the fellowship of the holy congregation; as though they were asking him to join other heathen people who worship foreign gods.

e- David had faith in God’s justice, who hears the hidden inner cry-outs saying: “*Do not let my blood fall to the earth before the Lord*”. If he was to be killed, his blood would cry out before the Lord, like that of the righteous Abel (Genesis 4: 10).

4- SAUL COLLAPSES BEFORE DAVID

Saul collapsed before David saying:

“I have sinned; Return my son David, for I will harm you no more, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly” (1 Samuel 26: 21)

Saul got very small in his own eyes; He gave his daughter Michal, David’s wife, to someone else; and persisted on chasing him to kill him; while David repaid him with good. This made Saul so ashamed of himself, that he kept on saying: “*My son David*”, realizing that the latter is gaining through his behavior, grace and success; so he said to him:

“May you be blessed, my son David! You shall both do great things and also still prevail”(1 Samuel 26: 25)

David sent back the king's spear, that represented his symbol of kingdom; and Saul received it with the spirit of humiliation and submission.

CHAPTER 27

DAVID SEEKS REFUGE IN ZIKLAG

Saul's repeated and persistent chase of David, despite the successive covenants between them, had taken away from David every confidence in Saul. He began to think seriously of escaping to a foreign land, especially that he became personally committed to two wives: 'Ahinoam' the Gezeelitess and 'Abigail' Nabal's widow (1 Samuel 27: 3); beside his children from them. His 600 men were likewise committed to their own families, that leaving them and hiding in caves became more difficult than before. It was so difficult for David's soul, that he expressed in his admonishment to Saul, saying: "*They have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord; saying: 'Go serve other gods'*" (Samuel 26: 19). It was not easy for him, having lived all his years caring for the people of God, to become a fugitive deprived, even from partaking of the collective worship of God.

now - probably due to human weakness, and without asking for the counsel of God - he had to resort to Achish, king of Gath, to allow him with his men to dwell in the village of 'Ziklag,' until Saul got desperate of finding him (1 Samuel 27: 1).

- 1- David escapes to Gath** 1 – 4.
- 2- David dwells in Gath** 6 – 7.
- 3- David raids the Geshurites and others** 8 – 12.

1- DAVID ESCAPES TO GATH

If David had been counted as one of the great heroes of faith, in this chapter, he appeared in some moments of weakness in faith, that brought on him much trouble. The Holy Book often presented David to us, as a role model of great faith; but here, it teaches us that, for every man, there are moments of weakness, in which he falls, not to surrender in despair, but to arise, in spite of all the inner and outer troubles that result from his fall.

David thought in his depths, of fleeing together with his family and his men, to the land of the Philistines, hoping that Saul would eventually lose hope to find him, and to seek him no more; so he would escape of his hand. He decided to go to Achish in Gath (1 Samuel 27: 3). Achish, mentioned here, was probably the successor of Achish, the son of Maach mentioned in 1 Samuel 21: 10. In the previous time, the king doubted him, as he came alone, assuming that he came to spy on him and on his land. However, this time he came together with his family and 600 men with their households, that were not easy to move along. Therefore he counted him as an asset and a useful ally. Moreover, Saul's chase of David became so well known to the surrounding nations, something that put the hearts of Achish and his men at ease, concerning David and his men.

Back to David,, we say that: although it was his right to doubt Saul’s promise to do him no more harm (1 Samuel 26: 21), it was not becoming of him to fear and escape in weak faith, having personally experienced God’s dealings with him; Who promised to grant him the kingdom, something that was known, and confirmed, by Saul and Jonathan, who told David that. The circumstances around the apostle St. Peter were disturbing; and when he doubted, he started to drown; “*And immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’* “ (Matthew 14: 31). The apostles also said to the Lord. “*Increase our faith*” (Luke 17: 5).

Weak faith made David go to Achish king of Gath, to pass through the bitterness of the ‘winepress’ [the word ‘Gath’ as **St. Augustine** believes means (winepress)]. Strong faith, on the other hand, lifts up the spiritual man, that his depths would behold the unseen, and his heart would be exalted up beyond the seen things (Hebrew 11: 13 - 16).

❖ Faith consummates every gap in our knowledge, and grants us every thing unseen; as said by the apostle Paul: “*By faith he (Abraham) endured, as seeing Him who is invisible*” (Hebrew 11: 27).

St. Gregory of Nyssa

David forgot the commandment of the prophet Gad: “*Do not stay in the stronghold; depart and go to the land of Judah*” (1 Samuel 22: 5); to keep him from leaning upon human arm and earthly strongholds; but to let him go to the people to partake of their suffering and humiliation by Saul. Yet now, here he was leaving the boundaries of Judah, to set forth to human strongholds, in the weakness of faith!

2- DAVID DWELLS IN GATH

Achish welcomed David, because knowing for sure that he is pursued by Saul, made him at ease that David would never trust Saul nor ally with him. Accepting David would break the sting of Saul as well as give Achish the chance to benefit from David and his men. As for David, he preferred not to dwell in Gath with Achish: Because, on one hand, the great number of his men and their households, would make them a burden on the city, as far as dwelling places and food are concerned. On the other, David did not intend to serve Achish, as he was heartily attached to his people beside wishing to have some freedom, especially for worshipping; so he said to Achish:

“*If I have now found favor in your eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there*” (1 Samuel 27: 5)

A further reason for his request, was his past experience in Saul’s royal court; He was apprehensive that a similar situation might arise if he succeeded in his ways, to be envied by Achish or some of his men. And being away from Gath, he and his men would not get in contact with the pagan festivities; as Gath was one of the great centers of worship for the Philistine gods.

In humility and contrition of heart, David presented his request saying:

“For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?” (1 Samuel 27: 5)

The king responded to his request, and gave him ‘Ziklag’ to live in it with his men.

‘Ziklag’ was a city in the farther south of Judah (Joshua 15: 31); given to the tribe of Simon (Joshua 19: 5; 1 Chronicles 4: 30); and in the days of Saul, it was in the hands of the Philistines;... then, later, it belonged to Judah (1 Samuel 27: 6); to be inhabited after captivity. It is probably ‘Tel- Khewilphah’ 10 miles east of the Hill of ‘Shariah,’ namely (of law) and 10 miles north of ‘Beersheba’.

3- DAVID RAIDS THE GESHURITES AND OTHERS

Dwelling far from Gath, gave David the chance to organize and lead his men, together with their households, with some freedom. That is why he started raiding the neighboring pagan people, like the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, known as violent robbers, beside their corruption and defilement. It was a chance to purify the earth, to keep corruption in its worst forms from infiltrating into the holy people, and the pure yeast.

The Geshurites and the Girizites, living in the southern parts of Palestine, were probably branches of the Amalekites, who were like gangs of thieves; who referred to sins, and symbolized the evil one. The divine command to Saul was: *“I will punish what Amalek did to Israel; how he laid wait for him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now Go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey”* (1 Samuel 15: 2, 3). Amalek symbolizes the evil one, who blocks our way of ascension from this world up to the heavenly Canaan, to keep us from enjoying the eternal life. Its destruction, symbolizes the uprooting of every trace of sin in us: sins of the soul (every man), of the body (every woman), of thought, even if just budding (every infant and nursing child), etc.

Saul broke the divine commandment, and spared ‘Agag’ the king of Amalek, beside sparing the best of the sheep and the oxen (1 Samuel 15). On the other hand, realizing Samuel’s words to Saul:

“David attacked the land; he left neither man nor woman alive” (1 Samuel 27: 9)

and, as the commandment was not directed to him, he took the spoil, to sustain on part of it, and to give the other part to Achish, as a kind of tax for having them in his land.

As a fruit of his resorting to foreigners, instead of staying in the land of Judah, David was not only committed to give part of the spoil as a kind of tax to Achish the king of Gath, but he also had to resort to deceit and to beating about the bush. When Achich inquired from him about his recent raids he did not tell him the truth, but said:

“Against the southern area of Judas, or against the southern area of the Jerahmeelites, or against the southern area of the Kenites” (1 Samuel 27: 10)

He pretended to have raided the southern parts of Judah, the Jerahmeelites (descendants of Judah), the Keenites (he actually raided their neighbors). That is why Achish assumed:

“He (David) has made his people Israel utterly abhor him; Therefore he will be my servant forever”(1 Samuel 27: 12)

The Jerahmeelites were related to ‘Jerhameel’ meaning (God has mercy); son of ‘Hezron,’ son of ‘Perez,’ son of ‘Judah’ (1 Chronicles 2: 4, etc.). Later, they were counted as descendants of Judah (1 Chronicles 2); and dwelt south of Judea.

The Keenites, already dealt with in 1 Samuel 15: 6; were assumed to have been like blacksmiths to Israel. They were allied to Israel, especially to Judah with some relationship to the Midianites, to whom Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, the Midianite priest was related. They were counted among the tribe of Judah in 1 Chronicles 2: 55. They preferred dwelling in tents even in the late royal era (Jeremiah 35: 6 - 10), in abidance to their father’s commandment.

CHAPTER 28

SAUL CONSULTS A MEDIUM

Resorting to Lachish had put David in an awkward position, when the Philistines gathered their armies together against Israel... As for Saul, afraid and his heart trembling, his condition worsened greatly, as God did not answer him anymore, because of his continuous iniquities, he resorted to a woman who was a medium, although he had previously cut off the mediums and the spiritists from the land. He disguised himself and put on other clothes, and asked her to bring up for him the spirit of Samuel to seek his counsel. The devil came to him in Samuel's form to talk to him... as it is not possible to bring up the spirits of the departed.

1- War between Israel and the Philistines 1 – 2.

2- Saul consults a medium

3 – 20.

3- Saul collapses

21 – 25.

1- WAR BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE PHILISTINES

Achish had been sure of David's loyalty to him; and David's response was calm and non-committing. As his soul was bitter concerning his people, we do not know what he would have done if he took part in that war?!

Having gathered his armies together for war, Achish, with confidence asked David:

"You assuredly know that you will go out with me to battle, you and your men" (1 Samuel 28: 1)

Achish counted that issue as something that needed no discussion; and counted it, as well, a credit to himself, to have David and his men fighting on his side, against their country and people.

As we said, David did not give a committing promise, but said:

"Surely you know what your servant can do" (1 Samuel 28: 2)

Taking it for granted, Achish misunderstood David's response, and was very pleased with him, expressed his confidence in his loyalty, and his capabilities in war, and promised to appoint him one of his chief guardians forever (1 Samuel 28: 2).

2- SAUL CONSULTS A MEDIUM

Now, what was the situation of Saul against the armies of the enemies that gathered for war, while the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him, Samuel was dead, and David fled from him because of his persecution?

The book repeats concisely the issue of Samuel's death, for the sake of clarifying the future actions of Saul:

“Now Samuel has died, and all Israel had lamented for him, and buried him in Ramah, in his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land” (1 Samuel 28: 3)

One of the good deeds done by Saul - most probably following the guidance of the prophet Samuel - was his opposition to works of magic and sorcery, and exiling the mediums and spiritists out of the land. The original word “mediums” came to mean those who talk as though through their bellies, pretending to have some lower spirits dwelling in them, that told them hidden things of the future. He also dismissed out of the land, the spiritists - meaning the followers and servants of the lower spirit, who claimed that they revealed to them things unseen and uncomprehended by humans, and offer them possibilities beyond human capabilities, as for example bringing up the spirits of the dead. Saul’s law banned all those practices, as they implied that man resorted to evil as his guide and support, instead of resorting to, and leaning upon God.

“Then the Philistines gathered together, and came and encamped at Chunem. So Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa” (1 Samuel 28: 4)

The Philistines gathered together at ‘Chunem,’ a city in the territory of Issachar, known today as ‘Solem,’ on the south-west side of Dohi mountain, within which there is a spring and fertile land. This mountain (hill) is 3 1/2 miles north-east of Jezril, and 5 miles north-west of the end of the Gilboa mountain, and 16 miles from the mountain of Carmel.

Saul and his army encamped at Gilboa, facing Chunem. ‘Gilboa’ is a Hebrew name, probably meaning (a flowing fountain); and known nowadays as ‘the mountain of Fakouh,’ located near the village of ‘Gilbon’. This mountain constitutes the protruding part at the north-eastern part of the mountain of Ephraim; and the waterfalls in between the basin of ‘Kaishon’ river, and the valley of the Jordan. That name designates a series of high mountains, that form an arch east of the valley of Jezril, 8 miles long, 3 - 5 miles wide, divided by deep and narrow valleys, into a number of plateaus. Its highest point is at ‘Sheik Yarkan,’ of 1696 feet elevation above sea level.

“When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly” (1 Samuel 28: 5)

The real secret of his fear was that the Spirit of God departed from him, because he rebelled against God, and persisted on his rebellion; contrary to David who did not fear any army saying: *“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?... Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear”* (Psalm 27: 1).

Because of his wickedness, Saul lost every possibility of victory. The Lord proclaimed that He rejected him; Samuel died, angry for his behavior; David departed, forsaking the land to him; and he had the priests of Nob killed;... etc. Hence when he inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams, by Urim, or by the prophets (Numbers 12: 6)

We know that 'Abiathar' the priest had fled from Nob and resorted to David, taking with him the Ephod (1 Samuel 23: 6); So it seems that Saul replaced him with another priest, and had another Ephod made.

What happened was for Saul a new opportunity among many others given to him by God, to reconsider his situation, to realize the secret of his failure, and to return to God with true repentance... But, on the contrary, he misused that opportunity, as he foolishly started to think to resort to a medium; thus insulting the Lord, by setting that ignorant woman in the place of God. How strange!

The king of Israel requested from his servants to find him a woman who was a medium, to seek her advice, in such a very important matter that touched his life and that of the whole people! What an idiocy!

They told him about a woman medium in 'Ein Dor,' 10 miles far from Gilboa, on the northern side of the mountain of Dohi.

Saul, who cut off the mediums and the spiritists out of the land (1 Samuel 28: 9) disguised himself, and went to a woman medium, to bring up for him the spirit of Samuel, to seek his counsel, after swearing to her by the Lord, that no punishment shall come upon her for this thing. Saul thus stumbled from one weakness to another, to finally commit that serious evil.

That is why the saintly fathers warn us against opening the door to sins, that may seem of no real danger, but would gradually lead to what we thought that we could never do.

❖ I beseech you brethren... to close the doors through which sins could enter; as the devil in his meanness, uses great shrewdness to lead mankind to perdition starting his attack against them by very trivial issues. Notice how he got Saul to believe in such nonsense, using a woman medium. Suppose he advised him from the beginning to do that, Saul could have rejected his counsel; as how he, who cut off the mediums, could accept that?! But he gradually led him to that, one step at a time.

St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom believes that the lowliness and collapse that Saul reached, to the extent of resorting to a medium, had come as a fruit of his separation from David, as a great and inspired leader through which he lost greatly saying: [Up to the time he was separated from David, both of them were glorious and secure; the glory of the leader passed up to the king].

What is the opinion of the saintly fathers, concerning the spirit that appeared to Saul?

St. Hypolite believes that Saul did not see Samuel; But that was a deception. What the devil revealed, was a natural consequence (his defeat) because of God's wrath upon him. It is as though, he is a false physician, with no knowledge of medicine, seeing a patient in a hopeless serious condition, he would tell him that he will surely die. The devil knew of God's wrath against Saul, from Saul's own behavior; He, through the medium, told him about his soon-to-be defeat and death; yet he erred in fixing the day of his death.

Saul sought the counsel of the dead, having lost the living God. Far from us to assume, that the soul of any saint or a prophet, could be brought up (from its place of comfort in Hades) by the devil. We are aware that “*Satan can transform himself into an angel of light*”

(2 Corinthians 11:14); and more likely, to a man of light; and that, finally, he will “*show himself that he is God*” (2 Thessalonians 2: 4); and will “*show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect*” (Matthew 24: 24).

(Scholar Tertullian)

St. Basil the Great believes that Saul saw evil spirits that were called gods (idols); as it came in psalm 96: 5; and Jeremiah 10: 11 (The Septuagint Version).

Saul’s great weakness and collapse were revealed; as:

a- He was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly, when he saw the army of the Philistines (1 Samuel 28: 5).

b- He collapsed before his servants, who knew that he had cut off the mediums from the land; and here he was asking them to find him a woman who was a medium! A shameful situation before his servants!

c- Fearing that the woman medium may get terrified of him, he disguised himself and put on other clothes (1 Samuel 28: 8); A shameful situation!

d- He went to her place in Ein Dor, walking about 10 miles; bearing exhaustion, and exposing himself to danger, as the enemy was encamping in Chunem, between Gilboa and Ein Dor.

e- Most probably, the woman recognized him, for his tall stature; so she pretended to know nothing of these things until he swore by God that no harm shall come upon her (1 Samuel 28: 10).

f- Most probably, Satan appeared in the likeness of the prophet Samuel, covered with a mantle to make the woman cry out in a loud voice, rebuking Saul; saying: “*Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul*” (1 Samuel 28: 12). As for him, he went on to complete that evil road; and entered in a dialogue with that spirit, who was pretending to be Samuel. Then, Saul stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down; and was dreadfully afraid... It was a series of collapses and troubles, that Saul went through at the end of his life.

g- The woman medium had compassion on him, because of his complete collapse - her own king - and offered him the best food she had, after urging him to eat, together with his two servants.

What a great difference between the way Saul confronted death ending his life with such a shameful way, rebelling against God till the last days of his life; and the way the apostle Paul confronted it; saying: “*The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness*” (2 Timothy 4: 6 - 8).

The evil man, corrupt inside, gathers bitterness for himself from day to day; While the spiritual man, stores in his depths successive glories, that fill his depths with joy, up till the end of his life on earth. Despite this, God does not close the door before the first, seeking his repentance, even in his last moments, as it happened with the right hand robber; while the latter should never become negligent, lest he may fall.

CHAPTER 29

THE PHILISTINES REJECT DAVID

David was actually in a tight corner; He pretended to go out with the enemy among whom he was dwelling, to fight against his own people; but his heart was broken. The lords of the Philistines proclaimed to Achish that they do not trust David. Although that was an insult, it was for David a God sent blessing; He says:

“Our souls has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers.

The snare is broken, and we have escaped”

(Psalm 124: 7)

1- David rejected from participating in the battle 1 – 5.

2- Achish apologies to David

6 – 11.

1- DAVID REJECTED FROM PARTICIPATING IN THE BATTLE

The army of the Philistines moved from Chunem toward the south to Aphek, close to the camp of the Israelites, who had moved to Jezreel, close to the mountain of Gilboa, near a well, probably ‘the well of Herod’ nowadays, where ‘Gideon’ had once encamped (Judges 7: 1). David and his men came, at the rear of the army of the Philistines, with Achish. David’s heart was burning for his critical situation: He could not get away with his men, when the battle began, lest Achish would count him as a traitor, having gave him hospitality in his land, and granted him every possibility to work freely; And if he did participate in the battle together with the Philistines, that would surely be treason to his people and country. And what would happen if Saul got killed? Wouldn’t the people look at David, the ally with the enemy, as the true killer?

The temptation was very difficult; Yet, as it was said: *“God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape”* (1 Corinthians 10: 13).

2- ACHISH APOLOGIZES TO DAVID

“Make this fellow (David) return, that he may go back to the place which you have appointed for him, and do not let him go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he becomes our adversary. For what could he reconcile himself to his master, if not with the heads of (our) men? Is this not David, of whom they sang to one another in dances, saying: ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?’” (1 Samuel 29: 4)

That was what the princes of the Philistines said to Achish; As Achish loved David dearly, and trusted him greatly, he defended him; but being one of five, he submitted to them, and apologized to David, and asked him to go back to Ziklag. He swore by God to David, that he had been upright; that longed to have him a partner in war; that to that day, he had found no fault

in him, since his defection; and that he was as good in his sight as an angel of God (1 Samuel 29: 6 - 9).

Indeed, how great is the testimony of strangers, about the purity of man's heart and his goodness! A good life could never be hidden nor denied!

Achish asked David to hasten to get back with his men, before the battle started, saying:

“Rise early in the morning with your master's servants,... and depart”(1 Samuel 29: 10)

He called them Saul's servants as David and his men had never forsaken their affiliation.

David found the solution for his difficult situation, and returned to Ziklag but with bitter soul for his people's sake.

CHAPTER 30

THE BURNING OF ZIKLAG

The Amalekites made use of David's going out of Ziklag with his men to take part in the battle; and in a sudden attack, they invaded the southern region, struck Ziklag, burnt it, and took captives the women who were there, among whom were David's two wives: Abinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. David inquired of the Lord; and instead of despair, he set forth together with his men, attacked the Amalekites, and recovered all what the Amalekites had carried away, including the women, the children, beside much spoils some of which he sent to his friends the elders of Judah.

- 1- Ziklag burnt** **1 – 6.**
- 2- David's victory** **7 – 20.**
- 3- Sharing the spoil with those who stayed back by the supplies** **21 – 25.**
- 4- Sending a share of the spoil to the elders of Judah** **26 – 31.**

1- ZIKLAG BUNTS

Having departed from the battle field, David and his men returned to Ziklag on the third day to find that the Amalekites had invaded the south - between the mountain of Judah and the wilderness, as well as Ziklag which they burnt with fire, after taking all women and children captives, amongst whom were David's two wives. Here, David and his men lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep. David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because he took all of them, and left nobody to guard the city.

If the word 'Ahinoam' means (Brother joy); and the word 'Abigail' means (Father or source of wisdom), David married both of them, to possess both the inner joy in the Lord, and the source of wisdom. So, while the Son of David grants us His kingdom, as an advance payment of eternal joy; and presents Himself to us as the source of heavenly wisdom, the work of the devil, on the other hand, the opponent of our Christ, is to take into captivity, our joy and wisdom, to let us live broken down with the spirit of despair and distress filled up with the darkness of ignorance and lack of wisdom.

I wish we strive with the Spirit of the Lord, to recover our inner joy, and our wisdom in the Lord, in order to live the new life, that is ours in Jesus Christ, the secret of our joy and wisdom.

2- DAVID'S VICTORY

David did not go on weeping, nor was he broken by despair, but "*strengthened himself in the Lord his God* (1 Samuel 30: 6); saying in his psalms: "*I will love You, O Lord, my strength; The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in Whom I will*

trust;... The pangs of death encompassed me; and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord; and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He was angry;... He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy; from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support. He also brought me out into a broad place. He delivered me because He delighted in me. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; According to the cleanness of my hands He has recommenced me; For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God...” (Psalms 18: 1 - 21)

“Wait on the Lord; Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord” (Psalms 27: 14)

“In You, O Lord, I put my trust; Let me never be ashamed; Deliver me in Your righteousness” (Psalm 31: 1)

David asked Abiathar the priest to bring him the ephod, to inquire of the Lord if he should pursue the troop of the invaders; and as the divine response was positive, he took 600 men and came to the Brook Besor, south of Ziklag and the land of Judah - probably the Brook of ‘Sharia’ (the law).

Although the 600 men were all strong men of valor, 200 of them stayed behind by the supplies, having been so weary that they could not cross the Brook Besor. David crossed with the 400 men, after commanding the 200 to stay on account of their weariness. They did not stay back out of fear nor of rebellion; but as is said: *“whom they also had made to stay at the Brook Besor”* (1 Samuel 30: 21).

They found an Egyptian lad in the field, who had been totally worn out, having eaten no bread, nor drunk any water for three days and three nights; he was a servant of an Amalekite, left behind by his master, because he fell sick and became unable to serve him. After offering him a piece of a cake of fig, and two clusters of raisins, his strength came back to him, and told them that he was with his master when the Amalekites invaded the southern area of the Cherithites [a tribe of Philistines (Ezekiel 25: 16; Zephaniah 2: 5); probably of Cretian origin]; in the territory which belongs to Judah, and of the southern area of Caleb; and when they burned Ziklag with fire.

David asked the Egyptian to guide them to where the troop of invaders were; He approved after David swore to him in the name of the Lord, not to kill him nor to deliver him to his master. They used, in the old days, to use a guide in war, then kill him lest he would betray them.

The Egyptian brought David and his men down to the Amalekites, and there they were, spread out all over the land, eating, drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil which they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. They were in a mood of celebration, knowing that both the Philistines and the Israelites were engaged in battle, and could not reach them swiftly enough.

The Amalekites, as we see here, were a violent congregation, that knew nothing but looting; who made use of the existing war to rob the two parties.

It seems that David and his men reached the region by evening; laid waiting until the Amalekites fell asleep; then attacked them from twilight until the evening of the next day. Not a man of them escaped, except 400 young men who rode on camels and fled. David then rescued his two wives and all the women and children, and recovered all the spoil, not losing a single man. All returned with joy, driving before them a great spoil that they called “David’s spoil” (1 Samuel 30: 20).

Who is that Egyptian taken and enslaved by the Amalekite, who used up all his energy, until he fell ill, then left him to die in the fields, of hunger and thirst; Who is he, but the robber on the right hand, who was enslaved by sin, and humiliated by the devil who used all his energies in evil; and finally he was lifted up on a cross, to die in a condition of agony, hunger and thirst, deprived of every relative or friend. To him, the Son of David, the true fighter against Amalek, offered food and drink, carrying him from the land of battle, to enjoy the triumph of Christ, and to rejoice with the spoil of his Master, Who brought down the gates of Hades, to rescue the captives, and to bring them back into his paradise.

David rescued his two captive wives: Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, and brought them back to him. They were the two Churches of the Old and New Testaments. The Son of David set forth to Hades to destroy the real Amalekite, the Devil; and to recover the men of both the Old and the New Testaments, as a holy Church eternally united to Him.

3- SHARING THE SPOIL WITH THOSE WHO STAYED BACK BY THE SUPPLIES

How gentle was David’s heart! With few men he conquered the mighty Amalekites; yet this conquest did not let him forget to care for those men whom he had made to stay at the Brook Besor because of their weariness; “*When David came near (those) people, he greeted them*” (1 Samuel 30: 21).

We often get so preoccupied by our conquests, to forget about our brethren: the weak, the needy, and the afflicted; But David was a true spiritual leader, who cared for all.

Some of the wicked and worthless men among David’s men, requested from him to deny the 200 men who stayed by the supplies, any part of the spoil, except for every man’s wife and children. But David insisted on giving them their share, according to the law (Numbers 31: 25 -

27). Yet, even here, he talked to those wicked and merciless men gently, meekly, and with wisdom, to avoid any dissension. He did not use his lawful authority to give orders, but with love as a brother he said to them:

“My brethren, you shall not do so with what the Lord has given us, who has preserved us, and delivered into our hand the troops that came against us. For who will heed you in this matter? But as his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike” (1 Samuel 30: 23, 24)

He showed love to all his men; and he attributed the victory to the Lord, who granted them a free gift; so it was fitting for them also to give their brethren from that same free gift. Partaking of the spoil between those who stayed by the supplies, because of their weariness, with those who crossed the brook together with David to fight Amalek, is like when men of the Old Testament, who were weary under the law, shared with those of the New Testament, who crossed by Baptism - the Jordan - to the battle of the cross, and gained all the conquest by the Son of David who conquered on their behalf.

4- SENDING A SHARE OF THE SPOIL TO THE ELDERS OF JUDAS

David’s heart was so full of generosity, that he thought of sharing the spoil with his brethren and friends, the elders of Judah saying to them:

“Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the Lord”(1 Samuel 30: 26)

He sent to the elders of countless cities, as a blessing, not from him, but from the Lord, the Grantor of the conquest and victory, and the Giver in abundance.. It is as though, David fought, not on behalf of himself nor his men, but fought the battles of the Lord, on behalf of all the people. He sent presents to the following cities:

Bethel: That was not ‘Bethel’ of Benjamin, but a city to the south of Judah (Joshua 12: 6); also called ‘Chesil’ (Joshua 15: 30), ‘Bethul’ (Joshua 19: 4), and ‘Bethuel’ (1 Chronicles 4: 30); probably it was located where ‘Kherbet El-Ras’ is nowadays, between Beersheba and Kholifa.

Ramoth of the south: That was not ‘Ramoth Gilead’; also called ‘Ramah’ of the south (Ramah of Nagb), and ‘Baaalath Beer’ (Joshua 19: 8) - a village south of the territory of Simon.

Jattir: a city of priests in the mountains of Judea, 6 miles north of ‘Molada,’ and 13 miles south west of Hebron. It was probably ‘Kherbet Jettir’; Jettir means (superiority), (Preference), or (exaltation).

Aroer: Different from Aroer in Moab; It is a village in Judah, on the way from Gaza to Wadi Mousa, about 12 miles south east of Beersheba, whose remains are still found in Wadi arara. [Aroer means (naked) or (a jungle of Oror trees)].

Siphmoth: A Hebrew name, that probably means (Moustaches); probably south of Judah.

Eshtemoa: A city of priests; whose name nowadays is ‘Semoa’; 9 miles south of Hebron. ‘Eshtemoa’ is a Hebrew name that means (listening or obedience).

Rachal: or 'Rakal'; a Hebrew name that means (commerce); a city in Judah, of unknown location nowadays.

Cities of Jerahmeelites: (See 1 Samuel 27: 10).

Cities of the Kenites: (See 1 Samuel 15: 6).

Hormah: Originally called 'Zephath' (Judges 1: 17); was a portion of Judah, then was transferred to Simon. Located in the south toward the territory of Edom, was probably located in Wadi El-Melh (Valley of the salt), about 3 miles south east of Beersheba [called Hormath after its destruction (Judges 1: 17)].

Chorashan: (Forn El-Dokhan) or (Oven of smoke), or 'Borashan' (Pit of smoke), or 'Ashan' (smoke); in the valley of Judah, transferred to Simon, then to the Levites; known as 'Kherbet Assan, north east and close to of Beersheba.

Athach: A village south of Judah; probably 'Ether' (Joshua 15: 42).

Hebron: That is 'El-Khalil' nowadays.

David gave of the spoil to the elders of all these cities, beside those of all the locations he and his men went to, as a token of gratitude for their generous hospitality.

CHAPTER 31

THE TRAGIC END OF SAUL AND HIS SONS

Saul tried in vain to kill David; Yet when David put the matter in God's hand, Saul, his sons, and his armor bearer, all fell in one day, without interference from David, whose heart harbored no hatred, but love (2 Samuel 1). He mourned, wept, fasted, and lamented over Saul and over Jonathan his son (2 Samuel 1: 12, 17).

- 1- Saul's sons slain** 1 – 2.
- 2- Saul wounded and killed** 3 – 7.
- 3- The inhabitants of Jabesh take their bodies** 8 – 13.

1- SAUL'S SONS KILLED

After talking about how David conquered the Amalekites, recovered the captives, and took much spoil that he distributed among many, the holy inspiration resumed its dealing with the war between Israel and the Philistines on the mountain of Gilboa and Jezreel.

The Philistines Killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons (1 Samuel 31: 2).

All the human accounts of Saul came to no avail, while those spiritual accounts of David the man of faith were all realized. According to Saul's accounts, David had to be killed, so that after Saul's death, he would not take the kingdom from Jonathan (1 Samuel 20: 31); Yet here there were, the mighty Jonathan, and his two brothers, killed before the eyes of their father, while David was kept safe to receive the kingdom in due time. Saul chased David away from his home, through his evil envy, and did not realize that by that, he kept him away, until the time came, for Saul and his sons to die, and for David to receive the kingdom after him.

David's accounts of faith, on the other hand, were not to stretch his hand to the Lord's anointed; but as he said: "*The Lord shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish*" (1 Samuel 26: 10). And here had come the day when the Lord knocked him out to get wounded by the hands of the archers of his enemies'; and to die falling on his sword.... I wish we leave our affairs in God's hands, believing in His work for us.

2-SAUL WOUNDED AND KILLED

The enemies concentrated their attack on Saul (1 Samuel 31: 3); so that if he fell, all his army would fall (1 Kings 22: 31). When he was severely wounded by the archers, he asked his armor bearer to draw his sword and thrust him through with it, lest those uncircumcised men, would come and abuse him [He probably recalled what they did to Samson, when they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze fetters, made of him a grinder in the prison; and brought him over to the temple of Dagon their god to perform before 3000 men and women to mock him (Judges 16: 21; 21)]. When Saul's armor bearer got greatly scared and would not abide to his

Master's command, Saul took his sword and fell on it. When the armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died with him. According to the Jewish tradition, that armor bearer was Doge the Edomites who killed the priests of Nob (1 Samuel 22: 18, 19).

Saul, his three sons, his armor bearer, and his royal guards, died (1 Samuel 31: 6); But Saul's handicapped son Ishbosheth and Abner, the commander of his army did not die. It was a bitter defeat for Israel; and the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley, (North of the valley of Jezreel; namely the tribes of Nephtali, Zebulun, and Jessacher), forsook their cities and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt there.

3- THE INHABITANTS OF JABESH TAKE THE BODIES

When the Philistines came the next day to strip the slain of everything of value, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. They cut off Saul's head, and stripped off his armor, and sent word throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim it in the temple of their idols and among the people. They put Saul's armor in the temple of Ashtoreth, referring their conquest to it (probably in the temple at Ashkalon, as was mentioned by Herodot); and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan - the nowadays city of Bissan, 5 miles west of the River Jordan; called Skethopolis after captivity, and was considered the capital of 'Decapolis'.

The inhabitants of Jabesh paid back their debt to Saul, who rescued them from Nahash the Ammonite, who accepted to make a covenant with them, and enslave them, on one condition: that he might put out all their right eyes, and bring reproach to all Israel (1 Samuel 11: 1, 2). Now, they refused to leave the bodies of Saul and his sons fastened to the walls of Beth Shan in humiliation; Their valiant men arose and traveled all night, took the bodies, came to Jabeth, and burned them there. Then they took the bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabeth, then fasted seven days.

This book started by the birth of Samuel, as a divine gift, not only to his mother Hannah, but to all the people, having been the fruit of the prayers, tears, and piety of his mother, to become a blessing to his people; He worked, and still is, working by his prayers for the kingdom of God. the book ended by Saul's suicide and the cutting off of his head by the hands of the enemy. Indeed, what an amazing difference between the ordinance of God, and that of man.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE FIRST SECTION

THE PROPHET SAMUEL:

CHAPTER 1: The birth of Samuel

CHAPTER 2: The growth of Samuel

CHAPTER 3: The call to Samuel

CHAPTER 4: The loss of the Ark of God

CHAPTER 5: The fall of the idol Dagon before the Ark of God

CHAPTER: 6 The return of the Ark of God.

CHAPTER: 7: Repentance is the way to triumph

THE SECOND SECTION

KING SAUL

CHAPTER 8: Israel demands a king

CHAPTER 9: Saul's encounter with Samuel

CHAPTER 10: Anointment of Saul as a king

CHAPTER 11: Fighting against the Ammonites

CHAPTER 12: Samuel's farewell address

CHAPTER 13: Saul extorts the priestly work

CHAPTER 14: The conquest by Jonathan

CHAPTER 15: The rejection of Saul

THE THIRD SECTION

KING DAVID

CHAPTER 16: Anointment of David as a king

CHAPTER 17: David and Goliath

CHAPTER 18: Saul fears David

CHAPTER 19: Michel rescues David

CHAPTER 20: Jonathan saves David

CHAPTER 21: David the fugitive

CHAPTER 22: In the cave of Adullam

CHAPTER 23: Saul pursues David

CHAPTER 24: David's decency toward Saul

CHAPTER 25: David and Abigail

CHAPTER 26: David refrains of killing Saul
CHAPTER 27: David seeks refuge in Ziklag
CHAPTER 28: Saul consults a medium
CHAPTER 29: The princes of the Philistines reject David
CHAPTER 30: Ziklag burns with fire
CHAPTER 31: The tragic end of Saul and his three sons