

THE SHEPHERD KING

“David was a representative man. His history is of interest to every soul who is striving for eternal victories. . . . David understood what it meant to fight against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world. . . .

“The struggle that David endured, every follower of Christ must go through.”

—Ellen G. White, “‘That Your Joy Might Be Full,’”
Signs of the Times®, August 11, 1909

“David’s experiences are recorded for the instruction of the people of God in these last days.”

—Ellen G. White, “David Becomes Weary in Well-Doing,”
Signs of the Times®, November 9, 1888

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PREFACE

The story of David has fascinated and inspired Christians for generations. His story comes to us as instructive of one man's lifelong struggle between good and evil. Here was a man capable of not only great heroics and tender mercies but also base crimes and poor judgment. As a gentle shepherd, faithfully leading his flocks to green pastures and courageously protecting them from danger, he plainly states, "The LORD is *my* shepherd" (Psalm 23:1; emphasis added). His psalms bring solace and inspiration. He is referred to as a man after God's "own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). And yet knowing his failings, we ask, How can this be?

David had his share of faults and failures. His lack of truthfulness directly led to the death of Ahimelech and most of Ahimelech's family (1 Samuel 22:9–23). By aligning himself with the Philistines, David came dangerously close to having to fight his own countrymen. He coveted and eventually committed adultery with another man's wife. He conspired against and ultimately murdered her husband to hide the results of that act. He neglected his paternal duties, which resulted in dysfunctional and rebellious sons. He went against the counsel of God by numbering the warriors of Israel during a moment of self-pride and thus brought punishment upon all Israel. Before committing any of these sins, he had said, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11). But he sinned nonetheless.

David's struggles with doubt, temptation, despair, betrayal, sorrow, fear, and pride resonate with us because we face many of the same challenges and questions. Does God exist? How can I have faith in a just God when bad things happen to seemingly good people? Where is God when I pray and no answer appears to be forthcoming? Why do the wicked seem to prosper? How do I deal with overwhelming grief? How long must evil continue? Is God punishing me? Which path does God want me to choose? Does God really keep His promises?

In the story of David, we find reasons to hope, believe, and trust in the Lord. True repentance and sorrow for sin brought peace and salvation to David. God forgave him. God did not forsake him. "These things . . . are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

CREATION OF A MONARCHY

Ruth 1–4
1 Samuel 1–15

Patriarchs and Prophets, chapters 55–61



GOOD AND BAD INFLUENCES

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God.

—Ruth 1:16

The Israelites seemed content, after forty years of wandering, to settle down in the midst of Canaan with enough room to raise a few sheep in relative security. They had no desire to conquer or live in the fortified cities of the Canaanites, but “living thus among the Canaanites the Hebrews were brought into close contact with the religion of the country and its cult system. This seemed so attractive to many that great sections of the people accepted the Canaanite religion. The repeated periods of apostasy were always followed by periods of moral weakness, a situation that provided their more powerful enemies an opportunity to oppress them. In such periods of distress a strong political leader invariably arose and, driven by the Spirit of God, led His people—in whole or in part—through repentance back to God.”¹

As the Israelites grew in numbers over the centuries, this cycle of war and peace developed between the two nations. Periods of peace existed only as long as a current judge lived. During this time, there occurred a famine in Judah. Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, sojourned in Moab, east of the Dead Sea. There, the sons married women of Moab; “the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth” (Ruth 1:4). The husband and sons died, leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law destitute. With the famine being over in Judah, Naomi decided to return to her home near Bethlehem.

Orpah chose to remain in Moab, but Ruth passionately refused (vv. 16, 17). Being poor, Ruth went out to glean the fields around Bethlehem. Here she came to the attention of Boaz, a rich relation of Elimelech. Boaz purchased Elimelech’s land from Naomi, thereby gaining permission to marry Ruth, whom he had come to admire. Ruth, the converted Moabite, gave birth to Obed—“the servant of God”—perpetuating the family line reaching to King David.

“All will have associates, and will influence and be influenced in their turn.”²

1. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1976), 45.

2. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 4:587.

VIRTUE IS NOT INHERITED

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

—James 1:27

When Israel entered Canaan the Lord had commanded them to assign cities to the Levites throughout the various tribes. Thus instruction in ways of righteousness might be given to all the people. But they seem to have paid little or no attention to the command. They did not, in fact, even drive out the Canaanites, but dwelt among them (Judges 1:21, 27, 29–33). Within a few years the Levites, who had received no specific tribal allotment, found themselves without employment. Even Jonathan, the grandson of Moses (see on Judges 18:30), visited the home of Micah the Ephraimite ‘to sojourn where’ he could ‘find a place’ (Judges 17:8), and became priest to Micah’s ‘house of gods’ (Judges 17:5). He eventually stole the images out of Micah’s house and went with the migrant Danites to be their priest (see Judges 18). Thus at a time when ‘every man did that which was right in his own eyes,’ Israel violated God’s plan that the Levites should instruct the people in His ways, and soon lapsed into the ignorant, superstitious ways of the heathen about them.”¹

Thus, the story of David begins with Samuel, the son of Elkanah and Hannah. He was “the last of the judges, one of the greatest of the prophets, founder of the schools of the prophets . . . , and the one who led out in the establishment of the Hebrew kingdom and in the laying down of the fundamental principles on which it was to operate (see 1 Sam. 10:25).”² “Samuel chose to repudiate the evils of the day and to devote his life to the correction of these tendencies.”³ “The reign of judges in Israel closes with Samuel, . . . few purer or more illustrious characters are presented in the sacred record. There are few, also, whose life-history contains lessons of greater value to the thoughtful student.”⁴

Position and possessions are lent to an individual to test his or her character. Helping and uplifting others purifies one’s nature from selfishness.

1. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1976), 449.

2. Nichol, 445–447.

3. Nichol, 449.

4. Ellen G. White, “The Birth of Samuel,” *Signs of the Times*®, October 27, 1881, 1.

A MOTHER'S INFLUENCE

*And [Hannah] called his name Samuel, saying,
Because I have asked him of the LORD.*

—1 Samuel 1:20

Hannah had long wished for a child. Elkanah's second wife, Peninah, had been blessed with sons and daughters, but Hannah was childless. During a yearly visit to Shiloh to offer sacrifices before God, she silently prayed that she might be blessed with a son. Should her prayer be answered, she promised God she would lend her child to His service all the days of his life. Eli, the high priest, was sitting nearby, leaning against a post of the temple. Seeing her lips moving but no sound coming out, he accused Hannah of being drunk. When her heartbreaking tale was told, Eli realized this God-fearing woman was pouring out a heartfelt desire to her Lord. His heart softened, and he said, "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him" (1 Samuel 1:17). God heard her prayer, and she gave birth to a son.

"During the first three years of the life of Samuel the prophet, his mother carefully taught him to distinguish between good and evil. By every familiar object surrounding him, she sought to lead his thoughts up to the Creator. In fulfilment of her vow to give her son to the Lord, with great self-denial she placed him under the care of Eli the high priest, to be trained for service in the house of God."¹

"As soon as the little one was old enough to be separated from his mother, she fulfilled her vow. She loved her child with all the devotion of a mother's heart; day by day, as she watched his expanding powers and listened to his childish prattle, her affections entwined about him more closely. He was her only son, the special gift of Heaven; but she had received him as a treasure consecrated to God, and she would not withhold from the Giver His own."² "And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men" (1 Samuel 2:26). This text brings to mind the description of another Child who found favor with God (Luke 2:52). Hannah had done her job well.

The influence of a Christian mother in forming her children's character is soul saving brought home.

1. Ellen G. White, "Training Children for God—No. 1," *Review and Herald*, September 8, 1904, 7.

2. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1943), 570, 571.

CALLED TO SERVICE

But Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod. Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

—1 Samuel 2:18, 19

Though Samuel's youth was passed at the tabernacle devoted to the worship of God, he was not free from evil influences or sinful example. The sons of Eli feared not God, nor honored their father; but Samuel did not seek their company nor follow their evil ways. It was his constant endeavor to become what God would have him. . . .

"Samuel had been placed under the care of Eli, and the loveliness of his character drew forth the warm affection of the aged priest. He was kind, generous, obedient, and respectful. Eli . . . found rest and comfort and blessing in the presence of his charge. Samuel was helpful and affectionate, and no father ever loved his child more tenderly than did Eli this youth. It was a singular thing that between the chief magistrate of the nation and the simple child so warm an affection should exist."¹

Levites were called to the ministry of the Lord only after they had attained their twenty-fifth birthday. Samuel was an exception to that rule. "Every year saw more important trusts committed to him; and while he was yet a child, a linen ephod was placed upon him as a token of his consecration to the work of the sanctuary."² The tiny linen ephod "was a short, sleeveless garment consisting of front and back panels joined at the shoulders and drawn in at the waist with a girdle."³

Hannah and her husband made yearly trips to the tabernacle and would bring Samuel a new coat Hannah had made for him. I can just see her trying it on him and asking him to turn so she might gauge the fit. The bond between mother and son was unbroken.

"What is lent to the Lord is sure to be returned with compound interest. Hannah dedicated one child to the Lord and was rewarded with five others."⁴

1. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1943), 573.

2. White, 573.

3. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1976), 463.

4. Nichol, 463.

A WARNING UNHEEDED

Wherefore . . . honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?

—1 Samuel 2:29

The sons of Eli were entirely unfit to serve as priests. They showed marked disrespect for the services. Eli's lack of early discipline made them incorrigible. No amount of pleading now made any impression on their behavior. "By their vile lusts they lowered the service of the Lord in the eyes of the people to the level of the sensual orgies of the neighboring idol groves."¹ When Eli failed to act, God intervened. One day a man of God appeared at the sanctuary with a warning message for Eli (1 Samuel 2:27–36). It should have had a sobering effect, but such was not to be.

"The promise had been made that the house of Aaron should walk before God forever; but this promise had been made on condition that they should devote themselves to the work of the sanctuary with singleness of heart and honor God in all their ways, not serving self nor following their own perverse inclinations. Eli and his sons had been tested, and the Lord had found them wholly unworthy of the exalted position of priests in His service."² The house of Eli would cease to exist. Eli's sons would die a violent death. They would not be punished immediately nor die by the direct hand of God, but "in turning away from the angel of the Lord (Ps. 34:7), they sealed their own doom. It was the Philistines who killed them (1 Sam. 4:10, 11), yet God permitted their death because of their refusal to follow Him."³

God lifted the veil and showed the results of continued sin. "He did not foreordain it. He who knows the end from the beginning knows all that affects the exercise of free choice. By warning individuals of what the future holds in store for them, God proves to the universe that men go so far of their own free choice that even that knowledge will not deter them."⁴

The influence of a Christian home is best seen in the character it develops.

1. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1976), 462.

2. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1943), 579.

3. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 2:463.

4. Nichol, 464.

THE VOICE OF GOD

*And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD,
where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep;
that the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.*

—1 Samuel 3:3, 4

There had been no direct message from God to the Israelites for some time. Neither dreams nor visits from heavenly messengers had taken place as the nation had sunk to a spiritual low. Samuel was now twelve years of age. Eli was an obese old man with failing eyesight. The high priest had come to rely upon the young lad for assistance in his old age. “Another warning was to be given to Eli’s house. God could not communicate with the high priest and his sons; their sins, like a thick cloud, had shut out the presence of His Holy Spirit. But in the midst of evil the child Samuel remained true to Heaven, and the message of condemnation to the house of Eli was Samuel’s commission as a prophet of the Most High.”¹

In the silence of the dimly lit tabernacle, “ ‘the Lord called Samuel.’ Supposing the voice to be that of Eli, the child hastened to the bedside of the priest, saying, ‘Here am I; for thou calledst me.’ The answer was, ‘I called not, my son; lie down again.’ Three times Samuel was called, and thrice he responded in like manner. And then Eli was convinced that the mysterious call was the voice of God. . . .

“No feeling of envy or jealousy was awakened in Eli’s heart. He directed Samuel to answer, if again called, ‘Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth.’ Once more the voice was heard, and the child answered, ‘Speak; for Thy servant heareth.’ So awed was he at the thought that the great God should speak to him that he could not remember the exact words which Eli bade him say.”² Samuel was frightened by the message of doom pronounced on Eli and his sons. As God had not told him to convey the message, he remained in silent turmoil all that morning.

God waited until He found a leader true to His calling. He never leaves us in the dark!

1. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1943), 581.

2. White, 581.

WHY ARE THESE LEADERS NOT REMOVED?

Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I. And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee?

—1 Samuel 3:16, 17

Things had become so bad at the tabernacle they could no longer be tolerated. “As the men of Israel witnessed the corrupt course of the priests, they thought it safer for their families not to come up to the appointed place of worship. Many went from Shiloh . . . determined to offer their sacrifices themselves, concluding that this would be fully as acceptable to God, as to sanction in any manner the abominations practiced in the sanctuary.”¹

“Elkanah and Hannah must have had some concern as they placed their gift to the Lord in the hands of Eli, and of his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. How much greater must have been the concern of the divine Father as He placed His Son under the influence and scrutiny of the unworthy priests of His day. Christ was 12 years of age when He came to the attention of the priests, yet His conduct upon that occasion testifies to the reality of divine protection extended even to children who seek heavenly guidance (see on Luke 2:52). Samuel’s experiences testify to the same divine guidance.”²

“Samuel lived for years in an evil environment, and could not help seeing the difference between the instructions given in the scrolls of the law and the lives of the young priests. . . . As he turned the matter over in his heart, the same question would come to him that comes to the mind of a godly youth today: If the Word of God lays down certain principles for the conduct of His work, and the leaders not only fail to follow these instructions, but are guilty of gross misconduct, why does He allow them to continue ministering in holy office?”³

Samuel knew he must faithfully bear the message given, no matter how painful. Eli accepted the verdict and the sentence (1 Samuel 3:18).

“Eli’s sun was about to set, but that of Samuel was already rising.”⁴

1. Ellen G. White, “The Sons of Eli,” *Signs of the Times*®, December 1, 1881, 1.

2. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1976), 462.

3. Nichol, 467.

4. Nichol, 467.