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# 1

## THE MINISTRY OF SAMUEL

### I SAMUEL 1-7

The first seven chapters of the book introduce the prophet Samuel, probably the greatest Old Testament figure since Moses. Samuel is often considered the last of the judges (7:6, 15; 12:11) and the first of the prophets (3:20). He was of Levitical descent and served as a priest in Israel (10:8). Samuel is well-known as a great prophet of prayer. Again and again we see him interceding in behalf of the people of Israel (7:5; 8:6; 15:11). It was Samuel who said to the people of Israel, "Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you" (12:23).

### THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL (1:1-2-2:11)

Samuel was born during a time of Philistine oppression (4:1, 17), religious scandal (2:22), and limited prophetic influence (3:1). Samuel's birth, around 1100 B.C., may be viewed as a ray of hope at a time of impending disaster.

### Samuel's Background (1:1-8)

Samuel was born into the family of a devout Levite residing in the hill country of Ephraim. Elkanah, whose name means "God has created," was a Levite by lineage, but not of the Aaronic priesthood (cf. 1 Chron. 6:26, 33). Elkanah's home town was Ramathaim-zophim ("the heights of the Zuphite"), which is a longer name for "Ramah" (1:19), a city that is probably to be identified with er-Ram, a site just five miles north of Jerusalem. The designation *Ephraimite* (1:1) refers to Elkanah's geographical situation in the territory of Ephraim, not his ancestry.

Elkanah was a polygamist. It was a marital situation that made for jealousy and strife in family relationships (cf. Gen. 30:1;

1 Sam. 1:6-7). Though at variance with God's ideal for marriage—one man with one woman (Gen. 2:24), polygamy was permitted by Old Testament law in the case of a childless first marriage (Deut. 21:15-17) and in the situation of Levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5-10). Elkanah probably took a second wife, Peninnah ("pearl"), because his first wife, Hannah ("grace"), was barren.

Elkanah's devotion to the Lord is evidenced by the fact of his regular yearly worship of "the LORD of hosts" at Shiloh (cf. Deut. 16:16). "The LORD (Yahweh) of hosts" is a military designation referring to God as the one who commands the angelic armies of heaven (1 Kings 22:19, Luke 2:13, Rev. 19:14) and the armies of Israel (1 Sam. 17:45). The term emphasizes the sovereignty and omnipotence of God (1:3). Shiloh, located twenty miles north of Jerusalem, was the religious center of the nation and location of the Tabernacle (Josh. 18:1) until its destruction after the loss of the Ark (1 Sam. 4).

Although Elkanah expressed his deep love for Hannah by giving her a double portion of the sacrifice, that did not compensate for her sense of loss in being unable to bear children. In ancient Israel barrenness was considered a tragic thing since the family name could not be carried on, and the woman would have no chance to become the mother of the Messiah. God's sovereignty over childbearing is expressed in the phrase "the LORD had closed her womb" (1:5-6). It is *God* who opens the womb (Gen. 30:2, 22) and provides children (Gen. 33:5; Psalm 127:3). Women today who have been unable to bear children should realize that: (1) God may still be preparing them to be mothers, (2) God may be preparing them to become foster or perhaps adoptive mothers, or (3) God's will may be that they not have children in order to be available to serve Him in some special way that would be otherwise impossible. Although Peninnah provoked Hannah, Elkanah encouraged her. He suggested that his love and care for Hannah was a greater blessing than having "ten sons"—a very large family (1:8).

### **Hannah's Vow (1:9-18)**

Hannah makes an excellent biographical study for a Mother's Day message. She is an example of a mother devoted to God and

to her family. Hannah also gave us an example of fervent prayer. There at Shiloh at one of the yearly feasts Hannah visited the Tabernacle and poured out her heart to the Lord. The phrase, “greatly distressed” (literally, “bitter of soul”), is descriptive of Hannah’s emotional condition—disappointed and distressed over her inability to bear children (1:10). The essence of Hannah’s prayer is her petition, “Remember me!” (1:11). Within her prayer Hannah made a vow to God—a vow that could have been annulled by Elkanah when he discovered what she had promised (cf. Num. 30:10-12). Hannah vowed that if God would give her a son, the child would be dedicated to lifelong Levitical service (cf. Num. 4:3; 8:24-26) and become a lifelong Nazirite (Num. 6:3-6). Her son would begin his Levitical service as a child and would always refrain from wine, haircuts, and ceremonial defilement.

Verses 12-16 are a sad commentary on the spiritual state of Israel at that time. When Eli, the high priest, saw Hannah praying fervently he assumed that she must be *drunk* (1:14). Hannah’s response, “I have poured out my soul before the LORD,” is an excellent description of fervent prayer (cf. Psalm 62:8, Phil. 4:6-7, 1 Pet. 5:7). The expression “a worthless woman” is literally “a daughter of Belial” (1:16). The Hebrew *belial* means “without value” and was used in later Jewish writings as a proper name for Satan (cf. The Book of Jubilees i.20; 2 Cor. 6:15).

After hearing Hannah’s explanation Eli blessed her (“Go in peace”) and prayed that God would grant her the petition. Having bared her heart before the Lord, Hannah experienced peace (cf. Phil. 4:6-7). She was able to eat, and her countenance was changed (1:18).

### **Hannah’s Blessing (1:19-20)**

God remembered Hannah, as she had requested (1:11, 19), and answered her prayer. The expression *knew* (KJV\*) is a euphemism for sexual relations. When Hannah gave birth she named the child Samuel explaining, “Because I have asked him of the LORD” (1:20). Keil and Delitzsch interpret the name to mean “heard of God,” commemorating the answer to prayer.<sup>1</sup> However, Brown, Driver, and Briggs’s Hebrew lexicon explains the name as meaning “name of God” (*shem-El*), serving as a continual reminder of God’s

\*King James Version.

mercy toward those who call upon His name.<sup>2</sup> With that second view the majority of commentators concur.

### **Hannah's Obedience (1:21-28)**

How easy it might have been for Hannah to rationalize her way out of keeping her vow. She could have argued that she had made a rash promise under severe emotional stress. But Hannah recognized the priority of obedience and the importance of keeping her vow (cf. Eccles. 5:4-5). Hannah did not go up to Shiloh to worship with her husband for several years until she had weaned the child and could fulfill her vow. Hebrew children were normally weaned from their mothers at two to three years of age (The apocryphal 2 Maccabees 7:27 makes reference to that fact). The word translated "weaned" literally means "dealt fully with" and may include the idea of spiritual training as well. It may well be that Samuel learned of the importance of prayer from his godly mother at a very young age and thus became a great prophet of prayer.

Old Testament law provided for a burnt offering to be given at the fulfillment of a special vow to the Lord (cf. Num. 15:3, 8). After offering the appropriate sacrifices (1:24-25), Hannah identified herself to Eli the priest and presented her child, Samuel, to the Lord. That was not "baby dedication" as might be inferred from the *New American Standard Bible*. Nor was the idea that of "loaning" the baby to God (KJV). The word for "dedicated" is literally translated "made him over to." The idea is that of a complete and irrevocable giving up of the child to the Lord. Hannah subjected her maternal instincts to her spiritual commitment and was careful to pay her vow even at great cost. The phrase "he worshiped" describes the response of Elkanah (1:28). His commitment to God is evidenced by the fact that he did not annul Hannah's vow according to the provisions of Numbers 30:10-14.

### **Hannah's Praise (2:1-11)**

The scene recorded here stands in sharp contrast with the situation in 1:9-15 when Hannah was last at the Tabernacle. Here she rejoiced and praised God. Hannah's praise was in response to God's answer to her prayer and may have been delivered as a

personal testimony before the congregation of worshipers at the Tabernacle. Like the psalms, this prayer is recorded as Hebrew poetry. The theme of Hannah's praise is her confidence in God's sovereignty over every aspect of life. Hannah also praised God for His holiness (2:2), knowledge (2:3), power (2:8), and judgment (2:10).

1. *Hannah's rejoicing* (2:1-2)

Hannah began her prayer with great rejoicing for being divinely delivered from barrenness. In doing so she recognized the unique holiness of Yahweh. The "horn" is an image of invincible strength (cf. Dan. 7:21; Zech. 1:18-21).

2. *Hannah's warning* (2:3)

Could verse 3 have possibly been addressed to Peninnah, Hannah's rival (cf. 1:6-7)?

3. *Hannah's testimony* (2:4-8)

Hannah proceeded to testify from her own experience how God intervenes in human affairs. A sovereign God can and does reverse human circumstances, humbling the proud and exalting the humble (2:7-8). Verse 6 points to the fact that the issues of life and death are in the hand of God. The Hebrew word *Sheol*, suitably translated "grave" in the King James Version, refers to a dark, shadowy, silent place of continued existence after death (Job 10:21-22; Psalms 94:17, 143:3). It appears that the word most often refers simply to the place of the dead—the grave of both the righteous and the wicked (cf. Gen. 37:35; Psalm 9:17).<sup>3</sup> However, *Sheol* can also be used in a more technical sense of the place of punishment for the wicked dead awaiting resurrection and final judgment (Num. 16:33; Job 24:19; Psalm 30:9; Isa. 38:18). In this latter sense it would be the equivalent of "hades" in the New Testament.

4. *Hannah's confidence* (2:9-11)

Hannah concluded by expressing her supreme confidence in God's power to protect and preserve His own. The righteous will be preserved, and the wicked will be punished. Having testified of God's blessing in her life Hannah returned home to Ramah, leaving Samuel to minister with Eli at Shiloh.

**THE CORRUPTION OF THE PRIESTHOOD (2:12-36)**

The rest of chapter 2 records the corruption of the priesthood in the time of Samuel resulting from Eli's failure to discipline his sons (3:13). Eli's sons dishonored God by despising His offerings and committing immorality with the women who served at the Tabernacle (2:17, 22).

**The Sin of Eli's Sons (2:12-17)**

The sons of Eli are described as "worthless men" (literally "sons of Belial"), an expression associated with idolatry and sensuality (Deut. 13:13; Judg. 19:22; 20:13). In addition, it is said that they did not "know" Yahweh. The word *know* speaks of an experiential, personal knowledge. How tragic to know about God, yet not know Him personally! It was the custom of Eli's sons to steal from God by taking any part of the sacrifice they desired, rather than their allotted portion (Lev. 7:34) and demanding the meat from the people before the fat had been burned as an offering to God (Lev. 3:3, 5). In essence, they disdained the offering of God, treating it irreverently and disrespectfully (2:17).

**The Blessing on Hannah (2:18-21)**

The conduct of Eli's sons is set in sharp contrast with the remarkable piety exhibited by Elkanah's family. Samuel was busy serving the Lord (2:18), and Hannah was ministering to the needs of her family (2:19). The linen ephod worn by Samuel was a close fitting, sleeveless outer vest extending to the hips and worn almost exclusively by priests, especially when officiating before the altar (Exod. 28:6-14; 1 Sam. 2:28). Hannah's obedience and devotion to God resulted in great blessing. Not only did God give her three more sons and two daughters, but she also had the privilege of watching her first-born, Samuel, grow before the Lord (2:21).

**The Immorality of Eli's Sons (2:22-26)**

Not only did Eli's sons steal from God, but they also committed adultery openly with the women who served at the Tabernacle (2:22; 4:19). The women mentioned here and in Exodus 38:8 were probably responsible for keeping the entrance of the Taber-



nacle clean. The Hebrew text of verse 24 suggests that the sin of those religious leaders was leading the people of Israel to transgress. The words “the LORD’s people circulating” are better translated “causing the LORD’s people to transgress.” Although Eli warned his sons of the certain divine judgment for their sin, they would not listen. The preposition *for* (2:25) may denote result (i.e., “therefore the LORD . . .”), pointing to the severe consequence of their sin against God. In contrast to the apostate sons of Eli, Hannah’s son was maturing both spiritually and socially (cf. Luke 2:52).

### **The Prophecy Concerning Eli and His Sons (2:26-36)**

Chapter 2 concludes with a warning given to Eli concerning the impending divine judgment on his house and family. The rebuke was delivered by a “man of God,” an unidentified prophet, or spokesman for the Lord. The essence of Eli’s sin was that by neglecting his responsibility for child discipline, he actually esteemed his sons above the Lord (2:29). Although he warned his sons of divine judgment (2:25), he never rebuked them for their sins (3:13). Verse 30 sets forth the principle that with God, honor is reciprocal. God will honor those who honor Him. But note carefully that the reverse is also true.

The prophet predicted the destruction of the priestly family of Eli (2:31-34). That judgment was partially fulfilled in the massacre of the priests of Nob (cf. 1 Sam. 22:11-19) and ultimately fulfilled in the transfer of the priesthood to the family of Zadok in the time of Solomon (1 Kings 2:26-27, 35). The death of Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, on the same day would serve as a sign to validate the prophecy.

With the destruction of Eli’s family God promised to raise up a faithful priest who will fulfill His will and whose house will endure. Although that priest has been identified as Samuel, or even Christ, it is preferable to view the prophecy as fulfilled in the accession of Zadok and his family to the priestly office in the time of Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 1:7-8; 2:26-27, 35).<sup>1</sup> Zadok himself served David and Solomon; his sons will serve in the millennial Temple (Ezek. 44:15; 48:11). The impoverishment predicted in verse 36

was probably fulfilled when Abiathar, a descendant of Eli, was dismissed from the priesthood by Solomon (1 Kings 2:27).

### THE CALL OF SAMUEL (3:1-21)

Although Abraham was the first prophet (Gen. 20:7) and Moses was the greatest prophet (Deut. 18:15, 18-22; 34:10), Samuel was the first of a series of prophets called by the Lord to speak His Word to the people of Israel.

#### Samuel's Call (3:1-18)

Samuel was probably a young teenager when he was called to his prophetic ministry. The word translated "boy" means "young person" and is used of David when he slew Goliath (17:33). This was a time of extremely limited prophetic activity (3:1), probably because there were so few faithful men through whom God could deliver His Word. It was just before dawn while the golden lampstand before the veil was still burning (cf. Lev. 24:3; Exod. 27:20-21) that Samuel was called to his prophetic ministry. Three times he mistook God's voice for the voice of Eli. Verse 7 explains why. Although Samuel had been assisting Eli in the Tabernacle, he did not yet know the Lord in a personal way nor had he ever received God's Word by divine revelation. Finally Eli realized that it must be the Lord and instructed Samuel in an appropriate response (3:9).

When God spoke a fourth time Samuel responded, "Speak, for Thy servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:10). The word translated "listening" means "to hear with interest" and can be translated "obey." Samuel was listening to God's word and was determined to obey it. Samuel exemplifies the kind of person that God can use—one who is always ready to receive God's message and obey His Word. The message God gave Samuel was an ear-tingling announcement of the impending destruction of Eli's house (3:11-14). The message spoken earlier by the "man of God" (2:30-34) was about to be fulfilled.

Eli's family was apparently guilty of "a sin of the high hand" (cf. Num. 15:30-31). For such defiant sin there was no atonement, and the death penalty would be immediately applied (2:33; 3:14).

Perhaps this is an Old Testament example of a kind of sin that is "unto death" (1 John 5:16-17). Samuel's first great test as a prophet of God was whether he would report the whole truth to Eli or compromise the message. He passed the test by speaking the whole counsel of the Lord concerning Eli and his family (3:17-18). Eli expressed no doubt that Yahweh had spoken through Samuel and submitted to God's sovereign discipline.

### **Samuel's Ministry (3:19-21)**

Samuel's commitment to communicate God's truth brought him great blessing. God was with him and allowed none of his prophecies to go unfulfilled—literally, "to fall to the ground" (3:19). Soon Samuel became recognized by all Israel as God's spokesman. The expression "from Dan even to Beersheba" denotes the whole territory of Israel from its most northern to its most southern extremity—a distance of about 150 miles (cf. Judg. 20:1). Samuel's call to the prophetic ministry provided a basis for God's continued revealing of His will and word at Shiloh (3:21).

### **THE JUDGMENT ON ELI'S HOUSE (4:1-22)**

First Samuel 4 records the fulfillment of the prophetic judgment to fall on Eli's family. The judgment came about as a result of a Philistine attack against Israel.

### **Israel's Defeat at Ebenezer (4:1-2)**

The Philistines, commonly referred to in Egyptian texts as the "Sea Peoples," were Indo-Europeans who migrated from the Aegean Islands (cf. Amos 9:7) and Asia Minor to the eastern Mediterranean coastal region in the twelfth century B.C. Most scholars agree that they set out for Palestine and Egypt under the pressure of the invasion of the Dorian Greeks. Migrations of that kind had occurred earlier, for we see that Abraham had contact with "Philistines" as early as 2000 B.C. (Gen. 21:22-33). Although the early migrants were more peaceful, the later ones were very aggressive. Their invasion toppled many of the kingdoms of the ancient East. Rameses III (1198-1166 B.C.) boasts that he succeeded in repulsing the invasion, but as a result of the attack Egypt lost control of the southern coastal plain of Palestine, and there the

Philistines settled. They formed a very strong political and military organization with fortress cities at Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza. The Philistines soon became the greatest threat to Israelite security.

The battle between the Israelites and Philistines recorded here took place between Aphek and Ebenezer. Aphek, just eleven miles northeast of Joppa, was a strategic border city at the northern edge of the Philistine territory. Ebenezer, yet unidentified, was probably situated on the plain between Aphek and the hills to the west. The name *Ebenezer* (“stone of help”) was given to commemorate Israel’s victory at the site some twenty years later (cf. 7:12). The battle between Aphek and Ebenezer resulted in Israel’s defeat and the loss of four thousand Israelite warriors (4:2).

#### **Israel’s Superstitious Use of the Ark (4:3-9)**

The leaders of Israel quickly recognized the hand of the Lord in the outcome of the battle. In order to insure a future victory against the Philistines they determined to remove the Ark from the Tabernacle in Shiloh and take it with them into battle.

A twofold theological error lay at the basis of that plan. First, Israel failed to distinguish between the Ark as the symbol of God’s presence (Exod. 25:22; 2 Sam. 6:2; Psalm 80:1), and the actual presence of God. It was the custom of ancient warriors to take their idols into battle so that their gods would deliver them (cf. 2 Sam. 5:21; 1 Chron. 14:12). That was apparently Israel’s plan. Their error was in failing to recognize that God is omnipresent—not subject to spatial limitations (Psalm 139:7-10; Jer. 23:23-24). God would be with Israel in battle even when the Ark was in Shiloh. Second, Israel became superstitious about the Ark, believing divine power to be in the Ark itself rather than God. They viewed the Ark as a “lucky rabbit’s foot” or good-luck charm that would insure their success in battle. Their error was in failing to recognize that God is omnipotent—infinite in power (Psalm 115:3; Jer. 32:17). Rather than placing their confidence in the Ark, the Israelites should have placed their faith in the infinite, all-powerful God. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, accompanied the Ark to the Israelite camp (4:4-5).

The joyful shouting of the Israelites at the sight of the Ark

brought fear into the hearts of the Philistines (4:6-7). They clearly looked upon the Ark as some sort of idol—an Israelite god—and were stricken with fear. They had heard of what Israel's God had accomplished for His people at the Exodus (4:8).

#### **Israel's Defeat and Loss of the Ark (4:10-22)**

The Israelites were again defeated at the hands of the Philistines, and this time thirty thousand Israelite warriors were slain in battle. One soldier who escaped from the battlefield ran up the Shiloh Valley to bring a report of Israel's defeat to Eli. He reported Israel's defeat, the death of Eli's sons, and worse yet, the capture of the Ark by the Philistines (4:17). When Eli heard that the Ark had been taken he fell off his seat by the gate and broke his neck. God was beginning to destroy the apostate house of Eli so He could replace it with a family of faithful priests (2:33-36).

Upon hearing the news of the death of her husband and father-in-law and that the Ark had been captured, Phinehas's wife went into labor and delivered a son. Like Rachel (Gen. 35:16-20), she died in childbirth, but before her death she named the child. His name would be Ichabod—literally, “no glory,” for the loss of the Ark meant the absence of glory in Israel (4:22).

It is probable that the Ark never returned to Shiloh, for archaeological excavation indicates that the city was destroyed around 1050 B.C.<sup>5</sup> It may have been destroyed by the Philistines after they captured the Ark. Jeremiah 7:12 reveals that the Lord brought about the destruction of Shiloh as a judgment on His wicked people.

#### **THE WANDERINGS OF THE ARK (5:1—7:2)**

The next several chapters of 1 Samuel record the wanderings of the Ark and the havoc it caused the Philistines while it was in their possession. One spiritual lesson to be gleaned from this section is that whatever is acquired by improper means can never bring blessing.

#### **From Ebenezer to Ashdod (5:1-7)**

The Ark was first taken to Ashdod, a Philistine city located on the Mediterranean coast about twenty-two miles south of Joppa.

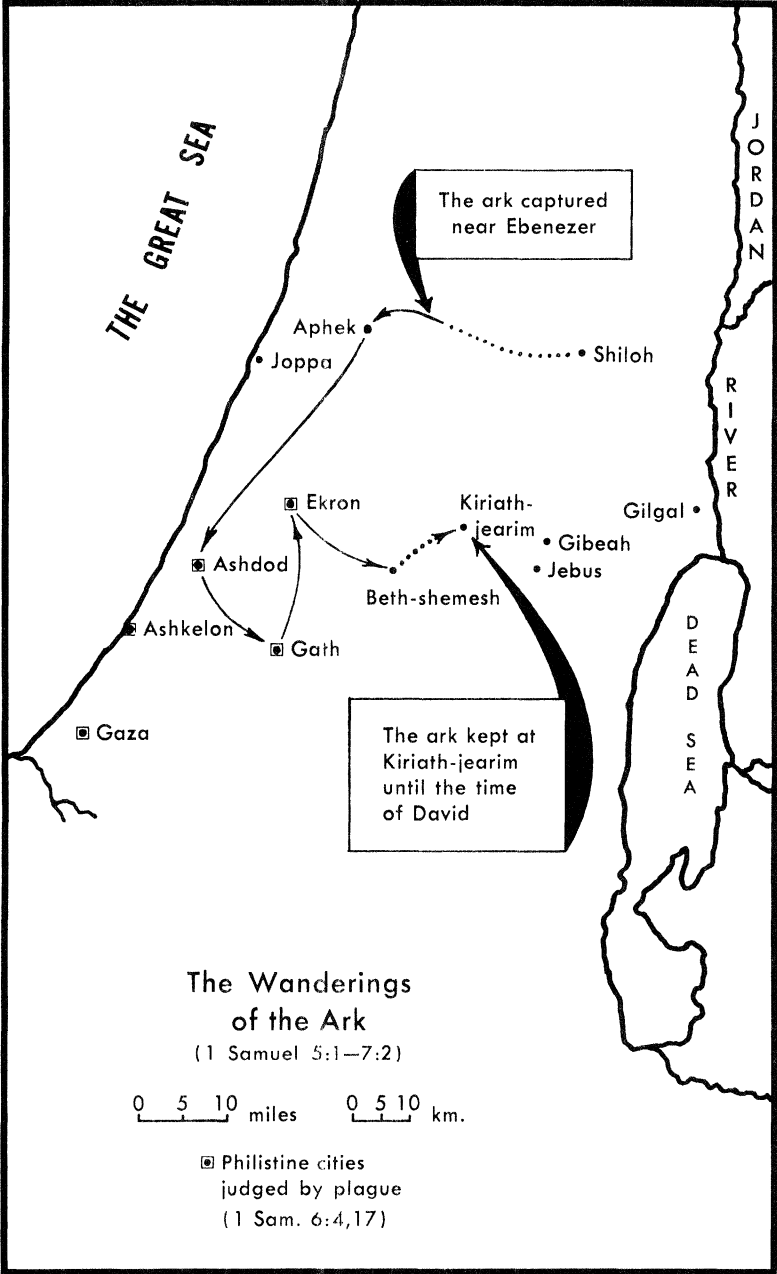


Fig. 1.1

There the Ark was placed as a trophy of battle in the temple of Dagon, a Philistine fertility deity. In Ugaritic literature, the Canaanite deity Baal is sometimes referred to as the “son of Dagon.” Twice the Philistine idol fell down before the Ark. Imagine the dismay of the priests of Dagon, finding their idol prostrated before the ark of Yahweh as though worshipping Israel’s God. The second time Dagon fell, the idol was destroyed (5:3-4). That was a divine judgment and is recorded here as a polemic against the Philistine god. Verse 5 explains, in a humorous vein, that this incident resulted in the Philistine custom of avoiding the threshold of Dagon’s temple (cf. Zeph. 1:9). Apparently the threshold was considered to be “holy” by virtue of its contact with the head and hands of Dagon.

Not only did the Lord destroy the Philistine idol, but He also brought a plague of “hemorrhoids” upon the people of Ashdod. The Hebrew word is derived from the verb *to swell*, and may refer to any kind of tumors or, perhaps, boils. In light of the later reference to the mice that ravaged the land (cf. 6:4-5), it has been suggested that those “swellings” were buboes, symptomatic of bubonic plague. The leaders of Ashdod soon recognized that the Ark had brought them misfortune rather than blessing, and they made haste to remove it from their territory.

#### **From Ashdod to Gath (5:8-9)**

The Ark was transferred from Ashdod to Gath, another of the five Philistine cities (6:17), probably located at Tell es-Safi, about twelve miles southeast of Ashdod. The divine plague, of course, followed the Ark, producing sores on both the young and old. Although the Ark was a good thing, it had been acquired by improper means and therefore could not bring blessing.

#### **From Gath to Ekron (5:10–6:9)**

From Gath the Ark was transferred to Ekron, a Philistine city probably located at Tell Miqne, just six miles to the north. There a similar plague resulted, and the Philistine people decided that it was in their own best interests to return the Ark to Israel (5:11).

After seven months of plague and panic the leaders of the people sought advice from the Philistine “theologians” as to how the Ark

should be restored to Israelite possession (6:2). The priests and diviners warned against returning the Ark empty and counseled that an offering would be necessary to appease the God of Israel and bring an end to the plague. A guilt offering of five golden hemorrhoids and five golden mice was prepared—one of each for the five Philistine cities (6:4, 17-18). A new cart was built to carry the Ark back to Israelite territory. The cart was to be pulled by two “milch cows”—cows still nursing their young (6:7). For nursing cows to leave their young and make a beeline for the Israelite city of Beth-shemesh would be quite unusual. That would be a clear indication that the cows were being led supernaturally and that the plague had indeed been the judgment of Yahweh (6:9).

#### **From Ekron to Beth-shemesh (6:10-20)**

The Ark was dispatched from Ekron, and the cows pulling the cart headed straight for Beth-shemesh (Tell er-Rumeileh), a Levitical city (Josh. 21:16) in the Sorek Valley about eight miles east of Ekron. The Israelites reaping wheat in the fields of Beth-shemesh were the first to see the Ark, and they thanked God for its safe return by offering the two milch cows as a burnt offering. Although there is no indication that the Ark was in Ashkelon (nine and a half miles south of Ashdod) or Gaza (twelve miles south of Ashkelon), they apparently came under the plague that fell on all the Philistines (cf. 6:4).

An unfortunate tragedy took place at Beth-shemesh with the return of the Ark. The Lord slew some of the men of Beth-shemesh who were guilty of the presumptuous sin of gazing into the Ark, apparently a violation of Numbers 4:20 (cf. Num. 4:5-6, 15-20). The Ark was a holy object and not to be meddled with by the unconsecrated. The number 50,070 is doubted even by conservative scholars and probably represents a scribal error in transmission.<sup>6</sup> Since the number fifty thousand is absent in three Hebrew manuscripts, the correct figure is probably seventy as recorded by Josephus (*Antiquities* VI. 16).

#### **From Beth-shemesh to Kiriath-jearim (6:21—7:2)**

So disturbed were the people of Beth-shemesh by the tragedy that had befallen them that they requested the men of Kiriath-



jearim to come and remove the Ark from their valley. The Ark was then taken to the house of Abinadab in Kiriath-jearim, identified with Deir el-Azar, just ten miles west of Jerusalem. There Eleazar, of no apparent priestly descent, was consecrated (literally “set apart”) to care for the Ark. The Ark of the Covenant remained at Kiriath-jearim for at least twenty years until David brought it to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:2-3). Since the “twenty years” (7:2) does not bring us to the time of David and the events of 2 Samuel 6, it must refer to the period until some important event—perhaps the repentance recorded in 7:3-4.

### **THE VICTORY OVER THE PHILISTINES (7:3-17)**

The rest of chapter seven records Israel’s third major battle with the Philistines during the ministry of Samuel. This time the Israelites were victorious. The victory resulted from Israel’s repentance and was accomplished by God’s power.

#### **The Preparation for Battle (7:3-4)**

Before Israel’s third confrontation with the Philistines, Samuel gave them the key to victory. He declared that repentance from idolatry and loyalty toward God were the prerequisites for blessing (7:3). Spiritual victory is the necessary prelude to success in every area of life (cf. Josh. 1:8). The people of Israel responded by putting away the idols of the Canaanite deities Baal and Ash-taroath. Idols of that sort and many other cult objects can be seen in Israel’s museums today. Baal was the supreme male deity of the Phoenician and Canaanite nations. He was a fertility god whose domain was the sky. From there he fertilized the land and thus controlled nature. Ashtaroath (7:3-4; 12:10; 31:10) is the plural form of “Ashtoreth,” the Canaanite mother goddess of fertility, love, and war. The rites connected with her worship were of a very licentious nature and usually involved prostitution. Ashtoreth was the supreme goddess of Canaan and the female companion of Baal.

#### **The Attainment of Victory (7:5-14)**

Before the battle against the Philistines, Samuel gathered the people of Israel together at Mizpah (Tell en-Nasbeh), seven miles

north of Jerusalem, for a prayer meeting. There they demonstrated their repentance by pouring out water (a sign of repentance, cf. Psalm 62:8, Lam. 2:19), fasting, and confessing their sin. The Philistines noted the renewed unity and commitment among the Israelites and considered it a threat to their security. They immediately organized an attack on Israel (7:7).

While Samuel was sacrificing and praying to the Lord, the Philistines engaged the Israelite army in battle (7:8-10). The Lord graciously intervened in behalf of His repentant people and caused a great thunder to confuse the Philistines enabling the Israelites to achieve a tremendous victory. As a result, Israel was able to receive back their territory from the Philistines as far west (i.e., exclusive of) as Ekron and Gath (7:13-14). To commemorate the victory and acknowledge the Lord's help, Samuel set up a memorial stone on the battlefield and named it *Ebenezer*, meaning in Hebrew, "the stone of help" (7:12). It is interesting that it was near that site that Israel had been defeated twice before (4:1-2, 5:1). This third battle was really fought in the hearts of the people against that old enemy, Satan. Once Israel achieved victory over their spiritual adversary (7:3-6), the Lord was able to bless their efforts against the Philistines (7:10-14). The term *Amorites* (7:14) is a general name for the original inhabitants of Canaan (cf. Josh. 7:1-7; 10:5; 11:3-5).

### **The Labors of Samuel (7:15-17)**

Samuel the prophet was also a circuit rider judge. He decided legal matters and settled disputes for those on his circuit from Ramah, Samuel's home, after the destruction of Shiloh to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. In addition to his civil duties as judge and his religious duties as prophet (3:19-20; 7:5-9), Samuel also had military responsibilities in Israel (12:11). Although the following chapters of 1 Samuel continue to record the ministry of this remarkable leader of Israel, the focus is clearly upon a young man named Saul who became Israel's first king.

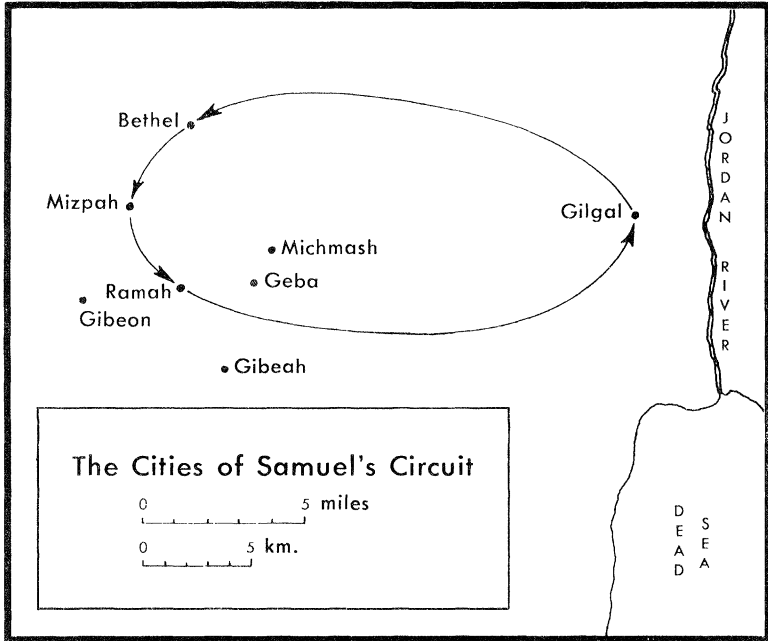


Fig. 1.2

## NOTES

1. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Books of Samuel*, trans. James Martin (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872), p. 25.
2. William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon to the Old Testament*, ed. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, trans. Edward Robinson (Cambridge: Oxford U., 1959), s.v. "Shemuel."
3. R. Laird Harris, "The Meaning of the Word Sheol as Shown by Parallels in Poetic Texts," *The Evangelical Theological Society Bulletin* 4 (1961): 129-135.
4. John J. Davis, *The Birth of a Kingdom* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Brethren Missionary Herald, 1970), p. 34. Neither Samuel nor Christ were of Aaronic descent and thus could not have filled the priestly office.
5. Howard F. Vos, *Archaeology in Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody, 1977), p. 200.
6. John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), pp. 87-89.