

CHAPTER 7

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST SAMUEL 7

This chapter gives an account of the ark being brought to Kirjathjearim, where it continued twenty years, (^{<000>}1 Samuel 7:1,2) of the exhortation of Samuel to the people of Israel to reform from idolatry, and which had its desired effect, (^{<000>}1 Samuel 7:3,4) of Samuel's praying for the people, and offering sacrifices for them, and of the success thereof, victory over their enemies, (^{<000>}1 Samuel 7:5-14), and of his administration of justice to them, and constancy in it, (^{<000>}1 Samuel 7:15-17).

Ver. 1. *And the men of Kirjathjearim came and fetched up the ark of the Lord*, etc.] From Bethshemesh, which was near unto them, as Josephus ^{f136} says; they made no difficulty of fetching it, but gladly received it; for if they knew of what happened to the men of Bethshemesh, they knew it was not owing to the presence of the ark among them, but to their irreverent behaviour to it; and though Kirjathjearim was not a Levite city, and so the men of it could not bear the ark themselves, yet they might have proper persons from Bethshemesh to do this service:

and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill; which; hill was within the city of Kirjathjearim, and is mentioned either to distinguish this Abinadab that dwelt on it from another of the same name in the city, as Kimchi observes; or else to remark the propriety of the place, and the reason of the choice of it for the ark to be placed in; hills and high places being in those times accounted fittest for sacred services to be performed in, as well as places of safety; who this man was is not certain. Josephus ^{f137} says he was a Levite, but if so he could only be a sojourner in this place; however he might be, as he suggests he was, a man of great esteem for religion and righteousness:

and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord; not only to watch it that it might not be taken away, but to keep persons from it, from touching it, or using it irreverently; and such as were not allowed to come nigh it; as well as to keep the place clean where it was put; and for this he was appointed by the priests, or the elders of the city; and was set apart for

this service, and prepared for it by washings and sacrifices; and the rather he and not his father was invested with this office, because he was a young man, and his father might be old and decrepit; and this his son also a holy goodman, wise and prudent, and active and zealous for God, and true religion; and on all accounts a fit person for this post.

Ver. 2. *And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjathjearim, that the time was long,* etc.] It could not be less than between forty and fifty years, for it remained here until the times of David, who removed it from hence after he was made king over all Israel, and when he had reigned over Judah seven years; and from the death of Eli to that time, which included the government of Samuel and Saul, it could not be less than what has been hinted:

for it [was] twenty years; not that this was all the time the ark was at Kirjathjearim, but it was so long there before it was much taken notice of, and sought unto, and the Lord by it; there was a great neglect of God, and his worship, which through the means of Samuel began to revive about this time, as it follows:

and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord; became sensible of their evil doings, and repented of them, and sought the Lord with fasting, and prayer, and tears; bewailed their backslidings and revoltings from him, and cried after a departing God.

Ver. 3. *And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel,* etc.] When they assembled at one of their three yearly feasts, or as he went from place to place, exhorting them to repentance and reformation; and perceiving they began to be awakened to a sense of their sins, and seemed desirous of returning to God, and restoring his worship:

saying, if ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts; truly and sincerely; for he might fear there was hypocrisy and dissimulation at least in some of them:

[then] put away the strange gods; as all but the true God are; or the gods of another people, as the Philistines, Canaanites, etc. Baalim seem chiefly intended, as appears from the following verse:

and Ashtaroth from among you; female deities, such as with other nations went by the name of Juno, Venus, etc. so the Arabic version,

“the idols of the women ye secretly worship.”

Aquila renders it, “the images of Astarte”; so they call Venus as Procopius Gazaeus observes, from “aster”, a star; but the word signifies flocks of sheep, and these deities are supposed by some to be in the form of them; but be they what they may, they were to be put away out of their houses, and out of their hearts:

and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only; that is, direct your hearts to him while in his service; let it proceed from the heart, and let it be done to him only, and not to another with him; or to him in and by another, as may be pretended, and commonly is by idolaters:

and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines; under whose dominion they had been for many years; for though their power over them was weakened by Samson, yet they were not completely delivered by him; so all the time of Eli they were not wholly free from them; and especially since their last defeat by them; when the ark was taken, they had been under oppression by them; now Samuel promises them deliverance from it, in case they relinquish their idols, and served the Lord solely and heartily.

Ver. 4. *Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth,* etc.] Both their male and female deities, of which (see ^{<0713>}Judges 2:13 3:7)

and served the Lord Only; Dr. Lightfoot ^{f138} observes, that a spirit of repentance and conversion came generally upon all the people; a matter and a time as remarkable as almost any we read of in Scripture, one only parallel to it; and that is in Acts, chapters two and three, at the great conversion there.

Ver. 5. *And Samuel said, gather all Israel to Mizpeh,* etc.] Not Mizpeh in Gilead, on the other side Jordan, but a city which lay on the borders of Judah and Benjamin, where the tribes met on the account of the Levite’s concubine, (^{<0710>}Judges 20:1). This order Samuel gave by messengers sent to the several tribes, or the heads of them, to meet him at this place:

and I will pray for you unto the Lord; no doubt he prayed for them privately, that the reformation begun might be carried on, and appear to be sincere, and hearty, and general, and universal; but he was desirous that they might appear in a body, and join with him in public prayer for their spiritual and temporal welfare; that they might have true repentance for

their sins, reform from them, and have remission of them, and be delivered out of the hands of their enemies.

Ver. 6. *And they gathered together to Mizpeh*, etc.] Even all Israel, at least the heads of the people, and representatives of them:

and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord; drew it from some fountain near at hand, and poured it out as in the presence of God, who was where his people were met together. Jerom^{f139} relates it as tradition of the Jews, that curses were cast into this water, as in the water of jealousy, and that idolaters were tried by it; and that whatever idolater, who denied he worshipped idols, and tasted of it, his lips so stuck together that they could not be separated, and by this means was known and put to death; and therefore it is said Samuel judged now at this place: but it should be observed, this water was not drunk, but poured out; and that as a token of their humiliation, as Jarchi, that they were before the Lord, as water poured out; and of the sincerity of their repentance, as the Targum, which is,

“they poured out their heart in repentance, as water;”

and of the atonement and expiation of their sins, which passed away as water to be remembered no more, as Kimchi, or rather signifying hereby that they thoroughly renounced idolatry, that nothing of it should remain; as water entirely poured out, there remains not so much as any smell of it in the cask, as does of honey or oil, or such kind of liquor; for what a learned writer^{f140} says, that this was in token of joy, like that at the feast of tabernacles, when they drew water out of the fountain of Siloah, seems not so agreeable, since this was a day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer, as follows:

and fasted on that day, and said there, we have sinned against the Lord; Samuel prayed in public for them, with whom they joined; and they fasted in a literal sense, abstaining from food, and made a confession of their sins; this was the work of that day:

and Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh; not that he now began to judge them, but went on in a more public and vigorous manner to judge them; he sat, and heard, and tried causes that came before him; explained the laws of God to them, and enforced the obedience of them; reformed abuses that were among them, and punished idolaters.

Ver. 7. *And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh,* etc.] Not knowing it was upon a religious account; but supposing they met to form schemes and measures to cast off their yoke, and deliver themselves out of their hands; and were preparing to take up arms, and fall upon them:

the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel; with forces out of their several principalities united to fight with them; judging it advisable to lose no time, but attack them before they were well prepared and provided to defend themselves:

and when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines; because they were unarmed, and not at all prepared for war, and having no expectation of it.

Ver. 8. *And the children of Israel said to Samuel,* etc.] To whom they applied, not as the general of their forces, but as the prophet of the Lord; believing his prayers for them would be of more avail to them than an army of men ever so numerous, or so well accoutred:

cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us: he had been praying for them that day, and they desired he would continue praying for them, well knowing that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much; they knew their salvation was of the Lord, and that he only could save them, and that he must be sought unto for it; and as Samuel had an interest in him, they beg he would continue to make use of it on their behalf; in which they expressed their trust in God, their regard to means, the duty of prayer, and the high esteem they had of the prophet of the Lord, whom they entreat to pray for them:

that he will save us out of the hands of the Philistines; who were now coming up against them, and who had for a long time tyrannised over them.

Ver. 9. *And Samuel took a sucking lamb,* etc.] Which it might be, and yet more than eight days old, for under that it might not be sacrificed, (⁽⁴²²³⁾Exodus 22:30)

and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord; the whole of it was burnt, skin and all, whereas the skin was the priest's in other burnt offerings; and this is remarked^{f141} as one of the three things in which it

differed from other offerings; the word being feminine, the Jews gather from hence, as Jarchi notes, that females might be offered at a private altar:

and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; not only offered a sacrifice for them, but prayed for them:

and the Lord heard him; and answered him, either by causing fire to come down on the sacrifice, by which it was consumed, or by the voice of thunder, which frightened and discomfited the Philistines; and the event of things manifestly showed it.

Ver. 10. *And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering* etc.] Which he might do by a priest, as Ben Gersom suggests, he being only a Levite; though he being a prophet, and an extraordinary person, and this an extraordinary case, he might do it himself, as Gideon and others, as well as offer it in another place than where the tabernacle was; Shiloh being now destroyed, persons and places for sacrifice were now dispensed with: and before Samuel had made an end of offering the sacrifice,

the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel; and were come as far almost as Mizpeh, where Israel were, and Samuel was sacrificing:

but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines; which fulfilled Hannah's prophecy, (^{<0020>}1 Samuel 2:10) and this, as Josephus^{f142} says, was attended with lightning, which flashed in their faces, and shook their weapons out of their hands, so that they fled disarmed; and also with an earthquake, which caused gaps in the earth, into which they fell:

and discomfited them; disturbed, affrighted them, and threw them into confusion and disorder, as well as destroyed many of them:

and they were smitten before Israel; the meaning of which is not that they fled before them, and were killed by them; but that before Israel could come out against them, and fight with them, they were smitten and destroyed, many of them by the thunder and lightning, and by the earth opening upon them, and devouring them; for this phrase, "before Israel", denotes time, as Abarbinel observes, and not place.

Ver. 11. *And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh,* etc.] To which they were encouraged by hearing or perceiving that the army of the Philistines was discomfited by the thunder, and lightning, and earthquake:

and pursued the Philistines; who, when they came out, were fleeing from the opening earth, and frightened with thunder and lightning, and many were killed, and all put in disorder; so that they stayed not to engage in battle with Israel, and who had nothing to do but to pursue their enemy:

and smote them: with what weapons of war they could get at Mizpeh, and with what some might have with them for private use, and in common wear; but more especially with the weapons of the Philistines, which they in their confusion and fright had thrown away:

until they came under Bethcar; a place so called; “car” signifies a lamb; here might be formerly a temple dedicated to the lamb, unless it had its name in memory of the lamb Samuel now offered, which was followed with such success. Josephus^{f143} calls this place Corraea; and in the Targum it is Bethsaron, which signifies a fruitful field or champaign country.

Ver. 12. *And Samuel took a stone, and set it*, etc.] Not for worship, but as a monument of the victory obtained by the help of God: and this he placed

between Mizpeh and Shen; which latter signifies a tooth, and designs the precipice of a rock which juts out, and hangs over in the form of one:

and called the name of it Ebenezer; which signifies “the stone of help”; and is the same place which by anticipation has this name, (~~1~~ Samuel 4:1), so that in the selfsame place where the Israelites were twice beaten by the Philistines, and the ark taken, was this salvation wrought for them:

saying, hitherto hath the Lord helped us; this was but the beginning of their deliverance from the Philistines, and which was owing to the help of the Lord; and as he had begun to help them, they might hope and encourage themselves that he would go on to help them until their deliverance was completed: however, they with Samuel thought it their duty, which was right, to acknowledge what the Lord had done for them, and perpetuate the memory of it, though they could not be sure what he would do for them hereafter; yet as they were sensible of, and thankful for this instance of his goodness, they hoped for more, and had their dependence on him for future success against their enemies.

Ver. 13. *So the Philistines were subdued*, etc.] Not that their country was conquered, or they made subject and become tributaries to Israel; but they were so humbled, as not to attempt to give the people of Israel any further

trouble and distress, who were now delivered from their oppression and tyranny:

and came no more into the coast of Israel; at this time they did not gather together their forces dispersed, nor raise and bring a new army into the land of Israel; they contented themselves with placing garrisons on the coast, but did not attempt to enter and invade them any more; that is, for a long time, even until Samuel was grown old, and the people would have a king, and had one, which offended the Lord, and then he suffered them to be distressed by them again; but while Samuel was alone governor they came no more, though they did quickly after Saul was made king, as it follows:

the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel; not all the days of his life, but all the days of his sole government, which restrained them from making incursions into the land of Israel; and indeed in later times, when they did come forth to make war with them, the battle was against them during the times of Samuel.

Ver. 14. *And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel,* etc.] We nowhere read that the Israelites went out to war with them, and took these cities from them by besieging and assaulting them; but they made a demand of them after the above victory obtained, by which the Philistines were so intimidated, that they quietly surrendered them to them:

from Ekron even unto Gath, and the coasts thereof, did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines; not by dint of sword, but by demand, to which they submitted; and though Ekron, if not Gath, fell to the tribe of Judah by lot, yet were never in their possession; and so are to be understood exclusively here, that not they, but the cities and towns that lay between them and the coasts thereof, which the Philistines had seized upon, these they were obliged to deliver up again to Israel; and if Ekron and Gath were delivered, they were not long held by them, for we soon read of them as in the hands of others:

and there was peace between Israel and the Amorites; who were a principal nation of the Canaanites, and are put for the whole of them that remained; and so Josephus^{f144} calls them the remnant of the Canaanites; these, finding the Philistines were subdued, were quiet and peaceable, and gave Israel no more trouble.

Ver. 15. *And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.*] Not only before Saul was made king, but afterwards; for though he had not the exercise of the supreme government of the nation, yet he might act as a judge under Saul, and hear and try causes brought before him, and execute justice and judgment; and as a prophet he taught and instructed the people, and reformed abuses among them; and besides, he held and exercised his extraordinary office, to which he was raised up of God, and even took upon him to reprove Saul himself, and to kill Agag. The Jews say ^{f145} he judged Israel thirteen years only, eleven by himself, and two with Saul; but his government must be much larger, his with Saul is reckoned forty years, (~~4423~~ Acts 13:21).

Ver. 16. *And he went from year to year in circuit,* etc.] As judges do; or “from the year in the year” ^{f146} from the time of the year in the year, as the Targum, from the middle of it, that is, every half year; and so Josephus says ^{f147}, that he went twice a year in circuit: and the places he went to, and where he held his courts of judicature, were

Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh; by Bethel is not meant Shiloh, as Abarbinel, for that was now destroyed; nor Kirjathjearim, where the ark was, for it would have been called by its name; but the same Bethel that was near to Ai, and not far from Shiloh, and was in the tribe of Benjamin, as all those places were. Gilgal was where the tabernacle, ark, and camp of Israel were first pitched, when they came over Jordan, and Mizpeh where the people used to be assembled on occasion, (see ~~9005~~ 1 Samuel 7:5,6),

and judged Israel in all those places; who came from all parts hither with their causes, and for advice and counsel in all cases, at the returning periods.

Ver. 17. *And his return was to Ramah,* etc.] When he had gone his circuit, he came back to this city, which was his native place, and where his father and mother had dwelt, (see ~~8006~~ 1 Samuel 1:1)

for there was his house; and his father’s house before him, and perhaps the same, (~~8009~~ 1 Samuel 1:19) and there he judged Israel; here was his fixed residence, and here he was always to be met with, except when on his circuit; and hither the people of Israel might come from all parts, to have justice done them between man and man, or receive information in matters of difficulty and importance:

and there he built an altar unto the Lord: to offer his own sacrifices, and the sacrifices of the people, either by himself, or by a priest, when the people came to have justice administered to them; or to desire him to pray for them, teach and instruct them, or to give them advice. Shiloh being destroyed, and no place appointed for the tabernacle and altar, the Jews say, high places for a private altar were lawful, and even for one that was not a priest to offer; these things, though settled by law, yet were for a time dispensed with, until things could be fixed in their proper place and order.