

he sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark. The Levites of Beth-shemesh, which was one of the Levitical cities (Josh. 21, 16), seem to have proven unfit to guard this sacred treasure, and were guilty of sacrilege (see chap. 6, 15-30). Hence its transfer to Kirjath-jearim. Judg. 17, 7 shows that in those days some of the Levites sojourned in cities which were not specially set apart for the sons of Levi.

**2. Twenty years.** This was a period of dense gloom and of deep humiliation for Israel. Samuel grew up to manhood, married, and had children (comp. chap. 8, 1). Of his ministry as a prophet during this time we have no certain knowledge, but this chapter shows that he was recognized and revered as a leader. The separation of ark and tabernacle demoralized what remained of regular worship among the tribes, and they were left without any one central seat of national worship. **Lamented after the Lord.** Several eminent authorities translate this, "assembled themselves after the Lord." This rendered, it serves as an appropriate introduction to the next verse, wherein **all the house of Israel** is addressed as if assembled together. On the other hand, the word so translated always elsewhere means "to lament," and hence it seems best to adhere to the common translation.

**3. Samuel spake.** We need not suppose that what is here written was spoken to **all the house of Israel** in formal assembly. Rather, his word of prophecy, consisting of rebuke, warning, and exhortation, was spoken to a number of the leaders of the people and by them repeated to others. **If ye do return.** This conditioning their salvation from their enemies upon repentance and obedience is characteristic of much of the Old Testament prophecy. The people are addressed as having gone away from God; and hence the exhortation to return. **With all your hearts.** True repentance and acceptable service must spring from the heart and must affect the whole heart. **Put away the strange gods.** This same language occurs in Gen. 35, 2, and Josh. 24, 23. Through all their history up to the time of the exile, the Israelites showed a most perverse tendency to cling to some form of idolatry. We meet the mention of teraphim in a number of instances (Gen. 30, 19; Judg. 17, 5; 1 Sam. 19, 13; 2 Kings 23, 24); and open idolatry is mentioned, as in Judg. 2, 12, 13. According to Amos they had carried about a star-symbol of Chiton, or Saturn (Amos 5, 26). Among the strange gods which they had followed **Ashtoreth** is here expressly mentioned. This is the Hebrew plural form of the word **Ashtoreth**, which appears 1 Kings 11, 5. **Ashtoreth** was the female, as **Baal** was the male, divinity of the Phenicians (see ver. 4). Her worship was very ancient and wide-spread, and her rites and ceremonies filthy and abominable. **Prepare your hearts unto the Lord.** Or, "establish your hearts firmly unto Jehovah." There had ever been too great a lack of steadfastness in their relations to Jehovah, as the above mentioned facts evince. **Him only.** According to the obvious requirement of the first commandment of the decalogue. All forms of idolatry were treason to the fundamental principle of the religion of Israel. **He will deliver you... Philistines.** Though the Philistines had been awed so as to return the ark, they still held the Israelites in irksome bondage.

**4. Israel did put away.** Here was genuine repentance, shown not by weeping and sentiment only, but by obedience to the word of the Lord. **Baalim and Ashtoreth.** Names in the plural, denoting all the images of the male and female idols of the Zidonians.

**5. Samuel said.** To the elders of the tribes. He thus issued a proclamation for a great assembly. All

**Israel to Mizpeh.** The phrase "all Israel" here, as often elsewhere, means a full representation of the people, not every individual of the entire nation. The name Mizpeh means "a watch-tower," or lofty place whence one could survey a wide range of country. It was accordingly given to several places which answered this purpose. The one here mentioned is not the Mizpeh of Gilead, where Jephthah summoned the eastern tribes to prepare for war against Ammon (Judg. 10, 17), but the Mizpeh of Benjamin, mentioned in Josh. 18, 25, 26, in connection with Gibeah and Ramah. Two eminences near Jerusalem present rival claims for being the site of this ancient Mizpeh. One is now known as Nebi Samwil, about five miles north-west, the other the height called Scopus, about a mile directly north of Jerusalem. **I will pray for you.** Samuel is remarkably celebrated for his prayers (see chap. 8, 6; 12, 17; 15, 11; Psa. 90, 6; Jer. 15, 1).

**6. Drew water, and poured it out.** All Orientals are keenly alive to the significance of symbolical actions. This pouring out of water before Jehovah signifies the pouring out of the soul in humble penitence before him. Thus the psalmist says, "I am poured out like water" (Psa. 22, 15); and in Lam. 2, 19 we read, "Pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord." **Fasted.** The symbolical act of penitence was supplemented by this sign of lamentation and grief. **We have sinned.** To their symbolical acts they also added open and audible confession. **Samuel judged... in Mizpeh.** He there and then, as this narrative shows, performed the work of a judge of Israel. The people came to him with their questions as they did to Moses (Exod. 18, 13-16), and his words of rebuke and counsel (comp. ver. 3), and his encouragement and prayers (ver. 9), helped Israel to victory.

**7. The Philistines heard.** These enemies probably had their garrisons in several strongholds of the country, and were quick to notice such a gathering as this at Mizpeh, and to regard it as the beginning of a revolt from their power. **The lords.** Chiefs; representatives of the confederate cities of the nation. These leaders joined their military forces to keep Israel in subjection. **Went up against Israel.** In battle array. They were resolved to nip in the bud all such beginnings of revolt as this great assembly at Mizpeh seemed to indicate. **Israel heard.** Fugitives, coming in from the country bordering on the Philistine plain, reported the march of an approaching army of their enemies, and, after forty years' oppression by these lords of the plain, the Israelites were naturally very much afraid of the Philistines. They were probably poorly armed (comp. chap. 13, 19-22), and, having come to Mizpeh for other purposes than war, they felt their want of ability to cope with the enemy, and feared still more grievous oppression might ensue.

**8. Cease not to cry.** They feel that now their only hope is in Jehovah. One principal object of their gathering at Mizpeh was to have the prophet pray for them (see ver. 5).

**9. Samuel took a sucking lamb.** The law provided that an animal victim to be acceptable must be over seven days old (Exod. 22, 30; Lev. 22, 27). Such a young lamb was, like the first-fruits of the field, a most fitting expression of the tender affection of the heart. **A burnt-offering wholly.** So that it was not like the peace-offering, of which those offering it ate a share, but was entirely consumed on the altar as a sign that the whole people offered themselves penitently in complete consecration unto God. Being a Levite and a prophet, Samuel felt himself warranted in offering this sacrifice with his own hand. Ark and tabernacle were separate, the Aaronic priesthood in a demoralized condition, and this