

## The Election of Saul.

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It is generally recognized that we have in the Books of Samuel two or, it may be, three accounts of the election of the first king of Israel. In the first account Saul is anointed king by Samuel, in order to lead the Israelites against the Philistines, and is bidden seize the first opportunity of fighting (1 S 9<sup>1</sup>-10<sup>16</sup>). In the second account, in consequence of the misrule of Samuel's sons (chap. 8), a king is chosen by lot, and the lot falls upon Saul (10<sup>17-27a</sup>). The sequel to the first account is given in chap. 11, when, about a month after his consecration by Samuel, Saul gains a victory over the Ammonite king Nahash (10<sup>27b</sup>-11<sup>15</sup>, omitting v. 14). The sequel to the second account is given in chap. 12, in which Samuel formally demits office.

The arguments for and against this analysis have been stated over and over again, yet the following points appear to have been overlooked, and may help to clear away some of the difficulties of the narrative as it stands:—

The first account is considered by critics to be the older of the two, and chap. 9<sup>1</sup>-10<sup>16</sup> especially to be a very old piece of narrative indeed. Yet these verses, both in regard to the expressions used and the subject-matter referred to, show a close affinity with some of the latest books of the Old Testament.

It is argued that the people of Jabesh send for help to all the Israelite cities, and *only amongst the rest* to Gibeah where Saul was, he being still unknown. But the point here seems to be that the people of Jabesh were throwing dust in the eyes of the Ammonite king, and, whilst pretending to send messengers in all directions as a forlorn hope, sent them straight to Gibeah to summon Saul. Saul seems to have been well known even before his anointing by Samuel (cf. 9<sup>20</sup>, and in 9<sup>17</sup> translate, 'Now Samuel had seen Saul,' etc.).

The difficulty in connexion with Saul's waiting for Samuel at Gilgal (10<sup>8</sup> 13<sup>8</sup>) may be explained by supposing that Saul waited literally seven days, whereas by 'seven' Samuel would, of course, mean what we should call eight, counting in both terms.

On the assumption that the present text is a combination of two distinct narratives, the reference in 11<sup>14</sup> to a 'renewal' of the kingdom has to be set down by critics as a gloss. Yet the method of procedure here detailed is very like that followed by the Arabs on the occasion of the appointment of a new Khalif. The oath of allegiance is taken on the first day by the principal men, and afterwards by all the people. In 10<sup>27</sup> there is some opposition threatened on the part of the people to the choice of their chiefs (the 'elders' of chap. 8): in chap. 11 this opposition is swept away by Saul's victory.

The fact that Saul is formally chosen by lot in 10<sup>17ff.</sup> is no disproof of his having been already selected by Samuel. The casting of lots may have been a pure matter of form. If this be so, then an exact parallel to the election of Saul will be found in *Joinville's Chronicle*, where he describes how the Tartar tribes met together in order to elect a king who should lead them against the tyrant Prester John. A certain wise man showed them how to proceed. Fifty-two marked arrows, one for each tribe, were placed before a five-year-old child, who was bidden choose one. The arrow of the tribe to which the wise man belonged was chosen. This tribe then selected fifty-two of its wisest men, and fifty-two marked arrows, one for each, were set before the child and he was bidden lift up one. He lifted the arrow of the wise man who had instructed the people. So it was no doubt in the case of Saul and Samuel.

The Oriental historian always leaves much to be filled in by the intelligence of his readers. If his work often seems unintelligible and self-contradictory to us, it is because we have not the knowledge of the circumstances necessary to fill up the gaps. If the above observations be well founded, the narrative of the election of the first king of Israel is intelligible as it stands. It is certain that it was intelligible to the author or 'editor' from whose hands it finally came.