

Cult and Prophecy in Israel

IN a previous lecture (1) we have examined all the evidence bearing on the relation between the prophets of Israel and the temple-service during the pre-monarchical period. The conclusion arrived at was this: "Prophetism, as instituted by God, had no connection with the temple-service. The prophets were God's spokesmen and his representatives in all that concerned God's position as the Only and true God of Israel..... They may have taken part in sacrificial worship, but their position as God's representatives made them independent of, and superior to, all the temple officials. Any cultic function which they may have performed was necessarily and essentially subordinated to their general mission as God's representatives and guardians of true religion" (2). We now pass on to the second period of the history of prophetism, namely, the first years of the monarchy or the reigns of David and Solomon, and try to evaluate all the evidence that is generally adduced in favour of the cult-prophet theory in order to show that this theory is unfounded and untenable.

The establishment of the monarchy was the greatest turning point in the religious history of Israel. It was not a mere change in the form of government, a political event brought about by the ever changing internal conditions of the people and their external relations with the neighbouring nations; it was also, ad mainly, the initial fulfilment of God's promises to the Patriarchs and the foreshadowing of their full accomplishment in New Testament times. God had already promised that his blessings would be mediated through Abraham and his descendants, one of whom, coming from the tribe of Judah, would rule over the Israelite people and keep the supremacy and royal prerogatives of the tribe until the coming of the king-Messiah. The monarchy was therefore a link connecting God's promises to the Patriarchs and the foundation of the messianic kingdom in the New Testament; it was a politico-historical event subordinated to, and regulated by, to a certain extent, the laws of human

(1) See *Melita Theologica*, IV (1951) 75-88.

(2) *Ibid.* p. 88.

history; but it was, above all, a part of God's plan of redemption and as such necessarily subject to God's will and direction.

Saul's election as the first king of Israel was, from a religious point of view, a failure. Although he achieved great success by uniting the people and defeating the Ammonites (1 Sam. 11, 1-11), the Philistines (1 Sam. 13, 15-14, 46), and all the hostile neighbouring nations (1 Sam. 14, 47), and the Amelecites (1 Sam. 15, 1-9), yet his unbounded ambition, his uncontrolled self-will, his mad rashness and unrepentant heart made him unsuitable for the high dignity of founder of Israelite monarchy. One might ask: Why has God chosen Saul if He foresaw that the choice would prove a failure? The ways of providence are hidden from man. But still we have in Saul an illustration of the necessity of man's cooperation in order to make God's grace effective.

Saul's rejection by Yahweh put David on the throne of Israel. David's character contrasted strikingly with that of Saul. Profoundly religious, he loved God with all his heart; he always refrained from laying his hands on the Anointed of the Lord, though this was seeking his life; the prophets and the highpriest were his advisers. He organized the temple worship, especially the liturgical chant and music. He captured Jerusalem, the Jebusite stronghold, and made it the new capital and the centre of Yahwistic religion. He defeated all his enemies, suppressed all internal opposition, consolidated the tribes into a powerful nation and so, on his death, he bequeathed to his son Solomon a vast, strong and well-organized kingdom. In spite of his weakness and his sins, which he sincerely confessed and bitterly deplored, he was in everything "a man according to the Lord's heart" (1 Sam. 13, 14).

Political and religious unity made David's kingdom the ideal type of the messianic kingdom. But, unfortunately, they were both short-lived. Political disruption and religious apostasy marked the Israelitic kingdom all through the ages. David, on his death-bed, gave the right of succession to his favourite son Solomon in preference to his elder son Adonijas, who claimed stronger constitutional rights. In spite of his brilliant beginning, Solomon was senselessly sowing the seed of discord. His extravagant expenditure, the magnificence of his buildings which surpassed anything Israel had known before, the hard labour which he forced upon the Northern tribes and from which his

Judæan subjects were apparently free, the Temple itself with its gorgeous furniture gradually estranged him from the Northern tribes and from those pious Israelites who preferred the simple and austere forms of worship of the olden days to the more ostentatious ceremonial of the new Temple. Moreover, his union with foreign wives and his facile condescension to, and participation in, the worship of their deities were an open attack upon that religious and political unity achieved by his father and the first step towards the spreading of idolatry among Yahweh's people. The seed was thus sown, and it fell to the lot of Solomon's son to reap the fruit.

It is against this historical background that the prophetic function during the early years of the monarchy must be viewed. Unfortunately our information is very scanty, but it is sufficient to show at least the main lines of prophetic activity and its influence upon the history of Israel.

The only prophets that are mentioned during this period are Gad and Nathan during David's reign, and Ahias during Solomon's reign. All three are called *nebiim*, but Gad is called also *hoze* "seer" (2 Sam. 24, 11 and 1 Chr. 21, 9). Whatever the difference, if any, between *hoze* and *nabi* may have been, it is certain that no sharp line of demarcation between the functions of the *hoze* and those of the *nabi* can be drawn (3), the difference of name pointing to different linguistic usage rather than to different functions.

Gad appears for the first time among David's followers in Moab as the bearer of a divine oracle: "Do not stay in the stronghold, depart and go to the land of Judah" (1 Sam. 22, 5). Many years later, on the occasion of the census, Gad announced to David the punishment which God was about to mete out to him on account of his vain glory and self-confidence, and advised him to erect an altar on the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite, in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. David, not only purchased the whole site of the threshing-floor, but acting obviously on Gad's advice, offered sacrifices on the altar which he had erected. We have no further information about Gad, but his appellation "David's seer" seems to imply that Gad was permanently attached to David as his private counsellor and as a pro-

(3) JUNKER, *Prophet und Seher*, p. 84, A.R. JOHNSON, *The cultic prophet in ancient Israel*, p. 29.

phet through whom David could consult God. The author of the Books of Chronicles makes him the historian of David's reign (1 Chr. 29, 29) and attributes to him a share in the organization of the musical service of the sanctuary (2 Chr. 29, 25).

According to this scrappy and incomplete information Gad is twice associated with the cultus. He bade David build an altar and offer a sacrifice, and through his agency God gave his directions concerning the musical service of the Temple. This close association of the prophet Gad with the cultus is said to be a clear proof of the part played by the prophets in the Temple service. Thus Johnson writes: "Confirmation of this i.e. that the seer was a cultic specialist closely associated with the sanctuary may be found in the fact that it was Gad, the hoze, also called a nabi, who bade David set up an altar in the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite; and it was clearly Gad's intention that the king should seek Yahweh's forgiveness (i.e. for taking a census of the people) by means of a definite cultic act—that of a sacrifice. Moreover (and this is ultimately very significant) according to 2 Chron. 29, 25 Yahweh's original commandment concerning the musical service of the Jerusalem Temple was made known through the agency of this same Gad, the royal *hoze*, in association with David the king and Nathan the *nabi*" (4).

We must beware of reading into the text more than it really implies. From the fact that Gad bade David set up an altar and offer a sacrifice no more can be deduced than from his proposal to David to choose one of the three punishments which God was about to inflict upon him. In both cases Gad is acting as God's representatives communicating to David a divine message. This is quite clear in the first case: "And the word of the Lord came to Gad, the prophet and David's seer, saying: Go and speak to David: So saith the Lord" (2 Sam. 24, 11f). In the other case the divine message is implied in the words: "And David went up according to the word of Gad, which the Lord had commanded him" (2 Sam. 24, 19). The only legitimate conclusion is that Gad was a court-prophet, David's seer, entrusted by God with the task of assisting the king during the first years of monarchy, giving him, in the name of God, advice and guidance in civil and cultic matters, threatening him with divine

(4) *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

punishment in case of transgression and keeping alive the Yahwistic faith as the characteristic mark of the new kingdom. His activity is confined to the royal court; he does not mix with the people; he is never represented as addressing the people as, for instance, Elijah and the prophet-writers. These are facts which none can deny. That Gad had some connection with the sanctuary is a possibility which we are willing to admit; but there are absolutely no grounds for supposing that he, by reason of his prophetic vocation, was officially and necessarily connected with the Temple.

Nor does the mention of Gad in 2 Chr. 29, 25 as one of the organizers of the music service of the Temple give us the right to infer that the prophet exercised a cultic function in the Temple. Apart from the fact that 2 Chr. 29, 25-28a may be regarded as a gloss breaking the connection between v. 24 and 28b and expanding what is said in v. 30 about David as a writer of liturgical songs (5), the real meaning of v. 25 is that David organized the music service on an order received from God through the prophet Gad. This appears clear from v. 25b: "for it was the commandment of the Lord by the hand of his prophets". In other words, Gad was not a temple musician whose services may have been required by David; he was a messenger bearing a divine order which David could not disobey. The music service, which king Ezechias was so scrupulously performing, is thus referred back to God who communicates his orders, whether they are of a moral or of a cultural character, through the agency of his representatives, the prophets.

Nathan's position was much the same as that of Gad. He too was a court-prophet, a privy councillor of David's in religious and political matters, though apparently associated with the Temple. He is first introduced as approving David's plan of building a temple to Yahweh and, afterwards, delivering a divine message to the effect that David's resolution would be carried out by one of his sons (2 Sam. 7). The fact that David sought the advice of Nathan about his plan of building a temple has provided Prof. Johnson with another link connecting the prophet to the Temple. Thus he writes: "It was a prophet, i.e. Nathan, whom David apparently first consulted concerning

(5) GOETTSBERGER, *Die Bucher der Chronik*, Bonn, 1939, p. 344.
L. MARCHAL, *Paralipomenes in Piroet-Clamer La Sainte Bible*, 1949, p. 221.

his project for a sanctuary in Jerusalem; and thereupon it was through Nathan's prophetic 'word' or 'observation', we are told, that the building of Solomon's Temple was foreshadowed" (6).

Here again Johnson is outrunning the evidence of the text. It is true that David sought the advice of a prophet about his plan of building a temple, but the only conclusion which, according to strict logic, we can draw from this fact is that the prophet was the only person that could give reliable advice. Now we are not to suppose that David consulted Nathan as he would have consulted an architect, or that he simply manifested to him his intention in a familiar conversation. It was God's advice what David was really seeking; it was God whom he was consulting, and through whom could David consult God except through the prophets? We see, therefore, no cogent reason for considering Nathan a member of the sanctuary personnel for the simple fact that he was consulted about a cultic matter.

This conclusion, namely that Nathan did not belong to the cultic staff of the sanctuary, is further strengthened by the following consideration of another of Johnson's arguments in its relation to Nathan's story. The prophets, says Johnson, were normally consulted on festival days and at the particular sanctuary to which they belonged. It was only in a case of emergency that a prophet could be consulted at any time or place. Such an obviously cultic association, Johnson goes on to say, is sufficient of itself to prove that the prophet was connected with the sanctuary (7). If a prophet was consulted under these circumstances, it is presumable that he would deliver God's messages under the same circumstances of time and place, even when he was not consulted.

Now let us apply the argument to Nathan's case. David had grievously sinned and lived for some time in his sin. During all that time David must have gone some time or another to the sanctuary where Nathan is believed to have been exercising his function of oracle-giver. There was, therefore, no emergency, and yet Nathan communicated the divine threat in David's own house (2 Sam. 12, 1-15), and presumably on an ordinary weekday. And after having delivered his message, Nathan returned to his own home (v. 15), not to the sanctuary. It follows either

(6) *Op. cit.* p. 26.

(7) *Op. cit.*, p. 25f.

that the assumption that prophets communicated the divine oracles in the temple is wrong, and so one of the links connecting the prophets with the temple is broken; or that the principle, though true in itself, is not applicable to a court-prophet like Nathan, and this again would dissociate Nathan from the temple.

Nathan's episode, to which allusion has just been made, besides disproving Johnson's contention of the close association of the prophets with the sanctuary, serves also to bring to light more distinctly Nathan's prophetic function. On that occasion Nathan had not been consulted by David, he was not answering in the name of the Lord to any question asked by David, he was not giving advice to one who had sought it, he was only commissioned by God to convey a message and a threat, so that in that juncture Nathan was God's messenger rather than David's counsellor and adviser. But God's message was in itself a call for repentance, a counsel spontaneously given to David, because it was needed though not requested. God could have left David rot in his sin and finally deprive him of the throne as he had done with Saul. God, however, in his unlimited graciousness, gave David the opportunity for repentance in order that his honour may be vindicated, the monarchy saved and his promise fulfilled. Nathan, therefore, is God's messenger and David's counsellor inviting the king to repentance for his own sake and for the sake of the monarchy.

Nathan reappears shortly after with a happy message to the king. David had called the name of his newly born son Solomon, "the peaceful", a name portending the peaceful times in which Solomon was to rule over Israel. But Nathan, on the Lord's command, called him Jedidja which meant "the beloved of Yahweh", thus signifying that it was in Solomon and through Solomon that God's prediction to David that his descendants would sit on the throne of Judah for ever (2 Sam. 7, 4-17 especially vv. 14b-16) would reach its complete fulfilment. The name Jedidja served also as a pledge of God's favour to David and of his forgiveness of David's sins. Nathan had previously predicted the death of the child born of the unlawful union of David and Bethsabee (2 Sam. 12, 14), but that sin has now been forgiven, and therefore Solomon will not only live but will also be the object of God's love and blessings. It was on account of this foreknowledge of God's predilection for Solomon and of his dispositions concerning David's dynasty that Nathan in later years

took such an active part in securing for Solomon the succession to his father's throne. On the occasion of Solomon's birth as on that of David's project to build a Temple for Yahweh Nathan is a court-prophet announcing future events concerning the well-being of the monarchy.

Nathan was not only a courtier but, apparently, also a shrewd political intriguer. Making good use of his authority as a prophet and of Bethsabee's intervention as David's favourite wife, he succeeded in securing the succession for Solomon against the rights of his elder brother Adonias. But Nathan's political activity was always informed by his religious principles. He knew only too well from previous revelations that David's dynasty would be perpetuated through Solomon, not through any other of David's sons. Consequently he always worked for the accomplishment of God's promise. Without giving undue play to the imagination, we may reconstruct the whole story of Solomon's succession in this way: Nathan fully realized that after David's death the power would pass, at least by customary right, to Adonias, the eldest of David's surviving sons. This, however, would frustrate God's promise. Nathan therefore endeavoured to divert the succession in favour of Solomon. Naturally he manifested his plans to some of the highest of David's officials, as Sadoc, the highpriest, and Banaias, the captain of the royal body-guard, who, together with the best of the army supported Solomon's cause. But Joab, the commander-in-chief, and Abiathar, a highpriest from another line, were in favour of Adonias. As David was very old and no longer able to govern, Adonias was proclaimed king of Israel by his supporters. The coronation festivities were not yet over when Nathan intervened advising Bethsabee to plead her son's cause with the king, then he himself expostulated with David for having allowed Adonias' succession without consulting his faithful adviser. The result was a royal decree proclaiming Solomon king of Israel.

We have seen so far that both Gad's and Nathan's prophetic activity was limited to the royal court. They were both the king's counsellors in state matters, and, as God's representatives, they always endeavoured to strengthen the monarchy by keeping sound and safe the religious foundation upon which it had been established. They were God's spokesmen to the king, because it was the king who needed most divine guidance and assistance during the first years of the monarchy. They are never

represented as speaking to the people or taking part in cultic functions. We feel, therefore, fully justified in concluding that both Gad and Nathan, the only prophets that are mentioned in David's story, were more closely associated with the court and with the administration of the government than with the Temple and its service.

This conclusion, insofar as it dissociates the prophets from the Temple, receives a strong confirmation from the fact that neither Gad nor Nathan nor indeed any other prophet is mentioned in the narrative of the cultic manifestations that took place during David's reign. In the procession of the ark from Gabaab to Obededom's house no mention whatever is made of the prophets either as singers or as composers of religious hymns (2 Sam. 6, 1-11). All the people are said to have taken part singing, dancing and playing musical instruments, but the prophets are not there. In the Chronicler's account, which is more elaborate, David is represented as consulting the military chiefs and the representatives of the people before carrying the ark, but here too no mention of the prophets occurs (1 Chr. 13, 1-14). Nor is any mention of the prophets made in the account of the translation of the ark from Obededom's house to its new abode in the City of David (2 Sam. 6, 12-23). Their absence is the more significant as David himself is represented as performing the greatest cultic function, that is, the offering of the sacrifice.

The history of Solomon's reign has recorded the name of one prophet only. Ahias of Silo, an Ephraimite, who played a leading part in the political scission of the kingdom of Israel. As has been said in the beginning Solomon was disliked by the Northern tribes, and Ahias, a Northerner, was naturally averse to Solomon's policy. One day the prophet met Jeroboam, another Ephraimite, who had been appointed by Solomon superintendent of works for the house of Joseph. Both shared the same anti-Solomonic feelings and the same aspirations for independence. Accompanying his words by a symbolic action Ahias not only incited Jeroboam to revolt against Solomon, but also assured him in the name of Yahweh that the Northern tribes would become a separate kingdom under his rule. Jeroboam was a reactionary voicing the general discontent of the Northern tribes, but the prophet Ahias was, apparently, a revolutionary inciting treacherously Jeroboam against the legitimate authority of the king. But whatever his personal feelings may have been,

Ahiah was consciously acting in the name of God and predicting what had already been determined by God. The division of Solomon's kingdom was a punishment for his sins (1 Kings 11, 11), and Ahiah became the means whereby God's purpose was accomplished. Thus we see that the prophetic activity of Gad, Nathan and Ahiah was mainly political and closely connected with the monarchical government, but while Gad and Nathan aimed at strengthening the monarchy, Ahiah contributed for its disruption. But they all were God's representatives, speaking and acting in his name. And they were all alike dissociated from the sanctuary.

From this brief and sketchy survey of the history of prophetism during the reigns of David and Solomon it emerges clearly that the prophetic activity during this period was restricted and directed to consolidating the newly established monarchy by means of the observance of the Law in its moral and religious aspects. Cult plays an almost insignificant part in David's and Solomon's histories according to the Samuel-Kings sources; but even in Chronicles, where cultic information is more abundant, the prophets are never represented as taking part in the temple service. There may have been prophets attached to the sanctuary in the time of David and Solomon, but it is extremely precarious to build up theories on mere possibilities. So far as information goes, the prophets of David's and Solomon's reigns were simply the king's advisers in religioso-political matters, speaking in the name of God and communicating his orders in all contributed to the stability and prosperity of the monarchy.

P. P. SAYDON.
