

PRESBYTERIANS AND POLYGAMY.

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In my previous letters I showed that plurality of wives was not only practiced by great men of God previous to the Mosaic dispensation, but that in that dispensation the order of marriage named was practiced and was divinely established and provided for in the statutes and judgments given through Moses for the guidance and government of the children of Israel and their generations after them in the promised land. I will now introduce some instances in the subsequent history of that people.

There was a man who was called to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Midianites, and the spirit of the Lord came upon him. His name was Gideon. The Lord wrought a wonderful deliverance for the children of Israel through him, and they wanted him to rule over them, but he would not, saying, "The Lord shall rule over you." Judges viii, 23. How did this mighty man, with whom the Lord conversed, stand on the marriage question? Scripture says, "And Gideon had three score and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives." See verse 30. Jair, a judge in Israel, had thirty sons. Ibzan, another judge in Israel had thirty sons and thirty daughters. Abdon, judge in Israel, had forty sons.

There was in Israel a Levite, whose name was Elkanah. He had two wives, one named Hannah, and the other Peninnah. The latter had children, but Hannah was not so fortunate. It appears that this man and his family went up annually to sacrifice to the Lord of Hosts in Shiloh. Hannah was in great trouble because she had no children. She went up to the Temple of the Lord, and she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but will give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." 1 Samuel i, 10, 11. Eli the priest saw her mouth moving, but heard no words. So he reproved her, thinking she was drunk. But she answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord." See verse 15. "Then Eli answered and said, go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him." See verse 17. "And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the Lord remembered her. Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord." See verses 19, 20.

After the child was weaned, his mother took him to the house of the Lord, to Eli, and said, "O my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed: and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there." See verse 26-28. Hannah was so full of joy that she broke forth into a song of thankfulness to the Lord. As for Samuel, "the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest." See ii, 11. "And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The Lord give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the Lord." See verse 20. "And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters." See verse 21. The Lord called Samuel and told him what should happen to the house of Eli, because of the wickedness of his sons. "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground, and all Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the

Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord." See iii, 19-21. Samuel succeeded Eli as a judge in Israel. "And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life." See vii, 15.

Now here we have the old story—a polygamous and barren wife asking the Lord for children, the prayer liberally granted, the man and the wife and the child of promise greatly blessed of the Lord. How different the treatment such a family would have received at the hands of the Presbyterian assembly at Saratoga.

Saul was a man who was made a prophet and called and anointed of the Lord to be king over Israel. He had several wives, and although he did not do in all things that which pleased the Lord, yet the fact of Saul's having more than one wife is not spoken of condemnatorily in the Bible. Saul was one of those persons who act very varyingly, according to the spirit that is in them at the time. When influenced by a good spirit he was humble and humane, but when influenced by a bad spirit he was vicious and even murderously inclined. Yet nowhere in the Bible is his plural marriage set down as resulting from the influence of an evil spirit. Saul displeased the Lord in his expedition against Agag and the Amalekites, in not keeping the commandment of the Lord in regard to the same. Said Samuel to Saul, "Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou." 1 Sam. xv, 26, 28. In consequence of this transgression, Saul was never restored to the favor of the Lord, for the inspired record says: "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it; and inquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse." 1 Chron. x, 13, 14.

David took Saul's daughter Michal to wife, but he took other wives also. The following are mentioned by name: Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; Abigail the Carmelitess; Maacah, daughter of Palmah, king of Geshur; Haggith; Abital, and Eglah. 2 Sam. iii, 2-5. This was while David was king of Judah, and before he was king of Israel. Thus David had at least seven wives in the early part of his reign. He was 30 years old when he began to reign. "In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah." See v, 4, 5. Thus David had seven wives, according to the sacred record, before he was forty years old, and at that time he stood well with the Lord beyond a doubt. For although Michal, after her marriage to David, had been given, by Saul her father, to another man, Phaltiel the son of Laish, yet David still claimed her as his wife, and demanded her of Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, who accordingly took her away from Phaltiel, and returned her to David. See iii, 13-16. But David did not stop with these seven wives, for the record says, "And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron; and there were yet sons and daughters born to David." See v, 13. In another place it is said: "And David perceived that the Lord had confirmed him king over Israel, for his kingdom was lifted up on high, because of his people Israel. And David took more wives at Jerusalem: and David begat more sons and daughters." 1 Chron. xiv, 2, 3. At that time David was in frequent communication with the Lord, and in reference to his wars with the Philistines it is said, "David therefore did as God commanded him." "And the fame of David went out into all lands; and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations." See verses 16, 17. The learned and devout gentlemen who made out the tables of contents at the head of the various chapters of the Bible were pleased to put the following indication of the above statement as to David's family—"David's felicity in people, wives and children." In reading this, one's mind naturally reverts to the Saratoga Presbyterian conclave,

and wonder, if its members approve of that passage, or how they would have expressed themselves there if they had been engaged in preparing the chapter contents or headings to the Bible. The exact number of the wives of David is not stated, but he is spoken of as having ten concubines. 2 Sam. xx, 3.

David is termed a man after God's own heart, and as a general thing he served the Lord with full purpose of heart and was greatly blessed of him in consequence. Nevertheless David was fallible, and in one matter he committed himself grievously, calling down upon him the righteous anger of the Lord. That matter was in committing adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, the Hittite, and in conspiring to effect the death of the injured husband. After these abominable crimes had been committed by David, it is written, "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord. And the Lord sent Nathan unto David." 2 Sam. xi, 27; xii, 1. The Prophet Nathan thereupon went to David, and by relating to him a parable of a rich man and a poor man, caused him to condemn himself. "And Nathan said unto David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if it had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine own eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." Sec. xii, 7-12. David straightway repented sorely, and the Lord mitigated his punishment, so that he was not slain, but the illegitimate child resulting from his adulterous intercourse with Bathsheba, died, according to the word of the Lord by Nathan the prophet.

There are some things very remarkable in connection with this affair. Presuming that Michal was David's first wife, we read nothing of the displeasure of the Lord when David took to wife Ahinoam, or Abigail, or Maacah, or Haggith, or Abital, or Eglah, or any other of his wives. No prophet went to him with the word of the Lord, denouncing his marriage to more than one wife. But when he trespassed with another man's wife and meanly sought that man's life, then the Lord was displeased with David, and sent Nathan to denounce his crimes and announce the punishment therefor. But what must sound strange to many people is the fact that the Lord, through Nathan, told David how he had been blest, how the Lord had given him the house of his father-in-law, Saul, and gave the wives of Saul into his bosom, "and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given thee such and such things." Intimation could hardly be plainer that the Lord did not condemn David's polygamy up to that time, that in contracting plural marriages David had not displeased the Lord, that the Lord had actually given several wives to David, that the Lord would have given him more if he had sought them in a proper spirit and manner, but that when David broke the seventh commandment by his adultery with Bathsheba, and then broke the sixth commandment by compassing the death of her injured husband, he committed mortal sin, the Lord was sorely displeased, and Nathan was at once sent to David to bring him to a serious reckoning, a reckoning which though modified, was an exceedingly costly one to David. It is still more expressly stated that David's taking several wives was not accounted criminal before the Lord. The sacred record says, "David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he

commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." 1 Kings xv, 5.

In taking the wife of Uriah, David committed a grievous sin, and the offspring of the adulterous connection, being a bastard, was by Moses excluded from the congregation of the Lord. Indeed the child was stricken of the Lord, and permitted to live but a short time. When David took the widow of Uriah as a wife, it was perhaps making all the reparation to her that he could, but that did not palliate the sin of his criminal intercourse with her during the life of her husband Uriah, nor the sin of effecting his death. Nevertheless, and this is a very notable thing, the next child that Bathsheba bore to David was Solomon. Now, although David had many wives besides Bathsheba, yet her son Solomon was not accounted a bastard, he was not excluded from the congregation of the Lord. On the contrary, Nathan was sent to David to approve of his design to build a house to the name of the Lord, and his preparations therefor, also to say that he should not build the house, for that work should devolve upon his son. 1 Chron. xvii. This chosen son was Solomon, Bathsheba's second child by David, for "the Lord loved him," from his youth up. 2 Sam. xii, 24.

I may enlarge a little on the messages of the Lord by Nathan in regard to the two first children which Bathsheba bore to David. When Nathan was sent of the Lord to David to reprove him for his adultery with her when she was the wife of Uriah, Nathan said to David, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme; the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." 2 Sam. xii, 13, 14. After Uriah's death, and David had taken to himself the widow of Uriah, the same Bathsheba, in regular form as a wife, and she had borne to him Solomon, the Lord sent this same Nathan again to David, but on a very different errand, for now Bathsheba was David's polygamous wife, but when her first child by him was begotten, it was through an adulterous union. Of their son Solomon, however, it is written, "The Lord loved him. And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet, and he called his name Jedidiah [beloved of the Lord]. because of the Lord." See verses 24, 25. Thus Nathan the prophet was sent to David three times with a message from the Lord concerning these two children which David had by Bathsheba—once concerning the adulterously begotten child, that it should die; and twice concerning the polygamously begotten child Solomon, and both of the latter times with the express blessing of the Lord upon the child, thereby demonstrating the vast, the diametrical, the irreconcilable difference, in the eyes of the Lord, between adultery and polygamy, the former being denounced and punished as heinously criminal, the latter being approved and blessed as honorable marriage.

When David was advanced in years, he caused his son Solomon to be anointed and proclaimed in his stead king over all Israel, and he charged Solomon to build the house of the Lord, and to serve the Lord with a perfect heart and a willing mind. "Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the Lord God of Israel. And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God: But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. Behold a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build an house for my name; and he shall by my son, and I will be his father." 1 Chron. xxii, 6-10. "And of all my sons (for the Lord hath given me many sons), he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel. And he said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father. Moreover, I will establish his kingdom for ever,

if he be constant to do my commandments and my judgments, as at this day." "And thou, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If thou seek him he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him he will cast thee off for ever. Take heed, now; for the Lord hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary; be strong, and do it." See xxviii, 5-7, 9, 10.

It is written also that in his earlier days "Solomon loved the Lord walking in the statutes of David his father," and the Lord appeared unto him in a dream of the night, and told him to ask what the Lord should give him. Solomon very sensibly asked of the Lord wisdom and understanding. "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this thy great people? And the speedily pleased the Lord that he had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold I have done according to thy word. lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any be like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honor; so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days." 1 Kings iii, 9, 14. See also 2 Chron. i, 7-12. These great blessings were promised and given of the Lord to a person whom the Saratoga Presbyterian conclave would have branded with illegitimacy and shame, and whose parents they would have fined and imprisoned for giving him a chance of birth even, for he was son of David by one of the last of his polygamous wives. What could possibly be plainer, from the statements in the foregoing quotations, that Solomon, child of a polygamous marriage though he was, was not accounted a bastard by the Lord, for it is directly stated, to the contrary, that the Lord acknowledged Solomon to be his son, and the Lord called himself Solomon's father. So far from Solomon being denied entrance to the congregation of the Lord, he was chosen of the Lord, before all the other sons of David or of any other man, to build the temple of the Lord. If the Lord had looked upon plurality of wives as the Saratoga Presbyterian assembly did, it is pasty strange that he should have chosen the polygamous son of a polygamist to bless with wisdom and understanding, riches and honor, power and influence, peace and prosperity, beyond precedent, and to build the most magnificent temple ever erected to the name of the Lord.

I will pass on and say, as is well known, that Solomon had many wives. The Bible says he had thousand wives and concubines. This was certainly a very large number, and most people would be inclined to consider it very excessive. Be this as it may, the sacred record nowhere condemns him for taking more wives than one. As he advanced in life he fell into transgression and came under condemnation of the Lord, but the Bible says his transgression consisted in marrying strange women, which was forbidden to Israel, and in being led by them to forsake the Lord and go into idolatry. The following passages are very plain upon this point—"But King Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you; for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart: and his heart was not perfect with the