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Twain Heights: Spirit and Word in Biblical Prophesying

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ABSTRACT: The place-name "Ramathaim," a noun in the dual number, found in Samuel's ancestry 1 Sm 1:1 and nowhere else, is an allusion to a pair of narratives each set in Ramah, namely 1 Sm 19:18-24 and Jer 40:1-6, which together show the Spirit and the Word as essential features of biblical prophesying. Elkanah thus appears as part of a trans-generational movement of study and spiritual revitalization, to which the canonical book of Samuel continues to call us.

Within the biblical narrative,1 Samuel is the most important spiritual leader in Israel between Moses and Jeremiah. The institutions of both kingship and prophecy emerge in his time and under his influence. Psalm 99 cites him beside Moses and Aaron as one whose prayer God answered (v 6) and Jer 15:1 pairs him with Moses as one whose prayers might yet save God's people. Within the Samuel narrative, he identifies himself with the prophetic conventicles that appear following the fall of Shiloh (1 Sam 10:5-6, 9-11; 19:18-24), when "the LORD awoke as from sleep" (Ps 78:65), and in the Chronicler, "the days of Samuel the prophet" are a standard of spiritual revitalization to which Josiah's Passover can be compared (2 Chr 35:18).

As the archetypal prophetic figure in Israel (Sir 46:13-20; Acts 3:24; Heb 11:32), Samuel naturally generates interest, starting with the long birth story that opens his book. We turn to this story, seeking insight into the spiritual gifts and power through which God led his people during that troubled time.

1. In this paper, I seek, without prejudice, to explain the received Hebrew text, using BHK and the facsimile of Codex Leningrad: D. N. Freedman, ed., *The Leningrad Codex: a Facsimilie Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

§1. RAMATHAIM

Its first words speak of Samuel's father:

> Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim who name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite.[2]

We hear the place he hails from before we find out his name – a place not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. Not only that, but the stories that follow tell us plainly that the town of Samuel and of his parents is Ramah.[3] "Zophim" means "watchers" (צוֹפִים), but what is this Ramathaim?

(a) One might assume that it is a geographical name (GN) in its own right and is the same location as Ramah; one scholar calls Ramah "the customary short form";[4] maps for Samuel's life and work show where Ramathaim-zophim might be located.[5]

(b) In linguistic fact, "Ramathaim" is a particular form of the Hebrew noun, designated by the ending /-aim/ or /-ayim/. This form, the "dual," is used to speak of objects that occur naturally in pairs.[6] For example, יַד is the Hebrew word for "hand," and when the Bible speaks of more than one hand it usually says יָדַיִם, meaning "a pair of hands." Since רָמָה is a Hebrew noun meaning "height, elevation,"[7] the dual form could refer to a pair of hills. Perhaps Samuel's family lived in the hill country of Ephraim near "the two heights [spoken of as] 'Watchers' "

2. So (more or less) KJV ERV ASV RSV ESV. NIV and NRSV keep "Ramathaim" but change "zophim" to "Zuphite," one of a dozen or more alterations that NRSV has made to the received text of 1 Sam 1.

3. 1 Sam 1:19; 2:11; 7:17; 8:4; 15:34; 16:13; 19:18; 25:1; 28:3.

4. W. H. Morton, "Ramah 2-3," *IDB* IV:8.

5. Plate IX of the *Westminster Historical Atlas* shows a location about 13 miles east of Joppa, and prints the designation, "Ramathaim-zophim, Arimathaea?" G. E. Wright and Floyd V. Filson, *The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1945), 61.

6. It designates "objects which are by nature or art always found in *pairs*, ... or things which are at least thought of as forming a pair" A. E. Cowley, editor and translator, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar as Edited and Enlarged by the Late E. Kautzsch* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910).

7. 1 Sam 22:6; Ezek 16:24-15, 31, 39.

– because from them you could see travelers approaching from either direction. If we were sure where Samuel's village was, we could check the topography and put him down as born in Doublehill, or (to suggest a classier ambience) Twain Heights. Even so, the long name is never used again, and the transition to Ramah in 1:19 is "abrupt and strange."[8] It is not that we need to explain why Ramathaim has a short form; we need to explain why Ramah has an embellished form.

(c) But wait. The Hebrew רָמָה occurs more frequently as a place name than as a noun meaning "hill." That would be the town and GN Ramah. What if the Bible associates Elkanah with something called Double Ramah? Suppose one of the hands that shaped Samuel the book has given us the name "Ramathaim" as an allusion to the prophetic movement that arose around Samuel the person. In that case, we would leave the realm of topography and enter the realm of literary allusion. Names can acquire cognitive resonance to the point that mentioning the name evokes more than the mere location. Think of "Washington" or "Hollywood." We still use the name "Waterloo," although its great symbolic event was centuries ago. Think of all that gathers around the name "Selma" – which carries its freight even without the name of its state. In the Bible, Mahanaim (Gen 32:1) is an example of a GN with figural significance, and within the Samuel and David stories, Gibeon and Gibeah symbolize different views of the kingship and therefore of the future.[9] Let us explore what a pair of cities named Ramah might call to mind.

Since the Bible knows several places called Ramah,[10] we could ask, What are the *two cities* Ramah that help define Samuel's patrimony and way of life? Or, since there is not yet agreement among scholars about the total number and location of cities called Ramah, we can ask, What is the pair of *biblical narratives* set in Ramah that will help us understand Samuel, his family, and his life's work?

The GN occurs thirty-one times in the OT, some of them nothing

8. S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 3.

9. S. D. Walters, "Jacob Narrative," *ABD* III: 604; ibid.; "Saul of Gideon," *JSOT* 16 (1991): 75-76.

10. H. P. Smith says there are eight, and identifies four that might compete in the book Samuel (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* [ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1899], 4-5).

more than check-points in a boundary list or military route.[11] But if we focus on episodes, there are perhaps five possibilities:

1. Israel's elders approach Samuel at his home in Ramah and demand a king (1 Sam 8:4-22).
2. David takes refuge from Saul with Samuel at Ramah, where there are also prophets "prophesying," by which strange contagion Saul himself is rapt (1 Sam 19:18-24).
3. During a war between Israel and Judah, the Israelite king fortifies Ramah, after which the Judean king dismantles and reuses those materials (1 Kgs 15:16-22 // 2 Chr 16:1-6).
4. In a famous oracle, Jeremiah says that Rachel can be heard in Ramah weeping for her children (Jer 31:15). The GN seems to stand for Rachel's tomb (1 Sam 10:2) in order to depict the ancestral mother of Joseph weeping for the loss of the northern tribes a century earlier.
5. Following the destruction of Jerusalem, the Babylonian official Nebuzaradan frees Jeremiah from captivity at Ramah, and utters a declaration about the fulfillment of God's word against Jerusalem (Jer 40:1-6).

Recalling the force of the dual ending in Hebrew (see note 6), we ask, Which of these two texts could be considered a natural pair?[12] And then – how will they help us understand Samuel's ancestry and heritage?

Of those listed above, the two that have a common subject matter are #2 and #5: both feature a major prophetic figure in Israel and deal with prophesying as an action present in Israelite society.[13] I will call them Ramah 1 and Ramah 2. What is "a prophet" (person)? What is

11. A city in Asher (Josh 19:29) and a city in Naphtali (Josh 19:36); Assyrian advance (Isa 10:29; Hos 5:8); Samuel's home (1 Sam 1:19; 2:11; 7:17; 15:34; 16:13; 25:1; 28:1).

12. This is the critical decision for this paper. Pick a different pair – get a different paper! I considered #4 and #5, a pair alluding to the destruction of the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah; but it is not easy to discern this allusion's pertinence to the birth and work of Samuel.

13. I am avoiding the term "prophetism." No doubt this paper is an essay in definition, but the –ism-word smacks of classification, of objectivity – and thus of distance. I wish to write about the ways of God with his people, about something central to the Bible and to the redeemed and empowered life of service to which Christ calls us.

"to prophesy" (verb)?[14] Taking up these two texts in succession, I inquire what they might imply about Samuel and about God's ways with the people of the covenant.

§2. RAMAH 1: 1 SAMUEL 19:18-24

Here is the text of this narrative (ESV).

> [18]Now David fled and escaped, and he came to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and lived at Naioth. [19]And it was told Saul, "Behold, David is at Naoith in Ramah." [20]Then Saul sent messengers to take David, and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. [21] When it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied. [22]Then he himself went to Ramah and came to the great well that is in Secu. And he asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" And one said, "Behold, they are at Naioth in Ramah." [23]And he went there to Naioth in Ramah. And the Spirit of God came upon him also, and as he went he prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. [24]And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay naked all that day and all that night. Thus it is said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

All the complexity of the larger Saul-and-David story gets funneled into this episode. David has just gotten away from Saul's thugs by going out his bedroom window (19:11-17), and now seeks sanctuary with Samuel. There are prophets a-plenty here (vv. 20, 24), and a flood if not a surfeit of prophesying. What do we learn of them and of it?

14. Note the distinction between "prophesy" (the verb) and "prophecy" (the noun). However, the Bible uses the latter word, נְבוּאָה, only three times (Neh 6:12; 2 Chr 9:29; 15:8), keeping emphasis on the person and the action, and preferring "word" to designate the message delivered.

1. It is a communal activity.

There is a district or a compound at Ramah, "Naioth," perhaps even the ancestral quarter of the Zuphites (1 Sam 1:1), where David will be safe. Samuel, once the boy-prophet (3:19-21), is now leader of a "company of the prophets" (19:20; 10:5). The covenant itself is an arrangement between God and the faithful Israelite community; within it there is room for smaller groups of those devoted to the divine word and will; "they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight" (Psalm 16:3).

2. There is ecstatic behavior.

The group's activity is of unusual emotional intensity, sustained over a period of hours, and including trance-like passivity. In no other biblical narrative is the divine Spirit given such freedom in coming upon people – unless it would be that of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Contagious ecstatic behavior is found in many religious traditions across time and around the world. This at Naioth is an extreme example, but passionate emotion is one form of religious practice.[15] The prophet's actions here are spiritually and psychologically akin to the divine induement upon the seventy elders who "prophesy" in Num 11:25, as well to the glossolalia of the congregation at Corinth (1 Cor 14) and, in our own time, to the falling, the laughing, the speaking in tongues, the weeping, reported from many different Pentecostal-type congregations, or, in an earlier century, from the revival and camp-meeting traditions. "Prophesying" is not itself a pejorative term.

At its best, religious ecstasy implies unreserved openness to God at the individual's deepest emotional level, even to the point of unusual behavior. The emotional release that accompanies the self-abnegation reinforces and compensates for it. I think it is this deep openness to the Spirit's "incursion" that Samuel countenances and that earlier led Moses to wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit upon them (Num 11:25-28). No doubt this openness can be present without the demonstrations, and the ecstatic contagion is undoubtedly dangerous in that it can be simulated, being sought for itself rather than simply accompanying surrender to God.

15. See "Rebirth Through Personal Encounter with the Holy," F. J. Streng and Charles L. Lloyd, *Ways of Being Religious* (Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice Hall, 1973), 23-95. The disciple "hopes for an incursion of the divine which he expects to be dramatic, unpredictable, uncanny, and perhaps even bizarre" (25). Several of Streng's documents bear comparison with the prophets at Naioth.

3. This is a work of the Spirit of God.

The biblical writer attributes it all to the divine Spirit, as do similar groups in other times and places. Saul sends deputies to seize David, but when they get to Ramah, there are the prophets "prophesying," with Samuel standing in authority over them. As the deputies look on, the Spirit of God comes upon them, too and they prophesy (20,23) – an experience Saul himself receives. The ways of God's Spirit are beyond predicting and arranging, being "the wind that blows where it wishes" (John 3:8).

4. There is leadership.

There is also a species of discipline in this uninhibited body, for Samuel is there as the group's leader. He does not join them, but he is there – "standing positioned," the Hebrew says (v 20).[16] Samuel accepts their practice; he acknowledges their chárisma,[17] their freedom, their spiritual bliss; he esteems the vitality it expresses.

Thus far, Ramah 1 attests the power of God's Spirit to engage the human spirit, and through an enspirited group, to transform behavior.

5. Prophesying.

What is this action "to prophesy"? The Hebrew uses the נבא in two different stems (the N in v. 20a, and the Ht in vv. 20b, 21, 21, 23, 24). The verb means "to do what a prophet (נָבִיא) does," without specifying exactly what that might be. Most translations have been content to render as "prophesy," although the NRSV gives "fall into a prophetic frenzy" for all six places in this passage.[18] While the prophets' behavior is indeed agitated, "frenzy" is not implied by the verb itself, and it is confusing to add ideas derived from the context to the basic meaning of the word.[19]

The prophets' behavior is so uncharacteristic of Saul and his soldiers that a proverb arises: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (19:24); careful readers of Samuel know that this is a second story of Saul's association with the prophets. That earlier story also includes a proverb – the same one (see 1 Sam 10:9-11)[20] Although the GN Ramah does not occur in ch. 10, the coinage of the proverb brings the two stories together. In that text, Samuel has sent Saul on his way after a private anointing in which he has made him Israel's first king (1 Sam 9:1-10:1). He tells him,

> You will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and a lyre before them, prophesying. Then the Spirit of the LORD will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man (10:5-6 ESV).

It happens just as Samuel has said: God changes Saul's heart, God's Spirit comes upon him, and he prophesies with the prophets (vv. 9-10, 13). I think Samuel has planned this encounter; he is obviously familiar with these disciples: he knows their meetings, their ways, their music, their route. And he knows the Spirit, whose unruly ways make even someone as unlikely as Saul into a new person.

Ramah 1 is Saul's last contact with Samuel.[21] He never returns to Ramah, and the story reports Samuel's death and burial in 25:1. These two quotations of the proverb (1 Sam 10:9-11 and 19:24) are thus an

16. The wording is נִצָּב עֹמֵר; both words are participles, and they are connected by the conjunctive accent merekha. The second word implies formal authority: "they saw...Samuel standing as appointed over them" KJV, "as head" ERV ASV RSV NIV, "and presiding" NASV, "in charge" NRSV.

17. Accenting the first syllable, to distinguish the word's classical meaning of "spiritual gift" from the sociological meaning, "flair, magnetism, mana."

18. And four places in 1 Sam 10, namely, vv. 5, 6, 10, and 13; see below.

19. So also Robert Wilson "[T]he verbal forms of נבא do not specify the behavioral characteristics of the נָבִיא (Wilson 1980, 138). 1 Samuel 18:10 uses the same verb in the Ht-stem to describe Saul's jealous fuming prior to casting his spear at David, implying that passionate if not agitated preaching was a stereotype of the prophet. The KJV ERV ASV render "prophesied," while "raved" is the translation of ERV^{mg} ASV^{mg} RSV NRSV. Note that the verb הָגָה has a similarly broad semantic range, from reflective repetition (Ps 1:3) to hostile plotting (Ps 2:1).

20. Some would say that the compiler of the Samuel material, having two stories that account for the proverb, puts them both into the narrative. This might have been the case, and I grant the identity of the two proverbs; but we have no way of knowing, since no biblical manuscript contains only one of the incidents. The interpreter should explain the text.

21. The earlier reference in 15:35, "Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death" might mean that Samuel did not seek out Saul as he did in 15: 12-13.

inclusion around the entire interaction of Saul and Samuel, from Saul's first bewildered designation as king to his final unwilling rapture with the prophets.

Both episodes are lively with religious emotion; freedom of expression is easier in a free-standing group than in a formal liturgical setting. In the early episode, the transformative aspect of the Spirit is effective in *self-regard* ("another man," 10:6) and *attitude* ("changed his heart," cf. Ps 105:25), while in the latter *emotional freedom* is apparent (19:20). The two stories are consistent in that both show religious ecstasy, but Saul's transformation shows that the influence of the divine Spirit goes beyond ecstasy to devotion and even character.

Even so, there are limits: the Spirit of God could give Saul a new heart, but it did not make him into an effective king. The charismatic experience is contagious and transformative, but it does not usually confer fresh and untried abilities.

What is prophesying? To speak from within the biblical narrative, these episodes show a transformative work of the divine Spirit in individuals and small groups, giving freedom in communal worship and effecting changes in one's self-regard and attitude towards others.

The Bible gives no account of the rise of the prophetic conventicles,[22] but in connecting the word "Ramathaim" with Samuel's parentage, Samuel's birth story intimates the longing and devotion of people such as Elkanah, and perhaps even a spiritual movement in the hill country of Ephraim. The name "Elkanah" means "God possesses, creates," and Samuel's father is the only person in the Bible to bear it. I return to this in §5 below.

§3. RAMAH 2. JEREMIAH 40:1-6.

The second Ramah-episode twinned by the GN "Ramathaim" occurs some four hundred years later and concerns the prophet Jeremiah. Ramah here seems to be the assembling area for the long march of the exiles to Babylon following the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple (586 BC). Here is the text (NRSV).

> [1]The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD
> after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him
> go from Ramah, when he took him bound in fetters
> along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who
> were being exiled to Babylon[23] [2]The captain of the guard
> took Jeremiah and said to him, "The LORD your God
> threatened this place with disaster; [3]and now the LORD
> has brought it about, and has done as he said, because
> all of you sinned against the LORD and did not obey his
> voice. Therefore this thing has come upon you. [4]Now
> look, I have just released you today from the fetters on
> your hands. If you wish to come with me to Babylon,
> come, and I will take good care of you; but if you do not
> wish to come with me to Babylon, you need not come.
> See, the whole land is before you; go wherever you think
> it good and right to go. [5]If you remain, then return to
> Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan, whom the king
> of Babylon appointed governor of the towns of Judah,
> and stay with him among the people; or go wherever you
> think it right to go." So the captain of the guard gave him
> an allowance of food and a present, and let him go. [6]Then
> Jeremiah went to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah, and
> stayed with him among the people who were left in the
> land.

Several notable things meet us here.

1. The Divine Word.

First of all, this passage speaks of "the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD" (v 1). This is an expression *introducing God's direct speech to the prophet*, and it occurs about three dozen times throughout the book of Jeremiah,[24] which is also replete with similar expressions, such as "The LORD said to me" (3:6, 11 and *passim*), "Thus says the LORD" (4:3), and "declares the LORD."[25] This is the language of divine revelation through speaking – speaking that reaches us today in the words of Scripture. Although God does not speak directly to Jeremiah here in 40:1, I think

22. "...the Old Testament is unconcerned with the historical origins of prophetism" (B. S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 123).

23. Since Jeremiah is a free man in ch. 39, commentators assume that in the meantime he has gotten scooped up for deportation by mistake, see J. Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB; Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1965), 246; J. L. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 651-52.

24.E.g., 1:2, 3, 4, 11, 13; 2:1; 7:1, and *passim* through 50:1

25. See below regarding the text "On the Prophets."

that Nebuzaradan's release of Jeremiah from the exiles and his promise of free choice for a safe and even favored future (vv. 2-5), comes to the prophet as the word of the LORD; the officer's words are certainly the only ones following the introductory formula.

What is prophesying? In Ramah 2 it is something verbal, something spoken. It is the entrance of the divine word into the prophet's mind and heart and thus into the life and society of God's people. It is invasion by God's Word, the delivery of God's call to covenant faithfulness together with his promise of fulfillment in both punishment and gracious redemption. Even when the divine word is unwelcome, Jeremiah finds himself unable to refuse it: "If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (20:9).

2. Spirit Absence.

Jeremiah – unlike Isaiah and Ezekiel[26] – does not connect prophesying with the Spirit of God. The Hebrew word רוּחַ occurs fourteen times in the book, never of the divine Spirit.[27] This absence is striking. I think Jeremiah's conflict with lying prophets – speakers who have not "stood in the council of the LORD" (23:18, 22)[28] – may have discredited Spirit-prophesying for him, or has at least led him to minimize its charismatic aspects. The book of Jeremiah uses the verb "prophesy" overwhelmingly of the lying prophets (twenty-four of forty occurrences). Preaching by those figures had such disastrous consequences for the covenant ways, and they themselves showed such immorality (23:13-14; 29:23), that Jeremiah uses the verb "prophesy" of his own work only in 26:12. In the major oracle "On the Prophets" (לַנְּבִאִים 23:9-40) he refuses the verb "prophesy" for his own preaching, employing it of the ungodly prophets (vv. 13, 16, 21, 25, 26[2], 32) and using "proclaim" (הִשְׁמִיעַ 22) and "speak" (דִּבֶּר v 28) of himself.

26. E.g., Isa 63:10-14; Ezek 2:1-2; 3:12, 14, 24; 37:1.

27. "wind, air" in 2:24; 4:11, 12; 5:13; 10:13; 14:6; 22:22; 49:32; 51:16; "breath" in 10:14; 51:17; "spirit" of a person in 51:1, 11; and uncertain in 52:23.

28. On this subject see Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 133-44. The Hebrew Bible does not use the expression "false prophet," which is a coinage of the Septuagint (ψευδοπροφήτης, Jer 6:13 *et passim*) taken up in the NT (Matt 7:15 *et passim*).

3. Fulfillment.

And then, the passage also implies that the divine word, whether of judgment or of promise, will be fulfilled. This is an essential feature of the prophesied message: what God says will come to pass – and it takes the Babylonian officer to say it most clearly (vv. 2-3). His words are "a resume of Jeremiah's preaching to Jerusalem and Judah"[29]– especially during the years of direct Babylonian threat and of the siege: God threatened punishment for the people's sins, and has now brought it to pass. Disobedience to God's voice leads to the calamities of judgment.

As a "resume," this omits Jeremiah's message of hope (e.g., chs. 30-33), but Nebuzaradan's further proclamation of release to Jeremiah (vv. 4-5) plays that role in this speech. To be sure, when the officer ascribes the catastrophe to "your God," he keeps Babylon free of blame, but he also credits the word of Israel's God with divine power in the world of human life and death, and confirms the truthfulness of Jeremiah's preaching. His words are a remarkable testimony to the prophetic purpose and influence.

4. Public Activity.

Ramah 2 also clearly highlights the prophet as a public figure. It is a big surprise that the "resume" of Jeremiah's preaching comes from Nebuzaradan, deputy of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and the officer responsible for torching the city of Jerusalem (39:9-10, 52:12-13) – not only summarizing the divine message, but testifying to its fulfillment. Jeremiah's preaching has been so public and so well-known that even a high Babylonian official knows its content. Jeremiah has an advantage with him, of course, having finally become pro-Babylonian in his politics. But I think Nebuzaradan knows Jeremiah's views because you could not visit Jerusalem in those days without finding out.

This is consistent with the book as a whole, which abounds with evidence for the prophet at the center of the people's daily life.

> (a) He delivers his words in public places: the gate of the temple (7:2), the cities and streets (11:6), the public gate (17:19), the court of the temple (19:14; 26:2), the potter's shop (18:2), the temple (debate with Hananiah, a dated event, 28:1), all the people (38:1); he was flogged and placed in the public stocks (20:2).
>
> (b) He delivers his words to named groups of people: the ears of Jerusalem (2:2), men of Anathoth

29. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 651-52.

(11:21), people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem (18:11; 25:2), elders and senior priests (19:1, 10); all the cities of Judah who have come to worship (26:2), priest, prophets and all the people calling for his lynching (26:8, 11, 24; 27:16) (yoke oracle); he writes to the elders, priests, prophets, and people of exile (29:1); all the people, overheard by four named men (38:1).[30]

The episode Ramah 2, then, shows that prophesying is a public invasion by the divine Word through faithful speakers, holding God's people accountable for covenant faithfulness and promising fulfillment in both punishment and gracious redemption. But the practice of spurious prophesying leads Jeremiah to refrain from some externals of prophetic address.

§4. THE PAIR

My argument in this paper is that the dual place-name "Ramathaim" invites us to bring together the elements of prophesying apparent in the two episodes taking place at Ramah. We may summarize some of the previous discussion by means of this chart.

	RAMAH 1	RAMAH 2
1.	Spirit of God comes	Word of God comes
2.	Involves Samuel	Involves Jeremiah
3.	Ecstatic	Composed
4.	Emotive, musical	Reasoned, verbal
5.	A private location (Naioth)	Many public locations
6.	Group activity	Individual speaking
7.	Transformative	Directive and promissory

To bring the two episodes together implies their compatibility

30. In this paper, I do not pursue the way that Jeremiah's public role opens easily onto the prophet shining God's light upon and into the nations, but Nebuzaradan's familiarity with the prophetic word reminds me of Daniel's pictures of Nebuchadnezzar, whose testimony to Daniel's God approaches actual confession of faith (Dan 4:1-3, 34-37). His statement also resembles certain psalms of globality such as 126:2, "They said among the nations, The LORD has done great things for them," and 138:4, "All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth."

and even parity. Each is true prophesying in its own way, but neither in its solitariness comprises all that prophesying is. The two scenes are complementary, and "Ramathaim" transcends each of them in isolation by requiring us to consider the two as a pair. Understood in the terms of this paper, it is a canonical justification for doing so.

We can see that each narrative contains features not found in the other. In Ramah 1, prophesying is accompanied by the abandonment of normal deportment; and in Ramah 2, the divine message appears to come through Nebuzaradan, giving us the oddity of an enemy official declaiming God's plan and purpose at the same time he is fulfilling its judgment.[31] This points powerfully to divine sovereignty and freedom in inspiration and revelation. Again, each narrative lacks something found in the other. Nothing in Ramah 1 by itself implies proclamation, even as Nebuzaradan brings God's word to Jeremiah without reference to the Spirit, even, indeed without intimate association with the covenant.

The GN Ramathaim thus implies a studied and reflective view of prophesying *that transcends the various experiences of it as we meet them in Scripture's running text*.[32] I believe we would do well to consider the life we live as a community of God's people in its light.

Spirit and Word.

The two towns figure for us the two central aspects of prophesying, namely, the presence of God's Spirit and the presence of the divine Word. With each of these nouns, the Hebrew uses the identical verbal construction, namely the simple verb "to be," plus a preposition, and the name of the person:

The Spirit of God	/was	/upon	/Saul (1 Sam 19:23)
The word from the LORD	/was	/to	/Jeremiah (Jer 40:1)

These are the twain heights of prophesying: the Spirit and the Word.

31. Isaiah's words about the king of Assyria exactly fit Nebuchadnezzar, who "does not...intend, and his heart does not...think" that God is using him, but "when the LORD has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king" of Babylon (Isa 10:7, 12).

32. As an element in the received text of Samuel it shows an awareness of the larger gathering of the prophetic writings and would therefore belong late in their redaction.

What the name Ramathaim here intimates, Isaiah states openly:

> And as for me, this is my covenant with them,
> says the LORD: my spirit that is upon you, and my words
> that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of
> your mouth...from now on and forever (Isa 59:21).

Bringing the two scenes together supplements interpretation of each passage. In Ramah 1 – I include the scene from ch 10 (see §2.5, page 66) – God's Spirit is active to energize, to enliven, to change for the better, and in Ramah 2 God's Word of revelation is active to instruct and to direct in the ways of the covenant, and to implement its own warnings and hopes. In making the two a pair, the word "Ramathaim" implies *the power of the divine Spirit is necessary to the effectiveness of the Word, and the cogency of the divine Word must be present with the experience of the Spirit.*

It follows that the Spirit's role in prophesying is larger than ecstatic experience (Ramah 1), and, conversely, that there is more to the spoken word than the mere utterance (Ramah 2). Ecstasy may be exceptional but the work of the Spirit is more than ecstasy; and prophesying with words, though not exemplified in the prophets of Naioth-in-Ramah, is usual in the larger biblical picture. To be sure, Samuel's disciples are known by their music, their ecstasy, their freedom, but Jeremiah's ministry shows that prophesying is, above all, the preaching of covenant accountability.[33] Not that there were never prophets to evoke the jibe,

> The prophet is a fool,
> The man of the spirit is mad (Hos 9:7; cf. Jer 29:26)

something Saul himself might have spoken – but obedience remains essential to the moral order intended under the covenant, and it is this that the word of the LORD ever seeks.

And so the Spirit must be present to facilitate the prophet's speaking, to confirm its cogency by testimony, to bear the spoken words to the hearts of the hearers, to convict – all comprised within the Spirit's work as we know it in Scripture as a whole.

33. This was, indeed, the character of Samuel's own prophetic ministry. For example: "word of the LORD" is an inclusion for 1 Sam 3 (vv. 1, 21); cf. also 3:10, 19-21; 8:6, 10, 21 (reminding us of Moses in Exod 19:7, 9); 12:15-18; 13:13-14; 15:1, 2 (כֹּה אָמַר יהוה), 10-11 (very Jeremianic), 16, 19, 23, 26. The thunder of 7:10 may figure divine speech, cf. Psalm 29. God frequently speaks directly to Samuel, starting with 1 Sam 3.

Without the confirming and enlightening presence of the Spirit, the divine Word will remain distant, obscure, effete. And the emotive force of the Spirit may distract the church away from God's Teaching into a morass of subjectivism. Recall that Jeremiah was critical of prophets who based their preaching on their dreams (23:25-32), a notably subjective medium. And so the Spirit is needed to confirm the Word, and the Word is needed to guide and chasten the experience of the Spirit. Charismatic experience without Teaching based on Scripture will betray the church; the gifts of the Spirit do not include ethics. It happened in Jeremiah's experience with immoral prophets (see §3, page 68), and it can happen wherever the disciplines of life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3) are sidelined by glib and superficial versions of the Christian faith, such as those that understand salvation primarily as emotional and physical well-being.[34]

§5. RAMATHAIM

The book Samuel opens with both geographical and genealogical references, and I suggested at the beginning of this paper that they might help us understand Samuel's life, and with it our own lives lived under God's direction. The distinctive character of the GN "Ramathaim" leads me to interpret it not as an actual location but as a cross-reference to prophetic activity epitomized by a pair of narratives, each set in Ramah. To introduce this into Samuel's genealogy places him in an intimated local community of obedience and devotion to the God of the covenant and to the divine life established by the coming of God's Spirit and of God's Word.

The founding forebear is Zuph (1 Sam 1:1), a name easily connected with one of the Bible's known words for a prophet, namely צוֹפֶה, צֹפִים "watcher(s)."[35] Elkanah – "God creates" – is the fifth in this line, and it is he who is "from the Double-Ramah" (מִן־הָרָמָתַיִם), i.e., who lives the life implied in the two Ramah-narratives. Through him and his family God is

34. Additional effects of the pair of Ramah-stories must be developed elsewhere. For example, (a) the twinning of the two prophets Samuel and Jeremiah – the Bible describes both as נַעַר "lad," and, with Holladay's chronology of Jeremiah, both are brought by catastrophe to an early ministry: W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) – and (b) the consequent import of Samuel as a public figure vis-à-vis portrayals of him as a nazirite (so NRSV 1 Sam 1:11, 22), such as 4QSam^{a}, which appears to have an ascetic and sectarian view of the prophet.

35. Ezek 3:17; 33:6-7; cf. Isa 52:8; 56:10; Jer 6:17.

creating the public prophetic movement in ancient Israel, and through it the life that only the Spirit and the Word can bring.[36] Accordingly, I translate, "There was a certain man from the Two Ramahs (and from the people called) Watchers, from the hill country of Emphraim."[37]

God's people need communities of learning and devotion. One thinks of prophetic groups later in the biblical narrative (2 Kgs 2:1-15; 4:1, 38), or of the Christian monastic tradition in which continuing communities devote themselves to study, teaching, and preaching, or of the Ben-Asher family of Tiberias with its trans-generational work of textual study and interpretation. Both the synagogue and the Christian service of the Word embody these ideals. To study God's Teaching and to praise the Triune God are marks of the church, and Scripture openly extends the category "prophet" to include all God's people: Moses wishes that all God's people might be prophets (Num 11:29), and in Psalm 105:6-15 the categories "my prophets" and "my anointed ones" are not people in office, but rather comprise all who gather under the promise made to Abraham and Jacob. In our congregations we should think of ourselves as formed by the twain heights of Spirit and Word. God's people should be communities of learning and devotion.

The basic explanation of "Ramathaim" that informs this paper occurred to me in the late eighties, when I was teaching seminary and graduate students; I thought it was original, and set it aside until there was time to develop it. Retirement has given me that opportunity, but the long delay has also given me time to realize that something like this interpretation of 1 Sam 1:1 was usual over many centuries of reading the Bible. As Mark Twain once said, "The ancient have stolen all our best ideas."

The merest summary must suffice. (a) Midrashic explanations of the GN "Ramathaim" word include those that take צוֹפִים to mean "seers, prophets." Rabbi Jochanan said that Elkanah was one of two-hundred (reading הר מאחים צפים "mount of two-hundred prophets"). Rabbi Eleazar even explained it by saying that there were two Ramahs, one of David

36. The allusion that I discern in the words מִן־הָרָמָתַיִם would be contemporary with the editing of the book Samuel rather than with its events or with its narratives. I have no theory about the possible pre-history of these words, only that as they now stand they seem to me part of an inferred process by which those narratives became Scripture.

37. Driver's linguistic objections (Driver 1913, 3) must give way if the words Ramathaim and Zophim have taken on double meanings. More than two "watchers" would require a plural and not a dual.

and one of Samuel.[38] Although Rabbi Eleazar attaches no significance to his twin-city explanation, this explanation is, in fact the assumption that underlies the present paper. It might be that I once found the idea in the midrash and have forgotten, but my point here really is that early post-biblical midrash already connected Elkanah with prophesying and with two Ramahs.

(b) Similarly, the Targum Jonathan (c. AD 135)[39] takes the Hebrew word צוֹפִים to mean "watchers," that is, prophets, and includes Elkanah among the "students of the prophets." To explain the word "Ephrathite" it speaks of Elkanah's "dividing a share in the holy things," that is, of his acceptance of a role in the community of study and praise. At 1 Sam 2 the Targum describes Hannah as a prophetess, and greatly enlarges her prayer (vv. 1-10) to include predictions about Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome[40]. Wherever the book Samuel speaks of prophets and prophesying, the Targum uses instead the language of study and praise. At 10:10, the "band of prophets...prophesying" becomes "a band of teachers...singing praise." In ch. 19 it understand Naioth as a "house of study," and even the indecorous prophesying of that episode it understands as a band of teachers singing praise[41]. (c) Later Jewish comment on Samuel's birth story follows this lead.[42]

A parenthetical paragraph on method. Harrington assumes that Targum Jonathan's use of this language – praise, study, teaching – reflects embarrassment with the spirit-prophesying of 1 Sam 10:5-13 and 19:18-24. In the Targum, he says, "tames the ecstatic prophets who do

38. Since the Bible does not mention a Ramah uniquely associated with David, the editor of the Midrash, Solomon Buber, suggests that the text should be emended to read, "One [Ramah] of his own (i.e., Elkanah), and one of Samuel." See S. Buber, ed., *Midrash Shemu'el* (Krakow: Joseph Fischer, 1905); A. Wünsche, *Aus Israels Lehrhallen, der Midrasch Samuel* (Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer, 1910); and A. J. Rosenberg, *Samuel I: A New English Translation* (New York: The Judaica Press, 1993), 3.

39. See D. J. Harrington, and Anthony J. Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets* (The Aramaic Bible; Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987).

40. ibid., 105-106.

41. ibid., 119, 139.

42. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1928), 57, 215.

not fit its understanding of prophets."[43] That is, the Targum tells us what prophecy was like in its own time but not in Samuel's time. No doubt the Targums wish to make the biblical text accessible to later generations of readers, but we do not need to posit that they have misrepresented that text. An alternative is to say that Palestinian Judaism[44] recognizes that the spirit-prophesying of 1 Sam 10:5-13 and 19:18-24 is a partial picture, and amplifies the depiction to include the elements of revelation and instruction. Note that even "singing praise" (שׁבח), used a dozen times in the Targum of these two passages, is consistent with ecstatic experience. Although denominated as "teachers," the sons of the prophets still have their musical instruments (10:5), and the contagious feature of their singing is still present in both passages. The Targum also introduces the word "spirit" (דוּחַ) into the text – a feature of Ramah 1 (10:6, 10; 19:20, 23).

(d) Christian commentary does the same, and here I refer only to eighteenth century English writers. Simon Patrick says that there was a "School of the Prophets" at Ramah, citing Jerome and the "Chaldee Paraphrase." John Gill does the same, quoting the Targum that Elkanah was among the "disciples of the prophets." I think Matthew Henry depends on Gill, but he knows that the Targum calls Elkanah a disciple of the prophets and allows that "one of the schools of the prophets" may have been there. But he thinks that prophecy took its rise with Samuel and not with earlier members of the line of Zuph.[45] He also says that Ramathaim means "the double Ramah."

Interest in Samuel's lineage as a trans-generational prophetic tradition disappears only when enlightenment biblical studies begin to turn away from theological interest in the text, and from the Jewish

43. Harington and Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan*, 119 n. 8; see also top of p. 12: "tamed into a school of teachers or prophetic community leaders."

44. The teachers cited in the Samuel midrash are generally Palestinian, see Wünsche, 4-5, who adds, "In spite of the fact that, from a literary-historical perspective the Midrash is late, its contents are everywhere old." So also Harrington, 13.

45. See S. Patrick, *A Commentary Upon the Historical Books of the Old Testament* (4th ed.; London: James and Jon Knapton, et al., 1694), II, 156; M. Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments in Six Volumes* (Edinburgh; A, Donaldson and K. Wood, 1760), II, 142; J. Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament* (London, printed for the author, 1763), II, 383-84.

interpretive tradition.[46]

I don't assert that the Targum is historical evidence that Samuel's forebears were prophets. But it is evidence that early Jewish interpreters read 1 Samuel 1:1 that way, while the present paper has argued that the curious word Ramathaim implies an early construal of the biblical text to a similar effect. In this view, during the disordered period of the Judges, there was still in Israel both study of the law and joyful praise of God's loving-kindness.

I pray that in congregations and other groups around the world God's Word and Spirit may still enliven the people of the covenant, transforming us and the world in which we live. Let all who love his name both give and heed the cry, "To the Teaching and the Testimony!" (Isa 8:20).

46. According to Michael Legaspi's research, "biblical studies" as a formal discipline arises in the German research university in the eighteenth century. He especially associates it with Johann David Michaelis's arrival at the University of Göttingen as assistant professor of Oriental languages (1745), and notes its post-confessional character and its disparagement of Jewish interpretive resources in favor of near eastern studies, including a burgeoning interest in contemporary Bedouin manners and customs. See M. C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (New York; Oxford, 2010), 96-99.