

1 Samuel 1
February 27, 2022

Open with Prayer

Background:

We are beginning our study of 1 Samuel. As we will learn over the weeks to come, the book tells of the transition in leadership from the period of the judges to the rise of the monarchy. During the period of judges, the nation was a theocracy, meaning that the Lord was its only king and authority. The tribes had no central authority to govern them and were held together because of their common commitment to the covenant with the Lord. With the establishment of the kingdom, God would express His rule in a new way, through His chosen king. God uses Samuel as His link for this transition. Samuel is serving as Israel's last judge, as well as being the first prophet, and as a power behind the throne of her first two kings.

Samuel is born into a devout home, the son of a barren woman who fervently prayed for a son (v. 11) and who pledged to set him apart as a Nazirite (see Num. 6:1–8).

First and Second Samuel are anonymous. According to Jewish tradition, based on 1 Chronicles 29:29, the Books of Samuel were authored by Samuel and completed by the prophets Nathan and Gad. Since 1 Samuel 25:1 records Samuel's death and he seldom appears after the anointing of David (1 Sam. 16:1–13), alternative explanations for the compilation of the Books of Samuel have been sought.

Transition: With that as background, we open with today's text, which introduces us to Samuel and his parents. Let's begin.

BOOK:

1 There was a certain man from Ramathaim (25 miles north of Jerusalem), a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ² He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

³ Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD. ⁴ Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵ But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. ⁶ And because the LORD had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. ⁷ This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. ⁸ Elkanah her husband would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

⁹ Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple. ¹⁰ In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. ¹¹ And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but

give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.”

¹² As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³ Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴ and said to her, “How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine.”

¹⁵ “Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. ¹⁶ Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.”

¹⁷ Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”

¹⁸ She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

¹⁹ Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. ²⁰ So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, “Because I asked the LORD for him.”

Hannah Dedicates Samuel

²¹ When the man Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfill his vow, ²² Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, “After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the LORD, and he will live there always.”

²³ “Do what seems best to you,” Elkanah her husband told her. “Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his word.” So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

²⁴ After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. ²⁵ When they had slaughtered the bull, they brought the boy to Eli, ²⁶ and she said to him, “As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. ²⁷ I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. ²⁸ So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD.” And he worshiped the LORD there.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

- Hannah’s barrenness did not diminish Elkanah’s love for **her**.
- Hannah was a woman of prayer

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK: There is power in persistent prayer! The Lord hears our cries and responds.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (1 Sa 1:1–28)*. Victor Books.

I. Hannah—A Godly Mother (1:1–2:11)

A. Her sorrow (1:1–10).

While God's perfect pattern for the family from the very beginning had been one husband and one wife, "because of the hardness of men's hearts" (Matt. 19:8), God permitted polygamy. See Deut. 21:15–17. Elkanah was a godly man but he had a divided home, and his favorite wife, Hannah ("grace"), carried a constant burden of sorrow because of her barrenness and because of the persecution of the other wife.

B. Her supplication (1:11–19).

Hannah was a woman of prayer, so it is no surprise to find her son Samuel a great man of prayer. So burdened was her heart that Hannah left the feast without eating and went to the tabernacle to pray. (The word "temple" in 1:9 simply means "a large public building" and does not refer to Solomon's temple which had not yet been built.) Hannah did not "bargain" with the Lord; rather, she proved her spirituality by willingly offering God her best—her firstborn son. Verse 21 suggests that her husband agreed with the vow; see also Num. 30:6–16. The Nazarite regulations are found in Num. 6. Eli, the High Priest, certainly judged Hannah severely (Matt. 7:1–5), especially considering that his own sons were "sons of Belial [Satan]" (see 2:12).

C. Her surrender (1:20–28).

God answered Hannah's prayers and sent a son, so she named him Samuel, "asked of the Lord." Jewish women weaned their children at about the age of three; at that time Hannah took Samuel to Eli and fulfilled her vow to the Lord. The three bullocks were probably for the sin offering, burnt offering, and special offering for the Nazarite vow; see Num. 15:8. "For this child I prayed." What a testimony from a godly mother! See 2 Tim. 1:5. If we had more parents like Elkanah and Hannah, we would have more godly people like Samuel. "Lent" means "given"; Samuel belonged to the Lord for the rest of his life.

Merrill, E. H. (1985). *1 Samuel*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 432-434) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

A. Samuel's birth and childhood (chap. 1)

1. SAMUEL'S FAMILY (1:1–3)

1:1–3. Samuel was the son of **Elkanah ... an Ephraimite** from **Ramathaim** Zophim. This area, otherwise known simply as Ramah (“the height”), was in the hill country about 25 miles north of Jerusalem. Perhaps, according to Eusebius, it is to be identified with Arimathea, the home of Joseph of Arimathea of New Testament times. (Ramah was Samuel’s birthplace [vv. 19–20], residence [7:17], and burial place [25:1].) Elkanah’s description as an Ephraimite appears troublesome since Samuel served as a priest, an office reserved exclusively for Levites. However, Elkanah was a direct descendant of Levi (1 Chron. 6:33–38) and was therefore qualified to function in a priestly capacity. He was a Levite by lineage but an Ephraimite by residence. One indication of how lawless were the times in which Samuel was born is his father’s bigamous marriages. Often in those days (though it was never sanctioned by God), a man whose wife was infertile would take a second wife by whom he could bear **children** (Gen. 16:1–3; 30:3–4, 9–10; etc.). This explains why Elkanah **had two wives** and why **Hannah**, the beloved but barren one, so fervently desired a son.

2. HANNAH’S PROBLEM (1:4–8)

1:4–8. Because a Hebrew man’s posterity was bound up in his having a son to perpetuate his name, his wife’s inability to conceive a son was regarded as a curse from God. (According to Deut. 7:13–14 having children was a sign of God’s blessing. Conversely the Israelites considered the inability to bear children as a curse.) But Hannah’s barrenness did not diminish Elkanah’s love for **her**. In fact he gave her twice what he gave **Peninnah**, his second wife, when they took their offerings to the **LORD** at **Shiloh**, the place some 15 miles north of Ramah where Joshua had located the tabernacle (Josh. 18:1). This antagonized Peninnah, so she belittled **her rival** Hannah (1 Sam. 1:6–7). One thinks of the jealousy which Jacob’s bigamy wrought in Rachel’s heart (Gen. 30:1). None of Elkanah’s assurances of devotion had any beneficial effect upon Hannah and her sorrow (1 Sam. 1:8). Her only resort was to cast herself entirely on the mercies of God.

3. HANNAH’S PRAYER (1:9–18)

1:9–18. The Law required all adult Hebrew males to appear at the tabernacle or temple of **the LORD** for the three major religious festivals of the year (Ex. 23:14–17). At this period of history the tabernacle was at **Shiloh** about 15 miles north of Ramah. Elkanah regularly attended the festivals with his wives, and **Hannah** there poured out her soul to God in petition for **a son**. On one such occasion Hannah **made a vow** that if God would grant her request she would **give** her son **to the LORD for** as long as he lived. This dedication of her son was a commitment to the Nazirite vow, described in Numbers 6:1–8. It was the same vow undertaken by the parents of Samson whom they dedicated to **the LORD** under nearly identical circumstances (Jud. 13:2–5). So intense was Hannah’s silent prayer that **Eli**, the high **priest** who was seated nearby, noted the movement of **her lips** and assumed **she was** intoxicated. When the priest learned about her true plight, he assured her that **God** would answer her prayer.

4. SAMUEL’S BIRTH (1:19–23)

1:19–20. Shortly after Hannah’s return to **Ramah**, she **conceived** and in due **course** bore **a son** whom she **named ... Samuel**. Though the name technically means “his name is God” or something similar, **Hannah** may, by assonance, have understood the name to mean “asked of

God.” She had “asked” (*šā’al*) God for a son, and He had “heard” (*šāma*) her. “Samuel,” then, would be associated with *šāmūa’ ’ēl*, “heard of God,” because **she had asked the LORD for him.**

1:21–23. At the next **annual** festival **Elkanah** went to Shiloh to offer **sacrifice to the LORD** (cf. v. 3), but this time he also paid **his vow** to the Lord. This payment of the vow must have consisted of the offering of Samuel himself whom Elkanah (and Hannah) had promised to give if the Lord would answer their prayers for a son (cf. Lev. 27:1–8; Num. 30:1–8).

Hannah and Samuel **did not** accompany Elkanah, for Samuel was not yet **weaned** and was therefore totally dependent on his mother. **Elkanah** saw the wisdom in this and agreed that Hannah and Samuel might remain at home. However, he was perhaps fearful that the temporary withholding of Samuel from the service of the Lord might jeopardize the Lord’s favor (in giving them a son who would survive and mature) and so Elkanah prayed that **the Lord** might **make good His word.**

5. SAMUEL’S PRESENTATION TO GOD (1:24–28)

1:24–28. After Hannah had **weaned** her son, she fulfilled her pledge and **took** him to **Shiloh** to offer **him to the LORD** as a lifelong Nazirite. Since it was customary for a child to be nursed until he was about three years of age (see the apocryphal 2 Maccabees 7:27), the lad Samuel would be no unusual burden for **Eli** and the priestly staff at Shiloh. Also Samuel would be old enough to learn the rudiments of tabernacle service.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 109–110). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

First and Second Samuel are named for the principal character in the early chapters of the book. Samuel led Israel as its last judge and anointed Israel’s first two kings, Saul and David.

First and Second Samuel were originally one book in the Hebrew Bible. The Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate first divided the Hebrew into two books. The Septuagint entitled Samuel and Kings as four consecutive books called “First—Fourth Kingdoms.” The Vulgate also had four books but with the title “Kings.” In the Hebrew Bible the division into two books was established with the first printing of the Hebrew Bible (A.D. 1488). The English versions followed the Hebrew title “Samuel.”

First and Second Samuel are anonymous. According to Jewish tradition, based on 1 Chronicles 29:29, the Books of Samuel were authored by Samuel and completed by the prophets Nathan and Gad. Since 1 Samuel 25:1 records Samuel’s death and he seldom appears after the anointing of David (1 Sam. 16:1–13), alternative explanations for the compilation of the Books of Samuel have been sought.

As the Jewish tradition itself indicates, the Books of Samuel are a composite work of more than one hand. Among the materials used were eyewitness accounts, archival materials, independent narratives, and poetry.

Scholars disagree on how and when the Books of Samuel were written. Some believe the work was completed soon after the time of David (1011–971 B.C.). Other scholars have dated the completed work about 650–550 B.C. as part of a larger history influenced by the central ideas of Deuteronomy. (See “The Historical Books.”)

Theme. Through the prophetic ministry of Samuel, God established the monarchy of Israel by choosing David, “a man after his own heart,” to rule over His people (13:14). The book helps us see that God is Lord over history. His sovereign plans are accomplished in spite of human failure.

- I. Righteous Leadership (1:1–7:17)
- II. Disobedient Saul (8:1–15:35)
- III. Faithful David (16:1–31:13)

Purpose and Theology

1. The book tells of the transition in leadership from the period of the judges to the rise of the monarchy. The book continues the story of Israel’s wars with the Philistines begun in the Book of Judges (see Samson, Judg. 13–16). Samuel was a transition figure who, as the last judge, inaugurated the first king, Saul (10:1), and initiated the dynasty of King David (16:1, 13).

During the judges period, the nation was a theocracy. The Lord was its only king and authority. The tribes had no central authority to govern them and were held together because of their common commitment to the covenant with the Lord. With the establishment of the kingdom, God would express His rule in a new way, through His chosen king.

2. The Lord’s choice of godly leadership is focal. Samuel is extolled in contrast to Eli and his sons, Phinehas and Hophni. They were rejected by God because of their evil deeds (2:12–36). Under their leadership the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant at the battle of Aphek (4:1b–11); but under Samuel, Israel defeated the Philistines at Mizpah (7:1–17). Yet Samuel’s sons were also unfit (8:1–6). So the Lord permitted the people to have a king (8:6–9, 19–20; 9:17). King Saul, however, rejected the prophetic word of Samuel for reasons of political expediency (15:26–29). God, who “looks at the heart” (16:7), chose David as His anointed servant to rule over Israel (16:1–13; 28:16–19).

3. For Israel to prevail over its enemies, God required covenant faithfulness and moral responsibility from Israel’s leadership. The sin of Israel’s leaders resulted in death for them and the people. The Philistine’s defeat of Israel under Eli’s evil sons (4:1–21) and under wicked Saul (31:1–13) is contrasted with Samuel’s and David’s victories (7:13; 23:1–5; 30:1–31).

4. God’s continued grace is another significant theme in the book. In spite of Israel’s repeated failures, the Lord raised up new deliverers in Samuel, Saul, and David. God answered the cry of Hannah (1:9–20), called the boy Samuel (3:1–21), granted the request for a king (8:6–9), and spared David for Israel’s golden age to come (18:6–11, 24–27; 19:9–10; 21:10–15).

5. The book demonstrates that God is Lord over history. His dominion is exercised over the rise and fall of important figures as well as whole nations. The motif of prophecy and its fulfillment shows that the Lord accomplishes His will in spite of human plans. Also the presence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Saul and David evidences God’s sovereignty (10:6, 10; 11:6; 16:13). When God disapproved Saul, the Spirit departed (16:14).

RIGHTEOUS LEADERSHIP (1:1–7:17)

In the opening section the godly life of Samuel is distinguished from the failures of the high priest Eli and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Although Samuel and the sons of Eli were reared in the same house, their dedication and destinies were very different. The Philistine wars led to the end of Eli’s family, but Samuel prevailed over the Philistines and led Israel as judge and prophet.

Samuel's Dedication (1:1–2:10). Samuel's unusual birth was an early indication of the special dedication Samuel would have to the Lord throughout his life. Barren Hannah, Samuel's mother, prayed for a son. She vowed to rear the child as a Nazirite (see Num. 6:1–21 and Judg. 13). Because the Lord answered her prayer, she dedicated Samuel to serve at the tabernacle under Eli's care.

Philbeck, B. F. (1972). 1 Samuel. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 164-165). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the twelfth century B.C., Israel's fortunes had reached a dangerously low ebb. Her resources were depleted by repeated attacks from hostile neighbors, and her internal structure was weakened by civil war and regional self-interests. Theoretically, the judges were able to deliver Israel from adversity (see Judg. 2:1–23), but even under Deborah's leadership, a majority of the tribes failed to cooperate (Judg. 5).

By about 1050 B.C. Israel was in dire straits. The Philistines, who had captured a foothold on the southern coast of Canaan more than a century earlier, began an aggressive campaign to control their neighbors to the east. In this struggle, the Philistines enjoyed many tactical advantages. Their forces were more united, their troops were better trained, and their iron weapons were among the first commonly used in Palestine. Under this new threat, Israel's national existence was gravely endangered.

Against this background Israel changed her system of government. This first book of Samuel describes the transition from a loose tribal federation under Samuel to the beginnings of a typical Oriental monarchy under David. This process was fraught with both political and religious dangers, but in the end Israel survived with the basic elements of her faith in the Lord intact.

The story is told from a purely theological perspective. The author was not concerned with modern interests in social or political causation. He saw God directly at work in human history, rewarding goodness and punishing evil (see Introduction to Judges). The books of Samuel face squarely the twofold theological problem precipitated by Israel's grave political crisis. Israel's defeats at the hands of the Philistines were the result of the people's violation of the Lord's will rather than an indication of his weakness. Similarly, Israel's shift in governmental structure was brought about by the people's persistent cry for a king, not by inherent weaknesses in the system itself. The story is organized around three human characters—Samuel, Saul, and David—but God will clearly emerge as the ultimate guide of Israel's destiny.

Samuel's Dedication (1 Sam. 1:1–2:11)

The passage—The story about the emergence of Israel's monarchy properly begins with Samuel. He profoundly influenced the entire period, serving as Israel's last judge, as one of her earliest prophets, and as a power behind the throne of her first two kings.

Samuel is clearly portrayed as a man chosen to perform his allotted tasks. He is born into a devout home, the son of a barren woman who fervently prayed for a son (v. 11) and who pledged to set him apart as a Nazirite (see Num. 6:1–8).

Special points—Elkanah regularly took his family on an annual pilgrimage to the temple of the Lord at Shiloh (vv. 2, 9). Such a practice was expensive and far beyond the means of

ordinary working men. The “temple of the Lord” mentioned here and in 3:3 should not be confused with the place of worship constructed by Solomon.

When Samuel was about three-years old, Hannah brought him back to Shiloh where he began his religious training under Eli’s leadership. Hannah’s song on this occasion (2:1–10) praises Israel’s God as the Lord of history. The Lord would surely judge the wicked and deliver the righteous (v. 9). This principle provides the theme for the ensuing chapters. Samuel’s emergence as God’s man of the hour will be paralleled by the precipitous decline of Eli’s corrupt sons (2:12).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Samuel 1:1-28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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