

FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 1

The Birth of Samuel

here was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite. 2 He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. 3 Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD. 4 On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. 5 But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. 6 And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. 7 So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. 8 And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?” 9 After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. 10 She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. 11 And she vowed a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.” 12 As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. 14 And Eli said to her, “How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you.” 15 But Hannah answered, “No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. 16 Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation.” 17 Then Eli answered, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him.” 18 And she said, “Let your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad. 19 They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. 20 And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, “I have asked for him from the LORD.”

1:1 This verse gives the liturgical moorings for the opening of the Book, which will present Samuel, the last of the judges, as priest (7:7–9), prophet (3:19–21), and kingmaker (ch 9), and which will deal with the relationship between the altar/priest/king. Samuel, in his prophetic ministry, will show the role of the king as patron of the altar and the ark. (TLSB)

Ramathaim. The name occurs only here in the OT and appears to be another name for Ramah (see 1:19; 2:11; 7:17; 19:18; 25:1). It is perhaps to be identified with the Ramah of Benjamin (see Jos 18:25) located in the hill country about five miles north of Jerusalem near the border of Ephraim and Benjamin. (CSB)

C 22 mi N of Jerusalem. Shows that Elkanah was probably a Zuphite (one of a particular Levitical family) from Ramah (cf 1Ch 6:25–28). (TLSB)

Zuph. It is not entirely clear whether this word refers to the man or the place. If it refers to the man, it indicates his descent from Zuph (see 1Ch 6:34–35). If it refers to the place, it designates the general area in which Ramathaim is located (see 9:5). (CSB)

Ephraimite. Although Elkanah is here called an Ephraimite, he was probably a Levite whose family belonged to the Kohathite clans that had been allotted towns in Ephraim (see Jos 21:20–21; 1Ch 6:22–26). (CSB)

Reference for where Elkanah lived, rather than his tribal origins. Since Elkanah was a Levite, i.e., one of the tribe from whom God drew men to serve as priests (Nu 3), it sets the sacred tribal status for Elkanah's son Samuel, who would go on to perform sacrificial rites usually associated with priests. (TLSB)

1:2 *no children.* Hannah's barrenness called into question God's blessing on her life (Gn 1:28). Lack of children also put her economic and social status in jeopardy, as Elkanah's future through her seemed to come to an end (Dt 25:7–10). (TLSB)

1:3 *this man used to go up year by year.* Three times a year every Israelite male was required to appear before the Lord at the central sanctuary (Ex 23:14–19; 34:23; Dt 16:16–17). The festival referred to here was probably the Feast of Tabernacles, which not only commemorated God's care for his people during the desert journey to Canaan (see Lev 23:43) but more especially celebrated, with joy and feasting, God's blessing on the year's crops (see Dt 16:13–15). On such festive occasions Hannah's deep sorrow because of her own barrenness was the more poignant. (CSB)

Probably for the Feast of Booths (Lv 23:33–43), or possibly as a personal pilgrimage. (TLSB)

the LORD of hosts. Traditionally “the LORD of hosts.” This is the first time in the Bible that God is designated by this title. The Hebrew for “host(s)” can refer to (1) human armies (Ex 7:4; Ps 44:9); (2) the celestial bodies such as the sun, moon and stars (Ge 2:1; Dt 4:19; Isa 40:26); or (3) the heavenly creatures such as angels (Jos 5:14; 1Ki 22:19; Ps 148:2). The title, “the LORD of hosts,” is perhaps best understood as a general reference to the sovereignty of God over all powers in the universe (hence the NIV rendering, “the LORD Almighty”). In the account of the establishment of kingship in Israel it became particularly appropriate as a reference to God as the God of armies—both of the heavenly army (Dt 33:2; Jos 5:14; Ps 68:17; Hab 3:8) and of the army of Israel (1Sa 17:45). (CSB)

Shiloh. The town in Ephraim between Bethel and Shechem where the central sanctuary and the ark of the covenant were located (see Jos 18:1; Jdg 21:19). (CSB)

North of Bethel. The tent of meeting, set up at Shiloh early in the conquest (Jsh 18:1), was the main sanctuary of God's people in the time of the judges and here. By the end of 2Sm (24:18–25), the altar has moved to Jerusalem. The movement of access to God's gracious presence from Shiloh to Jerusalem is the backdrop against which the events in the Books are rightly interpreted. (TLSB)

1:4–8 No explanation as to why the Lord allowed Hannah's prolonged affliction; there is no note of judgment against her. (TLSB)

1:4 *sacrificed.* Here refers to a sacrifice that was combined with a festive meal signifying fellowship and communion with the Lord and grateful acknowledgment of his mercies (see Lev 7:11–18; Dt 12:7, 17–18). (CSB)

Portions distributed came from the sacrificial animal, and eating the sacrifice was part of the sacrificial ritual (Lv 3). This was a festive meal and was the place of fellowship in thankfulness for God's mercy. Elkanah rightly distributed portions of this offering to his family; his behavior contrasts with that of Eli's sons (2:12–17, 22–25). (TLSB)

1:5 *the LORD had closed her womb.* The Lord gives and withholds children (see Ge 18:10; 29:31; 30:2, 22). (CSB)

No explanation is given. As in the Gospel account of the man born blind (Jn 9:1–3), the emphasis is not on the cause of the deprivation, but on how God is glorified in the life of His people. God continues to bring life and healing out of situations that seem desperate or hopeless from a human point of view (Rm 8:31–39; 2Co 12:1–10). (TLSB)

1:6 *her rival.* Peninnah exalted herself through her provocation of Hannah. This contrasts with Hannah humbling herself before the Lord (vv 9–18; cf 1Pt 5:6). The fact that Peninnah provoked Hannah in God's presence also suggests that perhaps Peninnah acted in a sacrilegious manner. (TLSB)

1:8 *heart sad?* Text gives no indication as to whether Elkanah rebuked Peninnah. Silence on this point invites us to meditate on the nature of the polygamous marriage and its consequences. (TLSB)

more to you. Weak attempt at comfort. (TLSB)

1:9 *eaten and drunk.* Worshipers near the tabernacle would eat portions of certain offerings as part of their fellowship with the Lord. (TLSB)

temple. Here and in 3:3 the central sanctuary, the tabernacle, is referred to as “the LORD's temple.” It is also called “the house of the LORD” (v. 7; 3:15), “the Tent of Meeting” (2:22) and “my dwelling” (2:32). The references to the tabernacle as a “house” and a “temple,” as well as those to sleeping quarters and doors (3:2, 15), give the impression that at this time the tabernacle was part of a larger, more permanent building complex to which the term “temple” could legitimately be applied (cf. Jer 7:12, 14; 26:6). (CSB)

Also used to describe the tabernacle, the typical place of sacrifice and prayer for God's people at this time. (TLSB)

1:11 *vow.* See Ge 28:20–22; Nu 21:2; Ps 50:14; 76:11; 116:14, 18; 132:2–5; Pr 20:25; 31:2. Regulations for the making of vows by women are found in Nu 30. (CSB)

A solemn promise made to God to perform an act or abstain from an act in return for God's favor. There was no necessity to make a vow, but once made, it was binding. Regulations for a married woman making a vow are set out in Nu 30:6–15. Hannah's vow was binding also on Elkanah her husband. (TLSB)

affliction. Hannah trusted that God would look compassionately on her in her childlessness (Ps 107:41) and also that God would not willingly bring affliction on her (Lm 3:33). (TLSB)

remember. To remember is more than simply to recall that Hannah existed. It is to go into action in her behalf. (CSB)

all the days of his life. In contrast to the normal period of service for Levites, which was from age 25 to 50 (see Nu 8:23–26). (CSB)

no razor. Hannah voluntarily vows for her son that which God had required of Samson (Jdg 13:5). Long hair was a symbol of dedication to the service of the Lord and was one of the characteristics of the Nazirite vow (see Nu 6:1–21). The vow was normally taken for a limited time rather than for life. (CSB)

1:13 *be drunken*. Eli’s mistake suggests that in those days it was not uncommon for drunken people to enter the sanctuary. Further evidence of the religious and moral deterioration of the time is found in the stories of Jdg 17–21. (CSB)

Drinking wine would have been part of the festive meal. Eli perhaps shows his own weakness in mistaking Hannah’s behavior for drunkenness. Cyr: “Hannah ... prayed to God not with clamorous petition, but silently and modestly, within the very recesses of her heart. She spoke with hidden prayer, but with manifest faith. She spoke not with her voice, but with her heart, because she knew that thus God hears; and she effectually obtained what she sought, because she asked it with belief” (ANF 5:448). (TLSB)

1:15 *pouring out my soul*. Crying out to God in trust. (TLSB)

1:17 Not simply an expression of good will toward Hannah, but a word from God to be received and trusted. (TLSB)

1:18 Hannah’s trusting reception of God’s Word made her a true daughter of Abraham (Rm 4:13–25). (TLSB)

1:19 *remembered her*. Does not mean that God had previously forgotten Hannah. Rather, God was graciously present for her according to His promise (v 17). (TLSB)

1:20 *Samuel*. “His name is El (God).” Suggests that Samuel’s God is the true God. (TLSB)

1:1–20 The Lord shows His mercy to Hannah and demonstrates that His power is stronger than human weakness by giving Hannah a son. Samuel, dedicated to God even before conception, is a living sign of God’s grace. Peninnah’s self-righteous provocation of Hannah is a warning to us never to judge those who suffer deprivation of any sort, or to assume that God judges us favorably in relation to those who suffer. Hannah’s trusting openness to God’s Word, and the blessing she received, encourages us to trust that God will deal with us according to His compassionate love in Christ Jesus. • Lord God, hear all those who cry to You in their affliction, and remember Your promise to save those who call on Your name. Amen. (TLSB)

Samuel Given to the LORD

21 The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. **22** But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, “As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the LORD and dwell there forever.” **23** Elkanah her husband said to her, “Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him; only, may the LORD establish his word.” So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. **24** And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. And the child was young. **25** Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. **26** And she said, “Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. **27** For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him. **28** Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD.” And he worshiped the LORD there.

1:21 *his vow.* Making vows to God was a common feature of OT piety, usually involving thank offerings and praise (see Lev 7:16; Ps 50:14; 56:12; 66:13–15; 116:17–18; Isa 19:21). Elkanah no doubt annually made vows to the Lord as he prayed for God’s blessing on his crops and flocks, and fulfilled those vows at the Feast of Tabernacles. (CSB)

1:22 *weaned.* It was customary in the East to nurse children for three years or longer since there was no way to keep milk sweet. (CSB)

Samuel would have been about age 3. Breast-feeding typically lasted much longer than it does today. Because it sometimes inhibits ovulation, breast-feeding can help prevent pregnancy. A feast celebrating the weaning might also be observed (Gn 21:8). (TLSB)

1:23 *his word.* No previous word from God is mentioned, unless this refers to the pronouncement of Eli in v. 17. The Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) and Syriac version resolve this problem by reading “your word.” (CSB)

Prayerfully, Elkanah expresses his own hope that God’s blessing of more children will come with the fulfillment of Hannah’s vow (v. 11). Hannah will not fail to bring Samuel into God’s presence and will prepare the boy for service to God. Husbands had responsibility for their wives. (TLSB)

1:24 The exact nature of this offering is not clear. It may have been a custom at Shiloh only or a offering specific to Hannah’s vow (cf. Lev. 27; Num. 30). (TLSB)

1:26 *As surely as you live.* A customary way of emphasizing the truthfulness of one’s words. (CSB)

1:28 *lent.* Literally, “make him one asked of the Lord,” playing off the verbs for asking that are repeatedly used. Samuel belongs to the Lord forever (v. 22). (TLSB)

worshiped – Literally, “he bowed down” (some versions have “they”). It probably means that Samuel worshiped the Lord at Shiloh from that time, though an act of consecration may be meant; the meaning is ambiguous. (TLSB)

1:21–28 Hannah brings the young Samuel to the presence of the Lord at Shiloh, and she offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving and consecration. In fulfillment of her vow, Hannah gives Samuel to the Lord for the length of his life. Everything that we have is a gift from the Lord. This means that we have no right to keep anything back from service to God, no matter how dear it is to us. God’s claim on our life is absolute (Lk 14:25–33). Always true to His Word, He will stand by His promises to us, even when we have no earthly reason for hope. • Thank You, Lord, for all Your gifts to us. Let our joy be complete as we offer ourselves and our children to You and to each other in love. Amen. (TLSB)