

FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 1

The Birth of Samuel

There was a certain man from Ramathaim, 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.”

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)

Zuphite. See NIV text note. 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 *two wives.* See notes on Ge 4:19; 16:2; 25:6. (CSB)

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 *Year after year this man went up.* 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 Almighty. 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 *sacrifice.* 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.* See note on Ge 16:4. (CSB)

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 (see NIV text note), 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 (see v. 19; see also note on Ge 8:1). (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 *drunk.* 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. Cypr: “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)

1:16 *wicked.* See note on Dt 13:13. (CSB)

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.* See NIV text note. (CSB)

“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)

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.

1:21 *annual sacrifice.* See notes on vv. 3–4. (CSB)

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 (see note on v. 3). (CSB)

1:22 *weaned*. It was customary in the East to nurse children for three years or longer (in the Apocrypha see 2 Maccabees 7:27) 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 (see NIV text note) 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 GIVE – ESV has "lent." Literally, "'make him oe 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)