

Prophet to Kingdom

It is really hard to overstate the importance of the book of Samuel. And we find the story of the prophet Samuel, and two kings, Saul and David, within its pages. If we look at Israel's history, we understand the law and priesthood was established during the time of Moses. Then, with Joshua the Israelites enter the Promised Land. However, during the time of the judges, God's people continually rebel except during times of crisis. When Samuel comes on the scene we are entering the last stages of the judges and the beginning of the kingdom. It is also the dawn of the office of prophet. The book of Samuel is not only a transition from the rule of judges to kings – it was also the story of the transition from tabernacle to temple. Without a doubt the book of Samuel is about the rise of King David and the establishment of his kingdom, which of course was a shadow of the true king and kingdom that was coming in the New Testament. A major theme in the book of Samuel is leadership. At the beginning of the book, Israel is sick with rebellion against God and is ruled by the Philistines. The nation had three leaders, Eli, Hophni and Phinehas. But with the birth of Samuel, a revolution began.

God was casting down the oppression of the Philistines, removing the wicked priests, and starting a new beginning with Samuel. By the end of 2 Samuel, King David has completely removed the domination of the Philistines and established his kingly dynasty. Samuel and David begin a new kingdom under God's leadership that would transform Israel and foreshadow the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, if there is one thing I want you to get out of this study, it is the principle found in I Samuel 7:3-4

And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashteroth from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashteroth, and they served the LORD only.

We are a nation in need of repentance, we need to leave our idols and return to the Lord and serve him only. This is not easy in a culture such as ours, but it is necessary for us to see restoration, reformation and needed change. So, keep this idea in mind as we progress through the book of Samuel. We will come back to this again and again because this is what the Bible teaches, and just like the Israelites, it is our greatest need.

So, let's begin with I Samuel 1. The historical context is around 1050 B.C. and as mentioned, it is a transitional time between the judges and the establishment of the monarchy. J. Daniel Hays notes, "the central themes presented in 1-2 Samuel is the transition in leadership from ineffective judges (and corrupt priests) to the effective monarchy of David, in which the king also led (like a priest) in worshipping God rightly." The book begins with the birth of Samuel and the first few chapters describe his rise as prophet.

There 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."

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. I Samuel 1:1-28

The chapter starts by telling us two things, first that Elkanah, who was Samuel’s father, has a genealogy, and according to I Chronicles 6, he and Samuel were part of the family line of Kohath, which meant they were Levites. The next thing the text tells us is that Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. And the painful truth was that Hannah was barren. Of course we are immediately reminded of all the women in the Bible who were barren, yet had very important sons. From Genesis we remember Sarah who had Isaac, and Rebecca who bore Jacob. Then there was Rachel, Jacob’s wife, who bore Joseph. In the book of Judges, Minoah’s wife was barren, but then she conceived Samson. And lest we forget, Elizabeth was childless before she gave birth to John the Baptist. Sometimes God’s greatest works begin in barrenness and distress. But then he stretches forth his hand, works a miracle and saves his people.

We note from the text that Elkanah was a righteous man and went up to Shiloh every year to offer sacrifices and worship the Lord. Elkanah always gave Hannah a double portion. However, Peninnah would provoke and irritate Hannah because she was childless. Now, I want to stop here a moment because of the symbolism. We have mentioned several women, including Hannah, that were barren. In truth, this barrenness represents Israel. During this time in Israel’s history, the nation was barren because of their unfaithfulness to God. And we know there is a major leadership problem. When Hannah goes to the sanctuary to pray, Eli thinks she is drunk. The priest could not even recognize a heartfelt prayer, and a person in anguish. The priests were rebellious and the land was barren. Yet, it is at this very point that God sends his prophet to restore and begin a new work, a new kingdom.

And honestly I think many of us can identify with Hannah. We live in a world where the persecutors seem to prosper and thrive. Peter Leithart in his book, *A Son to Me*, notes, “Many believers and churches today find themselves in the situation of Hannah. The favored ones, the remnant earnest to remain faithful to the Lord and His word, suffer because of indifference or active persecution from corrupt leaders. Eli and his sons preside at the sanctuary, and all the big churches, the big budgets, and the big libraries are at Shiloh. Peninnah seems to be the fruitful one, while Hannah remains barren.” But we know this is only the beginning of the story. God is about to act on behalf of his people – the prophet is coming!

So, Hannah is being provoked, harassed and persecuted. And as verse 7 tells us it went on year by year. But what does Hannah do? The Biblical text tells us she is weeping and will not eat, then she goes to the tabernacle to pray – she cries out to God in her anguish.

One of the greatest things about God is how he responds to his people in crisis. There are defining moments in our lives when we get to choose how to respond to our circumstances.

Our response reveals who we really are and most importantly who God is. Hannah was in a crisis, how does she respond? She goes to the temple and cries out to God. She weeps and makes a vow to God. She promises that if God will give her a son, she will give him to the Lord for his service.

Now, when Hannah prays she addresses her prayer to Yahweh Tsebaoth, which means the Lord Almighty or Lord of hosts. This name for God gives the meaning that God is sovereign, and has dominion and authority over everything. Hannah is the first person in the Bible to utter this special name for God. In addition, Hannah called on the name of the Lord seven times in chapter 1. What can we draw from this cry of anguish and the vow by Hannah? She understood the freedom to cry out to God. But her prayer is also a vow – she is going to give Samuel back to God. And not only that, she was going to give Samuel as a Nazirite. This is incredibly important.

There are only three permanent Nazirites in the Bible, Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist. And we can clearly see a similarity between Samuel and John the Baptist because just as John prepared the way for Jesus, Samuel prepared the people for the reign of King David.

I think what strikes us most is the deep, heartfelt prayer of Hannah, while the priest Eli seems oblivious to the situation. But to his credit he does confirm Hannah once she explains herself, but it demonstrates the difference between deep conviction and complacent leadership. We should remember that even when leaders are blind spiritually, God still responds to those who are faithful and cry out to him. It is not about position, but most certainly is about faithfulness and action. God looks at the heart.

So, I want to stop here a moment because what we are witnessing in this chapter is very profound. It was going to change a nation. Have you ever been in a painful situation? What did you do? Did you cry out to God? Hannah did – and God answered! Is that what we do? Be honest – is that what we do? Do we run to God, do we lay our burdens down at his feet or try to solve the issues ourselves? Take a moment and reflect how you respond to a crisis or painful circumstances.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones tells us in his book on revival that throughout history in the great revivals of the past that usually there was one man who gets a deep burden. The man gets a burden for revival and then does something about it. We might think of John Huss, Martin Luther or William Tyndale. The world looks to great leaders to fix the problems of our times, but the people of God should only look to Jesus Christ. God may give someone a deep burden, and then they act. What did Hannah do? She acted on her burden and cried out to God. And what did her prayer do? It brought a child, a prophet of God, but more than that. It brought great change. The corrupt priests would fade away and God's prophet would begin a new kingdom.

If we move back to the text we notice that after Hannah's experience of prayer, she is no longer sad. Her anxiety and pain are lifted. God's presence will do that!

In verse 19, the text tells us the Lord remembered Hannah. So, God heard and answered her fervent prayer, and Samuel was born. The name Samuel means, “name of God” or “asked of God”, and Hannah even says in the text, “I have asked for him from the Lord.” And I don’t think the point could be any more profound. She asked for a child, and God gave her a prophet who would change the nation. Ask...ask...ask. James 4:2-3 says, “ You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” And Matthew 17:19-21 states, “Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.”

If we truly want to see change, if we really want our national leaders to change, we must ask God for it. We must cry out! And honestly how bad do things have to get for us to have a passion to see change. Cry out!

Now, as we proceed to the next section, verse 21 through the end of the chapter, the text demonstrates the fulfillment of Hannah’s vow. Now, before getting into that, I want to note something. We have already said Samuel represents a transition from the judges to kings. It is interesting that the book of Samuel does not begin with the birth of a king. It begins with the birth of the prophet. The writer of the book of Samuel considered it fitting to start with the prophet who would anoint kings. Samuel’s birth is miraculous and sets in motion events that will begin a new kingdom and the true worship of Yahweh. Samuel is a picture of the ideal prophet, God’s mouthpiece to direct the affairs of Israel. His birth is of enormous importance. It is a miracle like that of Samson and Isaac.

Now, starting in verse 21 Elkanah goes to offer sacrifice to the Lord and pay his vow. We don’t have Elkanah’s vow in the text so either he joined and supported his wife’s vow or he made his own vow to the Lord in reference to Samuel. Hannah does not go with Elkanah, but tells him she will bring Samuel to the temple once the child is weaned. In ancient times, the weaning of a child was celebrated. It was a transition from the mother’s care to the father’s. Genesis 21:8 says, “And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.” In the case of Samuel the transition would be from Samuel’s family to the house of the Lord. We should keep in mind that weaning was different then than now. The weaning was probably around 3 years. So, Samuel was at least 3 when he went to the temple. We also notice the extravagant sacrifice. The ESV says Hannah brought a three-year old bull, but actually the Hebrew says it was three bulls. This was way more than what was required. Hannah wanted the dedication of her son to the Lord to be extravagant and generous. So, Hannah brings Samuel to the house of the Lord and to Eli the priest. And we should pay very close attention to her words. According to Dale Ralph Davis in his commentary on I Samuel, Hannah uses the Hebrew root s’l (to ask) four times. Davis provides a more literal reading of the text.

For this child I prayed, and Yahweh gave me my asking which I asked from him; and I also have given back what was asked to Yahweh; all the days he lives he is one that is asked for Yahweh. (pg. 20)

We cannot miss the deep meaning of asking God, but also that what she asked is being given back to Yahweh. The child whom she so desperately prayed for is given to the Lord for the rest of his days. Samuel will be with the Lord forever.

Peter Leithart notes in his book on I and II Samuel that God uses adopted instead of biological sons. For example, Samuel was not Eli's son, but Eli would become a father figure to Samuel, and ultimately replace his own sons when he becomes prophet to the nation. By the same token, when Samuel was old, his sons were not accepted as leaders to replace him and the people asked for a king. Saul would replace Samuel's sons. And of course Saul's son, Jonathan did not become king. David, Saul's son-in-law would be king. Leithart goes on to say, "This ultimately points to Jesus, the miracle-born son of Adam who displaced his fallen father. 1-2 Samuel thus makes the typology of Genesis more precise by showing that the 'seed' would not come through the normal channels of fleshly descent but would be preeminently the one 'born according to the Spirit.'"

So, what do we learn from this story in I Samuel? What does the text say about God? First of all, that God does allow suffering and unfairness. He allows impossible situations to arise. But often God allows these things to show his glory. To show how big he is and that he is always the answer. Hannah was in an impossible situation. But God heard her cry for help and answered with a prophet that would inaugurate a new kingdom and pure worship. There is nothing that can save us but God.

This story teaches us that God is compassionate and responds to his children. He listens, he understands, and he acts on heart-felt prayer. Prayer works! But it is real prayer, not stuffy, legalistic, or everyone look at how awesome I am prayer. God responds to prayer that is deep, filled with anguish and tears. God hears and God answers. Do you want to change our nation? Do you want the pure prophets of old? Then I suggest you get on your knees and start praying. Get real with God.

This story also teaches us that position does not matter that much to God. Hannah was a barren woman who was being harassed. God heard and answered her prayer. Eli the priest was about to find himself and his sons removed from authority. God looks at the heart, not the position. We need authentic, caring people – not a bunch of blind leaders. Leadership matters, but God often cannot use leaders because they have been dulled and blinded by accolades and position. Humility is essential in the kingdom of God. God elevates the humble and removes the proud. The biggest lesson of this chapter is about asking. Ask God for the impossible, ask God to meet your needs, your hurts. God hears our desperate cries for help. And he is enough. The book of Samuel is the beginning of the office of the prophet, and the beginning of kings and kingdom. This great transition, this grand beginning only occurred because God was moved to action by fervent prayer. To change a nation requires two things, prayer and God. That is all that is needed. Ask, ask, ask, and you shall receive. Will it be a transforming prophet, king or kingdom? God will decide, but it might be all three!