

SAMUEL II: BIRTH AND DEDICATION OF SAMUEL

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INTRODUCTION:

We begin this story with the birth and dedication of Samuel. As with many of God's great men, Samuel's birth was remarkable. God loves the pattern of death and resurrection, and He also loves the pattern of barrenness followed by fruitfulness. We can see the same truth in how He makes the wilderness become a garden. God loves the narrative arc of salvation stories. So should we.

THE TEXT:

"Now there was a certain man of Ramathaimzophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite: And 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. And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there. And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb . . ." (I Sam. 1:1-28).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

As we work through this book, we will go chapter by chapter. But as we have noted, these modern divisions were not in the original text, so we will also notice how their structures and divisions sometimes "slop over" the edges of ours. Here is the first example of that:

- a Elkanah and family go up from Ramah to Shiloh yearly in order to worship (1:1-8)
 - b Hannah's prayer of misery (1:9-11)
 - c Sad conversation between Eli and Hannah (1:12-18)
 - d Samuel is born (1:19-23)
 - c' Happy conversation between Eli and Hannah (1:24-28)
 - b' Hannah's prayer of rejoicing (2:1-10)
- a' Elkanah and family return from Shiloh to Ramah, without Samuel (2:11) .

A man named Elkanah from Ramah had two wives, one of whom, Hannah, was childless (vv. 1-2). This man was a faithful worshipper of God at Shiloh, but Shiloh is introduced to us as connected to the two corrupt sons of Eli (v. 3). Elkanah provided a portion for both wives, but took special care of Hannah (vv. 4-5). Peninnah was Hannah's adversary, and provoked her every year (vv. 6-7). Elkanah tried in vain to comfort her (v. 8). After one such episode, after they had eaten and drunk, Hannah went to the temple of the Lord to pray, and Eli was watching her (v. 9). She was in great bitterness of soul, wept grievously, and made a vow to God (vv. 10-11). She promised to dedicate any baby boy as a lifetime Nazarite (v. 11). Because of the way she was praying, Eli thought she was drunk and rebuked her (vv. 12-14). Hannah replies that she is not a daughter of Belial (a worthless covenant member), but rather that she was praying through her great grief (vv. 15-16). Eli responds by blessing her (v. 17), and she goes away contented (v. 18). They then worshipped first thing in the morning (v. 19), and returned to Ramah, where Hannah became pregnant (v. 19). In due time she had a baby boy, and she named him Samuel (v. 20), which means "God heard." A few months later, Elkanah goes to Shiloh again (v. 21), but Hannah and Samuel stay behind until he is weaned (v. 22). Elkanah agrees with this (v. 23), and so she went up to Shiloh some time after Samuel was weaned (v. 24). They sacrificed a bullock to the Lord, and brought the child to Eli (v. 25). She reminded Eli who she was (v. 26), and tells him of her answered prayer (v. 27). Samuel is lent to the Lord, and he is left to grow up in the worship of the Lord at Shiloh (v. 28).

BIBLICAL FRUITFULNESS:

First, notice three things in this text. The first is that the Lord was the one who had shut Hannah's womb (v. 6). Our God is the God who opens and shuts all things. The idea that we can control fruitfulness apart from Him is ludicrous. And secondly, note how Hannah thinks of her barrenness. Third, the point is covenant faithfulness, not simply numbers. If numbers were the only consideration, polygamy would be a great idea. But Peninnah is described as Hannah's adversary (v. 6). There are different ways that quantity can cause quality to fall apart.

CORRUPTION AND PURITY:

At this point in Israel's history, the corruption had set in deep. The coming monarchy was a sign of apostasy, but that apostasy was set up beforehand by corruption getting into Israel's bones, and especially at Shiloh. And yet, even though Hophni and Phinehas were there at Shiloh, a true worshipper of God was willing to leave her son there as a dedicated servant of the Lord. And the Lord received him as such. The history of the church has been marked by imbalance at this point. Either we are perfectionists, separating into our own little sectarian bands over every little thing, or we just go with the corrupt flow. There has to be a faithful biblical way to identify with and challenge at the same time. But never forget that Jesus worshipped in a Temple that was every bit as corrupt as Shiloh was, and every bit as much under judgment.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF BELIAL:

Eli rebukes Hannah for drunkenness, and Hannah responds by saying that if that were true, she would be a daughter of Belial, meaning worthlessness. But note also 2 Cor. 6:15. One of the reasons why things get this way is not because people are not rebuked. No, they are. But it is usually the wrong ones. Hannah is rebuked by Eli, even though his sons (who were far worse) were not. Elkanah comforts Hannah, but does not restrain his wife Peninnah. Often we rebuke, not the one who needs it, but rather the one who will take it. This is twisted.

But we have already been introduced to the sons of Eli (v. 3), and few verses later we are told what they were like and why. "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD" (1 Sam. 2:12). They were covenant members, but unconverted. They were covenantally worthless. If you are attached to externals, if you wrap yourself up in your office, if you go through the motions, but do not know the Lord, what good is it?



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