

Lecture #3 – Exposition of I Samuel 1-3

Introduction

Remember that as we begin I Samuel that we are still in the period of the Judges. There is rampant idolatry and moral confusion. The twelve tribes are loosely affiliated through their shared heritage and worship of God at the Tabernacle at Shiloh.

It is a troublesome time in the land. The Canaanite peoples that were not fully driven out of the land (Joshua 16:10, Judges 1:27-36) continually attack and oppress the Jews. God used these peoples to try Israel's faith (Judges 2:20-3:4). He used them as instruments of judgment to bring Israel to repentance when they strayed into idolatry. Yet, in these dark times God raised up Judges to lead the people back to Him.

We begin the transition from the Judges to the Kingdom with the birth of the final Judge, Samuel. Samuel will act as Judge, Prophet, and Priest during his lifetime. His impact on the nation of Israel cannot be understated. B.H. Carroll writes: "Counting great men as peaks of a mountain range, and sighting backward from Samuel to Abraham, only one peak, Moses, comes into the line of vision."¹

Chapter 1 – The Birth of Samuel

vs. 1-8 – Elkanah's Family

There is much to be learned from the names of Old Testament people and places. Gaebelien writes concerning the names in the first two verses:

"The names are of striking significance. Elkanah means 'acquired of God.' He was the son of Jeroham (tenderly loved), the son of Elihu (my God is He), the son of Tohu (prostration), the son of Zuph (honeycomb). They were pious generations from which the great man came. Elkanah had two wives. Hannah (grace) the much beloved was barren; Peninnah (pearl) had children."²

We must note the lineage of Samuel. His father was a Levite (I Chronicles 6:20-28) and a Ephrathite (I Samuel 1:1). This is not a contradiction as some have supposed, as Elkanah was a Levite dwelling in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim. Carroll explains:

"Samuel belonged to the tribe of Levi, but was not a descendant of Aaron. If he had been he would have been either a high priest or a priest. Only Aaron's descendants could be high priests, or priests, but Samuel belonged to the tribe of Levi, and from 1 Chronicles 6 we may trace his descent. The tribe of Levi had no continuous landed territory like the other tribes, but was distributed among the other tribes. That tribe belonged to God, and they had no land assigned

¹ *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Hebrew Monarchy*, by B.H. Carroll. p. 9

² *Annotated Bible* by A.C. Gaebelien. E-Sword module.

them except the villages in which they lived and the cities of the refuge, of which they had charge, and so Samuel's father could be called an Ephrathite and yet be a descendant of the tribe of Levi – that is, he was a Levite living in the territory of Ephraim.”³

The bigamy of Elkanah illustrates the spiritual confusion of the times. The portrait here is that, overall, he was a good man that worshipped God (I Samuel 1:3). His taking of a second wife appears to be because his first wife, Hannah, was barren so he took a second wife, Peninnah, to have children and perpetuate his house. Some cite Deuteronomy 21:15-17 as allowing this practice. However, that passage seems to be added more for the hardness of their hearts (as with the case of divorce in Matthew 19:8) to deal with a situation that could arise from man's sin rather than a blessing of polygamy. While Scripture accurately records occurrences of polygamy, it never once commends it.

vs. 9-18 – Hannah's Vow

Alfred Edersheim believes this takes place at Passover:

“‘Yearly’ - as has been inferred from the use of the same peculiar expression in Exodus 13:10 – ‘at the Feast of the Passover,’ the one above all others to which families as such were wont to ‘go up’ (Luke 2:41), Elkanah came to Shiloh with his household for the twofold purpose of ‘worshipping’ and of ‘sacrificing’ peace-offerings according to the law (Exodus 23:15; 34:20; Deuteronomy 16:16).”⁴

We meet Eli (“Jehovah is high”⁵) in vs. 9. He is both High Priest and Judge (I Samuel 4:18). His sons Hophni (“pugilist”) and Phinehas (“serpent- or brazen-mouthed”)⁶ serve with him. In vs. 9 he is said to be sitting in his place of judgment before the Tabernacle courtyard. The fact that Eli was High Priest is something of a mystery. He is a descendant of Aaron's son Ithamar, but the High Priest line had hitherto been through Eleazar. Josephus writes:

“Now Eli was the first of the family of Ithamar, the other son of Aaron, that had the government; for the family of Eleazar officiated as high priest at first, the son still receiving that honor from the father which Eleazar bequeathed to his son Phineas; after whom Abiezer his son took the honor, and delivered it to his son, whose name was Bukki, from whom his son Ozi received it; after whom Eli, of whom we have been speaking, had the priesthood, and so he and his posterity until the time⁷ of Solomon's reign; but then the posterity of Eleazar reassumed it.”⁸

Hannah's vow in prayer is beautiful. She prays to the Lord of Hosts (*Jehovah Sabaoth*, Lord “of all the hosts and armies in heaven and in earth”⁹) that she will give back to the Lord for service as a perpetual Nazarite (see Numbers 6:1-21 for these regulations).

³ *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Hebrew Monarchy*, by B.H. Carroll. p. 9-10

⁴ *Bible History: Old Testament* by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, p. 5.

⁵ *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible and Christianity*, 4th ed. by David Cloud. p. 190

⁶ So given in the Easton's and Smith's Bible Dictionaries.

⁷ Every online text I found of this book has this word wrong, having *thee* instead of *time*.

⁸ *Antiquities of the Jews* by Flavius Josephus. Book 5, chapter 11, paragraph 5.

⁹ *John Gill's Exposition of the Bible* on I Samuel 1:3. E-Sword module.

In vs. 12, God hears a prayer that is not spoken out loud. He can hear the thoughts and communications of the inward man.

It is interesting to note that Eli assumes that Hannah is drunk. Is he used to drunk people being around the Tabernacle? Is the spiritual state of the people so poor that he is not used to seeing people so earnest in their prayers? Either speaks volumes about the times.

Note the term *Belial* in vs. 16, which means “worthless” or “evil”. It is used in II Corinthians 6:15 as a name for Satan. In 17 of its 27 appearances in the Old Testament it is joined with “man/son/daughter of” to form an idiom, likely referring to the person being an idolator and by extension a vile person (these two go hand-in-hand). It is a noun and not an adjective. Note that drunkenness is here a characteristic of Belial.

Note Hannah’s faith in vs. 18. After her prayer and interaction with Eli her entire countenance changes. She is sure that her prayer will be answered.

vs. 19-28 – The Birth and Consecration of Samuel – 1159 B.C.

The name *Samuel* means “heard of God”¹⁰, because God heard Hannah’s prayer.

Elkanah pays an undefined vow here, likely related to the birth of Samuel. John Gill explains this vow “which he had made between feast and feast; for whatever vows men made at home, on any account, they paid them at the yearly festivals; and this vow might be on the account of the birth of his son, by way of thanksgiving for that.”¹¹

While Elkanah paid his vow, Hannah’s vow was not ready to be paid. She does not return to the Tabernacle until after Samuel has been weaned. Edersheim believes this would have taken a period of three years.¹² When they bring Samuel, they also bring three bullocks for sacrifice. Edersheim explains these:

“They had brought with them three bullocks - two for the usual burnt and thank-offerings, and the third as a burnt sacrifice at the formal dedication of Samuel. The meat-offering for each would have been at least 3/10 of an ephah of flour (Numbers 15:8).”¹³

Oh, that we would be like Hannah and give back the blessings God grants us in answer to prayer!

Chapter 2 – Contrasting Hannah and Eli

vs. 1-8 – Hannah’s Prayer

¹⁰ *Bible History: Old Testament* by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, p. 7.

¹¹ *John Gill’s Exposition of the Bible* on I Samuel 1:21. E-Sword module

¹² *Bible History: Old Testament* by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, p. 7.

¹³ *Bible History: Old Testament* by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, p. 8.

This is more than a prayer. It is poetry and a song of thanksgiving. This is an expression of Hannah's faith and joy that overflowed her heart.

Gaebelein writes:

“Hannah's heart filled with the Holy Spirit overflows with a marvellous utterance. Higher criticism claims ‘that this beautiful sacred lyric could not have been sung by Hannah in the circumstances as described. The words of verse 5 alone approach her situation, and doubtless led to the insertion of the psalm in its present context.’ They also say ‘that the Virgin's song (Luke 1:46-55) is largely modeled on the song of Hannah’ (Prof. A.R.S. Kennedy). Such statements deny inspiration. Hannah's and Mary's songs are so much alike because the same Spirit spoke through both. Why should it be thought impossible for pious Hannah to give forth such sublime and far reaching words which stand so closely related to all subsequent prophecy, if we believe that the Holy Spirit inspired her as He did Isaiah and other prophets?”¹⁴

On the word *horn* in vs. 1, J. Vernon McGee writes:

“A ‘horn’ speaks of strength, something to hold on to. Hannah says ‘her strength,’ but she means her strength in the Lord. She is rejoicing over the fact that God has given her a son. She is victorious over those who ridiculed her for being barren, and she is rejoicing in her salvation. There has been present deliverance.”¹⁵

Of note is the Messianic prophecy in vs. 10. There is yet no earthly monarchy when these words are spoken. By the inspiration of the Spirit, Hannah is seeing Christ as the *anointed* king. The word *anointed* is the Hebrew word *Messiah* – “anointed one”. In Greek it is *Christos*. Though not the first prophecy of Christ, this is the first mention of *Messiah*.¹⁶

vs. 12-17 – Crimes of Hophni and Phinehas

What a contrast! From the faithful Elkanah, prayerful Hannah, and surrendered Samuel to two men in line to be High Priest yet “knew not the Lord” and their weak father!

These thieving priests were taking more than their due from the offerings made at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. They were cheating the system and abusing their authority.

The sacrifice in vs. 13-14 appears to be a Peace Offering. Of this offering, only portions of the sacrifice are burned on the Altar (Leviticus 3:4-5,9-10,14-15) and the rest is eaten by the offerer and the priests (Leviticus 7:15-20,29-34). The priest's portion was to be the right shoulder and breast were the priests' portion (Leviticus 7:29-34). The people would then take their portion to eat it. It appears they often would boil it (as a stew perhaps) in large cauldrons. The priest's servant would then come with his tool and take the meat from the people's portion for the corrupt priests. Thus, they were stealing what rightfully belonged to the people.

¹⁴ *Annotated Bible* by A.C. Gaebelein. E-Sword module.

¹⁵ *Thru The Bible*, Vol. II, by J. Vernon McGee. p. 125.

¹⁶ *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption* by W. Graham Scroggie. Vol. I, p. 229.

They go further in the sacrifice in vs. 15-16. The portion that was the Lord's (fat, kidneys, etc.) was to be removed *first* and offered before the portions for the priests and the people were taken. Thus, they were almost certainly taking from the portions for the people and also, far worse, for the Lord. If someone protested the breach of the Mosaic Law, they were bullied into compliance.

vs. 18-21 – The Care of Elkanah and Hannah

It appears Samuel had a unique uniform. An *ephod* is an apron-like garment that only the High Priest wore to attach his breastplate to. Edersheim remarks that the term used for the coat (*meil*) he was given each year is the same used to describe the High Priest's coat in Exodus 28. Albert Barnes says on this: "This pointed mention of the ephod and the robe as worn by the youthful Samuel, seems to point to an extraordinary and irregular priesthood to which he was called by God in an age when the provisions of the Levitical law were not yet in full operation, and in which there was no impropriety in the eyes of his contemporaries, seeing that nonconformity to the whole Law was the rule rather than the exception throughout the days of the Judges."¹⁷

Elkanah and Hannah are blessed with five more children (Psalm 113:9).

 Judges 13¹⁸

vs. 22-36 – The Rejection of Eli's House

Why is Eli just now finding out about this and doing something about it?

The last part of vs. 25 shows us God's intervention in Hophni and Phinehas' doom. Their sin would require greater judgment than just a rebuke. Why? Probably because they were priests and held to a much higher standard and because they abused the holy office they were entrusted with.

Thank God for the nameless, fameless, faithful men of God! (vs. 27)

The last phrase of vs. 30 is a great lesson and also could be a theme for our course: "for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

Edersheim points how the punishment of Eli's house fits their crimes:

"...Eli and his house would become subjects of special judgment: none of his descendants, so long as they held office, should attain old age (1 Samuel 2:31); in punishment of their own insolence of office they would experience constant humiliation (ver. 32); another and more faithful line of priests should fill the highest office (ver. 35); and the deposed family would have to seek at their hands the humblest places for the sake of the barest necessities of life (ver. 36). Thus justice would overtake a family which, in their pride of office, had dared to treat the priesthood as if it

¹⁷ Barnes' Notes, E-Sword module.

¹⁸ Reese dates Samuel's birth to 1159 B.C. and Samson's to 1153 B.C. Judges 14-15 and I Samuel 1-7 are intertwined with almost no information to reconcile the chronology of the accounts.

were absolutely their own, and to degrade it for selfish purposes. As for the chief offenders, Hophni and Phinehas, swift destruction would overtake them in one day; and their death would be the sign of the commencement of those judgments, which were to culminate in the time of Solomon (1 Kings 2:27; comp. Josephus' *Antiq.* 5. 11, 5; 8. 1, 3).¹⁹

There is a double-fulfillment to the prophesy in vs. 35. Gaebelein notes: “Then there is the promise of the raising up of a faithful priest. Such a priest was Zadok, but the promise finds its ultimate fulfillment in Him who is the King-Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁰

B.H. Carroll makes a profound application for us today:

“The devil, here called Belial, is never more satisfied than when he can nominate his own children as ministers of religion. Hophni and Phinehas, children of Belial, were priests. The prevalent evils of today arise from the fact that children of Belial occupy many pulpits and many chairs in theological seminaries and Christian schools. Always they are the advance couriers of disaster to God’s cause, and herald the coming of a triumphant adversary. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48).

“When preachers and professors, in schools begin to hawk at and peck at the Bible, and rend it with their talons, or defile the spiritual feasts like harpies, you should not only count them as unclean birds of prey, but should begin to set your own house in order, for trouble is coming fast.”²¹

Chapter 3 – The Call of Samuel

vs. 1-18 – The Lord Speaks to Samuel

Note the spiritual condition of the land in vs. 1. “And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.” Special revelation from God through prophecy was rare. Barnes points out that from Deborah in Judges 4 the only prophecies had been Hannah and the nameless man of God in I Samuel 2.²² According to Reese’s date, this is about a century. Samuel is counted as the first prophet in Acts 3:24.

It is often said that the light of the Golden Candlestick went out, prompting God to call out to Samuel. The language here does not bear that out. The word *ere* means “before”, thus “*before* the lamp of God went out”. This would indicate the hours before dawn, when the oil would be running low before it was refilled in the morning. This, taken with the mention of Eli sleeping surely points to the wee hours of the morning.

How did Samuel not “know” the Lord in vs. 7? The simplest answer is that he knew Him in an intellectual sense, but not in a personal sense. This was the first special revelation of God to him as

¹⁹ *Bible History: Old Testament* by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, p. 12.

²⁰ *Annotated Bible* by A.C. Gaebelein. E-Sword module.

²¹ *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Hebrew Monarchy*, by B.H. Carroll. p. 22-23

²² *Barnes’ Notes*, E-Sword module. Notes on I Samuel 3:1

prophecy. Samuel did not recognize the voice of the Lord because this was the first time that he heard it.

Of note is vs. 10. Samuel not only heard the voice of God, but God “came, and stood”. He refers to the experience as a “vision” in vs. 15 and the Lord “appeared again” in vs. 21. It appears Samuel experienced two theophanies²³.

The burden of the message is the fall of Eli’s house. God is preparing Samuel for lies ahead, and warning him to not follow Eli’s path.

📖 I Samuel 9:1 – Saul is born around 1135 B.C.²⁴

vs. 19-21 – Samuel’s Reputation

Edersheim remarks:

“By the faithful discharge of a commission so painful, and involving such self-denial and courage, Samuel had stood the first test of his fitness for the prophetic office. Henceforth ‘the word of the Lord’ was permanently with him. Not merely by isolated commissions, but in the discharge of a regular office, Samuel acted as prophet in Israel. A new period in the history of the kingdom of God had commenced; and all Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba, knew that there was now a new link between them and their Heavenly King, a living center of guidance and fellowship, and a bond of union for all who were truly the Israel of God.”²⁵

Note – the phrase “Dan to Beersheba” indicates the whole land of Israel. Dan was in the far north, and Beersheba in the far south. This is akin to our saying “from sea to shining sea”.

²³ visual appearances of God

²⁴ Reese has Saul being born around 12 years after Samuel’s call.

²⁵ *Bible History: Old Testament* by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, p. 15