

The Age of Kings: 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles

The Age of Kings: What can history, even biblical history, possibly reveal to us about God? What was God up to in the reign of King David and his son Solomon? Why did God destroy ancient Jerusalem and send them into exile for seventy years? What relevance can the age of Old Testament kings possibly have in the life of a twenty-first century believer? Why did God speak prophetically to his people during this period of time? These questions and more will be considered in this class. We will explore together God's redemptive historical work revealed in the pages of scripture and see how the mission of the people of God both then and now has always been the same.

The objective of this class is: to gain an appreciation for the period of the northern & southern monarchies in the OT, and understand the relationship between the redemptive work of God and the events that unfolded during this specific time in history. Careful attention will be given to both the Davidic Covenant as well as the decline and exile of the people of God.

Introduction: We begin a new class this week, an exploration into a transitory period in the life of the Old Testament church. As we begin the first book of Samuel, we will take note of the birth of the man from whom this book and the following book receive their name. Originally, both books were part of one unit, and may have derived from an even earlier source in which the various other accounts from this period were summarized. We should not believe that all the events of the two books (1 & 2 Samuel) were written by Samuel himself, although it is quite possible that portions of the first book were. Nevertheless, it was the birth of this one man that marks a period of transition immediately followed by the Age of Kings. This week we will study the miraculous birth and spiritual growth of Samuel, God's man of transition.

Part One: A Miraculous Birth – The first chapter of the book that bears the name of the prophet, Samuel, reveals the miraculous occurrence surrounding his birth. It should not go unnoticed that God specializes in using people who are completely incapable of accomplishing a specific task through which to manifest his goodness and mercy. One has to only think of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Samson's mother, and Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist, to see that God specializes in using barren women to give birth to people chosen by him for a specific task. Hannah was one such woman. She was the beloved wife of Elkanah, who was apparently a man of means and notable lineage in his respective tribe. He would bring his two wives and their children to Shiloh, where the tabernacle of the Lord was pitched, once a year to offer gifts and sacrifices before God. Given the nature of the sacrifice (they were to eat and drink before the Lord), it is possible that the feast was that of First fruits mentioned in Exodus 23:19 given the fact that they participated in a jovial meal. The other wife of Elkanah, Peninnah, used this as an occasion to maliciously vex and torment Hannah in her state of barrenness.

Hannah's response to this vexation is notable. Instead of allowing the reality of her situation to make her hardened against God, she went in the sorrow of her heart to the door of the tabernacle where she wept and prayed before God. She asked God for a son, and made a vow that if God would indeed hear her and grant her request that she would give the boy to God from his youth. She seemingly was referencing a Nazarite vow that would be imposed on him from the womb in a similar fashion as that of Samson (1:11b). Eli, the aged priest of the Lord who proved to honor the ill intended wishes of his son above the sanctity of the worship God, saw Hannah pray and rebuked her thinking that she was drunk. Upon learning that he was mistaken, he blessed her and announced, "...Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him." It was not long after that God did indeed grant

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her petition and she gave birth to Samuel, a man asked of the Lord. She remained faithful to her vow and brought him to the tabernacle shortly after he had been weaned to present him in service to God.

One point should be made about the spiritual context into which Samuel was born. According to scripture, *"...the word of the Lord was rare in those days, there was no frequent vision"* (3:1). If we recall the period of the Judges, of which Samuel is technically the last judge, though he does not fit neatly into this category because of his prophetic ministry, and the overlap of his judgeship with that of Israel's first king, we know that things were truly rotten at the core among the people of God and were progressively moving from bad to worse. The last few chapters of the book of Judges highlight the fact that *"...there was no king in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes."* For this reason, the word of the Lord was rare. God was not speaking to his people like he had done in days past. When God's voice is silent in any generation, it is indicative of a spiritual deficiency that can often be traced back to leadership. This would prove to be the case at the time of Samuel's birth as well as we will explore in greater detail later,

Part Two: A Proclamation Concerning God's Kingdom – Dale Ralph Davis is correct when he states, *"...the way Yahweh delivered her (Hannah) is characteristic of the way Yahweh rules the world."*¹ This point is made clear in the song of praise sang by Hannah at the time Samuel was presented before God. The song is recorded in chapter 2 verses 1 through 10 and is reminiscent of the Magnificat of Mary found in Luke 1:46-55. The song can be divided into three parts: 1-3; 4-8 and 9-10. Part one (verses 1-3) describes the personal deliverance of Hannah over her adversary. The majesty of God is proclaimed as well as the justice of God ruling in the affairs of mankind. Hannah declares that her mouth, the same mouth that muttered in silence before the entrance to the tent of meeting, *"... opens wide against mine enemies."* The holiness of God is declared (vs. 2) as well as the singularity of God, *"...there is no rock like our God."* Finally, the fact that God sees all and rules in justice is referenced at the end of verse 3, *"...Yahweh is a God who really knows, and actions are under his scrutiny."*

Part two of the song of praise moves from the particular deliverance (salvation) of Hannah to the general deliverance of God's people. This is especially enlightening because of what has already been stated about the spiritual condition of God's people during this time in history. She declares, *"...those who are full, have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren have borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn."* This reference is made, not so much pertaining to the tension between Hannah and Peninnah, but to those in Israel who were faithful to the God of the covenant and sought to walk in his ways versus those who compromised their faith, and synchronized their worship with the idolatrous practices of the land. God (Yahweh) is then described as the one who sovereignly rules in the affairs of mankind: *"The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; and brings low and he exalts. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world."* The movement from the specific deliverance of Hannah to the global involvement of the Creator in every life and every aspect of his creation, is hereby described.

Part three of the song reveals the end of the matter, the grand crescendo, the climax of the story. The same manner in which God delivers individuals and his faithful among the nations is the same manner in which he will rule the world when it is all set right again. Verses 9 through 10 state, *"He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail."*

¹Davis, Dale Ralph. 1 Samuel: *Looking On the Heart*. Pg. 22

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The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth, he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed." The potency of this song is not solely its message of God's sovereign rule in the lives of his children, it is the reference to the "king" of the Lord as well as the "horn of his anointed". Both references resurface in the time of David as a way of describing his kingship. Both references are used prophetically of the King of Kings, David's offspring.

In summary, Hannah's song of praise is remarkable because it reveals that God is at work among his covenant community even in the days when the word of the Lord was rare, and every man did what was right in his own eyes. Such a praise reminded Israel of the immediacy of a change, and builds upon the historical redemptive promise of a coming Savior. It was a song heralding that a time of transition was upon them, in much the same way as the Canticle of Mary announced the birth of the long awaited Savior who would usher in an eternal kingdom, and whose reign would know no end.

Part Three: Liturgical Impurity – The story of Samuel's birth is surrounded by the darkness of priestly infidelity. A random and unnamed man of God came to Eli, the High Priest, and shared a message of rebuke concerning the unrestrained behavior of the priest's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. It was customary for the priest to be given part of the roasted meat as their portion to consume after the sacrifice was offered to the Lord (before it was completely consumed on the altar). This portion was allocated to them by God in the law (Leviticus 7:34-35) and consisted of the breast and the thigh. The sons of Eli, however, came with a pronged fork and speared the meat while it was cooking on the altar removing significantly more than their allotted portion. They also asked for meat that had been laid aside to be offered to God, while it was yet raw for their own consumption. Such activity remained unpunished by Eli as did the fact that they committed sexual immorality with the young women who served in the tabernacle.

The prophet's message was full of rebuke – *"Thus says the Lord, 'Did I indeed reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh? Did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? I gave to the house of your father all my offerings by fire from the people of Israel. Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?' Therefore, the Lord the God of Israel declares: 'I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me forever;' but now the Lord declares: 'far be it from me, for those who honor me, I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house... And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever'"* (1 Samuel 2:27-31, 35). This rebuke would later be followed by a similar message delivered by the young Samuel.

The above scenario demonstrates to the people of God the seriousness of safeguarding the purity of the church. It is tempting in today's world for us to consider a gospel that does not cause offense to be the utmost calling of the church. This is contrary to the teaching of scripture. We are not to prize the wellbeing and happiness of anyone, not even our children, above the purity and sanctity of worship. This underscores the importance of church discipline and the exercise thereof in the body of Christ as well as

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the value of the regulatory principle in worship, i.e. that we cannot worship God in any way that we choose, only in the way that he commands.

Part Four: The Call of Samuel – Samuel was busily serving in the tabernacle of God, when he encountered the word of the Lord in a manner previously unknown to him. It is telling that the scripture passage begins, “...The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was.” Two notable statements: 1) the lamp of the Lord were lit freshly every morning, and were expected to burn the majority of the night (Exodus 27:21). 2) The ark of the covenant of the Lord was placed in the Holy of Holies, and permission to enter was only granted to the High Priest (Eli) on one day a year, the Day of Atonement. So, this tells us that the word of the Lord came to Samuel in the early hours of the morning, and that the ark of God’s presence was still in the tent of meeting. I do not think we should understand this passage to be in reference to the fact that Samuel slept in the Holy of Holies, this would have been forbidden. Instead, it should be understood in light of the events in the following chapter in which the ark of God was captured and stolen away into the land of the Philistines.

Nonetheless, the word of God came to young Samuel, and he initially did not recognize his voice. After the third attempt, and with the encouragement of Eli, he replied, “*Speak, for your servant hears.*” The message that God gave to young Samuel was simply that He was about to bring judgment on the house of Eli because he had allowed the blasphemy of his sons to go unpunished. Such sins on the part of the High Priest would not be forgiven, and would not be forgotten. This may seem a depressing way to begin one’s prophetic ministry: the delivery of a message of doom to a man that he had undoubtedly come to regard as a father-figure, but it marked the beginning of Samuel’s call and the unique transitory period wherein the final Judge was also a prophet who performed priestly functions, and was used of God to anoint the true king of Israel.

Conclusion: As we conclude the lesson this week, a final point will be made from a redemptive historical perspective in regards to the content of the initial prophecy of the unnamed man of God. God promises that he will bring judgement to the house of Eli and remove him from the priesthood. He then promises that he will raise up a faithful priest who will do according to what is in his heart and mind. This priest will be built a “sure house” and shall go in and out before the Lord’s anointed forever (1 Samuel 2:35). When one bears in mind the fact that a king was not yet promised to the people of Israel up to this point in time, and the priesthood was certainly perceived as remaining with the house of Levi (and Aaron) per God’s earlier promises, the prophecy takes on new meaning. 1 Kings 2:27 reveals the expulsion of Abiathar, the High Priest who descended from Eli, from the priesthood and the appointment of a new priest, Zadok, in his stead. This would seem to be, according to the text, the fulfillment of at least half of the prophecy. Indeed, it was the fulfillment of the part of the prophecy concerning the removal of Eli’s descendants from the priesthood.

However, the other aspect of the prophecy, the appointment of a high priest who would do all that was in the heart and mind of God remained to be fulfilled. These statements are tremors, harbingers of the coming of one who will fulfill the role of both priest and king, who will come through the line of David, and be the anointed of the Lord forever!