



Session 1: Samuel's Birth & Dedication

Introduction

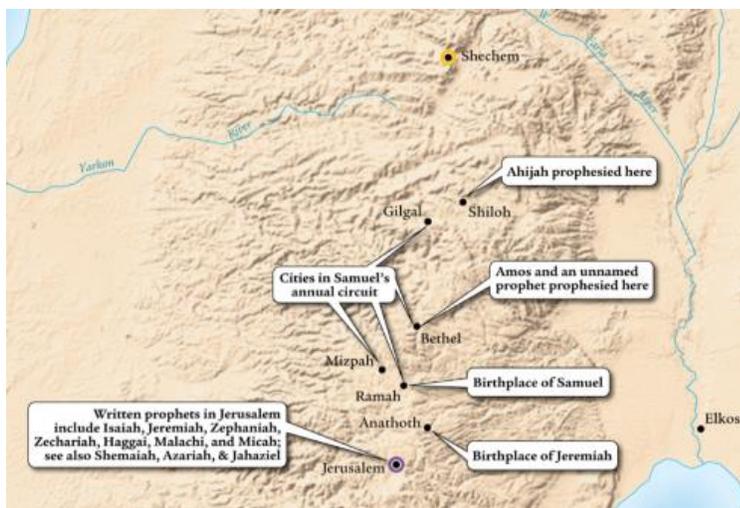
What's a time in life you've thought, "My crazy family is so messed up?" Pick a story or example you feel comfortable sharing.

Samuel's Family

1 Samuel 1:1-20

Background Notes:

- Elkanah is a name meaning "God-acquired/purchased" and is found only among the Levites. Though a Levite (1 Chr 6:27,36), he is called an Ephramite either because he came from there or because he lived in a town within Ephraim. (The Levites, who had no tribal inheritance, lived in towns among the tribes of Israel.)
- The day of sacrifice every year would probably have been one of the three great festivals on the Israelite calendar: either the Feast of Tabernacles (which celebrated God's blessing of the crops) or the Passover.
- The vow Hannah made was known as a Nazarite vow, which Samson and John the Baptist later fulfilled.



Learning Activity: Field Reporter for a Day

Envision that you are a journalist for the *Jerusalem Times*. You have been assigned as a field reporter for the day to interview this interesting family in Ramah for an upcoming human-interest piece. In small group, (1) draft a list a questions you would want to ask this family and (2) anticipate answers you would receive.

Settle the debate among commentators about how and why Eli responded to Hannah:

1. John Mittelstaedt, *People's Bible*, p. 10, "Eli, the high priest, saw her lips move but couldn't hear this prayer of her heart. He rashly concluded that she was intoxicated. It's a sad commentary on religious life in those times that a lone worshiper in the sanctuary should have been accused of drunkenness by the high priest. For Hannah, it was adding insult to injury. She could have been deeply offended."
2. Werner Franzmann, *Bible History Commentary*, p. 341, "We need not put Eli's appraisal of Hannah's behavior down to 'lack of spiritual sensitivity,' as some have done. We should be reminded to practice the Eighth Commandment also when we are interpreting the Scriptures."
3. Robert Bergen, *New American Commentary*, p. 6, "On the one hand, Eli appeared to be doing his job, vigilantly guarding the sanctuary from possible desecration by Hannah, ... on the other hand, he was actually demonstrating his incompetence. Here, as elsewhere, Eli is portrayed as a man unable to distinguish appearance from reality, as a man who himself lacked substance."

Samuel's Dedication

1 Samuel 1:21-2:11

Background Notes:

- Numbers 30:10-15 lets a husband nullify his wife's vow, but Elkanah here shows his faith in confirming her vow, even though it meant losing his firstborn son from his beloved wife.
- It seems the tabernacle has become more permanent since the time of the wanderings and the conquest. It's now known as "the house/temple of the LORD." At the very least, it appears rooms or housing was added in some way for Eli and his sons to be living on the "campus" of the tabernacle. It seems the tabernacle stayed at Shiloh, where Joshua put it, but its whereabouts during the time of the Judges are not known very well.
- Weaning would take about 3-5 years in that culture and time, and so this presentation would have been an exceptional act of faith at this time. This would be analogous to giving up your only child in preschool or kindergarten.
- The term "anointed," referring to the Messiah/Christ, appears in Scripture here for the first time.

Describe Hannah's prayer with one word/phrase. Then describe your prayers this past month with one word/phrase. What can you learn from Hannah's prayer for your own prayer life?

Samuel & Eli's Sons

1 Samuel 2:12-26

Background Notes:

- Robert Bergen, *New American Commentary*, p. 78, writes about the opening in 2:12, “The words cast an ominous pall over the passage and prepare the reader for the sequence of disasters that unfold in chap. 4.”
- It seems that the law did not specifically prescribe the practice or tradition described in 2:12-13, but rather it seems to have developed so that the process for determining the priest's portion was fair.
- In this ancient culture, the fat of an offering was one of the most important parts, since it showed that an animal was healthy. The fat was to be burned up, since it belonged only to the Lord and was not the priests' share (Lev. 3:16, 4:10, Dt 18:3, 1 Sa 2:29).
- These acts of Eli's sons were similar and perhaps based off of the worship practices of the false fertility gods in Canaan – later called Baal & Ashtorah (1 Ki 14:24, 15:12, 16:31-33, 22:46; Hosea 4:14). This was actually a part of their worship, as they viewed their sexual acts as encouraging the gods to do the same, thus sending rain on the land. More on this later.

Agree/Disagree “This was a sham of a rebuke by Eli without any semblance of actual Christian discipline.”

Conclusion

Respond: “Parents these days need to stop forcing religion onto their children's lives. They need to realize that children will grow up and make their own decisions about religion.” Make sure you consider and apply the contrast between Hannah and Eli in your response.