

## **Elkanah**

### **1 Samuel 1-2**

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#### **Introduction**

1 Samuel 1—with Samuel as the lead character, on our way to David. Samuel becomes the foremost leader of Israel after Moses/Joshua and before David. Samuel is the bearer of God's word (3:19-21), the administrator of justice (7:17), and is responsible for much of the life of Israel.

As we come to this chapter, it is clear that we must not hurry to David. The narrative of Samuel's birth and youth (ch. 1-3) is a single literary unit.

Analyzing this section, we see at the center the Song of Hannah [1:1-28; 2:1-10; 2:11-4:1a]. Every assertion from Samuel's birth (1:3-28) to the dream theophany (3:1-10) to the authorization of Samuel (3:19-21) shows Yahweh at the center of Israel. All are creatures of God's sovereignty and agents of God's future.

As we begin the book, Israel is waiting, a marginal community, marginalized by the power and pressure of the Philistines, politically weak, economically disadvantaged. There is also a moral and theological dimension to Israel's problems—moral chaos (cf. end of Judges), undisciplined religion, brutality.

To solve this problem, we move behind the great men, and locate the origin of Israel's future and the source of its "great leaders" in the family of Elkanah, specifically in noting a bereft, barren wife named Hannah. This is an Ephraimite family, a solid pedigree, but the mother is barren with no prospect of children. Israel is waiting, Hannah is waiting, Elkanah is waiting, all in a certain level of hopelessness. In the midst of hopelessness, fruitfulness is all the sweeter.

So the entry point into Israel's waiting is the Elkanah-Hannah-Samuel narrative which is our text today. In some ways, the Elkanah story is the paradigm for the entire drama of Israel's faithful waiting. The chapter is a narrative—begins with problem, ends with resolution. The problem is barrenness—no child, no son, no heir, no future, no historical possibility. The resolution is worship, with the child given and the future opened. This is witness to the transforming power of Yahweh, witness to Yahweh's will to begin again, to create newness in history out of despair. This story, if we listen carefully, violates our reason and reasonableness. Speaking reasonably, Hannah would have no child and Elkanah no heir. Israel would have no future. Rationality is shattered and defeated, exhausted. But God works best when rationality has failed.

#### **I. the problem, 1:1-28.**

**How can there be any real future with bitter, hopeless, fruitless barrenness.**

##### Scene #1, 1:3-8.

Elkanah and Hannah, problem of barrenness, incongruity is love Elkanah has for Hannah, but Hannah's barrenness overrides Elkanah's love. Thus we have a provoked woman, a rival in Peninnah. Hannah is depressed, grieving, and loses her appetite.

##### Scene #2, 1:9-18

Hannah and Eli, 3 speeches. (1) Hannah's vow, v 11. (2) Hannah's self-vindication to refute Eli's mistaken assessment. (3) Eli's response with assurance and benediction/blessing.

##### Scene #3, 1:19-20

Hannah and Elkanah. Terse, minimal words, the priestly promise (v 17) is implemented. God remembers.

##### Scene #4, 1:21-28

Complex, Hannah lingers, but comes to pay her vow, H=faithful, Y=powerful, H=grateful. Thus she worships. Complaint, assurance, thanksgiving.

By moving the typical problem-resolution model toward complaint-assurance, the focus is on the fidelity of Hannah and Yahweh, each to the other. God closed, grants the petition, remembers, grants the petition.

We should say something positive about Elkanah, because he is the one who must approve the giving of his son to the temple. This is wealth being given to God. This is prestige, promise, the firstborn.

## **II. The solution: Hannah's Song, Prayer and Praise, 2:1-10**

- The assertion is that the life and future of Israel have been reopened even as Hannah's womb. If a son can be given in barrenness, who knows what else might be given?
- The song has national dimensions.
- The understanding must be theological—Hannah's status has been changed. God transforms and intervenes for the powerless.
- This song of Hannah becomes the song of Mary and of the church, as the faithful community finds in Jesus the way in which Yahweh will gift the world, turn the world, make right the world.
- This text begins in barrenness redeemed, but barrenness is the penultimate humiliation. The last threat is death, and the most astonishing gift is resurrection.