Hannah and Samuel

Bible Stories Anthology — 1 Samuel 1–3

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> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

A Prayer No One Could Hear

Every year the family went up to worship at the tabernacle, and every year it was the same. Her husband loved her, but she had no children. His other wife had sons and daughters, and she made sure Hannah never forgot it. At the feast, Hannah wept and could not eat.

One year she left the table, went to the door of the house of the LORD, and prayed. Her lips moved, but no sound came out. The old priest sitting by the doorpost watched her and decided she was drunk.

She was not drunk. She was pouring out her soul to God, and she made Him a promise: *give me a son, and I will give him back to You for all the days of his life.*

God heard the prayer no one else could hear. She named the boy Samuel, and when he was old enough, she kept her promise and left him at the house of God. In a time when the priests were corrupt and **"the word of the LORD was precious,"** God spoke in the night to that little boy — and Samuel answered, **"Speak; for thy servant heareth."** He grew up to be the prophet who anointed Israel's first kings, including David, from whose line the Messiah would come.

It all began with a woman who could not have children, and a prayer no one could hear.

The Setting

When. The end of the time of the judges, a generation or so after Samson — in the mid-1100s to the 1000s B.C. by the reckoning most often used. Paul counts the judges **"about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet"** (Acts 13:20). Samuel stands at the turning point between the judges and the kings.

The spiritual condition. The book of Judges ended with the words, **"every man did that which was right in his own eyes"** (Judges 21:25). First Samuel opens in that same dark time. The priesthood at the tabernacle was in the hands of two corrupt men. **"The word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision"** (3:1).

Where. Hannah's husband lived at **Ramathaim-zophim**, usually shortened to **Ramah**, in the hill country of Ephraim. Every year the family went up to **Shiloh**, about twenty miles north of Jerusalem, where Joshua had set up the tabernacle (Joshua 18:1) and where the ark of the covenant had stood for generations. By this time the sanctuary at Shiloh had become a more permanent building with doors and doorposts (1:9; 3:15), and people called it **"the house of the LORD."**

The worship. The Law required every man of Israel to appear before the LORD three times a year (Deuteronomy 16:16). Elkanah went up **"yearly"** with his whole household for a feast of sacrifice and celebration. Part of each peace offering was eaten by the worshippers themselves in a joyful family meal before the LORD.

The family. Elkanah was from the hill country of Ephraim; the genealogies in Chronicles show that his family was descended from Levi (1 Chronicles 6:27-28, 33-34), living among the tribe of Ephraim. He had two wives. Polygamy was allowed in Israel, but every story in scripture where a man has two wives — Abraham, Jacob, Elkanah — shows the jealousy and grief it caused.

The administration. The **Mosaic Law**.

The Story, Told Faithfully

A Husband, Two Wives, and a Closed Womb

> **1 Samuel 1:1** *Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, 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:*
> **1 Samuel 1:2** *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.*

"Hannah." The name means *grace* or *favour*. **"Peninnah"** probably means *pearl* or *coral* — a jewel. It is likely, though the text does not say, that Hannah was the first wife and Peninnah was taken because Hannah had no children, as Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham.

"Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children." In Israel, a childless woman felt not only the ache of an empty home but a kind of disgrace. Children were a sign of God's blessing, and a son carried on the family name and inheritance. Rachel had cried to Jacob, **"Give me children, or else I die"** (Genesis 30:1).

> **1 Samuel 1:3** *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.*

"The LORD of hosts." This is the first time in the Bible this title appears: *YHWH Tseba'oth*, the LORD of armies — the commander of all the hosts of heaven and earth. It is fitting that it first appears in a story about a woman with no power at all.

“Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there.” The narrator plants them in the first scene. We will learn soon what kind of priests they were.

> **1 Samuel 1:4** *And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions:*
> **1 Samuel 1:5** *But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb.*

“Portions.” At the sacrificial meal, the father handed out shares of the meat to each member of the family. Peninnah received a portion for herself and one for every child. The table itself counted out Hannah’s emptiness every year.

“A worthy portion.” The Hebrew is unusual, and its exact sense is uncertain; many take it as a *double* portion, a mark of special love. **“For he loved Hannah.”** Elkanah did what he could.

“The LORD had shut up her womb.” The same thing had been said of Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel before God gave them sons. Scripture often speaks of God *doing* what He *permits* in His ordering of things — the Hebrew idiom of permission. Whatever lay behind Hannah’s barrenness, the story shows where she took it: to God.

> **1 Samuel 1:6** *And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb.*
> **1 Samuel 1:7** *And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat.*

“Her adversary.” The Hebrew word *tsarah* was used for a rival wife. It comes from a root meaning *to bind, to press hard* — the same root as *trouble, distress*. Peninnah’s taunting was deliberate: **“for to make her fret.”**

“Year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD.” The worst of it came at the very time and place set apart to worship God. The happiest feast of the year was, for Hannah, the most painful day.

> **1 Samuel 1:8** *Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?*

Four questions in one breath. Elkanah loved her, and he meant well. But **“am not I better to thee than ten sons?”** shows he did not understand. His love could not fill that place in her, and he could not change what Peninnah did. Only God could.

Pouring Out Her Soul

> **1 Samuel 1:9** *So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD.*
> **1 Samuel 1:10** *And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.*

“Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post.” Eli was the high priest and judge of Israel. He sat at the doorpost of the sanctuary, where he could see who came and went.

“In bitterness of soul.” *Marat nephesh*, bitter of soul. Hannah did not pretend. She took the bitterness itself to God.

> **1 Samuel 1:11** *And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.*

"O LORD of hosts." She used the name that had just been introduced: the Commander of all the armies of heaven. She was a powerless woman calling on the most powerful name.

"Look on … remember me … not forget." Three requests, one after another, each pressing a little harder.

"Thine handmaid." Three times she calls herself God's servant girl. She came humbly.

"I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life." Hannah did not ask for a son to comfort herself or to silence Peninnah. She asked for a son to give back.

"There shall no razor come upon his head." This was the mark of a **Nazarite** (Numbers 6:5), someone set apart wholly to God — like Samson, but this time chosen by a mother's vow.

> **1 Samuel 1:12** *And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth.*
>
> **1 Samuel 1:13** *Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken.*
>
> **1 Samuel 1:14** *And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.*

"She spake in her heart; only her lips moved." In the ancient world prayer was usually spoken aloud. Hannah's is the first silent prayer described in the Bible. She was not performing for anyone. She was speaking to God alone.

"Eli thought she had been drunken." It tells us something sad about the times: at the house of God, during a feast, the high priest's first thought on seeing a woman in fervent prayer was that she was drunk. Drunkenness at the feasts was evidently not unusual. And Eli, who could not see his own sons' sin, misjudged a woman at prayer.

> **1 Samuel 1:15** *And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.*
>
> **1 Samuel 1:16** *Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.*

"I … have poured out my soul before the LORD." A beautiful **metaphor**: she had emptied everything in her, like water poured from a jar, before God. The Psalms use the same picture: **"pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us"** (Psalm 62:8).

"A daughter of Belial." *Belial* means *worthlessness*, *good-for-nothing*. A "son" or "daughter" of something is a Hebrew **idiom** meaning a person characterized by it — here, a worthless, wicked person. Hannah answered the high priest with respect, but she did not accept the false charge. The irony is heavy: in the next chapter, the narrator will call Eli's own sons **"sons of Belial."**

> **1 Samuel 1:17** *Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.*
>
> **1 Samuel 1:18** *And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.*

"Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition." To his credit, Eli changed his mind at once and blessed her.

"Did eat, and her countenance was no more sad." Nothing had happened yet. She was not pregnant. Peninnah had not changed. But Hannah had given the burden to God and believed He had heard her, and her face changed before her circumstances did. This is faith: **"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"** (Philippians 4:6-7).

Asked of God

> **1 Samuel 1:19** *And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her.*
>
> **1 Samuel 1:20** *Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD.*

"And the LORD remembered her." Hannah had prayed, *remember me*. God did. In scripture, when God *remembers*, He acts (compare Genesis 8:1; 30:22).

"Called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD." The name *Shemu'el* sounds like *sha'ul me'el*, "asked of God," and scholars have debated its exact meaning — "name of God," "heard of God," or "God has heard." Hannah's own explanation ties it to her asking. Whatever its roots, every time she called her son, she remembered the prayer that God answered.

Keeping the Vow

> **1 Samuel 1:21** *And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and his vow.*
>
> **1 Samuel 1:22** *But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever.*
>
> **1 Samuel 1:23** *And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the LORD establish his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him.*

"His vow." Elkanah made his own vow as well. Under the Law, a husband could cancel a wife's vow when he heard of it (Numbers 30:6-8). He did not. He stood with her.

"Until the child be weaned." In the ancient Near East children were often nursed until about three years old; a later Jewish writer mentions a mother who nursed her son three years (2 Maccabees 7:27). Hannah had perhaps three years with her son.

> **1 Samuel 1:24** *And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young.*
> **1 Samuel 1:25** *And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli.*

"Three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine." A generous offering. (The ancient Greek translation and a Dead Sea Scroll of Samuel read "a three-year-old bull," which fits the single bull slain in the next verse; either way the gift was costly.) An ephah of flour was about half a bushel. The "bottle" was a wineskin.

"The child was young." The Hebrew says, literally, *the boy was a boy* — a small child.

> **1 Samuel 1:26** *And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD.*
> **1 Samuel 1:27** *For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him:*
> **1 Samuel 1:28** *Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.*

"I am the woman that stood by thee here." Years later, she came back to the same spot and told Eli the end of the story.

"For this child I prayed." One of the simplest and most moving sentences in the Old Testament.

"I have lent him to the LORD." Here the wordplay on *asking* is at its height. The Hebrew verb is *sha'al*, the same word as "asked" in verses 17, 20 and 27. Hannah *asked* God for the child; now she *gives him back as asked*. The phrase **"he shall be lent to the LORD"** uses the passive form *sha'ul* — which is also, letter for letter, the name **Saul**. The boy Hannah gave to God would one day anoint the king named Saul — the king the people *asked* for (1 Samuel 8:10; 12:13). The play on words is a **paronomasia**.

"He worshipped the LORD there." Even the little boy bowed before the LORD.

Imagine what it cost her. She had waited years for a child; she had him for perhaps three; and she gave him away. She kept her word to God.

Hannah's Song

> **1 Samuel 2:1** *And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation.*
> **1 Samuel 2:2** *There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God.*

On the day she left her son at Shiloh, Hannah sang. Her song is one of the great poems of the Bible, and it goes far beyond her own story.

"Mine horn is exalted." The horn of an animal, especially a wild ox, was a picture of strength and dignity. A lifted horn is a **metaphor** for being made strong and honoured.

"My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies." Her mouth, once silent before Peninnah's taunts, was opened wide.

“Neither is there any rock like our God.” *Tsur*, rock: another **metaphor** — God as the unshakeable refuge.

> **1 Samuel 2:3** *Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.*
>
> **1 Samuel 2:4** *The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength.*
>
> **1 Samuel 2:5** *They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.*

“Talk no more so exceeding proudly.” Perhaps with Peninnah in mind, but reaching far wider: God weighs every action.

The great reversal. The mighty broken, the stumbling made strong; the full going hungry, the hungry satisfied; the barren with many children, the mother of many grown weak. The whole song is built on this pattern of reversal — God brings down the proud and lifts up the lowly. It is the figure called **antithesis**, opposites set side by side.

“The barren hath born seven.” Seven is the number of completeness. Hannah herself would have six children (2:21). “Seven” says her joy would be full.

> **1 Samuel 2:6** *The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.*
>
> **1 Samuel 2:7** *The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.*
>
> **1 Samuel 2:8** *He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s, and he hath set the world upon them.*

“The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.” “Grave” is *sheol*, the grave, the place of the dead. Hannah declares that life and death are in God’s hand — the Hebrew often speaks of God *doing* what He *permits* — and, more than that, she declares that God **“bringeth up”** from the grave. As the library’s study *Where Are the Dead Right Now?* notes, this is one of the Old Testament’s early statements of hope in the resurrection: those who go down to the grave, God will bring up again.

“He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill.” The ash heap outside a town was where outcasts and beggars sat. God lifts them to sit with princes. Psalm 113 repeats these very words and ends, **“He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children”** (Psalm 113:7-9).

> **1 Samuel 2:9** *He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail.*
>
> **1 Samuel 2:10** *The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.*

“For by strength shall no man prevail.” The whole story in five words.

“He shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.” This is astonishing. Israel had no king. There would be no king for decades. Yet Hannah sang of God’s **king** and of **“his anointed.”** The Hebrew word is *mashiach — Messiah*. This is the first time in the Bible that God’s “anointed” is used of a king. A woman who had just given up her son looked forward, by revelation, to God’s anointed King, and her own son would be the one to anoint the first kings of Israel. And the song ends where the whole story of the Bible is going: the Messiah exalted.

The Sons of Belial

> **1 Samuel 2:11** *And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest.*
> **1 Samuel 2:12** *Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD.*

“The child did minister unto the LORD.” The small boy served at the sanctuary — opening doors, running errands, learning.

“The sons of Eli were sons of Belial.” The same phrase Hannah had refused to have applied to her. The priests were the worthless ones.

“They knew not the LORD.” They were priests, and they did not know God. They knew the rituals, the robes and the sacrifices; they did not know Him.

> **1 Samuel 2:13** *And the priests’ custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest’s servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand;*
> **1 Samuel 2:14** *And he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither.*
> **1 Samuel 2:15** *Also before they burnt the fat, the priest’s servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw.*
> **1 Samuel 2:16** *And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force.*
> **1 Samuel 2:17** *Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.*

Here is exactly what they did.

The priest’s portion. The Law gave the priests a set share of each peace offering: **“the wave breast and the heave shoulder”** (Leviticus 7:34). Eli’s sons ignored the Law. Their servant plunged a three-pronged fork into the worshipper’s boiling pot and took whatever came up.

“Before they burnt the fat.” Worse, they demanded raw meat before the fat had been burned on the altar. The Law said, **“all the fat is the LORD’s”** (Leviticus 3:16); it was to be burned first, as God’s portion. Eli’s sons took their share before God’s. **“If not, I will take it by force.”** They robbed both the worshipper and God.

“Men abhorred the offering of the LORD.” The worst result was that people began to despise worship itself. Corrupt leaders make people hate what is holy.

> **1 Samuel 2:18** *But Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.*
>
> **1 Samuel 2:19** *Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.*

"But Samuel." The narrator keeps cutting back and forth between the corrupt priests and the faithful child. This is deliberate **contrast**.

"A linen ephod." A simple priestly garment, worn by those who served at the sanctuary.

"His mother made him a little coat … from year to year." A tender detail. Every year Hannah made a new robe, a size larger, and brought it to her growing son. She gave him to God, but she never stopped being his mother.

> **1 Samuel 2:20** *And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The LORD give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home.*
>
> **1 Samuel 2:21** *And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD.*

"The LORD visited Hannah." She gave one son to God, and God gave her five more children. God is no man's debtor.

"The child Samuel grew before the LORD."

Eli's Warning, Unheeded

> **1 Samuel 2:22** *Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.*
>
> **1 Samuel 2:23** *And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people.*
>
> **1 Samuel 2:24** *Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD'S people to transgress.*
>
> **1 Samuel 2:25** *If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them.*

"How they lay with the women that assembled at the door." On top of robbing God and the worshippers, Hophni and Phinehas committed sexual immorality with the women who served at the entrance to the sanctuary (compare Exodus 38:8) — the very thing that marked the Canaanite fertility cults.

"Why do ye such things?" Eli rebuked them — with words. He was the high priest and judge of Israel, and he had the authority to remove them from the priesthood. He did not.

"If a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him?" Eli saw the danger clearly: when the priests themselves sin against God, who is left to make intercession?

"They hearkened not … because the LORD would slay them." This is a hard sentence. The Hebrew says the LORD *was pleased* or *had determined* to put them to death. As this series understands it, and as the library's study *God: Deliverer, Not Destroyer* sets out for judgments of this kind, their persistent, knowing rebellion had already brought them past the point of turning, and God, as the just Judge, had

determined that judgment would fall. It is not that God made them rebel. God says elsewhere, **"I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live"** (Ezekiel 33:11). They had been warned for years, by their father and by the people, and they would soon be warned by a prophet. When judgment came, it came on the battlefield, at the hands of the Philistines (4:11).

> **1 Samuel 2:26** *And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men.*

Again the contrast: the priests heading for judgment, and the child growing **"in favour both with the LORD, and also with men."** Luke uses almost the same words of the boy Jesus: **"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man"** (Luke 2:52).

The Man of God

> **1 Samuel 2:27** *And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house?*
>
> **1 Samuel 2:29** *Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?*
>
> **1 Samuel 2:30** *Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*

"Kick ye at my sacrifice." A **metaphor** from a stubborn animal kicking against its master.

"Honourest thy sons above me." Here was Eli's own sin. He did not do what his sons did, but he honoured them above God — and he ate the meat. **"To make yourselves fat."** The word for *honour* in Hebrew, *kabed*, also means *heavy*, and there may be a grim wordplay: Eli, who honoured (*kabed*) his sons more than God, was himself a *heavy* man (4:18).

"Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." One of the great principles of scripture. "Lightly esteemed" is *qalal*, to be light, of little weight — the opposite of *kabed*. God's promise to Eli's family depended on their faithfulness, and they had despised Him.

> **1 Samuel 2:34** *And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them.*
>
> **1 Samuel 2:35** *And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.*

"In one day they shall die both of them." It happened exactly (4:11). Later Saul massacred the priests of Eli's line at Nob (1 Samuel 22), and Solomon removed the last high priest of that line, Abiathar, **"that he might fulfil the word of the LORD, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh"** (1 Kings 2:27).

"A faithful priest." In the history, Zadok took Abiathar's place (1 Kings 2:35), and his line served for centuries. **"He shall walk before mine anointed"** — before God's *mashiach*, His anointed king. As this series understands it, many readers see a greater fulfilment in Jesus Christ, the faithful high priest who serves forever (Hebrews 2:17; 7:24-25).

“Speak; for Thy Servant Heareth”

> **1 Samuel 3:1** *And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.*

“The word of the LORD was precious.” *Precious* as in *rare*: scarce, like a costly jewel. God was hardly speaking to Israel at all. **“There was no open vision”** — no prophetic revelation spreading abroad. When God’s people turn from Him, one of the first things they lose is hearing Him.

> **1 Samuel 3:2** *And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;*
> **1 Samuel 3:3** *And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep;*

“His eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see.” Eli was going blind — and not only in his eyes. He had not seen the truth about his sons, nor seen Hannah’s prayer for what it was.

“Ere the lamp of God went out.” The golden lampstand in the holy place was to burn **“from evening to morning”** (Exodus 27:21). It was the last hour of the night, just before dawn, while the lamp still burned. As this series understands it, the detail is also a picture: the lamp of God had not yet gone out in Israel — there was still a light, and it was lying there asleep in the person of a boy.

“Samuel was laid down to sleep.” The Jewish historian Josephus says Samuel was about twelve years old. He slept in the sanctuary complex, near the place **“where the ark of God was.”**

> **1 Samuel 3:4** *That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.*
> **1 Samuel 3:5** *And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down.*

“Here am I.” *Hinneni* — the answer of Abraham (Genesis 22:1), Jacob (46:2) and Moses (Exodus 3:4) when God called them. Samuel said the right words without knowing who was calling.

“He ran unto Eli.” Every time, he ran. He was an eager, obedient boy. He assumed the only one who would call him in the night was his master.

> **1 Samuel 3:6** *And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again.*
> **1 Samuel 3:7** *Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.*

“Samuel did not yet know the LORD.” The same words used of Eli’s sons: *they knew not the LORD* (2:12). But the difference is in one word — *yet*. The sons never knew Him and did not want to. Samuel did not *yet* know Him, because God had not yet spoken to him directly. He was about to.

> **1 Samuel 3:8** *And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.*
> **1 Samuel 3:9** *Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.*

“Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.” To Eli’s credit, the old priest recognized what was happening. He had failed his own sons, but he gave this boy the best advice of his life.

“Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth.” Eli taught Samuel how to listen.

> **1 Samuel 3:10** *And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.*

“The LORD came, and stood.” God made His presence known. The text does not say Samuel saw anything; what it describes is a voice, and verse 21 explains how God showed Himself to Samuel: **“by the word of the LORD.”**

“Samuel, Samuel.” When God calls someone by name twice, it is a moment of great importance: **“Abraham, Abraham”** (Genesis 22:11), **“Jacob, Jacob”** (46:2), **“Moses, Moses”** (Exodus 3:4), and in the New Testament, **“Saul, Saul”** (Acts 9:4). The repetition of the same word for emphasis is the figure **epizeuxis**.

“Speak; for thy servant heareth.” Notice what Samuel left out. Eli told him to say, *Speak, LORD*. Samuel said only, *Speak*. Perhaps he was too awed to say the Name. What mattered was that he was ready to listen.

A Hard First Message

> **1 Samuel 3:11** *And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.*
>
> **1 Samuel 3:12** *In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.*
>
> **1 Samuel 3:13** *For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.*
>
> **1 Samuel 3:14** *And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.*

“The ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.” An **idiom** for news so shocking it makes the ears ring. The same phrase is used later of the fall of Jerusalem (2 Kings 21:12; Jeremiah 19:3).

“The iniquity which he knoweth.” Eli knew. That was the heart of it.

“His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.” Eli spoke to his sons, but he did not *restrain* them — the Hebrew means to rebuke with force, to hold back. Words were not enough when he had the power to act. (An ancient Jewish tradition, reflected in the Greek translation, holds that the original text read that his sons *cursed God*, and that scribes softened it out of reverence.)

“Shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.” The priests who had despised the sacrifices would find that no sacrifice could cover them.

The first message God ever gave Samuel was a word of judgment against the old man who had raised him.

> **1 Samuel 3:15** *And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.*
>
> **1 Samuel 3:16** *Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I.*

> **1 Samuel 3:17** *And he said, What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.*
>
> **1 Samuel 3:18** *And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.*

"Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors." He got up and did his ordinary work, carrying the message he dreaded to deliver.

"Samuel, my son." Eli called him *my son* — tenderly, the way he should have been a father to his own sons.

"God do so to thee, and more also." An **oath formula**: *may God punish you, and worse, if you hide anything*. Eli put the boy under oath to tell the truth.

"Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing." The first test of a prophet: telling the truth when it is hard.

"It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good." Eli accepted the word. It was a humble answer — and a weary, passive one. He did not repent, pray, or remove his sons. He accepted the judgment as though nothing could be done.

A Prophet in Israel

> **1 Samuel 3:19** *And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.*
>
> **1 Samuel 3:20** *And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.*
>
> **1 Samuel 3:21** *And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.*

"Did let none of his words fall to the ground." An **idiom**: every word Samuel spoke came true. Nothing he prophesied proved empty.

"From Dan even to Beer-sheba." From the northernmost town to the southernmost — the whole country. A **merismus**, naming the two ends to mean everything between.

"The LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD." Here is how God appeared: by His word. The drought of chapter 3:1 was over. *The word of the LORD was precious* — now it was coming again, through a boy who had learned to listen.

What Came After

The judgment came quickly. Israel went to war with the Philistines and carried the ark of the covenant into battle like a lucky charm. The ark was captured, and **"the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain"** (4:11) — in one day, as the man of God had said. When the news reached Shiloh, Eli, ninety-eight years old and blind, fell backward from his seat by the gate and died. Phinehas's wife died giving birth, and named her son **Ichabod**, **"The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken"** (4:22). Shiloh itself was later destroyed; centuries afterward God pointed to its ruins as a warning (Jeremiah 7:12). Excavations at Tel Shiloh have found a destruction by fire from about this period.

Samuel became judge, priest and prophet to all Israel. He led the nation back to God and to victory over the Philistines (1 Samuel 7). He anointed Saul, Israel's first king, and later anointed the shepherd boy David. Scripture remembers him among the great intercessors: **"Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them"** (Psalm 99:6). It all began with a mother's prayer.

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

"His anointed." Hannah's song is the first place in scripture where God's *anointed* — His *Messiah* — is His king. She sang it before Israel had a king, on the day she gave her son to the one who would anoint Israel's kings. Her words run through the rest of the Bible to Jesus Christ. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, praised God who **"hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David"** (Luke 1:69), taking up Hannah's "horn of his anointed."

Two mothers, two songs. When Mary, carrying the promised child, visited Elisabeth, she sang a song that echoes Hannah's almost line for line:

> **Luke 1:46** *And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,*
> **Luke 1:47** *And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*
> **Luke 1:48** *For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.*
> **Luke 1:52** *He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.*
> **Luke 1:53** *He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.*

Both women call themselves God's *handmaid*. Both rejoice in God their Saviour. Both sing of the great reversal: the mighty brought down, the lowly lifted up, the hungry filled and the rich sent away. Hannah sang of the anointed King to come; Mary carried Him.

"In favour with God and man." The boy Samuel **"was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men"** (2:26); the boy Jesus **"increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man"** (Luke 2:52).

The faithful priest. God promised to raise up **"a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart."** As this series understands it, the promise points beyond Zadok to Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was raised, and ascended to God's right hand, **"a merciful and faithful high priest"** (Hebrews 2:17): **"this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them"** (Hebrews 7:24-25). Where Eli's sons robbed the worshippers and despised the sacrifices, Christ gave Himself as the sacrifice.

The prophets from Samuel on. Peter said of Christ's sufferings and return, **"all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days"** (Acts 3:24). Samuel stands at the head of the line of prophets who pointed to the Messiah.

To the Grace Administration

Pour out your heart. Hannah took her grief straight to God and left it there. Believers are told to do the same: **"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you"** (1 Peter 5:7). And the peace came before the answer, as Philippians 4:6-7 promises.

Prayer beyond words. Hannah prayed with no voice at all. Believers have the gift of holy spirit within, which helps them pray even when they cannot find the words: **"the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered"** (Romans 8:26). **"When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret"** (Matthew 6:6).

Hearing God. In Samuel's day, the word of the LORD was rare. Believers today hold the whole written word, and God speaks through it: **"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"** (Romans 10:17). The prayer of a believer opening his Bible can still be Samuel's: *Speak; for thy servant heareth.*

Raising children for God. Hannah gave her son to God and never stopped caring for him. Eli honoured his sons above God and never restrained them. Believers are told, **"ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"** (Ephesians 6:4). Timothy, like Samuel, knew the scriptures **"from a child"** (2 Timothy 3:15).

Leaders who serve. Eli's sons used their office to take. God's leaders are told to **"Feed the flock of God … not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock"** (1 Peter 5:2-3).

"Them that honour me I will honour." The principle still stands.

To the Topic of Prayer and Hearing God

- **Take the bitterness to God,** not only the polite requests.
- **Faith can change your face before it changes your circumstances.**
- **Keep your promises to God,** even when they cost.
- **God is no man's debtor.**
- **Corruption in leaders makes people despise holy things.**
- **Knowing about God is not knowing God.**
- **Listening is where hearing God begins:** "Speak; for thy servant heareth."
- **A true messenger tells the whole truth,** even when it is hard.

The Main Takeaway

Hannah, barren and taunted year after year, poured out her soul to God in a prayer no one could hear, vowed to give back the son she asked for, and "the LORD remembered her"; she gave Samuel to God at Shiloh and sang a song that foresaw God's King and "his anointed" — the Messiah — before Israel ever had a king; while Eli's corrupt sons, who "knew not the LORD," despised the offerings, the boy Samuel grew in favour with God and men, and in a time when "the word of the LORD was precious," God called him by name in the night and he answered, "Speak; for thy servant heareth" — and through him God's word came again to all Israel.

- **God hears the prayer no one else can hear.**
- **Faith rests before the answer comes.**
- **What we give to God, He does not forget.**
- **Knowing about God is not knowing Him.**
- **Leaders who despise holy things will be judged.**
- **Hearing God begins with a listening heart:** "Speak; for thy servant heareth."
- **Hannah's song looked ahead to the Messiah,** God's anointed King.

For Our Learning — The People

- **Hannah.** Elkanah's beloved, childless wife; prayed, vowed, gave Samuel to God, and sang of God's anointed. Her name means "grace" or "favour."
- **Elkanah.** A man of the hill country of Ephraim, of Levite descent; husband of Hannah and Peninnah; faithful in yearly worship; upheld Hannah's vow.
- **Peninnah.** Elkanah's other wife, with children; Hannah's "adversary."
- **Eli.** High priest and judge at Shiloh; misjudged Hannah, then blessed her; raised Samuel; failed to restrain his sons; died at ninety-eight when the ark was taken.
- **Hophni and Phinehas.** Eli's sons, priests who "knew not the LORD"; robbed the offerings and defiled the sanctuary; killed in one day by the Philistines.
- **Samuel.** Hannah's son, "asked of God"; served at Shiloh from early childhood; called by God in the night; prophet, priest and last judge of Israel; anointed Saul and David.
- **The man of God.** An unnamed prophet who announced judgment on Eli's house.
- **Ichabod.** Phinehas's son, named "the glory is departed."

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **Yearly pilgrimage** to the sanctuary for a feast of sacrifice.
- **Polygamy** and rival wives (*tsarah*); the disgrace of barrenness.
- **Portions** of the peace offering handed out by the father at the family meal.
- **Praying aloud** as the usual practice; Hannah's silent prayer as unusual.
- **Vows to God,** and a husband's power to confirm or cancel them (Numbers 30).
- **The Nazarite sign:** no razor on the head.
- **Nursing a child until about three years old;** a weaning feast.
- **Offerings brought with a child:** bulls, flour, a skin of wine.
- **The priest's portion:** the breast and shoulder, with the fat burned first to God.
- **Three-pronged meat forks** and cooking pots at the sanctuary.
- **The linen ephod** worn by those serving at the sanctuary.
- **A mother's yearly coat** for her child.
- **The lampstand** burning through the night in the sanctuary.
- **Oath formulas:** "God do so to thee, and more also."

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Erotesis (rhetorical question)** — "am not I better to thee than ten sons?" (1:8).
- **Metaphor** — "poured out my soul before the LORD" (1:15); "mine horn is exalted" (2:1); "any rock like our God" (2:2); "kick ye at my sacrifice" (2:29).
- **Idiom** — "a daughter of Belial" (1:16), a worthless woman; "sons of Belial" (2:12); "the ears … shall tingle" (3:11); "let none of his words fall to the ground" (3:19); "God do so to thee, and more also" (3:17).
- **Paronomasia** — *sha'al* "asked" / *sha'ul* "lent" (1:27-28), the sound of the name Saul.
- **Antithesis** — the reversals of Hannah's song: mighty and stumbling, full and hungry, barren and many children (2:4-8).
- **Idiom of permission** — "the LORD had shut up her womb" (1:5); "The LORD killeth, and maketh alive" (2:6).
- **Epizeuxis** — "Samuel, Samuel" (3:10).
- **Merismus** — "from Dan even to Beer-sheba" (3:20), the whole land.
- **Contrast in narrative** — Samuel's faithfulness set again and again beside the sins of Eli's sons.

What the Bible Actually Says

- **Hannah prayed silently;** Eli thought she was drunk.
- **Hannah's face changed before her prayer was answered.**
- **"The LORD remembered her"** — and she named the boy for her asking.
- **Hannah gave Samuel to God when he was weaned,** and made him a coat every year.
- **God gave Hannah five more children.**
- **Hannah's song speaks of God's "king" and "his anointed"** before Israel had a king.
- **Eli's sons "knew not the LORD";** Samuel "did not *yet* know the LORD."
- **Eli rebuked his sons but did not restrain them.**
- **"The word of the LORD was precious [rare] in those days."**
- **God called Samuel four times;** Samuel answered, "Speak; for thy servant heareth."
- **Samuel's first message was judgment on Eli's house,** and he told it all.
- **God revealed Himself to Samuel "by the word of the LORD."**

God's Will and Intent

- **God hears the prayers of the brokenhearted.**
- **God lifts up the lowly and brings down the proud.**
- **God wants leaders who honour Him and serve His people.**
- **God judges persistent, knowing sin** after warning upon warning.
- **God wants His people to hear Him,** and He speaks to those who listen.

- **God was preparing His anointed King** — David, and after him the Messiah, Jesus Christ, crucified, raised, and ascended, the faithful priest who lives forever to intercede for those who come to God by Him.