

# KINGDOMS

## Week 1: I Samuel Chaps. 1-3

### I. Framework:

- When: c. 1100 B.C., end of the Bronze Age, beginning of the Iron Age
- This portion of our Kingdoms reading begins in the city of Shiloh, the current religious center of Israel.
- Authorship is not known conclusively, Jewish tradition is Samuel, Nathan, and Gad (cf. I Chronicles 29:29)
- Large thematic units within I Samuel:
  - Ark Narrative
  - Saul Cycle
  - David's Rise
- Elsewhere in the world:
  - Phoenicians develop their famous alphabet and accelerate their colonizing of the Mediterranean and control over trade.
  - Ramesses XI is pharaoh in Egypt, the last ruler of both the New Kingdom period and Twentieth Dynasty of Egyptian pharaohs.
  - The Greek Dark Age begins after the fall of Mycenaean civilization
  - Tiglath-Pileser I is king of Assyria. Over the next 5 centuries, the Neo-Assyrian Empire would conquer most of the Ancient Near East, including Israel and Egypt.
  - The Shang Dynasty is in decline in China, about to be succeeded by the Zhou Dynasty, which will last longer than any in Chinese history.

### II. Talking Points:

#### A. Chapter 1:

- Elkanah was a Levite, descended from Kohath (I Chronicles 6:33-38). His description as an Ephraimite in 1:1 merely describes where he lives.
- Biblical Law (Mosaic) contained provisions for more than one wife (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Biblical narrative, however, demonstrates that it causes misery (e.g. Jacob-Leah-Rachel).
- The story of the barren wife occurs often in the Hebrew Scriptures:
  - Sarah (as compared to the fertile concubine Hagar)
  - Rachel (as compared to Jacob's first wife Leah, and his two concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah)
  - Samson's mother
- In the ancient world, the inability of a woman to have children was socially and mentally taxing. A woman's value to society and her family was based on produce offspring, especially sons. Society may even assign a woman's infertility to a punishment from God (or gods). This may help us understand why Elkanah showed her love and perhaps even favoritism. It also explains Hannah's request for a male son. The prospect of being blessed by having a son is important that she is willing to give the child up to the Lord's service.
- There is some disagreement about the meaning of the Hebrew words translated "double portion" (NKJV) in verse 5. Scholars debate about that translation versus "one portion", "one double portion", or "special portion". It is clear from Peninnah's reaction that whatever it stands for, it made her jealous.
- Silent prayer was not as common then as we might expect today. Perhaps this is why Eli presupposes that Hannah is intoxicated.
- It is interesting that although it appears Hannah is presenting her requested son as a Nazarite with a life-long commitment to the Lord (v. 11), the legal requirements of a Nazarite do not require permanent status (cf. Numbers 6:1-21).
- Samuel's name means "heard of God" in Hebrew. He remained with his mother until he was weaned, typically about 2-3 years. When that time came, Samuel was taken up to Shiloh to begin his service to God. Elkanah and Hannah take items with them to offer a burnt sacrifice. Numbers 15:8-12 gives details about this sacrifice.
- Some translations say "three bulls" (v. 24) which follows the Masoretic Text. The Dead Sea Scroll fragment 4QSamuel<sup>a</sup> and the Septuagint (LXX) say "three-year-old bull". Some support the "three bulls" translation since they brought enough flour for three separate sacrifices. On the opposite side of the argument, it is worth considering that the bull may have been the same age as Samuel at his weaning. Also, the "bull" in verse 25 is singular.

- The term translated “lent (NKJV) in verse 28 is a Hebrew word that can mean “ask, request, borrow, or beg”. It can also mean, and likely in the case does, “to be given over, grant”. The modern term “lent” normally implies a return or payback to make the lender whole. Hannah, however, will not get Samuel back.

## B. Chapter 2:

- Reading Hannah’s prayer (2:1-10) contains some interesting points:
  - The horn (vv. 1 & 10) is a symbol of strength
  - Hannah recognizes the power of the Lord, knowing He established “the pillars of the earth”. The ancients in the Near East understood the world as a disk (cf. Isaiah 40:22; Proverbs 8:27) supported by pillars. The circle of the heavens was also thought to be supported by “pillars of the heavens” (cf. Job 22:14).
  - Hannah describes a God able to create change:
    - ✓ Bows of the mighty (warriors) are broken, and the fallen (defeated foes) are strengthened (v. 4)
    - ✓ The full have to now work for food, while the hungry are now filled (v. 5a)
    - ✓ The barren woman bears children, while the fertile one is made to be weak and mourn (v. 5b)
    - ✓ The Lord can kill or make alive, He can bring a man near to death, or rescue him (v. 6)
    - ✓ The Lord can change social, authoritative, and economic status (vv. 7-8)
    - ✓ His enemies will be defeated and all the world is subject to Him (v. 10a)
    - ✓ He will support the rulers He establishes (v. 10b)
  - Much debate has taken place on why Hannah refers to an anointed king in verse 10. This verse, contrary to those who erroneously declare that she is referring to Christ, is not to be thrown out even though the monarchy was not yet established in Israel. The idea was not new (cf. Judges 9) and it was an expectation for Israel spoke of centuries before (Genesis 17:6; Numbers 24:17; Deuteronomy 17:14-20). It is reasonable to think that Hannah could envision a future king over Israel.
- The remainder of the chapter can be briefly summarized by contrasting the evil behavior and prophesied decline of Eli’s house with the rise of pious and godly Samuel. Eli’s sons, Hophni (“fighter” in Hebrew) and Phinehas (“mouth of a serpent”) are handling the sacrifices brought to them with great disrespect for God. Compare I Samuel 2:13-17 with Leviticus 3:16 & 7:23-35. The accusation against them in the last half of verse 2:22 is questionable as it is not recorded in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint.
- The priesthood of the house of Eli and his lineage is replaced and the Lord’s Word fulfilled in I Kings 2:26-27.

## C. Chapter 3

- The Lord calls to Samuel three times, the first two times Samuel thought it was his elderly master, Eli. Because this type of conversation and/or revelation was “rare” and not “widespread”, it is not surprising that the immature Samuel doesn’t realize who is actually trying to communicate with him. The wiser and more experienced Eli realizes it and instructs Samuel on how to respond. Samuel’s inexperience and perhaps still undecided mind doesn’t respond exactly as Eli instructed (compare 3:8 and 3:10).
- Samuel is reluctant to share the prophecy given to him. One can see the respect and veneration that Samuel had for his “adopted” parent versus the sheer lack of regard that Eli’s biological sons had for their father. We can deduce that Eli, despite his failures as a father, still has great respect for the Lord by his response to Samuel’s revelation in 3:18. This is also not the first time Eli has been told this.
- Samuel is recognized as a prophet of the Lord throughout Israel. Samuel’s words were heeded by listening ears instead of “falling to the ground” useless. Verse 21 concludes this chapter in interesting and notable contrast to verse 1.

## III. **For Our Learning...**

- Elkanah’s compassion on his barren wife is commendable, especially considering it likely made his relationship with Peninnah more difficult. We need to love our spouse deeply and recognize the gift they are to us. Elkanah is shown to be a pious man who fears God, likely why he cherishes others.
- Hannah’s faith in God is evident from verses 18-19 of Chapter 1. She seems to take Eli’s blessing as a sign that God will fulfill her request. Her willingness to give up the greatest blessing God would give her is amazing. How much are we willing to sacrifice for God’s service?
- When we recognize and heed the Word of God revealed to us in the Bible, God begins to work in our lives. Even perhaps after we leave him for a while, the powerful Word can restore us to an active relationship with Him. Samuel’s faith, trust, and willingness to carry out the Lord’s work revived the “ears” of Israel to listen to His voice.