

1 SAMUEL 1

I. ANTICIPATION OF THE MONARCHY (1:1-2:10)

A. THE BIRTH OF THE KING MAKER (1:1-20)

Appropriately the story of Israel's monarchy begins with an account of the early life of Samuel the king maker. God chose Samuel to anoint both Saul and David, Israel's first two kings. Each was to be the "leader" (נָגִיד, *nāgîd*) over his people (1 Sam 10:1; 13:14; 16:13).

1. Hannah's Plight (1:1-8)

1:1 The NIV does not render the conjunction *waw* (ו, "now," NASB) with which v. 1 begins in the Hebrew. The independent histories of Ruth, Esther, and Jonah also begin with this conjunction. Therefore, the *waw* appears to be the formal opening to a historical narrative, without any connecting force.¹ The opening verse here is unlike v. 1 of Joshua and Judges in that those books are linked to preceding events by the first line of text. First Sam 1:1 signals that Israel is about to march down a different path, one which does not have its genesis in recent events. The verse sketches the background for the events of the birth story utilizing a pattern of gradually increasing specificity.

A certain man: lit., "one man," is an idiom sometimes used to indicate a person without rank or position (2 Sam 18:10; Judg 9:53). Here the description of Samuel's father is very similar to that of Samson's father (Judg 13:2) in that the idiom is accompanied by

¹*Contra* Kirkpatrick (1:43) who argues that the *waw* is intended as a linking device to the Book of Judges which immediately precedes the Book of Samuel in the Hebrew Bible.

(1) his town, (2) his tribal area, (3) his name, and (4) his marital status.² The “certain man” is more precisely identified in three ways.

1. As to location, the “certain man” was from “Ramathaim” (“the two Ramahs or heights”).³ This name, which appears only here in the Bible, is the more technical name for Ramah (“the height”) in v. 19. The name suggests (1) that a new village had sprung up alongside an old Ramah or (2) that this village was built near or on two hills. The writer uses “Ramathaim” to distinguish Samuel’s birthplace from the more prominent Ramah of Benjamin (Josh 18:25; Judg 19:13; et al.) and at least three other towns of the same name. Ramathaim has not yet been located.⁴

The Hebrew term rendered **Zuphite** by the NIV actually is part of the name of the town. A more accurate rendering would be “Ramathaim-zophim” (NASB).⁵ Some understand *zophim* (צֹפִים, *šôphîm*) to be a common noun meaning “Watchers,” perhaps expressing the idea that at one time the hills of Ramah had been used as lookout posts. The name of the town in English would then be “Ramahs of the Watchers.” The NIV connects *zophim* with Zuphites or descendants of Zuph, an ancestor of Elkanah. Ramathaim was located in an area called “the district of Zuph” (1 Sam 9:5f.). This region apparently had been settled by Zuph or Zophai (1 Chr 6:26,35).

Ramathaim was located in **the hill country of Ephraim**, lit., “the hill of Ephraim.” The NIV rightly interprets this phrase as a reference to a range of hills. The mountainous backbone of Palestine is referred to as *har*, i.e., hill country. The southern part of this range of hills is called “the hill country of Judah,” and the northern part took its name from the dominant tribe of the area, viz., Ephraim.

²The similarity between the introductions of the two fathers is probably intentional. It highlights the dedication of both Samson and Samuel as Nazirites to the Lord from birth (Youngblood, 570).

³“Ramathaim” appears to be a dual form. Youngblood (570), however, thinks it is not intended to be a grammatical dual, but rather possesses locative force.

⁴In Bible atlases Ramathaim is (1) equated with Ramah in Benjamin (ZA); (2) not listed (MBA); (3) identified with Rentis, New Testament Arimathea (OBA; Rogerson) located sixteen miles east of Joppa on the west slope of the hill country of Ephraim (Matt 27:57).

⁵The NIV translation is based on an emendation of the text, proposed by a number of scholars, who read *zuphi* for *zophim*.

The hills and valleys of this region are well watered and remarkable for their fertility.

2. As to ancestry, the “certain man” came from a family which elsewhere is traced back to Kohath, the son of Levi (1 Chr 6:1ff.). Here his genealogy to the fourth generation is recorded.⁶ This may mean that Elkanah belonged to a noble and well-known family. More likely, however, the genealogy has been recorded because of the importance of Samuel, Elkanah’s son, whose birth is the focus of the chapter. Why is Samuel not called a Levite in the book of Samuel? No doubt the reason was that the work of Samuel as the last of the judges and the first of a new line of prophets did not rest upon his Levitical descent, but upon his prophetic call. The fact that Samuel belonged to God by virtue of the vow made by his mother is not at variance with his Levitical descent. Levites were not required to serve at the central sanctuary until their twenty-fifth year, and even then only as they were needed. Samuel’s mother offered him in lifelong service under the terms of a Nazirite vow.

The pedigree of Samuel appears also in 1 Chr 6:13-11 and 1 Chr 6:18-20. The variations are such as often appear in parallel lists of names in the Old Testament. While some attribute such variations to deliberate alteration for religious purposes, conservative scholars suggest these different readings are the result of (1) errors in scribal transmission, (2) name change over time, (3) genealogical selectivity of the narrator, or (4) double names for the same individual.

Table 4		
The Genealogy of Samuel		
1 Sam 1:1	1 Chr 6:26-28	1 Chr 6:33-35
(Samuel)	Samuel	Samuel
Elkanah	Elkanah	Elkanah
Jeroham	Jeroham	Jeroham
Elihu	Eliab	Eliel
Tohu	Nahath	Toah
Zuph	Zophai	Zuph

⁶Eslinger (*Kingship*, 66f.) thinks the names in Elkanah’s genealogy are important only because of their unimportance. As stated here, the genealogy accomplishes nothing in the way of legitimation. “Samuel’s natural lineage grants him no claim to any important rank. If he has or attains any status at all it is not because of his family tree.”

3. As to civil standing, Elkanah was an **Ephraimite**, lit., *Ephra-thite*. Two other times in the Hebrew Bible this term is applied to Ephraimites (Judg 12:5; 1 Kgs 11:26), and the NIV correctly has understood it here. Levites had no tribal territory of their own. They originally were assigned forty-eight cities scattered throughout the tribes of Israel. Apparently it was the practice to reckon Levites as belonging civically to the tribes to which they were attached (cf. Judg 17:7).⁷ Elkanah is called an Ephraimite either (1) because he belonged to a Levitical family which originally had been assigned to the territory of Ephraim (Josh 21:20); or (2) because Ramathaim was located in the tribal territory of Ephraim, or at least in the hill country of Ephraim.⁸

1:2 Elkanah was the only commoner in the books of Samuel and Kings specifically mentioned as having more than one wife. One was named **Hannah** (“Grace”; cf. Anna in Luke 2:36) and the other **Peninnah** (“Coral” or “Pearl”). Perhaps he took the second wife because Hannah was barren. By her barrenness Hannah was being tested like several famous women before her (Gen 11:30; 25:21; 29:31; Judg 13:2).

1:3 Elkanah is represented as a pious man. The term translated **went up . . . to the LORD** is the technical language for a religious pilgrimage. The verb form has frequentative force. This verse sets forth four facts about Elkanah’s worship.

⁷In certain passages an Ephraimite refers to a citizen of Bethlehem (1 Sam 17:12; Ruth 1:2) because Bethlehem was known as Ephrathah (Gen 35:19; 48:7; Ruth 4:11; Micah 5:2). In Ps 132:6 the term is perhaps applied to a district where Kirjath Jearim was located on the border of Judah and Benjamin. Both Ephrathah and Ephraim mean “fruitful.” Baldwin (51) thinks that the text is claiming Elkanah had connections with Bethlehem. She points out that there were connections between Levites of Bethlehem and the hill country of Ephraim (Judg 17:7-12; 19:1-21). If Elkanah traced some family connections to Bethlehem, it would be natural that his son Samuel should return there to offer his sacrifice (1 Sam 16:2), even though the family more recently had been worshipping at Shiloh.

⁸Two unacceptable explanations of divergence between the Levitical and Ephraimite ancestry of Elkanah have been advanced: (1) because the Ephraimite Samuel was attached to the sanctuary by his Nazirite vow, the Levitical authorities could claim him as their own; and (2) Chronicles represents a later and inaccurate attempt of the priestly authorities to claim for this priest-like character a Levitical ancestry.

1. The time of his pilgrimage. **Year after year** is lit., “from days to days,” a phrase which elsewhere refers to a statutory annual religious observance. Elkanah made annual religious pilgrimages with his family. Did he ignore the Mosaic requirement to attend three annual festivals (Passover and Pentecost in the Spring, Tabernacles in the Fall) at the central sanctuary? (cf. Exod 34:23; Deut 16:16). Not necessarily. Families were not required to attend any festival. Elkanah, however, took his family to the central sanctuary annually (cf. Deut 12:10-12). Perhaps as a Levite (see above) he had responsibilities at the other two annual festivals. On the other hand, Elkanah may not have been as circumspect in observing the law of Moses as he should have been. The annual festival here may have been Passover.⁹

2. The purpose of the pilgrimage. Elkanah went from his town (Ramathaim) **to worship and sacrifice** to the Lord Almighty. The term “worship” means lit., “to bow down or prostrate oneself before a superior, whether monarch or deity.” The word speaks primarily to the attitude of the heart. “Sacrifice” refers to the presentation of an animal which was slain at the altar in a ritual jointly administered by worshiper and priest. Four basic sacrifices are described in the law of Moses: (1) the burnt offering which symbolized complete consecration, (2) the peace or fellowship offering, (3) the sin offering, and (4) the trespass offering. What follows in the chapter suggests that the peace or fellowship offering was the highlight of the festival (Lev 7:11-18).

The name of God here is literally “Yahweh of hosts.” The NIV has followed the lead of most English versions by substituting the word LORD (small caps) for the tetragrammaton, the four-letter name for God (יהוה, YHWH). This name was regarded by Jews in post-Old Testament times as so sacred that it ceased to be uttered. In time the accurate pronunciation of the name was lost. Jews would substitute the Hebrew equivalent of the word “Lord” when they came across the tetragrammaton in the Bible. The best scholarly guess as to how the name was pronounced in ancient times is *Yahweh*. The name means something like “he who exists,” or “he who causes things to exist.”

⁹The Hebrew expression rendered “year after year” is found in Exodus 13:10 in reference to the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread which immediately followed. Youngblood (571) thinks the festival was Tabernacles in the fall of the year. On the other hand, the annual sacrifice may have been a traditional family gathering unrelated to any of the prescribed feasts.

Here the name Yahweh is combined with “hosts” to form a special title for the God of Israel. This is the first of some 260 usages of this title. The complete title would be “Yahweh God of Hosts” (e.g., 2 Sam 5:10). The term “hosts” is used in the Old Testament of (1) the stars (Gen 2:1; Deut 4:19; et al.), (2) the angels (1 Kgs 22:19; Ps 103:21), and (3) the armies of Israel (Num 1:52; 1 Sam 17:45; et al.). Attributing to God the authority over all hosts in heaven and on earth is a way of underscoring divine power. This majestic name for God, appearing at the inception of the Israelite monarchy, describes him in a way that is much more royal than military.¹⁰ Polemically, the title “Yahweh of hosts” proclaims the Lord as superior to sun, moon and stars which were the objects of worship among the ancient peoples (Deut 4:19; Job 31:26-28).

3. The place of the pilgrimage. Elkanah went up to **Shiloh** (MBA, p. 82), a town in Ephraim, “east of the road that goes from Bethel to Shechem” (Judg 21:19). Archaeology has indicated that Shiloh (modern ruin called “Seilun”) was a new city, first built by Israelites.¹¹ The tabernacle had been located here since the days of Joshua (Josh 18:1). A platform (400' × 70') roughly hewn out of the rocky hillside is still visible there. This may have been the site of the tabernacle (Goldman, 2).

4. The impediments to the pilgrimage. The piety of Elkanah in going up to Shiloh regularly is here contrasted with the inactivity with the Elides who were merely there. At Shiloh the leading priests were **Hophni and Phinehas**, the **sons of Eli**. Either due to age, or to the other duties of judgeship, Eli seems to have delegated priestly responsibilities to his sons. These two are mentioned because (1) they were ranking priests, likely in line to become the high priest; (2) they figure prominently in one of the greatest tragedies which befell the people of God prior to the monarchy; and (3) these two prominent

¹⁰J.P. Ross, “Jahweh *S'ba'oth* in Samuel and Psalms,” *VT* 17 (1967): 76-92; T.N.D. Mettinger, “YHWH SABAOTH – The Heavenly King on the Cherubim Throne,” *SPDS*, 109-138. Eslinger (*Kingship*, 70), however, thinks the name introduces Yahweh as “the warrior god [*sic*] who will play such an important role in connection with the ark in chs. 4–6.” F.M. Cross (*CMHE*, 69-71) claims to have found parallels to this title in the Ugaritic texts. He concludes that this was a creation formula which originally meant “he who creates the (heavenly) armies.”

¹¹I. Finkelstein, “Shiloh Yields Some, but Not All, of Its Secrets,” *BAR* 12 (Jan-Feb 1986): 22-41.

priests illustrate the terrible state of corruption into which the priesthood had fallen (Spence, 295). Hophni and Phinehas were reprobrates and hypocrites. Yet Elkanah did not let their presence at Shiloh and their public leadership in ritual activities deter him from fulfilling the duty to express his worship at that shrine.

1:4-5 In the peace or fellowship offering, (1) the blood was poured out at the foot of the altar, (2) the fat was burned on the fire, (3) the breast and right shoulder were given to the priest, and (4) the rest of the animal was cooked and eaten in a joyous celebration by the worshiper and his family before the Lord in the courtyard of the tabernacle (Lev 7:11-34). Elkanah carved the meat for his family and dispensed portions to each family member. Hannah received a **double portion** (lit., “one portion for two faces”). Perhaps he gave to her his portion, as well as that which would normally be hers. In this way Elkanah (1) publicly proclaimed his love for her above his wife Peninnah and (2) expressed his sympathy for her barrenness. The words **the LORD had closed her womb** serve as (1) an implicit claim to inspiration (for who but the Lord could reveal such a fact) and (2) a signal that God was at work behind the scenes.

1:6-8 The Hannah story is one of several in the Bible where a barren wife is given a child by the Lord. Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Samson’s mother are examples of women who, for long periods of time, had to deal with the Eastern stigma of childlessness. These accounts serve to underscore the importance of the child who is born as well as the piety and faith of the parents involved. Four points are emphasized in these verses.

1. The plan of God (v. 6a). The statement that God had **closed her womb** is made twice. This suggests that God directly and actively restrained the womb of Hannah for his own sovereign purposes. This should not be viewed as a judgment for some sin in her life necessarily, but as a trial which would refine her priorities and faith. The painful experiences of life often drive a believer to make commitments and promises he otherwise would not be inclined to make.

2. The provocation of Peninnah (v. 6b). On **went up**, see v. 3. **The house of the LORD** refers to the tabernacle. Peninnah is called Hannah’s **rival** (רִיבָא, *ṣārāh*). Some think that a better rendering of the word here is “fellow-wife” (Goldman, 3). Peninnah’s spitefulness was triggered by Elkanah’s public display of affection for Hannah. She used her fertility to lord it over Hannah (cf. Gen 16:4; 30:1-24). She **kept provoking** Hannah, perhaps by making an ostentatious exhibition of

her children (Clarke, 107). One of the most detestable manifestations of malice is exultation over the misfortunes of others. Jealousy, grief, anger, and malice are some of the bitter fruits of polygamy. Peninnah had as her aim to **irritate** (lit., “to thunder against,” i.e., browbeat or bully) Hannah.

3. The pain of Hannah (v. 7). Peninnah’s provocation was an irritation to Hannah. Year after year the little family drama was played out. Elkanah gave Hannah the extra portion. Peninnah provoked Hannah to tears. Hannah would become so upset she could not participate in the religious meal. What was supposed to be a joyous feast became a miserable experience for all concerned.

4. The pity of Elkanah (v. 8). The Narrator emphasizes the special relationship between Hannah and Elkanah by attaching the seemingly redundant description **her husband** to the proper name. He is never described as Peninnah’s “husband,” though he of course was married to her. Elkanah addressed his grieving wife with exceptionally loving words of consolation. His four questions (v. 8), though of small comfort to his distraught wife, stress that in terms of their marriage she had nothing to worry about. **Why are you downhearted?** is literally “Why is your heart bad?” i.e., not so much sad, but resentful, angry and full of spite.¹² In response to Peninnah’s provocation, Hannah had developed a bad attitude. The fourth question — **Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?** — may have been an effort to use humor to wipe away Hannah’s tears. If taken more seriously, this question means something like “Am I not more devoted to you than ten sons would be?” He (wrongly) thought that his love for her would remove the pain of not having a child.

2. Hannah’s Prayer (1:9-18)

1:9-11 1. The time of her prayer (v. 9a). Apparently Hannah humored her husband by eating, for the text next declares, literally, “And Hannah arose after eating¹³ in Shiloh and after drinking.”

¹²The only precise parallel for this phrase is Deut 15:10 which forbids giving with a “grudging” (lit., “bad”) heart.

¹³The NIV has followed the LXX in supplying the third person masculine plural suffix to the infinitive construct, i.e., “after they had finished eating . . .”

Perhaps Hannah **stood up** merely to leave the table where the religious meal was eaten. The words could also be taken to be a reference to the posture of her prayer. Presumably she was in the courtyard of the Lord's house. **In Shiloh**, as in v. 3, serves to reinforce the contrast between this pious woman and the Elide priest who just happened to be sitting there (Eslinger, *Kingship*, 76).

2. The witness to her prayer (v. 9b). Eli was a **priest**, indeed he seems to have held the office of high priest. He belonged to the house of Ithamar, Aaron's fourth son (1 Chr 24:1,3).¹⁴ Eli was sitting on a **chair** (lit., "the chair," i.e., his special chair). He was a judge as well as a priest. The chair may have been his official seat of judgment. Eli was **sitting by the doorpost** or gateway. The seats of high officials were commonly placed close to posts or pillars (cf. 2 Kgs 11:14; Ezek 46:2). He was sitting in a prominent place where all the people could have access to him. From this position Eli could survey the courtyard where, presumably, Hannah was standing and facing the sanctuary itself. The **LORD's temple** could also be rendered "Lord's palace." That sanctuary was designated a "palace," not because of external magnificence, but because it was there that the King of Israel manifested himself from time to time in the glorious cloud called *Shekinah*. Some think the word "temple" suggests that the old tabernacle had been surrounded by a more permanent structure.¹⁵

3. The earnestness of her prayer (v. 10). She prayed **in bitterness of soul**. Her inward agony was expressed outwardly in that she **wept much**. Her faith and faithfulness are indicated in the fact that she **prayed to the LORD**, i.e., Yahweh. Under the circumstances she might have been tempted to follow the lead of many of her countrymen and address her prayer to some fertility goddess. Three times in the Hebrew in v. 11 she refers to herself as the Lord's **servant** (lit.,

¹⁴The last high priest mentioned prior to Eli was Phinehas, the son of Eleazar (Judg 20:28). Scripture says nothing about the circumstances which caused the high priestly succession to pass from the house of Eleazar to that of Ithamar.

¹⁵Other terms supposed to point to a permanent structure are "doorpost" (v. 9) and "doors of the house" (1 Sam 3:15). The Hebrew **הֵיכָל** (*hēkal*) is used of (1) a royal palace, (2) the temple, and (3) heaven as the true temple of Yahweh. It is applied to the tabernacle here and in 1 Samuel 3:3. In some psalms attributed to David, this term may be used of the tabernacle as well (cf. Ps 5:7). Psalm 27 describes God's sanctuary as a "temple" (v. 4) and a "tabernacle" (v. 6).

“handmaid”). By referring to herself in this manner, Hannah reveals her piety and humility.

4. The content of her prayer (v. 11). As part of her prayer, Hannah made a vow, a solemn and irrevocable commitment. Under the law of Moses, Hannah was duty bound to report this vow to her husband. As head of the family, he had until sundown to cancel the vow if he did not agree with it. The fact that the terms of this vow were in fact fulfilled, indicates that Elkanah, in effect, joined his wife in this vow.¹⁶

The vow was addressed to the **LORD Almighty** (lit., “Yahweh of hosts”; cf. v. 3). This vow was conditional. It was couched in an *If . . . then* format. Hannah asked that the Lord (1) take note of her misery, (2) remember her, and (3) give her **a son** (lit., “male-seed”). Childless women felt that they had been forgotten by God. The Lord would show that he had not in fact abandoned her, by giving her a son. In accordance with the custom of the time, Hannah asks, not for a child, or children, but for a son.

If God would give her a son, Hannah promised to give that son back to the Lord. In the light of what follows, Hannah meant to give the child to the service of the Lord in his sanctuary. She proposed to deny herself the pleasure of that child in the household. No greater self-denial was possible. As a Levite the son normally would serve at the tabernacle from age twenty-five or thirty to fifty. Hannah, however, proposed a dedication which would be **for all the days of his life**. The outward sign of the son’s dedication to the Lord would be that **no razor will ever be used on his head**. The uncut hair was the outward badge of one who took a Nazirite¹⁷ vow. The growth of the hair may have symbolized the complete dedication of all the man’s powers to the Lord (Kirkpatrick, 1:47) or his separation from the usual customs of life (R.P. Smith, 12). In addition, Nazirites were not permitted to drink wine or touch any dead thing (Num 6).¹⁸

¹⁶The law of vows, with special limitations in the case of married women, is given in Num 30.

¹⁷Although the term *Nazirite* is absent in 1 Samuel, it is surely presupposed. The Dead Sea Scroll fragment 4QSam^a states at the end of v. 22: “I gave him to be a Nazirite forever all the days of his life.” Early Jewish tradition is unanimous in recognizing Samuel as a Nazirite.

¹⁸A Nazirite’s abstinence from wine symbolized avoidance of any indulgence which might cloud the mind and render the man unfit for prayer or

1:12-14 As Hannah kept on praying (lit., “multiplied to pray,” i.e., prayed long and hard), **Eli observed** (lit., “was observing”) **her mouth**. Since she was praying inwardly (lit., “speaking upon her heart”), he noticed her lips quivering, but did not hear her voice. Eli jumped to the conclusion that a woman speaking to herself in the court of the Lord must be drunk. This priest could not recognize true piety when he saw it. Eli rebuked her with a question (“**How long will you keep on getting drunk?**”) and issued an order: **Get rid of your wine**, i.e., go away and sleep off your intoxication. This may be said in defense of Eli’s actions: (1) The high priest had the responsibility to guard the courtyard of the Lord’s temple from anything that would defile it. (2) Apparently drinking abuses were not uncommon in the precincts of the Lord’s house during festival celebrations (cf. Judg 9:27). (3) Silent prayer was unusual at the time.

1:15-16 Eli’s false accusation provided Hannah with the opportunity to proclaim her abstinence from alcoholic beverages, a basic requirement for a woman who would bear a Nazirite (cf. Judg 13:4). Though she had been injured by the harsh accusation, Hannah’s response was polite but firm. She refers to the high priest by the respectful **my lord**. Again she referred to herself in a deferential way as **your servant**. Hannah had been drinking (v. 9), but not intoxicants. Her response proves that the term “drinking” in the Bible does not necessarily refer to drinking intoxicants. She explained her demeanor as due to the fact that she was **deeply troubled** (lit., “a woman of hard, difficult, or severe spirit”). She explained her actions by saying **I was pouring out my soul to the LORD**, a vivid idiom for praying earnestly. She was praying out of **great anguish** (caused by her childlessness) **and grief** or provocation (caused by Peninnah’s taunting). Only a **wicked woman** (lit., “a daughter of worthlessness”) — a good for nothing woman¹⁹ — would appear drunk at the house of the Lord. She begged Eli not to regard her in this way. Here is a striking irony. The man who in the following

work for the Lord. Avoiding contact with the dead symbolized abhorrence for all moral defilement. The LXX inserts here “and he will not drink wine or any intoxicating beverage.”

¹⁹The KJV rendered the word as a proper name, *Belial*. The word traditionally has been explained as a compound of *b’li* (“without”) and *ya’al* (“worth”). The term is used to describe one who rebelled against all authority and social order (Judg 19:22; 1 Sam 10:27).

chapter could not recognize that his own sons were “sons of worthlessness” here falsely accused a godly woman of conduct which might be expected from a “daughter of worthlessness.”

1:17-18 Eli accepted Hannah’s explanation, though without apology for his error in judgment. Once he saw the genuineness of her need and the sincerity of her faith, he did his best to reassure her. He dismissed her with the traditional salutation of peace (**go in peace**), and added the wish or promise that her petition will be fulfilled.²⁰ Jewish commentators generally opt for interpreting Eli’s words as a promise. In any case, this is the only passage which actually shows a priest blessing an individual worshiper (Gordon, 75). Ironically, Eli is approving a request for his successor.

Hannah expressed the wish that she might continue to be viewed with favor by the old priest. This is an oblique request for his continued prayer. Hannah then **went her way**, i.e., returned to her regular activities. Though the formal religious meal had concluded (v. 9), Hannah was now ready to eat that of which she was unable to partake earlier (v. 7). **Her face was no longer downcast**, literally, “no longer to her [as it had been previously].” She was confident that now at last God had heard her prayer.

3. Hannah’s Presentation (1:19-20)

1:19-20 The day following the religious festival, Elkanah’s family again worshiped before the Lord at his sanctuary. Then the family returned home to Ramah, the Ramathaim of v. 1.

The Narrator notes that Elkanah **lay with Hannah**, literally, “knew Hannah his wife,” a common euphemism for sexual intimacy. **The LORD remembered her**, as she had asked him to do (v. 11), and as he had remembered Rachel in a similar situation (Gen 30:22). This means that God heard her prayer and removed whatever impediment there may have been to conception. The words **in the course of time** (lit., “at the coming around of days”) suggest that the

²⁰Grammatically the words of Eli could either be a wish or a promise. The JB, NASB, and NIV render them as a wish; the BV takes this as a promise; the ASV, NKJV, and NRSV render Eli’s words with the same ambiguity which they have in the Hebrew.

conception did not take place immediately,²¹ but later as a result of the normal connubial intercourse between husband and wife.

Hannah named the child. The names of children were given sometimes by the fathers (e.g., Gen 4:26; 5:29), and sometimes by the mothers (e.g., Gen 4:1; 19:37). The child was named **Samuel**. Among the early Israelites names were frequently compound, with one part, as here, including an appellation of God. In this name the final *el* is one of the generic names for the Deity in the ancient world. The meaning of the first part of the name "Samuel" is disputed. Some interpret "Samuel" to mean "name of God" or "his name is God." The derivation of this name, however, is by way of assonance rather than of etymology. The name appears to be a contraction of the Hebrew expression which means "asked from God" or "heard of God." Hannah explained the reason for giving the boy this name when she said, "**Because I asked the LORD for him,**" (lit., "from Yahweh I asked him"). "From Yahweh" by position in the sentence is emphatic. The lackluster genealogy of v. 1 is now superseded by that which gives Samuel his true credentials: he is from Yahweh.

B. REPORT OF SAMUEL'S BIRTH (1:21-28)

1:21-23 When the time for the annual festival arrived the following year, Elkanah **went up with all his family**. He had a double reason for going to the central sanctuary at Shiloh: (1) to offer the **annual sacrifice** (lit., "the sacrifice of days"), and (2) **to fulfill his vow**. Elkanah himself must have taken a vow either in anticipation of the birth of the son, or in gratitude for the birth of that son.²² His vow concerned offering special sacrifices. This is indicated in the Hebrew by the fact that the term **vow** is the second object of the verb "offer" or "sacrifice," the verb "fulfill" not being represented in the Hebrew text.

²¹W. McKane (34) points to a similar phrase in Exod 34:22 used in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles. If this is the case, then Samuel was born just as Elkanah was about to make the annual pilgrimage to Shiloh.

²²Others contend that Elkanah had accepted Hannah's vow as his own in conformity with Numbers 30:1ff., and had ratified the same by adding to it a thank offering of his own. Eslinger (*Kingship*, 86) proposes a modest emendation of the text by taking the last words of v. 21 as the first of v. 22, which then would read: "but with a vow Hannah did not go up." In this case the text makes no reference to a vow by Elkanah.