

### I Samuel

#### Lesson 3 - Chapters 1 and 2

Let's continue with our study of 1st Samuel. Hannah was barren, a degrading and humiliating condition for a woman of the ancient Middle East. Her husband Elkanah, a prosperous man, had taken two wives and the other, P'ninah, had provided Elkanah with the always needed and prized male heir (as well as other children to grow his family). As one might expect the two **sara** (Hebrew for "co-wives") were rivals for Elkanah's love and attention. Somewhat surprisingly we find that it was the barren co-wife Hannah whom Elkanah loved more than the other, which goes a long way towards explaining why the fertile supplier of Elkanah's offspring had an especially bitter attitude and quarrelsome relationship with Hannah. P'ninah never missed an opportunity to rub it in that Hannah was essentially a freeloader who had not done her womanly duty of bearing children.

For Hebrews the inability of a woman to conceive a child carried serious religious overtones with it. In other ancient societies fertility was just as important as it was for the Israelites, however the issue was societal, not spiritual. Certainly having many children was as important to the pagan husband and his wife, so they would go to Ba'al and Ashtoreth (or their counterparts in whatever god system was in use by their particular culture), as they were the recognized god and goddess of fertility. The married couple would pray and ask this god tandem for children, and if that didn't happen then they would sacrifice and pray to these gods to remedy the situation. But unlike for the pagan world that simply beseeched the gods for their help to have a large family (which was but a personal desire), to the Hebrew mind it was a matter of obedience to Yehoveh and thus a spiritual duty that a woman brings new life into the world, as this was commanded by the God of Israel in Genesis.

***CJB Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in the likeness of ourselves; and let them rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the animals, and over all the earth, and over every crawling creature that crawls on the earth." 27 So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them: God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and every living creature that crawls on the earth."***

Thus for a Hebrew wife or concubine to be barren it was essentially viewed as disobedience to God, and the consequence was very public. Yes, it may have been suspected that the woman's body was malfunctioning and thus it was out of her control; however that didn't make it any less her fault. Generally such a malfunction was seen as a curse from the Lord resulting from some commission of sin on the part of the childless female. It was a Catch 22 situation; the assumption was that because the woman was disobedient in some area of her life, God reacted by closing up her womb and the automatic result of that was yet another

disobedience by her not bringing new life into the world.

Every year when Elkanah, P'ninah and Hannah went up to Shiloh for the family festival it in some way amplified Hannah's barren condition and she became depressed. I imagine Hannah looked forward to this annual pilgrimage to the Tabernacle with dread. So one year Hannah decided to take rather drastic action and to present herself before the Lord and ask Him to relieve her from her awful burden. Let's pick up the story at verse 9.

### RE-READ 1ST SAMUEL 1:9 – 19

So emotionally debilitated was Hannah that she could not bring herself to eat, but she appropriately waited for the rest of Elkanah's family to finish their banquet that featured the meat of the sacrificial animal, and then she strolled over to the entrance to the Tabernacle and knelt down to confront the Lord in prayer in an area called the **mezuzah hekal**. The Hebrew word **mezuzah** is familiar to many of you; by tradition it is a small rectangular box that is attached to the doorpost of a Hebrew home. In early times when a dwelling usually only had one door of any kind (the outer, entrance door), this box was filled with a small handwritten scroll containing Scripture taken from Deuteronomy chapters 6 and 11. In much later times when homes began to have inner doors that separated rooms, it became tradition to attach a **mezuzah** to every doorway in the house. This meaning of **mezuzah** is not what is implied here; as such a religious device was not yet invented.

At the time of Samuel and his mother Hannah, a **mezuzah** only referred to the entryway to a dwelling or structure. That entryway could have been as simple as a doorway, or it could have been a kind of foyer or porch. What is equally interesting is that the place Hannah confronted God was called the **mezuzah hekal**, with the key word being **hekal**. And this is because **hekal** was the common word for temple. In other words, if we took this at face value it says that there was a temple to God at Shiloh, meaning that what Solomon built a hundred years or so later was NOT the first temple. Even in Hebrew tradition a temple and the Wilderness Tabernacle were two entirely different things; a temple is a permanent structure made of wood and stone, while a tabernacle is a portable tent.

So was there a permanent structure already built at Shiloh a century before David asked permission to build one for the Lord in Jerusalem? There's much scholarly debate about this but it seems to me that the answer is not so complex, especially once one has visited Shiloh and looked closely at the well-defined area where the Sanctuary once dwelt.

Here in 1st Samuel is the first use in Holy Scripture of the word **hekal** in referring to God's earthly dwelling place. The Hebrew language didn't spring up out of thin air; it developed primarily from two cousin languages Ugarit and Akkadian. Remembering what I taught you a couple of lessons ago that writing using alphabet characters was developed as a means to memorialize how a word sounded when spoken, it's not difficult for any of us to imagine that as the world's population that sprang from Noah spread out, and when the single common language became confused at the Tower of Babel, that people who lived in what were now hundreds of relatively isolated pockets developed minor language variations (called dialects) in their speaking and in the way they pronounced words. We have several English dialects in

existence in the modern USA; all one has to do is travel from the Deep South to New York to hear what seems to be the same language spoken quite differently. Take the name for a well-known city, Louisville, for example: in the Kentucky area people say, “Luvull”. In New York they might say, “Looy-ville”. If we used our alphabet characters to write down what the word Louisville sounds like in the South versus the North it would be spelled quite differently even though it is the same word.

Thus in Ugarit (that came before Hebrew) a standard word in their language was “egal”, which meant “large house”, and was therefore at times used to mean a temple. A “g” was pronounced with a very guttural sound, so it’s easy to see the transition from the Ugarit **egal** to the Hebrew **hekal** particularly when we understand that in biblical Hebrew the “h” sound is barely audible, almost silent.

Thus in this very early use of the Hebrew word **hekal** in the book of 1st Samuel, it is that **hekal** carried a meaning of “large house” or “large structure” as opposed to what it eventually came to mean in Hebrew society: Temple (remember I told you at our introduction to the book of Samuel that we were going to get a bit deeper into the meaning of some difficult Hebrew words and phrases).

So what we have is Hannah praying at a kind of porch or foyer that had been constructed at the entrance to the Tabernacle. In fact when one goes to Shiloh today you can find ancient post holes bored into rock that really only makes sense if they were used to hold large posts meant to be permanent. Very probably there was some amount of more permanent stone and wood structure added to the Tent as the Tent wore out, and as anterooms to be used for various purposes such as a place for worshippers and Levites to eat sacred meals.

As the High Priest Eli looked on seated in his chair of honor, he saw Hannah’s lips moving and facial expressions changing, and her tears flowing, but no sound was coming from her mouth. Her prayer (that included the vow that she would return her hoped-for son to God as a lifelong Nazarite if he would allow her to conceive) was made silently. For reasons we’re not told Eli assumed she was drunk! I wonder why he thought that? I think it’s very likely it’s because he had to regularly deal with worshippers who drank lots of ritual wine before they came before the Sanctuary Tent to commune with God. This was a very dark age of confusion and apostasy for Israel and I imagine we know little of all the depravities and nonsense that substituted for actual spirit filled Yehoveh worship.

But Hannah shot back to Eli that she wasn’t drunk; rather she was merely a woman with a deeply troubled soul and she was pouring out the longings of her soul to the Father. She says, “I have not drunk wine or other strong liquor”. Let’s pause here and examine this statement for a moment. In Hebrew Hannah says that she has drunk neither **yayin** nor **shekar**. **Yayin** is the customary word used throughout the Old Testament for wine, and **shekar** gets translated variously as strong drink, or liquor, or intoxicating beverage. Here’s the point: while its not ever my purpose to demean any Christian denominational doctrine, at the same time I don’t feel right about letting what amounts to nonsense stand as truth. Several familiar evangelical denominations say that in the bible wine doesn’t contain alcohol. And that the wine used for ritual by the priests, and drunk by Jesus and His disciples at Passover, and the wine that was

mystically converted from plain water by Yeshua at the request of his mother at the wedding ceremony at Kana were all merely grape juice. And thus the bible speaks against drinking alcoholic beverages under any circumstance and makes it a sin. This is simply not so; wine at all times meant a rather modest to low alcohol content drink made from grapes. One absolutely could get drunk from drinking wine and it is the getting drunk that is the issue, not the modest and appropriate drinking of the wine. But also notice here how Eli and Hannah both refer to wine as an intoxicating drink that was the cause of Hannah's seemingly strange actions (even though that wasn't so). So let's get by this silliness that wine wasn't REAL wine when spoken of in the Bible.

In verses 12 and 13 we're introduced to a new expression: "praying before the Lord" (actually it is, "praying before YHWH"); this is followed by "Hannah was speaking in her heart". This is referring to a person praying in a manner of total absorption into God's presence. It is worship of spirit-to-spirit. Hannah was utterly oblivious to what was going on around her or that Eli was looking on suspiciously and critically, so deeply connected was she to her Creator. "Praying before the Lord" is very different than, "praying to the Lord". "Praying to" indicates a direction. God is above and distant. The former indicates intimacy and unity, the latter indicates separateness.

Therefore in verse 16 Hannah asks the High Priest to believe her that not only is she not drunk, she has been communing with the Lord in proper worship. So she respectfully asks Eli not to see her as a "worthless woman". In Hebrew she asks Eli not to see her as a ***bath-Belial***, a daughter of Belial. This is another of those ancient Hebrew expressions that we know is a very negative one, but what exactly it meant to convey isn't so clear. Thus we'll get various translations such as daughter of worthlessness, worthless woman, or base woman. The idea is to describe the character of a person (in this case a woman) as immoral, destructive, harmful, or evil. It's the sort of character that would be destined to have his or her existence cease upon their death, or be permanently separated from God.

Eli responds by recognizing that he has misjudged her and so not only validates but also offers his blessing upon her requests of the Lord. The term "go in peace" is just a rather standard Middle Eastern expression of farewell.

Notice in verse 18 that the act of pouring out herself to the Lord in complete honesty brought peace and comfort to her. It's not that she became certain that now she would conceive, it's that the intimacy with God, done in a humble and sincere manner, gave her that "peace that passes understanding" that so many of God's people receive from time to time when we are in dire straits. It's not that our circumstances necessarily change, it's that somehow God gives us an unspoken assurance that He hears, is with us, loves us, and that whatever happens it will be OK. Hannah's state of mind was so elevated that her appetite returned.

The next morning Elkanah's family packed up and returned to their home in Ramah. Back in Ramah Hannah became pregnant; it is said that the Lord "remembered" Hannah. "Remembering" does not have anything to do with memory; rather it is that the one who remembers (Yehoveh in this case) brought about what He determined he would in connection with this person, in His time and in His way. Biblically God remembering is always in a positive

sense; that is when the Lord remembers someone it is to bring about blessing, not calamity.

### RE-READ 1ST SAMUEL 1: 19 - end

So now the story shifts; Hannah's unbearable humiliation is finally lifted by the birth of her son Samuel. In Hebrew his name is **Sh'mu'el**, which means something like "name of God". Often bible students will read verse 20 and assume that the sense of the sentence is that **Sh'mu'el** must mean, "asked of God" because it says she gave Sh'mu'el his name for that reason; but that is not probable. **Sh'mu'el** is derived from the two Hebrew words **shem** and **El**, meaning respectively "name" and "God". Let's incorporate something of what we've learned about how to understand the term "name" (**shem** in Hebrew) as used in ancient times.

We have discussed a number of times that the term "name" doesn't really mean Jerry, or Bob, or Karen. Rather a better way to think of it is as "attributes" or "essence" or "character". But it can also indicate progeny or offspring. In other words, when we studied Levirate Marriage the idea was for a childless widow to marry her brother-in-law, and then the hope was she would become pregnant with a son to become the heir for her deceased husband; the heir that she never produced before her husband died. Sometimes the bible will say that she is to raise up a son in her husband's name. More accurately in English it means to raise up a name (an offspring) for her husband.

So when we understand that **Sh'mu'el** means "name of God", it embodied two thoughts to Hannah: it meant that God is the father and Samuel is His offspring (not literally but figuratively). God had actively caused Hannah to become pregnant, just as He had for many years before actively caused Hannah to be barren. Thus she is but giving God the glory. And second it meant that Samuel would bear godly characteristics; and of course that would be expected, as he would start to serve in the House of God from a very early age.

The time rolled around again for the yearly festival at Shiloh but Hannah informed Elkanah she did not want to go until Samuel was weaned. This again points up to this almost certain reality that this was NOT a God-ordained pilgrimage festival that was being celebrated annually because it is doubtful Hannah could have refused without it being a sin. Thus it was somewhat optional and this year Hannah wanted not to turn over her young son to the Priesthood until he was a little older and weaned.

Among those ancient cultures weaning generally took place no earlier than 3 years, and sometimes it was up to 5 years if economic conditions dictated. Elkanah offered no resistance to Hannah's decision. In fact he told her it was fine with him, and then took the needed step of saying, "only may Adonai bring about what he said" (at least according to the CJB). More accurately what Elkanah said was, "only may Adonai establish His word". To "establish His word" is a saying that means approximately, "do His will". So what Elkanah is doing is validating Hannah's vow, which is both a duty and a prerogative of a husband.

***CJB Numbers 30:13 But if her husband makes them null and void on the day he hears them, then whatever she said, vows or binding obligation, will not stand; her husband has voided them; and ADONAI will forgive her.***

So Elkanah had every right to annul Hannah's vow to give up Samuel to the Priesthood and instead keep his son, but instead he chose to confirm it. Some time passed, the weaning occurred, and Hannah proceeded to keep her part of the bargain. The family again journeyed to Shiloh and this time brought a generous offering for the occasion. There has been some disagreement about the animal or animals that were brought for the sacrifice. Some versions will say that a 3-year old bull was presented; others (like our CJB) will say that 3 young bulls were offered for slaughter. The difference lies only in one group of translators feeling that 3 bulls of any age were much too much so the words must have been corrupted over time and in their eyes it should have read, "one 3 year old bull". But as usual we'd probably be best to keep it as it literally says and have 3 young bulls brought to Shiloh. For one thing, that is the plain reading. For another, very likely 3 different sacrifices were involved.

It was the Law of Moses that before any other kind of sacrifice could occur, an 'Olah sacrifice had to be presented. An 'Olah required an animal (as opposed to produce) and usually the more economically well off a worshipper was, the more expensive of an animal was used. Thus when Elkanah's family went on it's annual pilgrimage to Shiloh they probably normally brought 2 animals with them: one for the 'Olah, and then another for the Zevah Shelamim. The worshipper was not allowed to eat from the 'Olah, only the Zevah. So when we read of Elkanah's family having their banquet, the meat was the result of the Zevah Shelamim offering.

However, this time there was an additional kind of offering, the vow offering, that had to be performed as a completely separate act. The Law required that any time a vow was made with the Lord, a vow offering was needed upon the completion of the terms of the vow. Recall how in the New Testament St. Paul went to Jerusalem to make a vow offering to complete some kind of vow agreement he had made with God. Also remember Jephthah and his ill-fated daughter. Jephthah made a vow that if he achieved victory over his enemies, then he would sacrifice (as his vow offering) the first thing that came out of his house when he returned from battle. Sadly his daughter was that first thing, and Jephthah committed the atrocity of sacrificing her.

So here we have a situation requiring 3 different sacrifices and we have 3 animals brought from Ramah to Shiloh for the occasion.

Further we are told that one ephah of flour was brought as the required Minchah offering that was to accompany all animal sacrifices. An ephah is quite a lot of flour; far too much for only one sacrifice. The Law of Moses ordains different amounts of flour depending on the animal that is sacrificed. A bull was always to be accompanied with no less than 3/10ths of an ephah of flour. So 3 bulls would require a minimum of 9/10ths of an ephah, and we have it recorded that one full ephah of flour was brought thus we have a good match. It was indeed 3 bulls and the prescribed amount of flour to go with them that were brought to Shiloh, not one 3-year old bull.

Now verse 25 complicates the situation a bit because it says that after THE bull (singular) was slaughtered, Hannah brought Samuel to Eli. But again, some academics say this is proof that it was only one 3-year old bull that was brought; this is a problem only if you're looking for one.

The context of this statement is NOT of the family journeying to Shiloh for the festival, rather it is specific to the process of Hannah completing her vow by bringing Samuel to Eli. The final act before giving over Samuel is the vow offering. The vow offering is but one of the 3 bulls.

What a bittersweet moment that must have been for Hannah as she led little Sh'mu'el by the hand and turned him over to Eli; the child would not have been more than 5 years old, likely a year less. But let's not set aside the real reason for Hannah wanting a child in the first place; it was to erase her personal humiliation of never bearing a baby. Raising a child to maturity was never the issue for Hannah (though there is also no reason to cynically think that Samuel was little more than a means to an end for her).

As she presents Samuel to Eli, she reminds him of that day around 5-6 years ago that he found her praying at the entrance to the Tabernacle. And she explains something about that day that Eli didn't know: the subject of her prayer had been a vow to God for this child, and then if God gave Hannah fertility she would return with the boy and give him back to God.

This chapter ends with what appears to be a strange characterization by Hannah that what she was doing was "loaning" Samuel to the Lord. What is kind of fascinating is that the Hebrew word that is usually translated as "loaning" is Sha'ul; the exact same word as the name of the king that Samuel would anoint as the first king of Israel, Saul. The better translation is that Hannah "entrusted" Samuel to Eli, not "loaned". Loaned not only doesn't at all fit the context, it is a real stretch to assign the meaning of "loan" to that Hebrew word. Further if we more properly use the word "entrust", we have Hannah saying, "therefore, I entrust him to Adonai, and as long as he lives I entrust him to Adonai". In fact, this is a near perfect Western Semitic vow protocol for that era, thus it's hard to find fault with this much better and more literal rendering.

In fact, the use of the word Sha'ul here has caused some consternation because some academics think this means that this entire narrative about the birth and dedication of Samuel was originally the birth narrative of Saul and somehow the two got mixed up. But if that is the case we would have Saul spending his youth ministering at the Shiloh sanctuary and not only does the Biblical narrative not support that supposition, neither does any other biblical or non-biblical record.

Let's get a bit of a start on chapter 2 before we end this week's lesson.

### **READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 2:1 – 10**

These first 10 verses of chapter 2 probably better belong as the last 10 verses of chapter 1 because they take place at the time of, and in conjunction with, the dedication of Samuel to God and to the Priesthood. In other words Hannah said the words that end chapter 1 ("Therefore I have entrusted him to Yehoveh, as long as he lives he is entrusted to Yehoveh"), and then followed that up with what we just read; it didn't happen after some time passed.

These ten verses are so highly regarded as a theological treatise unto itself that it has been given its own title: "Hannah's Song", or "Hannah's Prayer". And while we will study it at

length in our next lesson, we need to take it as the framework for ALL that is going follow in the books of 1st and 2nd Samuel, and 1st and 2nd Kings; and in and even broader sense all Holy Scripture that follows it. It is as foundational as the 7 Noachide Laws, the Shema, and the 10 Commandments. It is factual and it is prophetic. It is profound and it is practical.

I want to end today's lesson with some food for thought. The era of Samuel is an era of a wholesale transition from the era of the Judges to the era of the Kings, and Samuel is God's catalyst and earthly tool to facilitate that transition. But what I want you to be acutely aware of as we go forward is that in no way did this transition involve a negation or change or abolishment or addition to any previous covenant or promise God made with Israel.

Many modern Christian scholars rightly declare that Samuel set the pattern for John the Baptist of the New Testament, and that both Samuel and Yochanon would be given the awesome and humbling privilege of ushering the Kingdom of God into the next stage of a series of stages that will end with the final redemption of mankind. And that privilege included anointing a king. Unfortunately the two great systematic theologies that emerged from the European Enlightenment about 3 centuries ago and today form the basis for what we call mainstream Christianity, say that in many way Yeshua broke away from some of the previous patterns and greatly changed or even abolished all previous covenants and set up an entirely new dynamic. One of the systematic theologies called Dispensationalism generally says that we can break bible history down into eras or administrations where God changed how He governed, and along with it He necessarily changed some of the rules and laws of His governance. Now I don't want to paint all denominations that adhere to this systematic theology with the same broad brush because there is a very wide variance of just how to view the various Dispensations. Some at one end of the spectrum take it as far as Replacement Theology, and at the other end some rightly deny and denounce Replacement Theology and see Israel and the Church having a great deal of overlap. But generally there is a belief that with every change of type of human governance (from Moses, to the Judges, to the Kings for example), that there were significant changes in God's justice system and even some alteration of His principles. And that with Christ a whole new, never before existing, justice system and religion was created just for gentiles, while mostly leaving intact the old justice system but only for Jews.

I fervently deny that the Bible, Old or New Testaments, ever envisions or brings about such a thing. At no time has the Lord God ever abrogated, destroyed, abolished, or otherwise made substantial changes to ANY covenant He has ever made. God did not replace Israel with the Church, nor did He create two separate justice systems, one for Jews and the other for gentiles. And it didn't matter that the form and structure of human government changed over time (and continues to change); God's laws and principles and covenants remained intact and enforce. If it was the **type** of human government that dictated which of God's laws and commands remained and which were jettisoned, then it ought to be that (in modern days) under Communism one set of God's laws apply, under Democracy another set applies, under a Monarchy it is different again, and under the tribal systems (that still govern much of the world's population) yet another group of divine commandments are at work. And further that the Jews have a whole other system of God's justice they are to operate under that is different and separate from those I've just mentioned. Such a thing is not only unscriptural; it is



irrational and illogical on its face. The notion that this is how God operates is nothing but manmade religious philosophy and tradition made to serve an agenda.

Samuel ushered in a new type of human government for Israel, not a new religion operating under revised laws and principles. We'll continue with 1st Samuel Chapter 2 next time.