EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Adults

1 Samuel

Commentary **Winter 2026–27**



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EVERYTHING WE NEED

If you're the product of a certain generation, you may remember the card catalog at your local library. While students today can find information at the click of a button or the tap of a screen, not that long ago we relied on the catalog's line of drawers and rows of cards to locate our research material. It was organized according to the Dewey Decimal System, but it had everything we needed.

It's helpful to have one resource that covers a variety of topics. While the card catalog took some time to navigate, it saved us time in the long run. It held the key to just about any subject we could image. From sports to history to geography to biographies to fiction to poetry, it was all there.

In a sense, the book of 1 Samuel is like a card catalog for learning God's perspective on life. Like an encyclopedia of His work in the world, 1 Samuel offers lessons on prayer, leadership, conflict resolution, faithfulness, courage, friendship, integrity, and so much more. Through the lives of individuals like Hannah, Eli, Samuel, Saul, Jonathan, and David, we get a broad picture of what God expects of His people—and what happens when things go wrong.

Best of all, 1 Samuel points readers toward the Messiah, the promised One who would come to redeem people from their sins. The Messiah would be a descendant of David: Jesus Christ. We all need Jesus to bridge the gap between ourselves and holy God. He is our only hope for salvation. If you've never made the decision to follow Jesus, there is no better time than right now! Here's what you need to do . . .

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith** receive Jesus as God's Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross. Jesus also rose from the dead, making a new, eternal life possible for us.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen."

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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*Evangelistic Emphasis

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MEET **THE WRITER**

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Explore the Bible: Adult Commentary (ISSN 1092-7174; Item 005075123) is published quarterly by Lifeway Christian Resources, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707, Ryan Blackwell, President, © 2026 Lifeway Christian Resources.

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Explore the Bible
Adult Commentary
Winter 2026–27
Volume 4, Number 2

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Printed in the United States of America

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FROM **THE TEAM LEADER**

I don't know about you, but I like having and following a plan. Knowing what to expect and when to expect it fills me with comfort. Life doesn't always cooperate, though. Plans change. Circumstances shift. When the unexpected happens, flexibility is key.

In 1 Samuel, we learn about God's plans for David. Surely God's purposes were far beyond anything David would have imagined for himself. In 1 Samuel 16, God instructed Samuel to travel to Bethlehem, visit Jesse's house, and anoint the one who would succeed Saul as king. God chose David, Jesse's youngest son and a humble shepherd, to lead Israel. Samuel anointed David, but the next part of God's plan was anything but conventional. David spent many years running from Saul and waiting for the day he would be installed as king. These years were filled with unforeseen and unwanted experiences that would test David's character. Still, God's purposes would come to fruition.

Whether you're enjoying a season of calm or learning to trust God with the unexpected, I hope this quarter of study brings you closer to Him. We can depend on His plans even when we don't have all the details. God is both trustworthy and good! "There is no one like you, and there is no God besides you, as all we have heard confirms" (2 Sam. 7:22b).

In Him,
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Explore **Discover**



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BIBLICAL **BACKGROUND**

Historians reckon that the events taking place in the books of Samuel happened in the period of 1050 BC (Samuel's birth) to 970 BC (just before David's death). David came to the throne somewhere around 1010 and 1000 BC. The book of Judges displayed the ugliness of Israel's disobedience when they reached the promised land, and only by God's grace did Israel survive that period. The books of Samuel give a picture of how the chosen people lived in Canaan for the next five hundred years. It was only by the Lord's grace. God was faithful to His covenant with them, and He provided for them, protected them, blessed them, and even disciplined them with unquestioned integrity.

During this period, no great world power was seeking to dominate the ancient Near East. The major world powers were experiencing internal unrest and external weakness. Israel's enemies in that day were the smaller states directly to the east (Ammonites, Moabites) and to the north (Aramean states around Damascus). But Israel's primary enemy lay in the west. The Philistines had established five city-states, had mastered the smelting of iron, and presented a strong military presence. They gradually pushed farther and farther eastward into Canaan, leading to a series of bloody conflicts with Israel. It was the threat of the Philistines that was one of the major factors of Israel demanding a king (1 Sam. 8:5,20). Saul was crowned king with the main purpose of subduing the Philistines, but Saul eventually died in battle with them.

But David was able to subdue the Philistines (1 Sam. 17; 23:1-5; 28–31; 2 Sam. 5:17-25; 8:1). During his reign as king, David imposed law and order on all Israel's hostile neighbors, established cordial relations with Phoenicia to the north, conquered many of the surrounding nations, and made Jerusalem his capital city. The boundaries of the land promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18-21) were the possession of Israel, from the border of Egypt to the Euphrates River.

Contents

In our English Bibles we usually place Samuel in the "History Books," but the Hebrews placed Samuel in the Prophets, specifically as one of the Former Prophets. They viewed history as prophecy, much like the difference between preaching and a world history book. What we have in Samuel, then, is "preached history" meant to convict and not merely to inform, to comfort and not simply to enlighten. It is preaching material aimed at God's people in the form of historical narrative. Thus, "history" in the Old Testament is a declaration from God about God. The writer

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had a message he wanted to proclaim. What God's people needed was not simply history but significant moments in history combined with prophetic interpretation revealing its meaning.

More specifically, Samuel seems to be a part of what is called the "Deuteronomic," or "Deuteronomistic History," that is, history told according to the theology of the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy taught of God's responding to the actions of people with blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Deut. 28), and the books of Samuel demonstrate this principle in action in Israel's history. Deuteronomy envisioned a day when Israel would have a king, and it set forth principles under which a king should rule (Deut. 17:14-20; see 1 Sam. 8:5,20). We will see how God requires obedience from the king and all His people and that they should worship Him and Him alone (1 Sam. 7:3-4). We will see that no person is immune from God's consequences for his or her actions.

Time Period

The oldest Hebrew manuscript is one from the Dead Sea Scrolls. It includes both 1 and 2 Samuel on a single scroll, but eventually they were probably separated into two because of length. First and Second Samuel along with the books of Kings cover the time from around 1080–586 BC, from the end of the period of the judges, the formation of the monarchy, the division of the kingdoms, up to the fall of the Southern Kingdom.

Author

Nowhere in 1 and 2 Samuel is an author mentioned. Determining the identity of the author (or final compiler) is no simple matter, but these things we can say with reasonable certainty. First, the author was not Samuel. Though he may have been responsible for some of the material contained in the earlier parts of the books (see 1 Chron. 29:29), since Samuel dies in 1 Samuel 25:1 his name was probably placed on the book because he was the dominant figure in establishing the monarchy. Second, the author used many different sources in writing or "compiling" the book. Some of these sources would be the Book of Jashar (2 Sam. 1:18; see Josh. 10:13); the Chronicles of Samuel (mentioned in 1 Chron. 29:29, ESV), not to be confused with the biblical books of "Chronicles"; the Chronicles of David (1 Chron. 27:24, ESV), possibly written by David himself telling of his wars, experiences with Saul, and his family experiences. Another source has been called the Charter of the Kingdom (1 Sam. 7–12), recording the establishment of the monarchy. The books also contain encapsulated poems or songs, such as Hannah's song (chap. 2).

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We can also determine that some length of time passed between the events described and the final compilation of the book. The writer had to explain certain archaic expressions (9:9), and the repeated expressions such as "up to this day" or "still today" (5:4-5; 6:18; 27:6; 30:25) reveal a distance between the event and the recording of the event. The writer told us the entire length of David's reign (2 Sam. 5:5), a fact that could have been known only after David's death (1 Kings 2:10). The writer referred to "the kings of Judah" (1 Sam. 27:6), showing that the final writing took place after the kingdom had been divided. Thus, the earliest possible date for the final composition of the book is sometime after the death of Solomon when Israel was divided (930 BC) and late enough for more than one king to have ruled in the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

The Message of 1 Samuel

Even though Israel may have an earthly king, the Lord remains the true leader of Israel. In 1 Samuel we see the Lord choosing and rejecting kings and chastising kings who refuse to follow God's commands. The same is true of all leadership whether it be kings, priests, or prophets. Thus, whoever is the earthly leader, they lead under the command of the Lord and are responsible to Him.

God providentially guides the events of the lives of His people. We see this in the lives of God-chosen individuals such as Hannah, Samuel, David, and even Saul. No two lives are exactly the same. We see "circumstances" that were designed by God's hand that contribute greatly to the story. Even though the people may be oblivious to what God was doing in the greater scope, God used people's actions, words, and character to contribute to His plan. We see Hannah's barrenness drive her to her knees before God, burdening her to have a son whom she could offer to the Lord. We see the boy Samuel placed in the tabernacle to bring a word of rebuke to Eli and his sons. We see Saul's search for his father's donkeys leading him to Samuel who would then anoint him as king. We see David's food delivery to his brothers on the battlefront lead him to his battle with Goliath, and on and on.

God's presence is everywhere, but especially among His faithful followers. God was present and heard Hannah's prayer. "The Lord was with" Samuel (3:19), David (16:13,18; 18:12,14,28; 30:6) and Jonathan (14:10-12). God's presence could be a source of blessing or of judgment (5:6,9).

The word of the Lord is powerful and demands obedience. The words of His prophets come true. Obedience to the Lord is more important than offerings and sacrifices (15:22). Eli and his sons found this out the hard way; Saul found this out the hard way. Yet God's blessing was upon those who would dare to trust and obey whenever and however God spoke.

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OUTLINE

1 Samuel

- **I. Samuel's Ministry** (1 Sam. 1:1–12:25)
  - A. Samuel's birth and call (1 Sam. 1:1–3:21)
  - B. The ark narrative (1 Sam. 4:1–7:17)
  - C. The people ask for a king (1 Sam. 8:1–12:25)
- **II. Saul's Reign** (1 Sam. 13:1–31:13)
  - A. Saul's battles with the Philistines (1 Sam. 13:1–14:52)
  - B. Saul's failure against the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:1-35)
  - C. David's selection as Saul's successor (1 Sam. 16:1-23)
  - D. David's victory over Goliath (1 Sam. 17:1-58)
  - E. David's struggles with Saul (1 Sam. 18:1–26:25)
  - F. Saul's reign ends (1 Sam. 27:1–31:13)

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Prayer

When God answered Hannah's prayer for a son, she dedicated the child to the Lord.

Almost every new chapter in God's story of salvation contains a birth narrative. The creation story focuses on the creation (birth) of Adam and Eve. Abraham's story is wrapped around the story of Isaac's birth. The exodus, the beginning of Israel's history as a nation, begins with the birth of Moses. The history of Israel's kings is prefaced by the birth story of Samuel, the prophet who would help establish the monarchy. It is a pattern in Scripture. God's great works in history begin with the birth of a child who is somehow significant to the story. In the Old Testament, when we read an extended story of the birth of a child, God is about to do something extremely significant that furthers His plan of salvation.

The New Testament is no exception. At this pivotal point in God's story of salvation, the era of the new covenant begins with two birth narratives. The first one is John the Baptist, the prophet foretold that would precede the Messiah. The second is Jesus, the Messiah Himself, who would bring salvation for the whole world.

The story of Samuel's birth is couched in prayer. Hannah possessed a heavy heart but also praying knees. One of the greatest tests to a person's faith is to remain faithful to God in the midst of trying circumstances that one may not understand. Hannah's strength was her prayer life. She knew the freedom as one of God's people to approach the Lord in prayer and place her burden before Him. God was going to use Hannah and her faith in a great way in His plan.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 Samuel 1:1–2:36

At the end of the period of the judges, a godly man from the territory of Ephraim named Elkanah "had two wives" (1 Sam. 1:2). The reason

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for his bigamy was self-evident, his first wife Hannah was childless, so Elkanah took a another wife who could bear him offspring. This was not uncommon in the culture of the time, but certainly not in God's ideal plan (Gen. 2:18). Peninnah was very fertile and bore Elkanah children. Peninnah repeatedly provoked Hannah over Hannah's childlessness, and possibly most distressing of all was the fact that "the LORD had kept Hannah from conceiving" (1 Sam. 1:6). Each year at the annual festival at the tabernacle located at Shiloh, Peninnah with her brood of children only made Hannah's pain worse. Though Hannah was Elkanah's favorite wife, he was of little consolation to Hannah's grief.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Fervent (1 Sam. 1:9-11)

Berated and verbally beaten down by her rival Peninnah, Hannah sought solace at the Lord's house. She poured out her bitterness and pain before the Lord, weeping as she prayed. She desperately wanted God to give her a son, and she made a vow that if the Lord gave her a son, she would dedicate him back to the Lord all of his life.

VERSE 9

On one occasion, Hannah got up after they ate and drank at Shiloh. The priest Eli was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple.

The old priest **Eli,** who had handed his priestly ministry to his two sons Hophni and Phinehas, still kept his place at the entrance to the tabernacle. The term **chair** in the Old Testament carries the connotation of "throne" or "seat of honor or authority." Thus, Eli's seat at the entrance of the tabernacle was much like the city elders who sat at the gate of the city (Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7). It shows that he still held a position of authority even in his elderly years. The tabernacle is referred to here as **the LORD's temple,** even though Solomon's temple had not yet been built.

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VERSE 10

Deeply hurt, Hannah prayed to the LORD and wept with many tears.

Hannah found freedom in her prayer life before the Lord. **Deeply hurt** (literally, "in bitterness of soul") Hannah poured out her soul to God with **many tears.** Hannah had a heavy heart but also praying knees. Because "the LORD had closed her womb" (v. 5, NIV), Hannah knew that the Lord was the only one with the power to open her womb and make it fertile. Through the years, she had probably pleaded with the Lord countless times before, yet she still had faith that when God's people pray, He listens. Even after many years of silence, Hannah still knew where she could freely bring her burden.

VERSE 11

Making a vow, she pleaded, "LORD of Armies, if you will take notice of your servant's affliction, remember and not forget me, and give your servant a son, I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and his hair will never be cut."

Hannah made a vow to the Lord. Some consider Hannah's prayer as a "bargain" with God, but this is far from the case. She made a vow, a promise to God, asking for something that she would freely give back to God.

Hannah said, **"If you will . . . give your servant a son, I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life."** Hannah desired God to give her a son who she could offer back to the Lord. Not only would Hannah consider Samuel a gift from God, but Samuel would be *her* gift to God.

The vow Hannah placed upon her son is considered by many as a "Nazirite vow" (Num. 6). "Nazirite" means "dedicated" or "consecrated," referring to someone specially dedicated to the Lord for His service. Numbers describes it as a vow that a man or woman would place upon themselves, usually for a specified period of time. Nazirites would demonstrate their consecration to God in three specific ways: they would drink no wine or grape products (vv. 3-4), their hair would not be cut during the period of the vow (v. 5), and they were not to touch or go near a dead body (vv. 6-8). At the end of the period of their vow, the Nazirites would bring an offering to the Lord and shave their dedicated hair and burn it on the altar (vv. 13-18). Several other biblical Nazirites we know by name are Samson (Judg. 13:5,7), John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), and for a period of time, the apostle Paul (Acts 18:18). Compared to the Mosaic instruction, several things about Hannah's vow are distinctive. First, the

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vow was not self-imposed but was made by the parent. This shows that Samuel was dedicated to God from the day of his birth. Second, instead of the vow being for a certain period of time, Samuel was dedicated to the Lord's service *all the days of his life*. Third, Hannah mentioned only one of the restrictions in her vow, **"his hair will never be cut."** This one restriction probably refers to all three, but is most immediate because parents began cutting their children's hair when they were still infants.[1]

Hannah presents a remarkable picture of dedicated prayer to the Lord, one worth emulating. First, *boldness*. She came boldly before the Lord with her petition (1 Sam. 1:9-10). Where many may have feared to approach God with such openness and honesty, Hannah boldly approached the throne of God's grace, knowing that God would be attentive to her prayers. At the same time, Hannah recognized God in His sovereignty. Her prayers clearly recognized God's right to answer yes or no as He wills. She would make her petition, but God may answer as He chooses.

Second, *dedication*. Hannah repeatedly referred to herself as "*your servant*" (v. 11, three times in the Hebrew). This is more than a mere title; it is a statement of submission to the Lord's service. She was a servant of God Almighty who lived to fulfill His purposes.

Third, *intimacy*. The song of thanksgiving recorded in the next chapter that Hannah prayed to the Lord is replete with the mention of the Lord's personal name *Yahweh* (translated as "LORD") throughout the prayer. This shows a deep personal relationship with the Almighty. She could call Him by name. When she prayed, she knew that the Lord Himself was listening.

Fourth, *persistence*. Hannah also demonstrated persistence in prayer. With the constant reminder of her own barrenness by the repeated taunts of Peninnah with her children, Hannah kept on asking God for a son of her own. Who knows how many years before God answered, but she kept on asking, seeking, and knocking (Matt. 7:7-11), trusting that one day God would answer.

Fifth, *dedication*. Hannah clearly revealed that her request to the Lord was not for selfish reasons. She wanted a son whom she could offer back to the Lord, a most precious gift. This reveals intense dedication in her heart. The gift that God would give her, she would give it directly back to Him.

Sixth, *trust*. Rather than resorting to human schemes to have a child (see Gen. 16:2), Hannah demonstrated her intense trust in the Lord. She knew the "LORD of Armies," God Almighty, had all power and authority in His possession. The Lord was her only hope, and she would bring her

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burden to the Lord and lay it at His feet. God had heard, and He would answer in His wisdom and in His timing.

Explore Further

Read "Nazirite" on page 1149 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are some ways that we can demonstrate our devotion to God today? How do you demonstrate your devotion to God?

Persistent (1 Sam. 1:12-18)

As Hannah earnestly prayed at the door of the tabernacle, the old priest Eli mistook her actions as those of a drunk woman. Hannah assured Eli that she was not drunk, but rather she was pouring out her heart to God in great pain. Eli blessed her, and Hannah left with renewed hope.

VERSE 12

While she continued praying in the LORD's presence, Eli watched her mouth.

The phrase **praying in the LORD's presence** or "praying before the LORD" (KJV) describes a greater intimacy with God than simply "praying to the LORD" (NIV) which connotes sending a prayer from a distance. On her knees in the presence of God Almighty, Hannah knew that when she prayed God would listen. **Eli watched her mouth** as Hannah prayed rather than observing the tenor of her heart. He was a spiritual leader but he was unable to determine the spiritual significance of Hannah's struggle. He could not distinguish between a devout worshiper praying before God and an immoral woman who was drunk. He could not tell the difference between genuine heartfelt devotion and drunkenness.

VERSES 13-14

Hannah was praying silently, and though her lips were moving, her voice could not be heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "How long are you going to be drunk? Get rid of your wine!"

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Instead of being **drunk,** Hannah was desperate. She dared to believe that God's grace was available to her, so she took the opportunity to ask for it. Hannah poured out her heart before the Lord **silently . . . though her lips were moving.** Eli mistook her actions for those of a drunk woman. Immorality was blatantly present, even at the doorway of the tabernacle (2:22). Israel had a history of drunkenness and sexual immorality in their "worship" (Ex. 32:6; Judg. 9:27). Eli had heard that his own sons were fornicating with women who served at the tabernacle, and he assumed that Hannah, whom he perceived to be drunk, was one of those immoral women. Drinking was allowed in Israelite worship (Deut. 14:23), but drunkenness never was (Lev. 10:9).

VERSE 15

"No, my lord," Hannah replied. "I am a woman with a broken heart. I haven't had any wine or beer; I've been pouring out my heart before the LORD."

Hannah was used to being misunderstood. Elkanah misunderstood the depths of Hannah's anguish in being childless and tormented, thinking that somehow marriage to him was better than ten sons (v. 8). Here, Eli mistook her fervency before God as drunkenness. Hannah explained herself to Eli, **"No, my lord . . . I am a woman with a broken heart."** She used the term meaning "a hard or severe spirit" describing severe brokenness. Her actions were not caused by alcohol, but instead **"I've been pouring out my heart before the LORD,"** like a vessel completely emptied. Her entire soul was involved in her petition before the Lord.

VERSE 16

"Don't think of me as a wicked woman; I've been praying from the depth of my anguish and resentment."

Hannah pleaded that she was not **a wicked woman** (literally "a daughter of Belial"). The term *belial* means "worthlessness," but sometimes the term is used as a proper name, such as referring to Satan in the New Testament (2 Cor. 6:15). The term often refers to people who are worthless or good-for-nothing, many times being sinister or conniving, causing disruption and discord (1 Sam. 25:25; 2 Sam. 16:7; 1 Kings 21:13). Eli's wicked sons are called "sons of Belial" (1 Sam. 2:12, "wicked men," CSB).

Instead, Hannah assures Eli that she was a woman overcome with grief, heartache, and pain. Her actions were the result of great **anguish, resentment,** and distress. She was in desperate need.

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VERSE 17

Eli responded, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant the request you've made of him."

Realizing his mistake, Eli's response was more gracious. He could not make a prophetic announcement or a guarantee to Hannah. Instead, he offered a blessing, the assurance that God had heard her prayer and the hope that He would give Hannah what she asked. **"Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant the request you've made of him."**

VERSE 18

"May your servant find favor with you," she replied. Then Hannah went on her way; she ate and no longer looked despondent.

Hannah considered Eli's blessing as comforting news. God had heard her prayers, and this gave her hope that God may indeed grant her request. Might God be gracious and open a new chapter in her life by granting her a son? **"May your servant find favor with you,"** in other words, may Hannah always remain in Eli's good graces. She wanted to be a source of delight to him rather than a burden.

Earlier, Hannah had refused to eat (v. 7), but with her new outlook of hope, **she ate.** With renewed hope Hannah found a reason for rejoicing. Her entire demeanor changed, and **she no longer looked despondent.**

The intervening verses tell us that "the LORD remembered her," and as a result, this time Hannah conceived and bore a son (vv. 19-20). The Hebrew term for "remembered" is more than simple recall. It is a mindful, sharp focus of one's attention on something. "Remembering" is an active term that leads to action. When God "remembers," it means that He is about to act. In Hannah's case, it means that the Lord opened her closed womb, and she conceived a son, even as she had asked.

Hannah named her son "Samuel" (v. 20). There is some debate as to the meaning of the name. Probably the best explanation is that the name comes from the term "to hear," thus meaning "being heard by God," because she asked of God, and He heard.

Hannah determined to keep the child until he was weaned (around age three), and then she would present him to the Lord at Shiloh (vv. 24-28). When she presented Samuel to the Lord, she would leave him to serve the Lord "forever" (v. 22; "permanently," CSB).

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Explore Further

Read "Samuel" on pages 1408–1409 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What different roles did Samuel play as God's servant throughout his life?

Fulfilled (1 Sam. 1:24-28)

Hannah fulfilled her vow. After she had weaned Samuel, she brought him to the tabernacle, bringing a thanksgiving offering to God. She reminded Eli of her earlier visit and how God had answered her prayer by giving her a son. As she had promised, she gave her son back to the Lord to be the Lord's servant. From then on, Samuel served the Lord in Shiloh.

VERSE 24

When she had weaned him, she took him with her to Shiloh, as well as a three-year-old bull, half a bushel of flour, and a clay jar of wine. Though the boy was still young, she took him to the LORD's house at Shiloh.

When Hannah brought Samuel to Shiloh she would leave him there. Thus, she kept him at home until he was **weaned.** It was not uncommon in the ancient world for a child to be breastfed until at least three years of age. Because infant mortality was so high, it was customary to hold a feast of rejoicing when the child reached an age of healthy growth and could transition from infancy into childhood (Gen. 21:8). Since she had vowed to give her son over to the Lord, these early years would have been her only chance to nurse and bond with Samuel.

When she finally took Samuel to Shiloh, she also brought an offering of **a three-year-old bull, half bushel of flour, and a clay jar of wine.** Though worshipers gave their offerings to the Lord, the sacrificial offerings were also a way that the priesthood and their families were fed (Lev. 7:28-36). The text reiterates that Samuel was **still young** (literally, "the lad was a lad") when he was taken to **Shiloh.** This highlights that Samuel was dedicated to the Lord while still extremely young.

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VERSES 25-27

Then they slaughtered the bull and brought the boy to Eli. "Please, my lord," she said, "as surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. I prayed for this boy, and since the LORD gave me what I asked him for,

Though the focus of the text is upon Hannah's actions, the verbs used are plural, *they* **slaughtered the bull,** and *they* **brought the boy to Eli.** This means that Elkanah was very much involved in this dedicatory event.

Hannah reminded Eli, **"I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD."** Since the event was over three years earlier, Eli needed something to spur his memory of Hannah's earlier visit. **"I prayed for this boy,"** and now this boy represented the Lord's answer to her prayer. **"The LORD gave me what I asked him for."** She asked. God heard. God answered.

VERSE 28

I now give the boy to the LORD. For as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD." Then he worshiped the LORD there.

The Hebrew term for **give** is related to the verb "to ask" used frequently in this passage. In this form the verb means to honor a request, to grant the object asked for, to entrust into someone's care. Hannah entrusted Samuel to the Lord. Hannah kept her promise to Yahweh. **"For as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD."** In uttering these words, Hannah thus dedicated Samuel to the Lord for his entire life. She gave what God had given to her back to the Giver. It truly was a sacrificial act of worship, a very costly sacrifice. Giving God's gifts back to Him is an act of worship, an act of praise. The focus should not be on the gift received but rather God's gifts employed for His glory.

According to the Mosaic law every firstborn male child belonged to the Lord (Ex. 13:2,13; Num. 3:46-47; 8:15-17; 18:15-16). However, a family could "redeem" that child back for five shekels. If the child was a part of a vow made to Yahweh, the male child could be given to Yahweh for a period of years, then redeemed back later (Lev. 27:1-8). But Hannah gave Samuel to the Lord permanently. She did not give her son to Eli and his family but was giving him to the Lord. The Lord would take care of him.

Then, from that point on, **he** [Samuel] **worshiped the LORD there.** His home was now the tabernacle in Shiloh, and his life would be dedicated to the worship of the Lord (1 Sam. 2:11). The point is that Samuel

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was obedient to his parents in remaining at Shiloh, doing what he was told. Hannah and Elkanah's devotion to the Lord is reflected in the life and actions of their precious son. Virtually from the day of his birth, Samuel knew that his life was to be spent in the Lord's service.

Though God does not directly speak in this chapter, it is the Lord who is the prime mover in every scene. "The LORD had kept her from conceiving" (vv. 5-6); "may the God of Israel grant the request you've made of him" (v. 17); "the LORD remembered her" (v. 19); "the LORD gave me what I asked him for" (v. 27); "I now give the boy to the LORD" (v. 28); "he worshiped the LORD there" (v. 28). God's power brings life and gives hope, and He alone deserves the praise for His acts (v. 28). From the difficulty of the situation and the hiddenness of the Lord's purpose, the Lord could still be trusted. His plans will never fail.

It is important that we do not read this passage wrongly. God had a special purpose for Samuel. Samuel would become the true prophet of God in a day when words from the LORD were rare (3:1). He would lead Israel from the period of the judges into the period ruled by a king. He was a prophet, a priest, and he served as Israel's last "judge" (7:15-16). Few characters in the Bible carry as much significance in the history of God's people as the prophet Samuel. God's timing for Samuel's birth was perfect, and Samuel served the Lord faithfully. However, this passage is not a promise that all childless couples will one day bear children. Sometimes God answers "yes" and sometimes He answers "no." Sometimes He answers "wait."

We are encouraged to keep praying, boldly to approach the throne of His grace, to find His grace and mercy (Heb. 4:16). Yet, we are also encouraged to trust—to trust His wisdom, His goodness, and His love.

Explore Further

Do you have something particular on your heart that you need to take to the Lord? Consider doing so right now. Spend some time in prayer. Hand what is in your heart over to the Lord, trusting in His love for you, no matter His answer be a yes, a no, or not yet.

1. David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 118–119.

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