



PALMA CEIA
Presbyterian Church

Hannah's Prayer & Its Biblical Echoes (I Samuel)

Gathering Together Around God's Word

*Sunday, March 13th 2022
10:05am in EM 307/308 & Zoom*

Background

Samuel I & II are believed to have been written sometime between 630-540 BC, during the Babylonian Exile. It's important to note, though, that parts of the book were composed prior to these dates. The two books are part of a larger Deuteronomistic History, a series of Old Testament books that tell the theological history of Israel and the law. The entire Deuteronomistic History is composed of the books Joshua, Judges, Samuel I & II, and Kings I & II. The two books of Samuel recount Israel's history from the birth of the prophet and last judge Samuel through the reigns of Saul and David. These books cover the transition of Israel from a tribal people ruled by judges and prophets to a centralized nation-state ruled over by a monarchy. This transformation had a large impact on Israel's political, social, and religious identity.

The Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann has pointed out that while Samuel I & II contain history and theology, the books are better thought of in totality as an imaginative narrative: "The shrewd convergence of all these factors of realism, Davidic distinctiveness, and Yahweh's presence can be expressed only in an artistic idiom that means to acknowledge and transcend our conventional historical and theological questions." Brueggemann warns, "Our historical approach tends to end in *Realpolitik* (reducing social relations to the operation of sheer power), and our theological reading tends to end in a monopoly of certitude."

Some themes to pay attention to through I & II Samuel are kingship and covenant loyalty and the ongoing tension between the two. The Philistines, who showed up in Judges, play an important and antagonistic part in these books. Another theme is the manner of worship of God and the role of the ark. In many ways the ark is a central character in I & II Samuel and figures into the story both religiously and politically. Israel continues to shift in how it organizes and governs itself; the transition from tribes ruled by judges to a nation state ruled by a monarchy is an critical change that has wide ranging effects. Lastly, the subject of God's anointed one is another central theme that will continue throughout the remainder of the Old Testament.

Outline

I. The Story of Samuel (I Samuel 1-7)

- I Samuel 1:1 - 4:1 The Birth and Call of Samuel
- I Samuel 4:1 - 7:17 The Loss and Return of the Ark

II. The Story of Samuel & Saul (I Samuel 8-15)

- I Samuel 8:1 - 12:25 Saul Anointed King
- I Samuel 13:1 - 15:35 The Failure of Saul's Kingship

III. The Story of Saul and David (I Samuel 16-31)

- I Samuel 16:1 - 17:58 The Rise of David
- I Samuel 18:1 - 31:13 The Decline & Death of Saul

Hannah's Prayer

The story of Hannah begins the book of Samuel and, in many ways, sets the stage for the remainder of this book. I Samuel 1 introduces us to a man named Elkanah who has two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. We learn from the beginning that Peninnah has children, but Hannah does not. This introduces the barren woman theme we have seen at various times in our readings (*e.g.*, Sarah in Genesis). Hannah's barrenness causes several issues, including her being provoked and irritated by her "rival" Peninnah so much so that Hannah would cry and not eat (I Sam 1:6-7). However, the text informs us Elkanah "loved her [Hannah], though the Lord had closed her womb" (I Sam. 1:5) and would ask Hannah, "Am I not more to you than ten sons?" (I Sam 1:8).

The story continues with Hannah going to the sanctuary at Shiloh and praying before the Lord. Hannah promises that if a child is given to her, she will set the child aside as a nazirite (*i.e.*, one consecrated). A comical scene follows wherein the priest Eli mistakes Hannah as a drunk because she appears to be mumbling senselessly in the sanctuary. Hannah replies she is not drunk but pouring out "great anxiety and vexation" (I Sam 1:16). Eli answers her, "Go in peace, the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him" (I Sam 1:17). Soon after Hannah bears a child, Samuel (Hebrew *shemu'el*, "He who from God"), who is later given over to Eli at Shiloh.

After this series of events, I Samuel 2 opens with Hannah's Prayer, a beautiful poem of thanksgiving. This poem/prayer touches upon a number of themes that are persistent throughout I & II Samuel. Examples include the sovereignty and holiness of God, the upending of social norms and power structures, God's concern for the lowly, justice, and the concept of the Lord's anointed. Additionally, the unfolding tension between the prophetic and the monarchy is foreshadowed in this powerful prayer.

Biblical Echoes

- Moses' Song (Exodus 15:1-18)
- Miriam's Song (Exodus 15:21)
- Deborah's Song (Judges 5)
- Psalm 113

Praise the LORD!

Praise, O servants of the LORD;
praise the name of the LORD.

² Blessed be the name of the LORD
from this time on and for evermore.

³ From the rising of the sun to its setting
the name of the LORD is to be praised.

⁴ The LORD is high above all nations,
and his glory above the heavens.

⁵ Who is like the LORD our God,
who is seated on high,

⁶ who looks far down
on the heavens and the earth?

⁷ He raises the poor from the dust,
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,

⁸ to make them sit with princes,
with the princes of his people.

⁹ He gives the barren woman a home,
making her the joyous mother of children.

Praise the LORD!

- II Samuel 22

²⁶ With the loyal you show yourself loyal;
with the blameless you show yourself blameless;

²⁷ with the pure you show yourself pure,
and with the crooked you show yourself perverse.

²⁸ You deliver a humble people,
but your eyes are upon the haughty to bring them down.

²⁹ Indeed, you are my lamp, O LORD,
the LORD lightens my darkness.

³⁰ By you I can crush a troop,
and by my God I can leap over a wall.

³¹ This God—his way is perfect;
the promise of the LORD proves true;
he is a shield for all who take refuge in him.

³² For who is God, but the LORD?
And who is a rock, except our God?
³³ The God who has girded me with strength
has opened wide my path.
³⁴ He made my feet like the feet of deer,
and set me secure on the heights.
³⁵ He trains my hands for war,
so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
³⁶ You have given me the shield of your salvation,
and your help has made me great...

⁵⁰ For this I will extol you, O LORD, among the nations,
and sing praises to your name.
⁵¹ He is a tower of salvation for his king,
and shows steadfast love to his anointed,
to David and his descendants for ever.

- The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)

And Mary said,
'My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'