

1 Samuel 1:1-18

The Book of 1 Samuel

Samuel is a single book in the Hebrew Bible. It was divided into two books in the Septuagint translation around the second century B.C. In fact, the Vulgate version used by Catholics incorporate Samuel and Kings into 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 3 Kings and 4 Kings. The Protestant Bible in 1517 used the divisions we use today, and the Catholic Bible later also adopted them.

According to the Talmud, 1 Samuel 1-25 was written by Samuel, with later chapters added by the prophets Gad and Nathan.

The main characters are Samuel, Saul and David. Samuel is often considered the first of the prophets:

- **Acts 3:24** - Peter says, "...all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after"

- And in **Acts 13:20** Paul says, "And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet."

Samuel was a priest, a prophet and a Nazarite from birth.

The Birth of Samuel

1 Samuel 1:1-2 - "Now there was a certain man of Ramathaimzophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite: And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

A Rabbinical Story -

"Elkanah and Hannah were both endowed with the gift of prophecy. Aside from this gift, Elkanah possessed extraordinary virtue. He was a second Abraham, the only pious man of his generation, who saved the world from destruction when God, made wroth by the idolatry of Micah, was on the point of annihilating it utterly. His chief merit was that he stimulated the people by his example to go on pilgrimages to Shiloh, the spiritual centre of the nation, making the three prescribed pilgrimages annually.

"The lookers-on invariably inquired into the reason of the rare spectacle, and Elkanah told them: "We are going to the house of the Lord at Shiloh, for thence come forth the law. Why should you not join us?" Such gentle, persuasive words did not fail of taking effect. In the first year five households undertook the pilgrimage, the next year ten, and so on until the whole town followed his example. Elkanah chose a new route every year. Thus he touched at many towns, and their inhabitants were led to do a pious deed.

- *Legends of the Jews*

https://www.sefaria.org/Legends_of_the_Jews

During the period of the Judges, the Tabernacle and its services had been generally ignored. This rabbinical story shows that a return to holiness was beginning, and the faith and piety displayed by Ruth and Boaz, for instance, was returning to Israel.

Hannah - i. e. "Beauty or charm," is the same as "Anna" in **Luke 2:36**.

Peninnah - "red pearl," translated coral in **Job 28:18**, but ruby in **Proverbs 3:15**, etc. Its ruddy color is vouched for in **Lamentations 4:7**. (Perhaps harking back to the contrast between Jacob and ruddy Esau?)

The Mishnah rules that if a couple has been married for ten years without having any children, the husband is obligated to take an additional wife, in order to fulfill the commandment to be fruitful and multiply (Mishnah Yevamot 6:6).

The Jewish tradition is that Hannah encouraged Elkanah to take a second wife since she was barren, (like Sarah and Hagar, Rachel and Bilhah). But this always seems to lead to family strife.

Hannah's Prayer and Vow

1 Samuel 1:10-11 - "And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head."

"O Lord of Hosts" - The Rabbis assert that Hannah was the first person since God created His world to use the name "Hosts." She said to Him: "Master of the Universe! there is a heavenly host and an earthly one. The heavenly host neither eat nor drink, are not fruitful and don't multiply, and do not die, but live forever. The earthly host eat and drink, are fruitful and multiply, and die. I do not know to which host I belong, whether to the heavenly host or the earthly one. If I am of the heavenly host, for I do not give birth, then I do not eat or drink [as Hannah did at Shiloh], and I shall not die, but live forever. But if I am of the earthly host, let me then eat and drink, give birth, and die" (Pesikta Rabbati 43).

God said: "Hannah, since the Creation, no one except you has praised Me with the words 'Lord of Hosts.' By your life, your son shall begin his prophecy with those words." Samuel did, in fact, commence his prophecy (1 Samuel 15:2) with the words: "Thus said the Lord of Hosts." God said: "Hannah, you said 'Hosts' and increased My myriads, and I will increase your myriads [that is, your offspring]." Hannah's offspring included Heman (1 Chronicles 25:5), who had fourteen sons and three daughters (Midrash Samuel 2:5).

The Rabbis derive from the unusual wording of v. 10 — "She prayed to the Lord," with the preposition *al* (instead of the usual *el*), literally meaning: "She prayed concerning the

Lord" — that this was an accusation directed against the Lord (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 31b).

Hannah did not ask Eli the priest to act as an intermediary for her prayer; she enters the sanctuary of the Lord and she herself addresses God, the rabbis note.

She reminds the Lord that "even the wicked Jezebel bore seventy sons!" (Midrash Samuel 2:1).

"bitterness of soul" = mar - bitterness, anger, discontent, depressed From a root that means "to drop," or flowing down. As in the bitter "waters of Marah" (**Exodus 15:23**).

(Those waters were made sweet by throwing in a "tree" which the rabbis said contained the Tetragrammaton, the unpronounceable Name of God, written on it. And that's the only thing that can make our own bitter waters sweet.

God had brought barrenness, or "shut up her womb," for a purpose, so she would pray prompting God to bring about the miracle of Samuel's birth and ensure his future ministry in Israel.

When you experience bitterness and depression, consider that God may be bringing you to that circumstance or feeling for a purpose. Mary the mother of Jesus was also "troubled" at the words of the angel. When we factor in the cross (the tree) and God's name, you can look at your circumstances and your feelings differently.

Tradition says Elkanah was a Levite, although he was living among the Ephraimites. Samuel would have been dedicated as a Levite at age 25, but here Hannah goes further and dedicates him as a Nazarite from the womb.

After so many rash vows in the Book of Judges, now we have a vow that is carried out with benign results.

Was Hannah Praying in Tongues?

The Midrash explains that the first part of this incident occurred at Passover season, because it mentions that Elkanah "used to go up year by year from his town to worship" (**1 Samuel 1:3**) and the command to observe Passover says, "You shall keep this ordinance at its proper time year by year." (**Exodus 13:10**).

This perhaps lasted for the whole season until Pentecost, because Hannah's prayer "happened on the day..." (verse 4). According to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi in Midrash Shmuel, this is a reference to Pentecost (Shavout). "The day" implies a holiday that last just one day, which is Pentecost.

Hannah "rose up" and left to go to the Tabernacle, where Eli was sitting. She prayed and made her vow "after they had eaten in Shiloh and after they had drunk" (**1 Samuel 1:9**), which could indicate after the Passover meal. It's possible her grief and distress

kept her from eating the Passover and drinking the four cups of wine. "One who weeps does not eat (because they lose their appetite)" (Midrash Samuel 1:8).

Eli sees or "notices" Hannah's mouth as she prays in **1 Samuel 1:12**.

1 Samuel 1:13 - "Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken."

A better translation is: "Now Hannah, she spake to her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not understandable: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken."

Hannah responds to Eli: "You are no lord in this manner, nor is the Shekhinah [Divine Presence] with you, since you took a harsh view of my conduct and did not know that I am a woman embittered of soul" (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 31a-b).

The Hebrew word for "heard" = *sama* - is translated "understand" in Genesis referring to the Tower of Babel

- **Genesis 11:7** - "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand (*sama*) one another's speech."

According to the midrash, Hannah's prayer was in a whisper heard by none, but already granted (Midrash Samuel 4:1).

The rabbis explain that the words "only her lips moved" (ibid.) teach that "thinking to oneself the words of the prayer is not sufficient; they must be pronounced with one's lips."

Hannah was not an obscure biblical figure. Her later prayer (2:1) is quoted in Mary's Magnificat, **Luke 1:46-55**. (Mary also had a miraculous pregnancy!).

And in verse 16, Hannah says she had indeed been "speaking" (*dabar*) as a woman of a "sorrowful" spirit (this can also mean heavy, vehement, even stiff-necked). i.e. she was either trying to break out of that position, or alternately to "vehemently" move God to hear her complaint.

Her not-understood prayer may be a foreshadowing of the Day of Pentecost, when the disciples were also thought to be drunk. (Passover and Pentecost are considered one feast, bound together by the Counting of the Omer of first fruits). And perhaps it points us to speaking in tongues when in extreme despair, when in "an abundance of complaint and grief," or when our brains can no longer put together logical/reasoning expressions to God. But also when great joy inhibits our ability to put our feelings into words.

The Effect of the Pilgrimage Feast

The midrash explains that when Hannah saw all Israel gathered together for the pilgrimage feast, she said to the Holy One: Master of all the worlds, this is the hour that you will favor me - "Remember me, O Lord, when you show favor to your people; take note of me in your redemption." (**Psalm 106:4**). Both requests were answered. She requested: "Remember me, O Lord" and He did, as it is stated: "And the Lord remembered her (**1 Samuel 1:19**). And she requested: "take note of me in your redemption" and He did it, as it is stated: "And the Lord took note of [visited] Hannah" (**1 Samuel 2:21**).

She says she has "poured out my soul before the LORD." Like a libation or drink offering upon the altar.

1 Samuel 1:16 - "Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial..." The contrast is between Hannah and the evil sons of Eli:

See **1 Samuel 2:12** - "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD."

Targum: "they did not know to fear before the Lord."

Then Eli confirms that God heard her:

1 Samuel 1:17-18 - "Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad."

Note: Nothing had changed for Hannah outwardly. She was still barren and had no children. But when we know God has heard us, joy can break through and overwhelm our sadness and depression.

Why Suffering and Disappointment?

Why was this righteous woman forced to suffer so many years of childlessness? In their answer to this question, the Rabbis cite **Proverbs 27:21**: "For silver — the crucible, for gold — the furnace, and a man is tested by his praise." The jeweler puts silver into the fire, and gold into the furnace, and fires every material in accordance with its strength. Thus, in this metaphor of the Rabbis, God refines in the crucible each of the righteous according to his or her strength: He refined Sarah for twenty-five years, Rebekah for twenty, and Hannah for nineteen.

<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/hannah-midrash-and-aggadah>

What happened to Peninnah?

The magnitude of Peninnah's vexing of Hannah is matched by the depth of Hannah's weeping, which explains the intensity of Hannah's prayer and the vow that she took at Shiloh (Midrash Samuel 1:9).

(One interpretation sees Peninnah as acting like Job's "friends," suspecting Hannah was childless because she had an unconfessed sin, and constantly urging her to repent. - Me'am Loez citing Nachlas Reuven)

The rabbis saw a parable in **Ezekiel 17:24**: "And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done it."

"I make high the low tree"- that is Hannah. "I dry up the green tree" - that is Peninnah. Hannah mentions this in her praise in Chapter 2: "But she who has many children is forlorn." (**1 Samuel 2:5**) "And make the dry tree to flourish" - that is Hannah, as stated "The barren has born seven" (**1 Samuel 2:5**).

Peninnah was punished for her misdeeds, according to the rabbis.

Hannah would give birth to one child, and Peninnah would bury two; Hannah bore four, and Peninnah buried eight. When Hannah was pregnant with her fifth child, Peninnah feared that now she would bury her last two children. What did she do? She went to Hannah and told her: "I know that I have sinned against you. I beg you, pray for me, so that my two remaining sons will live." Hannah prayed to God, saying: "Please, leave her the two sons and let them live." God responded: "By your life, they deserve to die, but since you have prayed that they live, I will call them by your name." Thus, even though Hannah bore only five children, she says in her song (1 Sam. 2:5): "While the barren woman bears seven," for Peninnah's two sons were reckoned as Hannah's (Pesikta Rabbati 43).

Tradition says Hannah was 130 years old when she became pregnant, as was Jochebed (Midrash Samuel 4:1) There was a rabbinic trend to compare Samuel with Moses.