

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY

STUDIES IN FIRST SAMUEL

LESSON 2

"DARKNESS AND THE MORNING STAR"

I. SAMUEL THE MAN

As a major character of Biblical history, Samuel has few peers. As a foundational person for the redemptive history in the early growth of the nation of Israel, he is equaled only by Moses. As Moses served as the foundation for the covenant, law, and theocracy, Samuel stands as the foundation for the monarchy.

Samuel strides through this period of history like a giant in a Lilliputian land. He served at the same time as prophet, priest, judge and kingmaker.

A. The Last Judge

Following Eli, he was the last of the judges. Just when it seemed that Israel must be crushed out by the Philistines and by their own degradation, Samuel arrived. Samuel stopped the nation's decline and turned the people around to begin an orderly and forward-thinking kingdom. 1 Samuel 7:15 says, "Now Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life."

B. The First Prophet

Samuel was the first of the prophets, at least of the prophetic office. There had been prophets in Israel before (Num. 11:25; Jud. 6.8) and even Moses himself was called a prophet (Dt. 18:18). But until Samuel there was no specific prophetic office. Consider these passages: Acts 3:24, "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also pronounced these days"; Acts 13:20, "And after these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet"; Hebrews 11:32, "And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets."

C. The Great Educator

Samuel continued Moses' great work of attempting to educate the people by founding schools which not only helped them mentally but promoted the true worship of Jehovah. It seems implied from the books of Samuel that a system of national education grew up. By the time of Isaiah we see an educated man speaking to educated people.

D. The Special Priest

Though Samuel himself was not of the family of Aaron (he may well have been from the influential Kohath family), he did the work of a priest. Because of the corruption of the priesthood and the tabernacle service in those low moral and religious times, God seems to by-pass the priestly order that He himself had set up and uses Samuel to set up the sacrifices, celebrations and revelations that He desired.

E. The Humble King-Maker

Samuel, of course, is best known as the king-maker. His was the task of the shaping of the constitutional monarchy within the overall theocracy. What Samuel envisioned was the kingly power in the hands of a layman, but acting in accordance with the will of God revealed through living prophets, and acting in obedience to the written law of God revealed by Moses. Not until David did he see this come about. The greatness of Samuel is seen in the passage from Jeremiah 15:1: "Then the LORD said to me, 'Even though Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me, My heart would not be with this people; send them away from My presence and let them go!'"

II. SAMUEL'S BIRTH

The first two chapters paint two family pictures: that of Hannah and her family, and of Eli and his family. The contrast could hardly be greater. We see a humble obscure woman who has the joy of seeing God answer prayer and the fulfillment of seeing her child grow up godly, useful and honored. On the other hand we see a prominent man in a priestly office who had to endure the pain of seeing his children

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disgrace not only his name but the sacred office that they held. Hannah gives us a song of praise; Eli gives us merely feeble rebuke of his evil, wicked sons. Hannah is given more sons to make up for the one she has given to God; Eli has the sons that he has taken from him and his entire line destroyed. Why? What made the difference? Hannah placed God before her son; Eli placed his sons before God. In short, Eli failed as a parent and no amount of ministering could redeem that failure.

The first three chapters may be developed by looking at the people involved.

A. Elkanah 1:1-4

Elkanah lived a few miles north of Jerusalem on the borders of the territory of Benjamin, at what perhaps became the New Testament city of Arimathea. He was a Levite of the line of Kohath whose ancestors originally lived in Ephraim (Josh. 21:20). It is that geographical name that is meant in 1:1 when he is called an "Ephraimite". Evidently a man of wealth, he could afford two wives and lived on his own property. He probably took Peninnah to wife when he had abandoned hope of having a son by Hannah. God's initial design for marriage was clearly one of monogamy but polygamy was not forbidden in the Mosaic economy, so those who practiced it did not sin against any formal law. It had been widely practiced throughout the ancient world and, like slavery, was not abolished by the covenant at Sinai but regulated and limited in its practice. But any lowering of God's ideal always brings its own problems. Thus Elkanah's home life was ruined by the bickering and contention of his wives.

B. Hannah 1:5-2:11

1. Hannah's Barrenness 1:2-8

To have no children was the worst fate for a woman of Hannah's day. You can see this in Genesis 30:1 in Rachel's appeal to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die."

Originally Moses had ordered that all male Israelites were three times a year to appear before the Lord at the central sanctuary (Ex. 23:14-19), but throughout the period of the judges most of these religious celebrations were not observed. Evidently one public appearance a year was deemed sufficient by religious people of the time.

2. Hannah's Prayer 1:9-11

The tabernacle was now set up at Shiloh where it had originally been pitched by Joshua. Evidently it was moved around temporarily to some other locations such as Bethel and Mizpah but must have always returned to Shiloh, which was regarded as the home of the national shrine. This position is seen in the careful detailed description given to the location in Judges 21:19. Hannah's prayer is a model of submission, respectful request and spiritual vow. Basically, she is vowing that her son would be a Nazirite (cf. Num. 6:1-21 and Samson in Jud. 13:5). Normally the vow was for a limited time but Hannah offers him for life.

3. Hannah's Defense 1:12-18

Eli was both priest and judge in those days. None of the other judges had been of priestly descent. Eli holds the high priesthood from the house of Ithamar, the younger son of Aaron. Indeed it may have been his position of judge that moved the circumstance to allow him to become the high priest when that office became vacant. By the time we see Eli he is an old man. He died at 98 and had judged Israel for 40 years. That would place his judgeship as commencing when he was nearly 60 years old. Perhaps idealism, realism and the energy of youth had now degenerated into apathy and resignation. We see him now as fat, lazy and indifferent, a permissive parent and an infirm priest who has given over the sacred functions to his licentious sons.

Eli, still functioning as God's judge, sees Hannah praying and accuses her of drunkenness, an accusation that may say something of what went on during those religious celebrations of that time. Hearing of Hannah's real desire he offers a blessing which would be looked upon in her day as efficacious and Hannah goes away happy.

4. Hannah's Pregnancy 1:19-20

Nine months later a boy is born named Samuel. The phrase "because I have asked him of the LORD" is a play on words. Samuel, which means "his name is El" (God), sounds like a Hebrew word for "heard of God." There is another play on the word "asked" in verses 26-28.

5. Hannah's Dedication 1:21-28

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Hannah keeps her word and takes Samuel to give him to the Lord. To her, she is simply giving back what He had given to her.

6. Hannah's Song 2:1-11

Hannah's Song or Prayer is a psalm of praise and thanksgiving and is similar to the Magnificat of Mary in Luke 1:46-55. Indeed it is significant that there is no birth narrative of Saul or David or even of Solomon but there is a birth narrative of Moses, Samuel, John the Baptist and Jesus. The psalm especially magnifies three attributes of God.

a. His Holiness (2:2)

Holy in Scripture primarily means that something is separated, different, a radical distinction. God is distinguished from everyone and everything by His absolute power and His moral perfection.

b. His Uniqueness

God is the incomparable One. There is no one like Him (cf. Isa. 45:6). In that Canaanite culture where there were many gods and goddesses, Hannah's setting God apart as wholly Other and Unrivaled is a first step to the concept that no other gods exist.

c. God's Faithfulness

The analogy or metaphor of a rock is a common one to show strength and stability and security for the people of God. In nature as a rock and in deeds victorious, God is always trustworthy. Hannah's song should not be taken literally but seen as the beautiful poetry that it is. The one prophecy that has been taken as Messianic is in verse ten, where there is the promise of giving strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed. The word "anointed" is the word translated "Messiah" or in Greek "Christos," and in English "Christ" (cf. Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:7, 17 and Dt. 17:14-20).

III. ELI'S SONS 2:12-17,22

The writer purposefully places the sins of Eli's sons against the beautiful picture of family life and devotion of Hannah and her family. Note that verse 12 sharply contrasts to verse 11 and verse 18 sharply contrasts in the opposite direction to verse 17. And verse 26 is 180 degrees from verse 25. The spotlight shifts back and forth between the two families. The sons are guilty of two major sins that mar any ministry.

A. Greed 2:12-17

The law allowed a certain portion of the sacrificial offering to be eaten by the priests. The remainder of the animal was returned to the offerer to be eaten by himself and his family, and the Levites. The portion of the peace offering was to be the breast and the right shoulder, however, the fat had to be burned on the altar, and no portion could be eaten until that burning had taken place. The suet was offered because it was looked upon as the best portion and the symbol of a perfect and well-nourished body. No fat of the sacrifice was to be eaten. This did not stop Eli's sons. They took what had evidently become a customary way of determining the portion and totally misused it. They took the portions before the offering was made, robbing God of the symbolic ceremony. In addition they stole from the worshipper what was legally his. The worshippers' knowledge of the levitical regulations brought about disputes and dishonor to the sanctuary of God.

B. Sexual Immorality 2:22

The women mentioned did not carry out the service of the Levites but probably did various servants' tasks and took care of children such as Samuel. There is no other reference to such women in the Old Testament. The immoral actions may have been part of pagan fertility rites of religious prostitution such as had been seen at the Canaanite temples (cf. Dt. 23:17-18; 1 Ki. 14:24; 15:12; 22:46). Eli salves his conscience with a few cold and apathetic warnings and a mere slap on the wrists of his sons (2:22-25).

IV. SAMUEL'S EARLY YEARS 2:18-26

What a contrast as Samuel grows in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men (cf. Lk. 2:52 where the same phrase is used of our Lord). In 2:18 we are told that Samuel ministered wearing a linen ephod. Remember this was a garment worn by a priest who served the Lord at the tabernacle. It was

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about hip length and like a sleeveless pullover. A special and different ephod was worn by the high priest (Ex. 39:1-26).

His mother each year made him a little robe (2:19). If this is comparable to the priest's robe, it would have been a sleeveless one that probably reached to the knees and was worn under the ephod. So Samuel was the little doorkeeper of the House of God in Shiloh. He ran the messages, opened and shut the doors lit the seven-branched lampstand at sunset and put it out each sunrise, doing everything little hands and little feet could do.

The weaning period would have been about three years, so Samuel would have been at least that old when he began to minister in the tabernacle.

V. THE MAN OF GOD AND THE HOUSE OF ELI 2:27-36

The prophet that God sent to Eli reminded him of all the privileges that he had as a priest. Verse 28 mentions three of them: to offer sacrifices, to offer incense at the altar in the holy place, and to wear an ephod, which the high priest would have included the breastplate containing the Urim and Thummim, which was the divine method of communication from God. Prophets were quite common in the ancient world, spanning many centuries and many countries. Their major function was to give a spoken, not a written, word from God. The writer of Samuel described the words of the prophecy in detail to give us a hint that the events that are recorded here did not just happen but were fully planned by God. That also is the meaning of verse 25. God's will to put them to death was planned in the sense that they had already gone so far that nothing could change their hearts. God then was at work in bringing down Eli's family and in planning for its replacement. The major principle upon which God based His actions is given in verse 30, "Those who honor Me, I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed." Eli was implicated in his sons' sins because he honored the sons more than God and evidently partook of the fruit of their greed (verse 29).

In verse 30 the prophet reminded Eli that God had promised that Aaron's house would last but now Eli and his house would not be allowed to participate in this honor because of their sin. Again we see the principle being carried out, "To whom much is given, much shall be required" (Lk. 12:48). Note the prophecy in verse 32, "the distress of my dwelling", which was fulfilled in Chapter 4 when the ark was captured. The prophecy of verse 34 was fulfilled in 4:11. The remainder of the prophecy was fulfilled in the massacre of Eli's descendants by Saul (22:18-19) and the removal of Abiathar from his office in 1 Kings 2:26-27.

The loss of the priesthood would have been devastating to Israel without some replacement. God graciously promised to raise up a faithful priest, initially fulfilled in Zadok (2 Sam. 8:17). His line continued to the time of the Maccabees in the inter-testament period (about 175-165 B.C.). The prophecy undoubtedly looked beyond this to the eternal priesthood of the Messiah.

If, as God usually does, His warning had the implied condition, "Unless you repent," it went unheeded. The sons' continued sin and Eli's greedy apathy brought a certain fulfillment of the prophecy. There is no mention of an Aaronic priest from Eli's time until we come to Ahijah, his great-grandson, in the days of Saul (1 Sam. 14:3). Evidently, Samuel, by special commission from God, filled in as priest. In verse 35 there is again, as in Hannah's prayer, a hint of a coming kingship and ultimately of the anointed Messiah.

VI. THE CALL OF SAMUEL 3:1-21

Other prophets can just appear and be called "a man of God" but Samuel was to be the foundation for the monarchy and to be the leader of all Israel. He was to play a role second only to Moses, so his call is given in an extended narrative similar to that of his birth.

A. Samuel's Age

Samuel is now, according to the Jewish historian, Josephus, about twelve years of age or older.

B. Samuel's Work

Verse three seems to imply that the golden lampstand, which stood opposite the table of the bread of the Presence in the holy place and was lit in the evenings and put out in the morning hours, was somehow under the ministry delegated to Samuel. The lamp was not to be permitted to go out during

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the nighttime, so it must have been night but in the early morning hours when the Lord spoke to Samuel.

C. Samuel's Commission

God calls for Samuel, and Eli did not recognize the voice of his own Master! The word of the Lord was rare (3:1). During the 350 years of the judges, there were only five revelations given and only three prophets mentioned. Verse seven means Samuel had not yet ever received a revelation from God. When Eli realizes that the voice was God calling, he at least knew what to tell Samuel to do (3:9). Samuel was told the fate of Eli and his willingness to tell this difficult news to Eli became a test of his fitness for the prophetic office (3:15-18).

D. Samuel's Growth and Recognition 3:19-21

None of Samuel's prophecies or judgments proved unreliable and he became recognized as a prophet who truly spoke for the Lord. All Israel from Dan to Beersheba, the usual expression for the entire land (Dan being located in the far north and Beersheba in the far south) all recognized Samuel as a prophet of Jehovah. Samuel became both priest and prophet in the tabernacle at Shiloh, judging all of Israel. The morning star of Israel's monarchy had appeared.

CONCLUSION - Major Lessons:

1. The family is the foundation of both the religious and political life of a nation. There are many great principles of family life here: a loving husband, a religiously observant man, a praying woman, a cooperative father, a loving and committed mother who unselfishly gives her son to the Lord but continually, year by year, shows him she loves him. There are also negative lessons: the danger of undisciplined home life, a selfish love that refuses to confront evil and degenerates into sentimentality, and the rebellion of sons against a father.

2. Great privileges bring great responsibilities (2:27-29).

3. Greed and immorality degrade the house of God (1 Pet. 5:2; Eph. 5:3).

4. God does not leave Himself without a witness. He makes Himself known through providence (Acts 14:17) or through faithful prophets.

MEMORY VERSE: 1 Samuel 2:30b, "...For those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed."

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 3

1. Read lesson 2. Mark what was encouraging or convicting to you.

READ 1 Samuel Chapters 4-7:

2. What did the Israelites take with them to battle, thinking it would deliver them? Why that particular object? (See 4:7; Ex. 25:22; Josh. 3:14-16; 6:1-4).

3. What was the result of the battle?

4. What were the circumstances of Eli's death?

5. How did the name that Eli's daughter-in-law gave to her son describe Israel's condition?

6. Why do you think God let the ark be captured?

7. What happened to the idol in the Temple of Dagon?

8. List the places where the ark traveled in Chapters 5 & 6.

9. Why did God kill the men of Beth-shemesh?

10. Read 5:6 - 6:9. What was the significance of the gold tumors? Of the gold mice?