

1st Samuel

Lesson 2

Continuation of the Introduction to the Book

The Storyline of the Gentile Nations

Every booklet in the Bible also includes the storyline of the non-Israelite nations, called the Gentile Nations, and their interaction with the Nation of Israel. In 1st Samuel, we will see the Amalekites and the Philistines back in action in their attempt to oppress and control Israel. Transcending from the book of Judges, Samson had killed the major leaders of the Philistines. He ended their oppression of Israel when he pushed the building down on them and himself. Still, the Philistines quickly found new leaders and returned with their champion, Goliath, the giant, to attempt to take over Israel again. In a strange turn of events, we will also see the Philistines embrace David while he runs from King Saul. We will also see them reject David as they make their last stand against King Saul to defeat him at the Battle of Mount Gilboa.

The Storyline of the Main Character(s)

Finally, in every booklet of the Bible, we will see the storyline of the main character or characters. This means that there may be several storylines going on simultaneously in the Scripture. A simple look at the first outline we made of the four books of the kings shows us that in 1st Samuel, we will see that the stories of the main characters of Samuel, Saul, and David, are intertwined, yet separate stories.

Minor but important storylines are also included for the rest of the characters in the book. In chapters 1 - 4, we will see the story of Eli the priest, his family, and his ministry with Samuel. In chapters 13 – 20, we will see the story of Saul's son, Jonathan, and his friendship with David. In chapter 14, we will be introduced to Abner, who will be instrumental in causing the first divided kingdom of Israel at the time of the death of Saul, and his story will continue in 2nd Samuel. And, in chapter 22, we will be introduced to the prophet Gad who will be used of the LORD after the death of Samuel and on into the record found in 2nd Samuel.

And then there are also the tiny storylines with less material, yet, no less importance. We will just mention them by name here, and we will get to know them as we walk through the Scripture. We will meet in order, Elkanah, Peninnah, Hophni, Phinehas, Ichabod, Abinadab, Eleazar, Joel, Abijah, Kish, Nahash, Merab, Michal, Ahinoam, Ner, Agag, Jesse, Eliab, Shammah, Adriel, Doeg, Ahimelech, Abiathar, Keilah, Nabal, Abigail, and the witch of Endor. All of these have their own stories in this book. They are all important to the total story found in 1st Samuel.

For our study, we will break the book into two major divisions. The first will be called *The Nation of Israel with Samuel the Prophet* (1:1-25:1). The second will be called *The Nation of Israel without Samuel the Prophet* (25:2-31:13). Within these two divisions, we will meet the LORD, the nation of Israel, the Gentile nations, and the stories of the main characters of Samuel, Saul, and David, as well as the many people alive at the time who interacted with all the aforementioned.

Chapter 1

I. The Nation of Israel with Samuel the Prophet (1:1-25:1)

A. The Nation Without a King

1. Samuel's Mother (1:1-2:10)

a) Samuel's Parents

(1) His Father

(a) His Father's Wives (1:1-2)

Let us begin our study of the nation of Israel with Samuel the prophet with the introduction of Samuel's mother, one of Samuel's parents, along with his father and his father's wives. Chapter 1, verse 1. *"Now there was a certain man from Ramathaim-zophim from the hill country of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah the son of Jerobam, the son of Elihu, the son of Tobu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ² He had two wives: the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children."* (1:1-2)

We begin with an interesting discovery. Samuel's family was living in *Ramathaim-zophim*. The name of the town means *the two watchtowers*. The *certain man* identified in this passage is also from the *hill country of Ephraim*. We would naturally jump to the conclusion that he was an Ephraimite, but we would be wrong. We begin this study with a translation error, minor as it is but significant in its effect. The Hebrew is much clearer in this point, stating that he was from the *mountains of Ephraim* instead. What is the difference between the *hill country of Ephraim* and the *mountains of Ephraim*? Nothing in reality. By translating it as the *mountain of Ephraim*, by investigation of ancient maps, we learn that the mountain range called the *mountains of Ephraim* extended down into the tribal area of Benjamin. Just because the primary mountain range in the tribal region of Ephraim extended down past the borderline with the tribal area of Benjamin did not mean that the name of the mountain range changed. This point helps us immensely because the village of Ramathaim-zophim, which was originally in the land of Zuph or Zophe, was Ramah, located in the tribal area of Benjamin. In verse 19 of this very chapter, our writer tells us that Ramathaim-zophim is the village of Ramah. However, this verse does not tell us that this *certain man* was an Ephraimite; rather, it tells us that this *certain man* lived in the mountains of Ephraim.

Next, the lineage of this *certain man* is given with his name. He is *"Elkanah the son of Jerobam, the son of Elihu, the son of Tobu, the son of Zuph."* These names would literally mean nothing to us except for one simple fact – we have in our Bibles the booklets called 1st and 2nd Chronicles. The Chronicles hold in them the genealogy of the Israelite people starting with Adam at the beginning of creation and ending with the Israelites being allowed to return to the Promised Land by order of Cyrus the Great about 536 BC or about three thousand six hundred and sixty-seven years after the creation of Adam. Besides the *"who begat who"* in the genealogy, side stories are told that place the people in the genealogy in the middle of known historical events. Such is the case with this list. In 1st Chronicles 6:35, we find this list in the genealogy of the Kohath priestly line of Aaron the Levite associated with the men that the future King David will appoint to serve in the house of the LORD. It reads as follows.

"From the sons of the Kohathites were Heman the singer, the son of Joel, the son of Samuel, ³⁴ the son of Elkanah, the son of Jerobam, the son of Eliel, the son of Toah, ³⁵ the son of Zuph, the son of Elkanah, the son of Mahath, the son of Amasai, ³⁶ the son of Elkanah, the son of Joel, the son of Azariah, the son of Zephaniah, ³⁷ the son of Tabath, the son of Assir, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, ³⁸ the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, the son of Israel." (1 Chronicles 6:33–38).

The first person that King David assigned to the house of the LORD was a singer by the name of Heman. Heman was the grandson of Samuel the prophet, the son of Samuel's son Joel. Samuel was the son of the *certain man* in this passage named Elkanah. Samuel was not just a judge but he was of the priestly line of Aaron. When the Nation of Israel took the Promised Land, Zuph, the priest, was assigned by Joshua to serve in the town of *Ramathaim-zophim*, or *Ramathaim-zuph* as it was also translated into English, which sat in the *mountains of Ephraim*, in the tribal area of Benjamin.

Samuel's father had two wives. The first wife of Elkanah was Hannah. She was barren. Therefore, Elkanah had taken a second wife named Peninnah, who had given Elkanah several children.

(b) His Father's Worship (1:3-5)

As a priest in the line of Aaron, Elkanah was assigned a day each year to participate in the sacrifices at the Tabernacle complex that was stationed at Shiloh. No doubt, he did this daily in the Levitical city where his family had been stationed since the time of the taking of the Promised Land, but one time of year, it was his privilege to serve at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. We must not think this is strange. It was part of the system for the descendants of Aaron's line. Speed forward many generations to the opening pages of the Gospel of Luke, where we find Zacharias going to the Temple in Jerusalem to participate in the sacrifices. There, the LORD spoke to Zacharias and told him of his son whom we would come to know as John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus. John the Baptist was a Levite in the line of Aaron and could have been the High Priest one day had the LORD not had a different plan for him. Jesus, his cousin, was of the tribe of Judah. How was a Levite connected to a Judite? They were connected through their mothers. John's mother married a Levite; Jesus' mother married a Judite. Be that as it may, Elkanah was privileged to be assigned one day a year to serve in Shiloh. Here in verse 3, Samuel records for us his father's worship.

"Now, this man would go up from his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests to the LORD there. ⁴When the day came that Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters; ⁵but to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, but the LORD had closed her womb." (1:3-5)

We have already explained why Elkanah served in the Tabernacle worship one time every year. Now we can flush out that story because we are told that "*Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas, were priests to the LORD there*" Hophni and Phinehas were the sons of the High Priest Eli. To be serving with their father in the priestly position at the Tabernacle, Hophni and Phinehas had to be at least thirty years of age at the time. However, they could have still been in training which began at the age of twenty-five. We can use this as a time marker in the Scripture in association with the age of Samuel in two important points. First, Eli, the High Priest, was much older than Samuel, possibly two generations older, meaning he was already in his fifties when Samuel was born. Second, Hophni and Phinehas were at least twenty-five years older than Samuel, and more than likely had children of their own at the time. In addition, we will learn in this story that Phinehas was the younger and would still be having children when Samuel had passed the age of thirty, on the day that Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas died (4:11).

This passage shows us that the entire family of the priest would accompany him on his special day to serve in the sacrifices at the Tabernacle complex. As we studied in the book of Leviticus, the families of the priests serving at the sacrifices were fed their meals by the meat and grain offerings that they presided over in the daily offerings presented to the LORD. Elkanah's family was no different. However, Elkanah was not completely fair with the portions he divided to his family. Each plate was full, but Hannah's plate was doubly full. Why? Two reasons. First, because of his great love for Hannah; she was his first wife. Second, because she was barren.

(c) His Father's Worries (1:6-9)

We might think that giving your first wife a double portion was a fair tradeoff for Elkanah. After all, his second wife received a portion from the sacrifices to eat, and all his children received a full portion to eat. Combined, it was much more than the double portion that Hannah received to eat. But that did not make a difference. By giving Hannah a double portion, Elkanah set up the scene for Peninnah to see that Elkanah loved Hannah more because she was barren, and it would stir jealousy in Peninnah's heart. Samuel tells us of his father's worries. Verse 6. *"Her rival, however, would provoke her bitterly to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb."*⁷ *It happened year after year, as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she would provoke her; so she wept and would not eat."*⁸ *Then Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep and why do you not eat and why is your heart sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?"* (1:6-9)

It is clear from Samuel's biography in this passage that he viewed his stepmother as a rival to his mother. She was. Hannah was loved. Peninnah was irritated because she had done the work to give children to Elkanah. Why would he not love her as much as he loved Hannah? Why would he gift Hannah an extra portion and not put an extra portion on Peninnah's plate too? Why would Hannah receive two presents when Peninnah received one? Both were wives of the same man. Why was that man not fair to each wife? *"Year after year"* the text tells us that Peninnah would *"provoke"* Hannah. No wonder Hannah cried each year when they visited Shiloh. No wonder Hannah did not have an appetite as she looked at the double portion of food sitting in front of her. It could not be hidden. Elkanah saw it every year. Because of his love for Hannah, he tried at least once to console her sad heart. *"Am I not better to you than ten sons?"* he said to her. What did he mean by these words? I am sure you can notice from this frank passage that men have not changed in all these years. In fact, almost universally, men say the wrong thing at the wrong time. All Elkanah was trying to do was to express how much more he loved Hannah, and it did not matter at all to him that she was barren. Let us hit the nail on the head and be frank. It was the wrong question to ask a crying wife with a broken heart. Period. Elkanah was the husband of both Hannah and Peninnah. He had the absolute power to stop Peninnah from provoking Hannah, but he did not handle it that way. Instead, he tried to console Hannah with his love and his own physical personhood. What if he died the next day? Where would that leave Hannah in the family? According to the law, she would be relegated back to her father's house to be cared for by her siblings or relatives. We must remember, in those days, the father of Elkanah had paid a dowry to the father of Hannah in pledge for the marriage. That dowry was paid to Hannah's father to take care of Hannah if Elkanah died before Hannah had adult children who would take care of Hannah once she was widowed.