

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 447

1 Samuel 1:1 through 2:11

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Episode Summary

The story of Hannah's barrenness and faithful prayer to Yahweh for a child is well known to Bible readers. Yet there is much more to the story and her prayer than meets the eye. In this episode of the podcast, we look at how this portion of 1 Samuel connects to the wider Old Testament, especially the patriarchs and David. We also devote some focus to issues and topics that arise in the text. Was Samuel a Nazirite? What is the significance of Elkanah's genealogy? How is Hannah's prayer a strike against the gods of Canaan?

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 447: 1 Samuel 1:1 through 2:11. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike. How are you feeling?

MH: Oh, not too bad today. I'm having a good day.

TS: Well, that's good. Interested to get into Samuel. I haven't read Samuel in a long time and it's nice to get into it. I'm anxious to hear what you have to add to it.

MH: Yeah, yeah, agreed. I mean, I wanted to do something Old Testament and Samuel is sort of a favorite book, so why not?

TS: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I don't want to keep our listeners waiting any longer. So I'm ready if you are.

MH: Okay. That's good because we're going to end up reading the whole passage here, but just a little bit of a reminder first that I'm going to try to stick to a format for this series. And when we do book studies, it's not a verse-by-verse exposition, but I like to highlight different things in the passage that I think are interesting or that I think the listening audience might consider interesting. But we're going to try to stick to a specific pattern in this series and you'll figure out what that is. I'll try to telegraph it as we go.

But with that, let's just read the passage. Let's start off by reading it because I can't assume that 1 Samuel is in everybody's head like maybe some New Testament passages would be. So it starts out this way and I'm reading from ESV:

There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite. ² 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.

³ Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh,

Or *she-LOH* if we're going to pronounce it more correctly, but I'll end up defaulting to the English (the Anglicized) versions here.

...where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD. ⁴ On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵ But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. ⁶ And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. ⁷ So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. ⁸ And 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 more to you than ten sons?"

⁹ After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. ¹⁰ She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. ¹¹ And she vowed a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head."

¹² As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³ Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. ¹⁴ And Eli said to her, "How long

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will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you.”¹⁵ But Hannah answered, “No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD.”¹⁶ Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation.”¹⁷ Then Eli answered, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him.”¹⁸ And she said, “Let your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.¹⁹ They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her.²⁰ And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, “I have asked for him from the LORD.”

²¹ The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. ²² But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, “As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the LORD and dwell there forever.” ²³ Elkanah her husband said to her, “Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him; only, may the LORD establish his word.” So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. ²⁴ And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. And the child was young. ²⁵ Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. ²⁶ And she said, “Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. ²⁷ For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him. ²⁸ Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD.”

And he worshiped the LORD there.

This is chapter 2:

And Hannah prayed and said,
“My heart exults in the LORD;
my horn is exalted in the LORD.

**My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in your salvation.**

**²“There is none holy like the LORD:
for there is none besides you;
there is no rock like our God.**

**³Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the LORD is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed.**

**⁴The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble bind on strength.**

**⁵Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.
The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.**

**⁶The LORD kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.**

**⁷The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low and he exalts.**

**⁸He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor.
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's,
and on them he has set the world.**

**⁹“He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,
for not by might shall a man prevail.**

**¹⁰The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces;
against them he will thunder in heaven.
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed.”**

**¹¹Then Elkanah went home to Ramah. And the boy was ministering to
the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest.**

So that's our section for today, chapters 1:1 through 2:11. And there's a lot in here. But first we want to talk about just in general terms, what's the passage about? Well, I mean, there's a hint at the end there in chapter 2 when Hannah says, "The Lord will judge the ends of the earth and he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed." At this point, there is no king in Israel. 1 Samuel serves as sort of a transitional book. It is essentially a sequel to the book of Judges, as bad as things were there, and the passage at hand informs us that the cure for the apostasy in Israel that you read about in the book of Judges is going to be the prophet Samuel and God's chosen, King David, later on in the book. The righteous in Israel will be vindicated through God's answer to the prayer of faithful Hannah, who will give birth to the prophet Samuel, the last judge and first classical prophet—one of the rare king-making prophets in the historical books.

Further, we could also say Hannah's story begins the same way as the stories of Samson in Judges 13, where it says "a certain man of Zorah" named Manoah, and then so on and so forth. Then Micah in Judges 17: "Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim..." did so and so. So this story begins kind of the same way again. It comes around on the heels of the book of Judges and is essentially a sequel to it. Despite Samson's shortcomings back in the book of Judges, it was under him that the beginning of the end of the Philistine oppression would transpire. We get that from Judges 13:5, which says specifically that, that Samson would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. As Chisolm notes in his commentary on 1 Samuel:

Micah's anonymous mother's obsession with idols contributes to the Danites' unauthorized worship system (Judg. 17–18). But Hannah's allegiance to the Lord is the catalyst for the revival of true worship through the spiritual leadership of her son, Samuel.

10:00 Now what all that means is that generally what this is about is it is about a turning point. It is about a turning point in the fortunes and in the fate—really the life of Israel. And the writer specifically makes Elkanah's beginning sound like Samson's and sound like Micah's because he wants people to mentally go back to the days of the judges when we have under Samson the beginning of the deliverance from the Philistines. And we have it in Micah—again, the problem of idolatry. Those things are going to get resolved in the book of Samuel, this first book.

Now let's make a few broad observations though—broader than the book of Judges in many respects. Again, how does the book of 1 Samuel... How does this passage in particular connect to the wider canon—to other things that we read about in the Hebrew Bible?

First, the scene with Hannah and Eli takes place at Shiloh where the Ark of the Covenant was housed. We learned that from 1 Samuel 4:3. This is where the Ark was kept. Really, this is actually where the Tabernacle was. Go to 1 Samuel 1:24, which we just read in passing. It says:

²⁴ And when she had weaned him [MH: when Hannah had weaned Samuel], she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh.

So it's very clear that the house of the Lord... Early here it's called "the temple." There is no temple yet because they're not even... The land hasn't even been conquered here. So we're not talking about the Temple of Jerusalem when 1 Samuel uses that term earlier in the book. We're not thinking about *The Temple* when we have the house of the Lord here. What we're thinking about is the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was at Shiloh, and even though the Tabernacle was designed to be a mobile place of worship (remember back into the wilderness wanderings—that period of Israel's history), by now it had become sort of fixed at Shiloh, its fixed home in Judge 18:31. Let me just read that to you. It's another reference here, way back in the book of Judges.

³¹ So they set up Micah's carved image that he made, as long as the house of God was at Shiloh.

So there you go again. The house of God, house of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord—it's at Shiloh. The Tabernacle had been constructed and put up and never taken back down because they haven't completed the journey that they're supposed to complete. It is very clear in earlier books where the Temple is supposed to be: a place where God chooses to set his name, which is going to be Jerusalem. But Jerusalem at this point is under pagan control. You remember in the life of David (which is going to come later in the book of Samuel), Jerusalem has to be taken from native Canaanites—native populations. It's not even Israelite in territory. So this is a long way to go yet before we get to what was supposed to happen with some immediacy under the time of Joshua and on into the period of the book of Judges. But the book of Judges chronicles the failures of Israel to do what they are supposed to do after Joshua dies. So we have here a connection with Judges with the house of the Lord in Shiloh.

Second, and on a bigger level (more canonical level), the chapter links what God is going to do in Israel to the patriarchs by virtue of the barrenness of Hannah and the miraculous God-enabled birth of Samuel. This is kind of interesting. Think back in your Old Testament to the patriarchal era. Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel were all barren—all three of them. Their children kept the Messianic promise moving forward, and you're going to have the same thing happen here

with Hannah. She is going to give birth to Samuel and Samuel is going to anoint David. So there's a connection here by virtue of the theme of barrenness back to these patriarchal women. Peter Leithart notes in his commentary:

In Genesis, the woman's barrenness was not only an emotional or family problem but threatened the fulfillment of God's promise of an abundant seed to inherit the land. Barrenness is significant ultimately because of God's promise to raise up a "seed of the woman" to crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). That was the seed promised to Abraham, but so long as Sarah was barren, the promise was not being fulfilled. Without a son, there was no future for Israel.

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So this is where Samuel is going to take off. We're going to have this new child born. The child's going to be born by divine intervention and he is going to further the promise given to Abraham. So there is this connection back to the patriarchs that way. Barrenness was also a spiritual metaphor for Israel, God's bride, per the curses in Deuteronomy 28:15. Let me just read those because they actually sound familiar. Deuteronomy 28:15. We'll read a few verses here. This is part of one of Moses' sermons about curses for disobedience to the Lord to get the people prompted to go into the land and take the land that God said he wanted taken. God said he would be with them. If they fail, they're going to be cursed. We read here in verse 15:

¹⁵ "But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. ¹⁶ Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. ¹⁷ Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. ¹⁸ Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock.

I mean, everything is going to be barren.

¹⁹ Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.

So, again, barrenness is a metaphor for the whole country. Israel's apostasy is transparent not only because the book opens in the period of the judges when everyone is doing what's right in his own eyes (per Judges 21:25), but because of the spiritual condition of its priestly leaders—Eli and his sons, who were notorious. We'll get into some of that and some of what they were doing a little bit later on in future episodes. But "negligent" is a nice term that you could use of Eli and his sons. I mean, they're apostates in many respects. Leithart summarizes this well in his commentary. He writes:

1 Samuel opens in the period of the judges, a period marked by repeated apostasy. Apparently, prayer at the Shiloh sanctuary was so rare that Eli could not recognize it when he saw it (1 Sam. 1:12–13).

Remember the description of Eli thinking Hannah was drunk. He doesn't even recognize when someone's praying, silently moving their lips. Leithart continues:

Eli's inability to identify what Hannah was doing, however, points to the apostasy of the priests and Levites during this period. The book of Judges comes to a climax with stories about corrupt Levites (chapters 17–21), and 1 Samuel fills out that portrait [MH: with Eli and his sons]. So long as Israel was "husbanded" by the likes of Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas, she would remain a waste land.

So, again, there's this connection back to the patriarchs, back to the period of the judges again.

Third macro-observation: Leithart observes how the use of the term "doorway" connects the Samuel narrative to the patriarchs. The ESV doesn't exactly translate "the door post," "post of the door," "post of the house of the Lord" in the same way, but in the Hebrew text we have a similarity here. We have these references to the term "doorway." You say, "Well, so what?" Well, it's kind of interesting. Leithard comments:

A couple of side details about Hannah's prayer are interesting. Eli was sitting at the door-post of the "temple" as he watched her pray. The description is odd, since there was in fact no temple in Shiloh. Because the tabernacle had been there throughout the period of the judges (Josh. 18:1), however, it had become virtually a permanent building. Eli's location at the door-post seems an incidental detail, but is not. Sarah stood in a doorway when the angels told Abraham that he was going to have a son (Gen. 18:10), and in the exodus, Israel passed through blood-stained doorways as they came to a "new birth" from slavery in Egypt. In these passages, the doorway symbolizes birth. God "opens" the doorway of the womb so that a child can enter the world. Hannah's child would eventually stand in the same doorway as the "gatekeeper" of Israel (1 Sam. 3:15).

This would be Samuel's job, or one of them. So again, Liethart points out, there's this larger connection. These are literary connections back to, again, the patriarchs and things in the book of Judges and so on and so forth that helps create a setting for what's going on in 1 Samuel. And the author of 1 Samuel does this deliberately. We're assuming that the choice of the vocabulary implies intent.

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Now let's hit a few specific nuggets in the portion we read. There are a number of things that we could point out here, but again, I view it as my job in a series like

this to just be familiar with the commentaries and the academic literature and just pull a few things out that are of interest (or at least I think will be of interest). The first one is Elkanah's background. Again, that's a point of interest for some unusual reasons here.

There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite.

So you get his genealogy. Now Hoffner in his 1 Samuel commentary writes this about the genealogy:

The specification that Elkanah's home (and Samuel's birthplace), Ramah (Ramathaim) of the Zuphites, was located in the hill country of Ephraim could be intended to remind us of the corruption, chaos, and violence that occurred in this same region in the final chapters of Judges (esp. Judg 19–21).

Now let me stop there. Look at that. Do we realize that some of the horrific stuff that you read at the end of the book of Judges is going to be this same region where Samuel is born, again, with supernatural assistance? By virtue of mentioning this thing, the intelligent Israelite reader or listener is going to pick up on that right away. So God's going to bring something good out of something horrific. Continuing with Hoffner on the genealogy, remember Chronicles is sort of a rehearsal or repetition of material in Samuel and Kings.

The genealogy of Samuel in 1 Chr 6:33–38 adds an additional fifteen earlier generations to Elkanah's genealogy, tracing him back to Jacob through Kohath, son of Levi.

So he's related to Jacob. Again, we wouldn't know that unless we go look at the genealogy—the expanded one in 1 Chronicles. Hoffner continues:

The Samuel text makes no obvious attempt to exploit this Levitical ancestry...

He's not only related to Jacob; he's related to Levi.

The Samuel text makes no obvious attempt to exploit the Levitical ancestry, but it may be important implicitly in view of Samuel's faithful exercise of cultic services at Shiloh. In contrast, that of Eli's son.

So here... Let me just break in again. So here we have someone descended from the Levites (Samuel) who is going to be the faithful priest compared to the guys that are already there. Hoffner continues:

Although most modern versions and commentators opt for interpreting אֶפְרַתִּי (*ephrathiy*) here as “Ephraimite” and consider the genealogy of Samuel in Chronicles, which traces him back to Levi, as secondary, there may nevertheless be two important intertextual links to Elkanah’s Ephrathite affiliation. Both of these intertextual links look backward as well as forward in time in a hopeful way: Naomi and Boaz, the husband of Ruth, were noble and godly Ephrathites (Ruth 1:2; 4:11)

So again, it hooks us back into Naomi and Boaz who are going to produce David.

...and direct ancestors of David (Ruth 4:18–22)...

Again, trying to connect what’s going to happen in Samuel to the Messianic line ultimately and again through David.

...who was also an Ephrathite from Bethlehem. And long after David’s era, God through the prophet Micah prophesied that the Messiah would also be born in Ephrathite Bethlehem (Mic 5:2). This was Elkanah’s heritage according to 1 Chr 6:33–38.

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That’s the end of Hoffner’s observation. When you look at that, and just this genealogical information connects us back to Judges... It connects it back, again, to the patriarchs; it connects us back to Jacob and Levi. Samuel is going to be descendant of Jacob and a descendant of the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe, this connection with the Ephrathite, the affiliation with Naomi and Boaz and David... All these things are telegraphed through that simple verse. And again, going back out to 1 Chronicles to look at the longer genealogy.

Second, the name Elkanah (which again I wish I could show you this or I wish I could count on people knowing Hebrew, but I’m going to try to make this intelligible)... The name Elkanah is spelled “El”... There’s the first element, *el*, which is the *aleph*, and then we’ve got *aleph-lamed* with an “e” vowel—*el*. The second half of it is *qanah* with a “q.” It’s a qoph—q-a-n-a-h. So Elkanah is *el* plus *qanah*, which also seems... This name itself seems to be an intertextual link back to the patriarch, Abraham. Again Hoffner observes:

The name Elkanah recalls Gen 14:18–24 (esp. v. 22), where plays on the names of Elkanah and Eli can be found in the description of Yahweh... (*el elyown qoneh shamayim wa’arets*) (“God Most High, Creator [קֹנֵה, *qoneh*] of heavens and earth”). This intertextual link suggests that Elkanah is important to the fulfillment of Yahweh’s covenant, with Abraham as a facilitator: As Melchizedek honored Abraham and Abraham’s God and thus received Yahweh’s reward in the title of the plunder given him by Abraham, so Elkanah will honor Hannah’s vow to Yahweh and will become the father of the great prophet Samuel. Through

Elkanah is established the lineage of the prophet Samuel, who is the protagonist until David appears.

You have to realize that Hannah is barren. Elkanah could've withheld conjugal rights from Hannah with complete justification. "You're not going to give me a child anyway so why have sex with you? Why bother?" But he loves her. So because he is faithful to her in that way, she is going to be the conduit through which the Abrahamic blessing is continued.

Third, the question we could ask here is, was Samuel a Nazirite? (Again, we're just pointing out things that might be items of interest.) We get this from 1 Samuel 1:11, where Hannah prays. She vows that no razor will come to the hair of the head of her child, of Samuel. Now that sounds like Nazirite, but the rest of the elements are absent here. They're absent. In the Septuagint, they are there. According to the Septuagint, Samuel was a Nazirite. The Septuagint adds the detail from Numbers 6 about abstinence from the fruit of the vine, and when it does this it agrees with the Dead Sea Scrolls, but this material is absent in the traditional Masoretic text. So what isn't clear in MT is made clear in the Septuagint and in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Leithart comments on this. He says:

There are three permanent Nazirites in the Bible: Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist, and each of them was born to a barren woman.

There we go again. Again, these intertextual connections.

Samuel typifies the ministry of John: As Samuel prepared the people for the reign of David, so John turned the hearts of the fathers to the children and prepared a people for the coming of the Davidic King.

Fourth nugget: there is a subtle religious polemic in Hannah's barrenness transformed to new life in the birth of Samuel. Let's read 1 Samuel 2:2-6 again here. Go back to 1 Samuel 2:2-6. This is part of Hannah's prayer. Catch what she is saying here.

² "There is none holy like the LORD:

This is a challenge to the other gods.

² "There is none holy like the LORD:

for there is none besides you;

there is no rock like our God.

³ Talk no more so very proudly,

let not arrogance come from your mouth;

**for the LORD is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed.**
**⁴ The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble bind on strength.**
**⁵ Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.**
**The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.**
**⁶ The LORD kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.**

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So that's 1 Samuel 2:2-6. Chisolm writes of this in this regard. Again, there's a subtle religious polemic here that you'd have to know Canaanite religion to pick up on. Chisolm writes this:

The Canaanites (neighbors of ancient Israel) worshiped the fertility god Baal, believing him to be a mighty warrior king who controlled the elements of the storm. They counted Baal as responsible for both agricultural and human fertility.

Let me just break in here. Well, didn't we just read in Hannah's prayer who really is responsible for both agricultural and human fertility? It's Yahweh, not Baal. Okay, continuing with Chisolm:

Baal's quest for kingship, under the ultimate authority of the high god El, is the main theme of their mythological texts. He defeats Yamm, the god of the unruly, threatening sea, but must then face the challenge of Mot, the god of the underworld and death. Mot initially defeats Baal, much to the dismay of El and the other gods. But then Baal returns to life and eventually engages in a violent conflict with Mot. Baal wins, but one suspects that the struggle for power is not over. The myth reflected the realities of nature. When the rains arrived at the proper time and the crops grew, Baal was in control. But when drought interrupted the natural cycle and brought starvation, Mot had defeated Baal.

Again, this is Canaanite religion. Chisolm adds:

In her song of praise following Samuel's birth, Hannah declares that the Lord is incomparable to all other so-called gods. Living at a time when many are worshiping the fertility god Baal (cf. Judg. 2:11–13; 6:25–32; 8:33; 10:6, 10; 1 Sam. 7:4), Hannah could be tempted to look to this popular god to deliver her from her childless condition. But she remains faithful to the Lord and is vindicated.

In effect, when Hannah says there is no god like Yahweh to celebrate the answer to her prayer in the baby Samuel, she declares Yahweh's direct superiority over Baal. It is Yahweh who lives life, not Baal. Yahweh is in control of death and life, not Baal or any of the other Canaanite deities. Leithart comments in this regard:

If Hannah hoped to rejoice as a mother of children, she knew she had to appeal to the only one who could bring life from the dead. If Israel hoped to be revived, her only option was to “pour out her soul before Yahweh.”

Fifth nugget: the etymology of Samuel's name. Now I'm going to read 1 Samuel 1:20 just so we get the flavor of this.

²⁰ And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel [shmo-el], for she said, “I have asked for him from the LORD.”

Now what the deal with this is, *Shmo-el* (Samuel's name) does not in fact derive from the verb “to ask” (*sha-al*). What the verse says in one respect is not true. *Shmo-el* (שמואל) does not derive from *sha-al* (שאל) as 1 Samuel 1:20 claims. The name is comprised of Hebrew *shem*, which means “name” and *el*. “His name is *El*” or “his name is God.” Now scholars all know this and so they look for it in this set of circumstances with this verse because it's so obviously wrong. They look for something else beneath the surface. They see 1 Samuel 1:20 in a statement as reflecting something deeper. Typically, where scholars go with this is they believe there is an intended pun here. As Leithart notes, the word for “ask” is from the verb *sha-al*—close enough to make a punny etymological connection but distant enough to make us suspect that there is something more afoot. Now Hoffer, I think, takes a pretty logical view of this if you're looking at the Hebrew letters. Hoffner writes of the name as follows. He says:

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In Israel's early period, mothers could name their children. Nevertheless, Hannah's naming her boy Samuel and the statement explaining his name are slightly unusual, as the verb in the explanation (שאל, *sha'al*, “ask”) is not part of Samuel's name.

Again, it's *shin-aleph-lamed*. That verb is not part of Samuel's name.

Ancient wordplay is very likely involved—a simple rearrangement of the letters of שמואל (*shmw'l*) (“Samuel”) yields שאל מ (*sh'wl m*) (“asked from [Yahweh]”).

So you can actually get to... Again, it's difficult to convey this because you're not looking at the letters and I can't count on how many people in the audience know some Hebrew, but if you just take the letters of his name, you can actually get the Hebrew behind “asked of,” “asked from,” and then “Yahweh,” which is kind of interesting. שאל מ (“asked from Yahweh”)—you can actually get that from שמואל.

Again, so is that intentional? Is the writer doing this just to sort of play with the name and play with the circumstance of Samuel's birth? And most scholars are going to say, "Yeah, this is why it is what it is," because obviously the Hebrew writer is going to know that Samuel's name is not actually derived etymologically from *sha'al*. But in terms of making a pun, in terms of using the letters, you *can* say it derives from that. Again, it's just how you get there. So again, I thought that was interesting, and Hoffner's commentary takes a lot of this kind of stuff apart so we'll be hearing from him again.

But here were five things, again, that I think are interesting in what we read today. Again, there are a lot of connections back to the period of judges, to the patriarchs, the patriarchal promises. Again, there are a lot of intertextual links here in 1 Samuel—just this first chapter going into chapter 2—that we need to be aware of.

Again, part of the reason that I pointed some of these things out, whether they're macro structural things, literary connections, or whether they're just some of these nuggets here, is that we need to become more intelligent readers of our Bible. Well, look up the genealogies. Invest in a commentary that can get you into the meat of the text like this because you're going to find that you're going to discover things that you never saw were there, that the writer is doing something very intelligent and very intentional to get the mind of the reader—the original reader—again, the Israelite, the person who would've been living much closer to the circumstances than we are for sure, and maybe a few centuries away. But they're going to know the thing about the doorpost. They're going to know the thing about the barrenness. They're going to know... These connections are going to fire off in their mind in their head and they're going to be able to see what the writer of 1 Samuel is doing in connecting us back to the patriarchs, back to Levi, back to Jacob, back to Abraham, and ultimately forward to... well, still backward to Naomi and Boaz, and then finally David. I mean this is where the whole thing is going. So there are just things dropped into the first chapter here, and then on into the second chapter, that very skillfully create this network of ideas. And then some of these little nuggets about the name and so on and so forth are just interesting.

So this is what we're going to try to do in this series in 1 Samuel. I'm going to try to in each episode connect it back on a big level (connect it to other things in the Hebrew Bible on a macro level) and also drill down on some of these nuggets that just might be items of interest or curiosities. Like the Nazirite thing... Was Samuel really a Nazirite? You might read what it says in the Masoretic Text and then ask yourself because the part about strong drink and the fruit of the vine is not there, but it is in the Septuagint. Again, that text (along with the Dead Sea Scrolls) tell us, yes, Samuel was a Nazirite. It makes sense. It makes sense in other respects, too, but again, we'll be getting to these things in this series. So I hope this was a good sample of what we're going to try to do.

TS: As always, Mike, very interesting. I'm looking forward to it. Obviously next week chapter 2, correct?

MH: Yeah, next time we're going to finish chapter 2. That will be our assignment to finish the rest of chapter 2 to the end of that chapter.

TS: Alright. There you go. Everybody you got your homework. Alright, Mike, looking forward to the rest of the book study and with that I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.