

A CHARACTER STUDY IN

THE LIFE OF SAMUEL

INTRODUCTION AND
PROLOGUE

I Samuel 1:1 - 28

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THE LIFE OF SAMUEL

The man Samuel was used of God in a particularly difficult time in the history of Israel. Moses and Joshua are gone. Israel is living in the Promised Land and for years had been ruled over by a series of judges that were appointed by God. As a nation they had been constantly harried by enemies as they repeated a spiritual cycle of; forgetting God, being chastised by God, and returning to God. They were a nation but in reality were a loose knit group of tribes that were loyal to the whole nation only in times of peril. They longed for a king who could be a strong leader for them to rally behind. So far, however, God had not chosen to give them a king. "The two books [of Samuel] present a continuous account of the history of Israel from the end of the Judges period to the latter years of King David. The purpose of the book was to describe the way in which the monarchy was established and the part played by the prophet Samuel in its institution." (Harrison P. 695)

Into this political, social and religious context, God brought the man Samuel. “The character and services of the expected child were sufficiently important to make his birth a fit subject for prophecy. (P. 136 JFB) Samuel is one of the few people in the Bible that we are given their entire life’s story from birth to death. He was the last of the judges of Israel. God used him to choose the first two kings of Israel. He guided the nation of Israel with a stern and exacting instruction to keep the people in fellowship and obedience to God.

INTRODUCTION

The book of I Samuel tells us the story of how Israel transitions to a nation led by a king from one being governed by judges. As the book begins the story of Samuel’s birth and the circumstance surrounding it are given as a narration. When this story is retold in our modern day it is usually given from the viewpoint of Hannah, Samuel’s mother. However, to overlook the role of Elkanah, Samuel’s father, in his early development would miss crucial aspects of the forming of Samuel’s character and

personality. With that in mind, we shall look at the effects of Elkanah's influence on the young by Samuel.

SAMUEL'S PROLOGUE

The narrative in I Samuel chapter one gives an interesting look into the home life of two devout children of God. Verse one ends with the statement that Elkanah was an Ephrathite. This suggests that he was of the tribe of Ephraim. However, throughout the book Samuel is busy doing the office of a priest. Only one who is of the tribe of Levi could do these things. He offered sacrifices as a priest (7:9). God said *"And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind."* (2:35) God chose Samuel as a priest. In I Chronicles 6:34 we read a list of Levites that includes Elkanah and his lineage. The statement in verse one that Elkanah was an Ephrathite simply means that he lived in the area of Ephraim.

Elkanah was a man who was faithful to and loved the house of God. *"And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and*

to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh.” (1:3) He was a loving Husband. He had two wives. One had several children but one, Hannah, was barren. This was a curse to her but because of this he loved her even more. “And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah:” (1:5) A “worthy portion” was a double portion of the meat offered to the Lord. He was saying how special she was to him. He tries to comfort her by asking, “Am I not better to thee than ten sons?” (1:8) He tried to be as good a husband to her that he could. “Ten is a round number used to express a large number. ‘Am I not better to you than a large family?’ is the meaning.” (Wycliffe. P 275) Later when Samuel was born Elkanah understood how important it was for Hannah to stay at home when he went to Shiloh to worship. Hannah kept Samuel close to her for his first several years. During this time both Hannah and Elkanah trained the young boy to be a servant of the Lord. After all, when Hannah

gave Samuel to the Lord at Shiloh, Elkanah was also giving his son. *“And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and his vow. But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide forever. And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the LORD establish his word.”*

(1:23) In conclusion, Elkanah can be said to be;

A loving husband

A sensitive husband

A devout and godly man

These character traits as well as others were transmitted to his son, Samuel during the several years that Hannah raised him at home before she gave him back to the Lord.

Notes
