**The Birth of Samuel**

This week we begin out study of Samuel who was one of the more prominent men of the Old Testament. He was a prophet, priest and judge of Israel and 2 books of the Bible bear his name although the second describes events that occurred after his death. He was the last judge of Israel before kings ruled and was highly regarded by God (see Psalm 99:6 and Jer 15:1).

The story of Samuel begins prior to his birth which had some similarities to the birth of Samson, another important judge of Israel. Like Samson, Samuel was born to a mother who had been barren. While the angel of the Lord heralded Samson’s birth and directed his parents to dedicate him as a Nazarite, Samuel’s mother dedicated him to God’s service before his birth. Chapter 1 begins by introducing Elkanah who is described as a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim. The term “Zuphite” is derived from the name Zophai who was an ancestor of Elkanah. Although Elkanah is referred to as an Ephraimite, he was a Levite, descended from the clan of Kohath (see 1st Chron. 6:22-27). Elkanah had 2 wives; Peninnah who had children and Hannah who was childless. Elkanah was faithful to offer a sacrifice each year, traveling to Shiloh where the tabernacle was attended by priests named Hophni and Phineas who were sons of the high priest Eli. Similar to the story of Rachel, Elkanah loved Hannah but God had closed her womb.

One year when they went to Shiloh, Hannah prayed that God would grant her a son and she made a vow that he would be given to God all the days of his life and a razor would never be used on his head, apparently a Nazarite vow. Hannah continued her prayer so fervently that her lips were moving although he did not speak. Eli accused her of being drunk and she replied that she had been praying out of her anguish and grief. Eli answered “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him”. Notice that he did not inquire about what caused her anguish and grief.

Later, Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son whom she named Samuel meaning God has heard. After Samuel was weaned, she took him along with a sacrifice and other offerings and to Shiloh and presented him to Eli, reminding him of their previous encounter when she prayed to God. She told Eli that God had granted her wish and she was giving Samuel to the Lord.

I think we can learn a couple of lessons from the life of Hannah. First she was specific and reserved in her prayer, she wanted just one son unlike Rachel who demanded *children* (see. Gen 30:1). Her situation was similar to Rachel but there is no mention of resentment towards Elkanah’s other wife. Matthew Henry did speculate that Hannah was his first wife and he married Peninnah later who delivered him children but also vexed him. Certainly verse 7 indicates that Peninnah was a woman of poor character.

I will also engage in speculation. I wonder if God kept her childless waiting for a reason. Perhaps He waited until she not only prayed for a child but prayed for something that was in His will. He always accomplishes His will, often using methods beyond our understanding. As we will learn in the next chapter, Samuel was called by God and God would bring about the circumstances for Samuel’s service.

Those who make vows should be prepared to carry them out and Hannah certainly did that. David Guzik noted that she vowed that Samuel would serve God all the days of his life, well beyond the requirement for Levites to serve from age 30 to 50 (see Num. 4:2-3). It is interesting that the King James version says that Hannah *lent* Samuel to the Lord while the NIV says that she gave him to the Lord. She was faithful to her vow and furthermore, she did not have “vower’s remorse”. Rather than being bitter about separation from her son, she praised God.