

The Background to David Becoming King over Israel

Part 4

The Spiritual Foundation and the Need for Faithful Leadership (1 Samuel 1–7)

- **The Setting:** Israel is in the chaotic era of the Judges. There is no king, spiritual darkness is rampant, and external enemies (the Philistines) are closing in.
- **The Theme:** God works from the “bottom up.” Before He brings a righteous king, He starts by changing the spiritual atmosphere through prayer, humility, and repentance.

Hannah’s Grief and God’s Answer (1 Samuel 1)

This book begins with a story involving a woman named Hannah (Heb. *Chana*, meaning “Favored or Gracious,” from *chanan*, “show mercy, grace or favor”). She is married to a man named Elkanah, but she is unable to conceive children.

- **Summary:** Hannah, in deep anguish over her barrenness, pours her heart out to God at the tabernacle. Eli the high priest misjudges her as drunk, but God hears her humble vow and grants her a son, Samuel.

Her words in verse 11 are a classic example of a contingent prayer—often referred to in theology as a vow-prayer or a conditional petition. Hannah negotiates a binding covenant with God: *If* He will look upon her affliction and grant her a son, *then* she will give that son back to Him for a lifetime of service as a Nazirite.

In human relationships, a conditional bargain can often look like manipulation or a transaction. However, Hannah’s contingency is structurally different from standard pagan prayers of her era. Ancient Near Eastern worshipers would bargain with false gods by offering sacrifices to *bribe* the deity into granting them health, wealth, or fertility. The goal was always self-enrichment. In contrast, Hannah asks for a son, but her vow promises that she will not keep the reward. The moment the boy is old enough to be weaned, she surrenders him to the Tabernacle forever. She isn’t bargaining for a child to build her own legacy; she is offering her womb to fulfill a divine need. So, she sacrifices the very thing she is begging for by presenting young Samuel to Eli the priest and explicitly references her conditional prayer in verses 27-28:

“For this boy I prayed, and Adonai has given me my petition which I asked of Him. So I have also dedicated him to Adonai; as long as he lives he is dedicated to Adonai.”

The connection to David

This story teaches that God often begins His work in the shadows. God’s plan to establish David’s royal line does not begin in a palace; it begins with the private tears of an ordinary, overlooked woman. Similarly, when God looks for Israel’s next king, He bypasses the battlefield and goes to a forgotten pasture to find David.

Hannah’s Prophetic Song of Praise (1 Samuel 2)

Hannah sings a song of praise with the following characteristics:

1. **Rejoicing in God's Salvation and Strength.** She declares that her heart rejoices explicitly in the Lord, rather than just the gift of her child. When she states that her "horn is exalted in the Lord," in biblical imagery, a horn symbolizes strength and victory, showing that God lifted her out of her personal shame.
2. **The Unmatched Character of God.** She proclaims that there is "no one holy like the Lord" and "no rock like our God," celebrating His ultimate distinctiveness and dependability. And she warns human beings against arrogance and pride because God is a "God of knowledge" who sees and weighs every human action.
3. **The Great Divine Reversal.** A central theme of the song is how God routinely upends human hierarchies, overturning the fortunes of the proud and the humble:
 - **The Weak vs. The Mighty:** The bows of mighty warriors are shattered, while those who stumbled are given strength.
 - **The Hungry vs. The Full:** Those who were once wealthy and full must work for bread, while the starving are finally filled.
 - **The Barren vs. The Mother:** The barren woman gives birth to many, while the woman who boasted of many children loses her vigor.
 - **Sovereignty over Life and Wealth:** Hannah emphasizes that the Lord controls life and death, poverty and wealth, raising the needy out of the ash heap to sit with princes.
4. **Prophecy of the King and Messiah** – The song concludes by looking past Hannah's era (the time of the Judges) to a future where God establishes a king.

Historical Legacy: Centuries later, Miriam/Mary (the mother of Yeshua) used the exact same structure and themes of divine reversal in her own song of praise, known as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55).

The connection to David

This song acts as the blueprint of David's life. Her stunning prophecy that God will "give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed" (v. 10) was written before Israel even had a king! This is a milestone prophetic statement in scripture, pointing forward historically to King David and ultimately to the Messiah. David's entire life is a living illustration of this song: a humble shepherd boy raised to the throne while the proud King Saul is brought low.

The Wickedness of Eli's Sons (1 Samuel 2)

- **Summary:** The sons of Eli the High Priest, Hophni and Phinehas, who are priests themselves, abuse their priestly authority. They steal the best portions of the sacrifices for themselves and treat God's offerings with utter contempt, and commit sexual sins at the tabernacle.
- **The consequences:** In verse 34, an unnamed prophet ("man of God") delivered a severe prophetic judgment declaring that Hophni and Phinehas would both die on the exact same day as a direct consequence and sign of God's rejection of their corrupt priesthood. In addition, the prophet stated that God would break the strength of Eli's family line, ensuring that no descendant would live to old age (v. 33) and God would raise up a faithful priest who

would act according to His heart, effectively stripping Eli's lineage of their honored position and reducing the surviving descendants to poverty and subservience.

- **The outcome:** The judgment was carried out shortly after in 1 Samuel 4:10–11. During a war against the Philistines, both Hophni and Phinehas were slain on the battlefield, the Ark of the Covenant was captured, and Eli died upon hearing the news. Following the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas, the priestly line of Eli's descendants was systematically decimated through political violence and finally terminated by Solomon's royal banishment approximately a century later.

This story illustrates what happens to a community or nation when its spiritual leaders care more about self-indulgence and personal gain than God's holiness.

The connection to David

Eli's sons represent leadership by entitlement and bloodline, leading to spiritual rot. This sets up the absolute necessity for a ruler who leads out of a relationship with God. Later, David will model the exact opposite: when David sins, he repents deeply (Psalm 51) because he genuinely cares about God's holiness, unlike Eli's sons who ignore all warnings.

God Calls a True Servant (1 Samuel 3)

When God initially called out to Samuel audibly, he thought that Eli was calling him. But when Eli concluded that it was God speaking, he prepared Samuel to be ready for the next time that God called.

- **Summary:** In a time when the word of the Lord was rare, God bypasses the corrupt, blind priest Eli and calls out directly to the young boy Samuel, who responds, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (v. 10).

The connection to David

God deliberately bypassed the established, prominent adults to speak to an unnoticed child. This perfectly foreshadows 1 Samuel 16, where God bypasses David's older, tall, impressive brothers and tells Samuel to anoint the youngest boy who was out tending the sheep. This tells us that God chooses people based on a servant's heart, not on human status.

Repentance and Victory over the Philistines at Mizpah (1 Samuel 7)

- **Summary:** Samuel leads Israel to smash their false idols and return to Adonai. While they are fasting and praying at Mizpah, the Philistines attack. Israel was completely outmatched technologically, but God thunders from heaven, throws the enemy into a panic, and delivers Israel. This event is similar to the way that God gave the nation a victory over the Amalekites at the beginning of the Exodus and the conquest of the land of Canaan, when the deciding factor was God's direct intervention, not the military skills or power of people.

The Historical and Geographical Context

Understanding the Philistines is essential for comprehending the biblical narrative because they are not just generic "bad guys." Instead, they represent a highly advanced, foreign, and looming existential threat to Israel.

- **European Origins:** Genetic DNA mapping from excavations in Ashkelon confirms that the Philistines were Europeans of Aegean origin, possibly from modern-day Greece, Crete, and Cyprus. The Bible itself accurately tracks this, noting they migrated from “Caphtor” (Crete).
- **The “Sea Peoples”:** Around 1175 BC, during the Late Bronze Age collapse, a massive migration wave known in Egyptian records as the “Sea Peoples” swept across the Mediterranean. After failing to conquer Egypt, one tribe—the *Peleset*—settled along the southern coast of Canaan.
- **Technological Superiority:** Unlike the Israelites, who were mostly tribal farmers operating with Bronze Age tools, the Philistines possessed advanced Iron Age technology. They held a strict monopoly on blacksmithing and weapon-making. This meant they had iron-rimmed chariots, advanced armor, and superior swords.
- **Sophisticated Governance:** They did not have a single absolute king. Instead, they operated as a unified coalition governed by five distinct city lords (called *serens*). They were highly coordinated during times of national emergencies.
- **Why it matters:** Since Israel lacked iron weapons and a unified military structure, the Philistines were steadily creeping from the coastal plains into Israel’s central hill country, making them a continual significant threat.

The connection to David

Samuel shows that Israel’s true weapon is never armor or military numbers, but corporate repentance and relying on God’s power. David fights Goliath with this exact mindset, declaring: “The battle is the Lord’s!” This battle sets the paradigm for David’s famous clash with Goliath.

The Big Takeaway: True leadership is birthed in humility, sustained by listening to God, and defined by a commitment to His holiness.