

The Davidic
Succession and the
Man of God in the
Books of Samuel
and Kings

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By

Robert Ignatius Letellier

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INTRODUCTION

“Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David.” (Isaiah 55:3)

And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it and he cried, “My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” And he saw him no more. (2 Kings 2:11-12)

Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:49)

When Christians are baptized, they are initiated into the *triplex munera* of Jesus: the three spiritual ministries of Prophet, Priest and King. This means the charism of proclaiming the truth; of praying and worshipping in spirit and in truth; and finally of administering a rule of life based on service and love. These baptismal graces all find their origins in the history of God’s People as recorded in the earliest accounts of the liberation from servitude in Egypt (the Exodus) and the long period of trial and growth as a nation (during the Forty Years in the Wilderness). If Abraham is Our Father in Faith (Genesis 15, Romans 5, the Roman Canon)—obeying the Lord and sealing the great Covenant of Circumcision—then Moses is Our Father in Hope (Exodus 3, *Piers Plowman* Bk 3)—whose leadership saw the bestowal of the Law (summarized in the Ten Commandments)—the path to true righteousness and peace. In proclaiming the great truth of the Law, Moses’ prayer was “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets” (Num 11:29). Moses was also entrusted with the revelation of true worship, and was told to build the Tabernacle, the tent of adoration, with its Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant (the golden casket containing the Tablets of the Ten Words) was to be housed (Ex 24). This prefigured the construction of the great Temple in Jerusalem that would eventually be accomplished by Solomon. To administer the rituals of the Tabernacle, Moses was instructed to appoint his brother Aaron as chief minister: he was to be set apart (Ex 28) and consecrated for his office (Ex 29; Lev 9; Ps 105:26). These appointments and ministries were to be for all the people, and

Moses announced the divine will: “You shall be to me kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6).

These great events of the epic history of Ancient Israel were to shape their identity in perpetuity, and of course have become integral, foundational in the further unfolding of salvation history in the fulfilment of the Covenant in Jesus Christ, the face of the Unseen Father (Jn 14:9; Col 1:15).

And while the role of Priest was formally appointed in the Wilderness, those of Prophet and King still awaited such consecration. The Judges beginning with Joshua would follow Moses: ruling the People of God and overseeing their entrance into the Promised Land, presenting as it did the challenging contact with the pagan Canaanite and Philistine peoples. The Books of Joshua and Judges recount the early days of Israelite habitation of the country, a time of violence, conflict and lawlessness. Already at the end of the Book of Judges there was a realization that stronger government was needed to counter the growing lawlessness of the land (see the terrible stories of Judges 19—20).

The last of the Judges was Samuel, dedicated as a child to the high priest Eli for service in the sanctuary at Shiloh (1 Samuel 1—3). Samuel’s call and office singled him out as a unique leader, filled with the Holy Spirit “so that none of his words fell to the ground, and all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that there was prophet in Israel” (1 Sam 3: 19-20). This dynamic leadership encompassed both spiritual and political affairs, but had to deal with the growing menace of the Philistines and tribes like the Amalekites. The Israelites, gathered in the loose political federacy of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, now sought to have a king, in the manner of other nations. Despite Samuel’s efforts to dissuade the People from this radical and potentially troublesome political choice, he was eventually divinely instructed to accede to their wishes. He chose the man Saul of Kish to be anointed as the first King of Israel (1 Sam 10:1, “Then Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on his head, and kissed him, and said, ‘Has not the LORD anointed you to be prince over his people Israel?’”). Despite his youth, energy and dynamism, Saul proved headstrong, arrogant, self-willed and moody. He disappointed Samuel in his choice, and was rejected in favour of the youngest son of Jesse of Bethlehem—the shepherd-boy and harpist David. David was now anointed over his stalwart older brothers (1 Sam 16). The sacredness of these elections, the sacramental nature of the anointing, are underpinned by the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon both Saul (1 Sam 11:6) and David (1 Sam 16:13) who are consecrated with a charism beyond them (“And the Spirit of God came

mightily upon Saul”; “And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward”).)

The stories of Samuel (his birth, boyhood, divine calling), of Saul (in promise and disappointment, in rash bravado and deepening psychosis), and David (his youth, beauty, charismatic attractiveness, friendship with Jonathan, his fallibility and repentance) are among the most famous events in the Bible, and indeed rank among the greatest narratives in the world. This is not only because the power of their discourse, but because of the depth of their depiction of the human condition, and their unsentimental frankness and inflexible analysis of character. The story of David and Goliath must be among the most celebrated ever written, while the coruscating truthfulness of David’s adultery with Bathsheba, the destruction of her husband Uriah, and the sordid troubles of David’s offspring (Amnon, Tamar, Absalom, Adonijah) remain astonishing in their power and tragedy.

These vivid annals describe the rise of the monarchy in Saul and its perfect embodiment in David. The person of David was so outstanding that the question was always: who could and would succeed him? The discussion of this issue is the underlying structure of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, and constitutes a trope called the Succession Narrative (or *Thronfolgegeschichte*), alternatively the King’s Story (*Königsnovelle*). Like David himself, it was his younger son, Solomon, who assumed the crown and became the proverbial symbol of Wisdom for all time. This was another topos in Israel’s history: of the younger superseding the elder (ultimogeniture rather than primogeniture)—as if to assert regularly that Man’s ways are not God’s ways. These developments were possible only through the office of the prophets sent by God to direct his People, and remind them of their call to holiness (Lev 11:44; 20:7). Samuel was succeeded by Nathan who renewed the Covenant in David, promising that his dynasty that would last forever (2 Sam 7). Here we leave the realm of historical chronology (*kronos*) and enter the mystery of prophecy (*kairos*), and of Messianism. This was God’s decisive intervention in history to reconcile heaven and earth, and realized in Jesus, born in the flesh of David’s line in his city of Bethlehem. But Nathan also fearlessly challenged David’s moral lapse in the scandal of his relationship with Bathsheba. The King of God’s People can never be a law unto himself, a despot or autocrat, but always the servant of the Lord and his transforming Law of justice and mercy. The King becomes in fact “the Servant of the servants of God” (as exemplified messianically by Jesus Washing of the

Disciples' Feet, John 13, and reflected in the papal title chosen by Innocent III).

The manifestation of the Prophet as the Man of God comes later, in the time of the Divided Kingdom, in the illustrious record of Elijah of Tishbe and his appointed successor Elisha (1 Kings 17—2 Kings 14). The stories of their lives have a similar narrative potency and memorability: Elijah in his contest with the Prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel; his theophany on Mount Horeb; his assumption into heaven in front of Elisha, and the many miraculous events in Elisha's ministry. Despite the human failure of the monarchy and the division of the Kingdom of Israel into the Northern (Israel) and Southern (Judah) entities, the role of the Prophets as conscience of the nation, reproving the various monarchs, and always calling the people back to monotheism and to holiness, set a precedent across the ages. This is testified in the great Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of the Church (325, 381 AD: the Holy Spirit "has spoken through the prophets").

The Books of Samuel and Kings are a sequence of extraordinary historical chronicle and moral teaching. Not only do they recount the emergence of Monarch and Man of God in Israel, but they incidentally unfold a theology of charismatic leadership. They describe the role and true nature of prophetism and kingship in God's dispensation for his Chosen People. And through this spiritual inheritance for all ages, he calls each person by name and consecrates them in baptism to the service of his Universal Kingdom until the advent of the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21:1).

—

The **cover illustration** of this book is remarkable for its representation of the first prophet of Israel, Samuel, and the first king of Israel, Saul. The vivid painting by William Sidney Mount (1828) is a depiction of the famous séance by the Witch of Endor in which the ghost of Samuel was summoned from the dead to counsel the stricken Saul on the eve of the fateful Battle of Gilboa. The centre is dominated by the Witch, terrified at the huge and unanticipated consequences of her forbidden spiritualism. The ghost of Samuel stands on the right, his arms menacingly stretched out to the fraught Saul, announcing the king's fate at the battle on the morrow. Saul falls to the ground crushed by the portentous and overwhelming situation, and all it signifies: his doomed relationship with the prophet in life, the failure of his royal stewardship, and the devastating announcement of his imminent death.

I. THE SUCCESSION OF DAVID

1 & 2 Samuel —1 Kings

The Monarchy in Israel

1 & 2 Samuel

From the Judges to the Kings.

Nature of the Book

Treated as one book in the Hebrew, 1 & 2 Samuel constitute one of the finest historical writing in all literature. Written largely as historical biography, these narratives differ from contemporary documents (Syrian, Egyptian, Hittite) in not merely pegging out events on the line of passing time. The events themselves are stressed, and the moral and spiritual repercussions of these events and of the persons involved are highlighted. Accordingly, these books have eminent critical and didactic value. From a prophetic viewpoint, they are also important in that they tell of the founding of Israel's kingdom under David. These events foreshadow the coming of Israel's true King (cf. Num 24: 17-19 and 1 Sam 2:10) and establishment of the Kingdom under the Messiah (Acts 1:6).

Authorship and authenticity

While Samuel is not said to be the author, he may have been joint author with Nathan and Gad (cf. 1 Chron 29:29). The higher critical contention that 1 & 2 Samuel consist of various discordant traditions is not sustained by careful discerning exegesis of the books.

We must some questions:

- 1) Where does the story begin?
- 2) What is the theme?
- 3) What is the scope of the story?
Anti-Davidic? Anti-Solomonic?

- 4) What is the date of the text?
Immediate? Late?
- 5) Is it general literature? What is the genre?
Is it true or false?

There is a **thematic unity** to these chapters, two sets of three:

- three groups of texts
- three themes

- 1) Samuel's birth and ministry: 1 Sam 1—8
- 2) Saul the King of Israel: 1 Sam 9—15
- 3) The Rise of David: 1 Sam 16-30
- 4) David King of Israel (Solomonic Texts): 2 Sam 7: 11-14, 1 Kgs 1—2
- 5) Absalom's Rebellion: 2 Sam 13—20
- 6) Saul's Descendants: 2 Sam 2—4, 9, 16; 1-14, 19—20

The problem is that 2 Sam 9 and 10 are late texts to give an historical aura.

Why is it called the First and Second Books of Samuel?

Previously both were one book as the two Books of the Kings. In the Septuagint they are known as the four Books of the Kings. The Talmud speaks of only one Book of Samuel.

- 1 Sam ends with the death of Samuel
- 2 Sam begins with David lamenting the death of Saul and Jonathan
- 1 Kgs begins with the succession of Solomon.

So this is a Greek division, not a Hebrew one.

Who wrote the work?

Internal witness names three authors: Samuel, Gad and Nathan (1 Sam 29:29). Joshua is mentioned in 2 Kgs. So it could a combination of variations.

K. Budde finds a continuation of the Pentateuchal authors J P E D.¹ But this has few followers. For Martin Noth, Deuteronomy and the Historical

Books make up one historical work, a work made in Judea during the Exile.² There are three great historical divisions:

- 1) The Pentateuch
- 2) The Deuteronomic Books
- 3) Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah

The Exile was the result of the sin of Israel. There was no seeming possibility of a return, so it ends with the Exile. We can separate the work and see it as a unity, with David the Chosen King. But the text is not detailed enough to give a conclusion to this idea. The first group of texts pertains to Solomon.

The book is anonymous. The Book belongs to an early date, perhaps shortly after the separation of the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel (cf. 1 Sam 27:6). The author was probably a prophet in the monarchical period who employed earlier sources left by Samuel, Gad, Nathan (1 Chron 29:29) and possibly others. This is suggested by the fact that the work possesses unity as well as plan and purpose, and is thus to be regarded as of a single author or compiler. That the book ends just previously to David's decease suggests that it derives from that period. The reference to Judah and Israel (1 Sam 27:6) need not rule out this date since such a distinction prevailed as early as the Davidic Period before the consolidation of the monarchy (1 Sam 18:6; 2 Sam 2:10; 24:1).

In its present form, however, the work appears to have undergone considerable modifications. This seems clear from the additions, omissions, double narratives and discrepancies that can be traced in it. In 1 Chron 29:29 "the book of Samuel the seer" is mentioned; and in 1 Sam 10:25 mention is made of a work by Samuel, which contained at least the law of the kingdom. In all probability these early sources were employed by the compiler of the Books of Samuel.

Otto Eissfeldt, in *Die Komposition der Samuelisbücher* (1931), separates the text into three sources L, J and E, which are regarded as continuation of the sources of the Heptateuch.³ This theory has not been widely received. It is commonly held that the Books of Samuel consist of at least two principal sources, with J, the earlier, about the 10th c. BC (R. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1941).⁴ The relationship of these documents is claimed to be similar to J and E in the Pentateuch and Judges, if not a continuation of these documents, as Budde maintained. It is claimed that in the 7th c. these two sources were united; and that they

allegedly contain contradictions, conflations and differences in style. Later a Deuteronomistic editor of the 6th c. deleted certain portions contrary to his religious convictions, but these were subsequently restored. This theory disregards the unity of the books, and makes out the compiler/editor to be prone to error, a blunderer. But differences in viewpoints are not evidence of a variety of authorship, nor do arguments for composite authorship on the grounds of style and diction.

In recent decades, an important shift has taken place in the study of the tendencies, both leading away from the *Thronfolgegeschichte* hypothesis as it was formulated in 1926 by Leonhard Rost. One of them is to retain Rost's key postulate that much of 2 Samuel and 1 Kings 1—2 is a self-contained "Succession Narrative" or "Court History" that was included in the narrative of the Israelite monarchy as a unit, but to reappraise the extent, genre, theme, message, and dating of this unit. Another tendency, represented by a very small but steadily growing minority of exegetes, is to deny its existence.

Thus, already in 1964 R. A. Carlson presented tradition-historical arguments in favour of viewing the whole history of David's reign in 2 Sam 2—24 as an integral Deuteronomistic composition tracing the king's fate first under the blessing (chs. 2—7) and then under the curse (chs. 9—24). Almost two decades later, in 1981, Jan Fokkelman published the first volume of his grand literary interpretation of Samuel (*Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*). Although the scope of this volume, analyzing 2 Sam 9—20 and 1 Kgs 1—2, almost exactly coincides with the limits of Rost's *Thronfolgegeschichte*, Fokkelman dismissed the idea of treating these texts as a separate entity and declared that "the *Thronfolgegeschichte* theory ... [had] crippled OT science for almost 50 years." In the same year, Peter Ackroyd issued a terse and forceful warning: in the texts pertaining to David's reign: "There are so many uncertainties—uncertainties of chronology, uncertainties about the nature of the narratives, uncertainties about their proper order—that any attempt at mere historical reconstruction is out." In 1993 Robert Polzin published a commentary on 2 Samuel that completely ignored both the *Thronfolgegeschichte* concept and the hypothetical literary boundaries associated with it, and in 2000 Steven McKenzie concluded that "there [had been] no S[uccession] N[arrative]".

This significant shift notwithstanding, the core of Rost's hypothesis, namely, the notion of a large, continuous, self-contained, and distinctive "document" (henceforth D) underlying a large part of 2 Samuel and

perhaps the first two chapters of 1 Kings, remains largely intact. Most scholars invest their efforts in modifying and refining it; others, with the notable exception of McKenzie, seem to take issue primarily with the diachronic mode of interpretation in general, not with specific redaction-critical presuppositions that can be traced back to Rost. As a result, these presuppositions still dominate the field and shape it. Perhaps nothing illustrates this more graphically than Fokkelman's strategic decision not only to include 1 Kgs 1—2 in his reading of the Books of Samuel but to treat these chapters together with 2 Sam 9—20, ignoring the fact that in the received Hebrew Bible the two units are not contiguous. Likewise, McKenzie limits his discussion of literary connections between Davidic narratives to the texts included by some of his predecessors in this Document (2 Sam 2:8—4:12; 9:1-13; 13:1—21:14; 1 Kgs 1—2) and concedes that these texts may be based on earlier sources, thereby assigning them a special status.

The concept of such a Document *per se* can be challenged by demonstrating that the received Masoretic Text (MT) of Samuel and Kings does not offer any evidence of its existence. Examination of 2 Sam 1—1 Kgs 2 in synchronic and diachronic perspectives suggests that from both points of view it is preferable to regard it as an integral composition tracing David's biography after Saul's death and as an integral element of the history of the Israelite monarchy. The concept of kingship in general and Davidic monarchy in particular that found its expression in 2 Sam 1—1 Kgs 2 broadly matches the outlook of Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic passages in the Former Prophets.⁵

In more recent research on the literary history of the Former Prophets several scholars argue for a first Deuteronomistic history-book consisting of 1 Sam – 2 Kgs. While the argument for a Deuteronomistic history book relating to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah seems sound, the assessment that the bulk of 1 & 2 Sam (and 1 Kgs 1—2) was an integral part of this work presents several difficulties. C. Westermann puts emphasis on the different genres: While 1 & 2 Sam above all includes stories, 1 & 2 Kgs consists mainly of historical accounts. In addition to this observation, the important theological divergences between the two books should also be taken into consideration. Certain tendencies of the stories of Samuel—the positive interest for various cult-places (i.e. Shilo, Rama, Bethel, Gilgal, Nob, Hebron), the drawing of a very ambiguous image of David—are in a strong tension to the main principles of the authors of 1 & 2 Kgs: essential for their judging of Israelite and Judean kings is the strict observance of the command of cult centralization and the imitation of a King David who

in 1 & 2 Kgs is seen in an entirely positive way. There are several discrepancies between 1 & 2 Sam and 1 & 2 Kgs that reassess the literary-historical relationship between the two unities.⁶

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The Books of Chronicles

The name “Chronicles” is from the Vulgate *Liber Chronicorum* (“Book of Chronicles”). In Hebrew manuscripts, the books are regarded as one. The present division into two books is adopted from the LXX and the Vulgate. The Hebrew title *Devri Hayyammim* (“Acts of the Days” or “Events of the Times”) is a general term indicating the historical character of the work. In the LXX, the books are called *Paraleipomena* (“Things Omitted” or “Things Left Over”) i.e. from the Book of Kings since the translators viewed the Chronicles as a supplement to the other historical books.

According to Jewish tradition, Ezra was the author, but this seems inconsistent with the genealogy in 1 Chron 3:19-24. The date is Post-Exilic, and the books appear in the third part of the Hebrew Canon, in the place where Malachi is found in the English Protestant order of books. The work may have been written by a Levite connected with the musical services of the Second Temple, as the writer takes great interest in all that appertains to the Temple and public worship, especially with regard to the Levitical singers and the musical part of the service. But it is of a comparatively late date.

The Books of Kings were written before the Captivity; the Books of Chronicles after that event (1 Chron 6:15). Kings traces the history of Israel from the *prophetic* point of view, Chronicles from the *priestly* approach, emphasizing the Temple ritual. The blessing and grace of God towards David, as the one who established the Temple worship, and his successors on the throne of Judah, are set forth in Chronicles down to the Exile. The kings of Israel are ignored, and treated only as necessity dictated. This is in contrast to 1 & 2 Kings which interweave the history of the Dual Kingdom.

The author’s object appears to be not merely to write a supplement to the already existing historical books, but to compose an independent work, from a Levitical and religious standpoint. He omitted much that was not connected to the object in view, such as the period of the Judges, and deals only briefly with the history of Saul. The Northern Kingdom is related only in as far as it is connected with the Southern.

The two books may be divided into four parts:

- 1) 1 Chron 1—10 contains an outline of the history from Adam to David, mainly consisting of genealogical lists
- 2) 1 Chron 11—31 considers the reign of David
- 3) 2 Chron 1—9 recounts the reign of Solomon
- 4) 2 Chron 10—36 narrates the history of the Southern Kingdom down to the Babylonian Exile.

1 SAMUEL

Thematic Outline

Samuel's Judgeship	1—7
Samuel's childhood and call	1—3
The capture and return of the Ark	4—6
Israel's demand for a king	7
Saul's reign	8—31
The rise of Saul	8—15
The rise of David, the decline of Saul	16—31

The attempt to identify the structure of the Books of Samuel is one of the most vexing topics in past and present research. The problem is common to both synchronic and diachronic methods. Diachronic methods usually divide the books into smaller blocks assuming different levels of redaction. Synchronic methods assume that the Books of Samuel are a work of art, unified in its content, messages and characterization. Common to these methods is the great diversity of opinions with regard to its structure.⁷

In spite of the apparent confusion of the chapters dealing with Saul's accession to the throne, it is possible to delineate a structure which reveals that in the last analysis a unifying plan and theme binding the separate parts together. This unity has been described clearly by D. J. McCarthy.⁸ He has observed that 1 Sam 8—12 is separated from what precedes it by the formulae at the end of 1 Sam 7 which are used to mark the end of the story of a judge, and from what follows by 1 Sam 13:1 which is the formula used for beginning the report of a king's reign. These five chapters from a formal point of view consist of an alternation of reports and stories in which a pattern of contrasts between an attitude critical of the monarchy and an attitude favourable to the monarchy is built up. Criticism of the monarchy is found in Samuel's Speeches contained in the reports, while the stories remain positive and well-disposed. The tension between these two attitudes, which exists from the beginning of the section, is finally resolved in the last chapter, 1 Sam 12, where the new Institution of the Monarchy is integrated into Israel's covenant relationship

with YHWH, so that the rupture of that relationship, which the Institution of the Monarchy at first threatened, does not in the end come to pass.

This is a valuable contribution to an understanding not only of the structure of these chapters dealing with the rise of the monarchy, but also of the attitude of the editor/compiler (whom we identify as the Deuteronomist) to the monarchy as an Institution. On the other hand, however, it is doubtful if it can tell us very much of the background of the material contained in these chapters or of the process of growth of the traditions which have found their deposit there. We are left, rather, with a picture of the Deuteronomist as a very skilful organizer of a variety of materials available to him. The connecting links between the different elements of the total presentation are too subtle to be fortuitous.⁹

Chapter 1: Samuel's birth and boyhood

1 There was a certain man of Ramatha'im-*zo'phim* of the hill country of E'phraim, whose name was Elka'nah the son of Jero'ham, son of Eli'hu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an E'phraimite.

2 He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Penin'nah. And Penin'nah 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, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phin'ehas, were priests of the LORD.

4 On the day when Elka'nah sacrificed, he would give portions to Penin'nah his wife and to all her sons and daughters;

5 and, although he loved Hannah, he would give Hannah only one portion, because the LORD had closed her womb.

6 And her rival used to provoke her sorely, 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 Elka'nah, 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 thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget thy maidservant, but wilt give to thy maidservant 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 will you be drunken? Put away your wine from you.”

15 But Hannah answered, “No, my lord, I am a woman sorely troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD.

16 Do not regard your maidservant as a base 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 which you have made to him.”

18 And she said, “Let your maidservant find favor in your eyes.” Then the woman went her way and ate, and her countenance 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 Elka’nah 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 him of the LORD.”

21 And the man Elka’nah 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, that he may appear in the presence of the LORD, and abide there for ever.”

23 Elka’nah 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 slew 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 which 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 they worshiped the LORD there.

Hannah’s prayer and vow (1-18)

The ancestry of Samuel is given (1-2). The domestic circumstances of Elkanah and his family, living in what may have been the New Testament Arimathea, suggest well-to-do and pious family. The annual pilgrimage to

the great shrine at Shiloh at the Feast of Tabernacles provides an important context for theme of the Book and its depiction of the great prophet Samuel and the noble king David. The Law commanded every male to appear before the Lord three times in the year at the central sanctuary (Ex 34:23; Deut 16:16). Shiloh (Khirbet Seilun) was central in the heart of the powerful tribe of Ephraim.¹⁰ It held the Ark of the Lord which implied the special presence of God.¹¹ It thus became the religious and political capital of the nation. The sporadic nature of the Conquest, the dispersal of the tribes, and the generally lawless state of period of the Judges, mitigated against a single centre of divine worship. The question of polygamy is associated with the fear of childlessness. Elkanah's two wives were in accordance with the custom tolerated by the Mosaic Law (Deut 31:15-17). The drama of Hannah's infertility is brought into sharp contrast by the fecundity of Peninnah and her arrogance towards Hannah. God's sovereign working is seen in the birth of Hannah child. For similar unusual offspring of barren women: cf. Sarah (Gen 17: 16-19); Rebekah (Gen 25:21-26); Rachel (Gen 29:31; 30:22-24), Samson's mother (Judg 13:2-5) and Elizabeth (Lk 1:5-17). Hannah's prayer and consecration were answered.

Samuel born and given to God (19-28)

The name *Samu-el* ('requested of God' or 'the name of God is El') (*sha'al*, to ask) was given to the child as a token of the Lord's faithfulness in answering Hannah's prayer—as was the case with Isaac (Gen 18:12), Samson (Judg 13:24) and later John the Baptist (Lk 1:57-66). The child was weaned and presented to Eli the priest at the central shrine at Shiloh in Ephraim, East of the main road from Shechem to Jerusalem.

Chapter 2: The failure of Eli's house

1 Hannah also prayed and said,

"My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in thy salvation.

2 "There is none holy like the LORD, there is none besides thee; 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 gird 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.

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

8 He 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.

10 The 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 power of his anointed."

11 Then Elka'nah went home to Ramah. And the boy ministered to the LORD, in the presence of Eli the priest.

12 Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they had no regard for the LORD.

13 The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand,

14 and he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. So they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.

15 Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast; for he will not accept boiled meat from you, but raw."

16 And if the man said to him, "Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish," he would say, "No, you must give it now; and if not, I will take it by force."

17 Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD; for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt.

18 Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy girded with a linen ephod.

19 And his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

20 Then Eli would bless Elka'nah and his wife, and say, "The LORD give you children by this woman for the loan which she lent to the LORD"; so then they would return to their home.

21 And the LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew in the presence of the LORD.

22 Now Eli was very old, and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

23 And he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people.

24 No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad.

25 If a man sins against a man, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father; for it was the will of the LORD to slay them.

26 Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men.

27 And there came a man of God to Eli, and said to him, "Thus the LORD has said, 'I revealed myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh.

28 And I chose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me; and I gave to the house of your father all my offerings by fire from the people of Israel.

29 Why then look with greedy eye at my sacrifices and my offerings which I commanded, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves upon the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?"

30 Therefore the LORD the God of Israel declares: 'I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me for ever'; but now the LORD declares: 'Far be it from me; for those who honor me I will honour, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

31 Behold, the days are coming, when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house.

32 Then in distress you will look with envious eye on all the prosperity which shall be bestowed upon Israel; and there shall not be an old man in your house for ever.

33 The man of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep out his eyes and grieve his heart; and all the increase of your house shall die by the sword of men.

34 And this which shall befall your two sons, Hophni and Phin'eas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day.

35 And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind; and I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed for ever.

36 And every one who is left in your house shall come to implore him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread, and shall say, "Put me, I pray you, in one of the priest's places, that I may eat a morsel of bread".

Hannah's Ode (1-11)

This is an inspired song of praise to the Lord (1-3), celebrating his power and grace in deliverance (4-8). The theological point of view reflects Hannah's situation perfectly. God controls human destiny, precisely the theological point made in the stories of Samuel and Saul that are to be unfolded. On another level there is with a prophetic glimpse in to the future Day of the Lord preceding Israel's true King and the establishment