

1 Samuel 1–7

The content of the two books bearing the name of Samuel is the history extending from the period of **Samuel, the last of the Judges, to the end of the reign of David**. In the Greek translation, the books of **1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings** appear under the titles **1–4 Kings**. Some modern translations also preserve this tradition. Samuel, which originally existed as a single book, was divided into two books by the translators of the Greek Old Testament.

Around **1050 BC**, the threat posed by the Philistines to Israel increased. Although the Israelites were able to suppress the Philistines from time to time under the leadership of the Judges, no permanent solution was achieved. The people hoped that they would have peace and prosperity if they had a king like the other nations. The leadership of Samuel's sons was not acceptable to the people. They insisted that they wanted a king (1 Sam 8; 15). Although Samuel believed that Israel did not need another king besides the Lord, he received the Lord's instruction to act according to the people's demand. Samuel therefore **anointed Saul as king** (1 Sam 10:1).

Although Saul achieved victories in the wars against the Philistines, he was rejected because he acted contrary to the will of God. In his place, Samuel secretly anointed **David, the son of Jesse**, without Saul's knowledge (1 Sam 16:13). Saul was wounded in battle against the Philistines and died by falling upon his own sword.

David was anointed at **Hebron**, where he reigned for seven years (2 Sam 2:1–10). Afterwards, he transferred the capital to **Jerusalem**. David's reign, which lasted forty years (1010–970 BC), was full of significant events. The attempts of **Ishbaal**, the son of Saul, and **Absalom**, David's own son, to seize the throne were unsuccessful. David defeated his external enemies—the Philistines, Amalekites, Moabites, and Edomites—and established peace in the kingdom. Israel enjoyed a period of prosperity.

When prosperity had been established, David desired to build a temple for the Lord. However, the Lord, through the prophet **Nathan**, did not permit him to do so. Instead, through Nathan, the Lord promised that **David's throne would endure forever**. This became one of the foundations for the belief that the coming **Saviour/Messiah would be a descendant of David**.

Although David was a righteous king, there were also moments of weakness in his life. The great deception David committed in order to take **Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah**, became the subject of Nathan's strong criticism. When David realized his sin, he repented deeply and sincerely (Ps 51). The son born to David and Bathsheba was **Solomon**, who eventually became his heir to the throne.

At the end of the Second Book, we see David offering sacrifice and pleading with God to save the people from the plague that came as punishment for David's taking of the census against God's will (2 Sam 24).

The history in the **First Book of Samuel** begins with Samuel, who appears as the final major figure of the period of the Judges after Samson (Judg 16:31). In this book, we can observe the **transfer of authority from a theocratic form of governance, in which God had the supreme authority, to the institution of monarchy**.

Three major figures receive particular attention in the book: **Samuel**, the last Judge and the first major prophet; **Saul**, the first king of Israel; and **David**, the most renowned of the kings of Israel.

The First Book of Samuel describes the **birth of Samuel**, his training in the temple, and later how he functioned as a **prophet, priest, and judge**. According to God's command, Samuel anointed **Saul as the first king of Israel**. The later sections of the book describe the conflict between **Saul, who was filled with jealousy, and David, whom God had chosen as king**.

The book describes the **transfer of authority from the tribal confederation to the institution of monarchy**. As God, who is the Lord of the history of individuals and of Israel, demonstrates his sovereignty, many questions arise in the minds of the people. **Why did the Exile occur? Why did God punish Israel? Were the gods of Babylon more powerful?** To find answers to all these questions, we need to understand their **customs, geography, literary forms, and other historical and cultural contexts**.

The author provides answers to the questions that arise in the minds of the people. Why was Eli punished? Why was the Ark of the Covenant captured? Why did God reject Saul even after he asked for forgiveness? Why was David forgiven even though he had committed a grave sin? How reliable is the covenant made with David? While the elder brother was still alive, what right did Solomon have to become king? How did monarchy become established in Israel?

The Historical Period of the Events

Samuel's ministry	1100–1020 BCE
Saul's reign	1050–1010 BCE
David's reign	1010–970 BCE

Interpretation of the text

1 Samuel 1:5–6 — (Rehem) and (Sagar) : Hannah's problem is not merely the social problem of "childlessness." The writer repeatedly uses the Hebrew word **Rehem** — "womb." An important verb is: — **Sagar = to shut, close:** "YHWH had closed her womb" (1 Sam 1:5). Thus, the narrative presents Hannah's condition not merely as a social difficulty but as a situation that exists within the sphere of divine providence and ultimately requires divine intervention.

1 Samuel 1:10 — (Tefillah) — "Prayer": Hannah's response is neither revenge nor despair; it is **prayer**. — **Tefillah = prayer.** Her "prayer" is not simply an ordinary request. She opens the pain of her heart before God. This is closely connected with another powerful word in 1 Samuel 1:15: **Sapak = to pour out**. "I have been pouring out my soul before YHWH." Thus, prayer is presented as **pouring out one's heart and inner anguish before God**.

1 Samuel 1:11 — (Neder) — “Vow”: Hannah makes a vow: **Neder = vow**. If God gives her a son, she will dedicate him to YHWH, and “no razor shall touch his head.” This vow is connected with Samuel’s later life of special dedication to God and has a **Nazirite-like character**.

1 Samuel 1:11 (Raa) — “To See”: Hannah says: “Look upon the affliction of your servant.” Here, “seeing” does not mean merely seeing with the physical eyes. In Biblical Hebrew, when God “sees” someone's suffering, the expression often carries the idea of **paying attention to it and acting/intervening**. A significant parallel is Exodus 3:7: “I have surely seen the affliction of my people.” Therefore, Hannah’s prayer can be understood as: **“Pay attention to my condition and intervene in my situation.”**

1 Samuel 1:11, 19 — (Zakar) — “To Remember”: In the Hebrew Bible, when God “remembers,” it does not mean that God had previously forgotten something and suddenly recalls it. Rather, divine remembering often means **turning attention toward someone and acting on their behalf**. The theological pattern in Hannah’s story can therefore be expressed as: **Hannah asks → YHWH remembers → YHWH acts**. This is an important theological pattern throughout the Old Testament. The opposite of **Zakar — “to remember”** is: **Sakah = to forget** Hannah asks God: “Do not forget your servant...”

1 Samuel 1:17, 20 — (Saal) — “To Ask”: This is one of the most important **wordplays** in 1 Samuel. **Saal = to ask, request** : Hannah asks God for a son. Subsequently, the explanation of Samuel’s name is connected with this same idea: “I asked him of YHWH.” Thus, the basic theological movement of the story is: **Asked → Received → Given back to YHWH**.

1 Samuel 1:28 — (Hisil) — “To Lend / Give Over / Dedicate”: Hannah gives Samuel over to YHWH. This form is related to the root **Saal (to ask)**. The theological logic is striking: **Hannah asked God → God gave → Hannah gave back to God**. The child received from God becomes a gift returned to God.

1 Samuel 1:15 — (Nephesh) — “Soul / Life / Self”: Hannah says: “I have been pouring out my **nephesh** before YHWH.” **Nephesh** does not simply mean a “soul” separated from the body. Depending on the context, it can mean: life, person, self, inner being, soul, living being. In this context, **“my whole inner self”** or **“my entire being”** conveys the meaning well.

1 Samuel 1:15 —(Sapak) — “To Pour Out”: “I have been pouring out my soul before YHWH.” This is a powerful **metaphor**. Prayer here is not merely the act of speaking words. It is: **Pouring out one’s inner pain completely before God**. Another important Hebrew word is: **Ruah = wind / breath / spirit**: The word **Ruah** has three major semantic meanings: **Wind, Breath, Spirit**. Its precise meaning depends on the context.

1 Samuel 1:16 — (Bəliyaal) — “Worthless / Wicked”: Hannah says that she is not a “daughter of Beliyaal.” **Bəliyaal = worthless person / wickedness**: The term later becomes strongly associated with **evil** in Jewish and Christian literature and eventually becomes a designation associated with an evil or demonic figure.

1 Samuel 2:1, 10 (Qeren) — “Horn”: “My horn is exalted in YHWH.” In Hebrew culture, the horn was a symbol of **strength and power**. Therefore: **“To raise/exalt the horn” = to raise one’s**

strength, honour, dignity, or royal power. Hannah's language therefore celebrates God as the one who restores strength and honour to the humiliated.

1 Samuel 2:1 (ramah) — “To Raise / Exalt”: Hannah's song emphasizes God's action of raising those who have been brought low. This becomes one of the central theological themes of **1 Samuel 2:1–10: God's Great Reversal.** God reverses human situations: the weak become strong, the humiliated are honoured, the poor are lifted up and the proud are brought down.

1 Samuel 2:2 (Qadosh) — “Holy”: There is none holy like YHWH.” **Qadosh** does not mean merely “morally good.” It carries the ideas of: set apart, unique, divine, holy, incomparable. Therefore, Hannah is emphasizing the **absolute uniqueness and transcendence of YHWH.**

1 Samuel 2:2 — (tsoor) — “Rock”: “There is no rock like our God.” In Biblical Hebrew, **soor** can communicate the ideas of: stability, protection, refuge, faithfulness, permanence. The image presents God as the **unchanging and dependable Rock** of his people.

1 Samuel 2:3 — (Geeh) — “Proud / Arrogant”: Hannah's song contains a warning against pride. The context emphasizes that human pride cannot stand before the sovereignty of God.

1 Samuel 2:7–8 —(Ani) — “Poor / Afflicted” This word does not refer only to economic poverty. Depending on the context, it can refer to someone who is: oppressed, afflicted, humbled, vulnerable and one in need of help. Thus, the theological statement is: **“God raises up the afflicted and the lowly.”**

1 Samuel 2:8 —(Apar) — “Dust”: “He raises the poor from the dust.” Apar is an important Hebrew word in the creation account of Genesis 2:7, where humanity is connected with the dust of the ground. Therefore, the image of “dust” in Hannah's song can evoke both: 1. **a person's lowly or humiliated social condition**, and 2. **humanity's creaturely dependence upon God.** God is able to raise a person from the lowest condition and give that person honour.

1 Samuel 2:10 — (Masiah) — “Anointed One”: This is one of the most important theological words in **1 Samuel 1–7.**— **Masah = to anoint:** From this root comes:— **Masiah = anointed one.** This is the principal Hebrew basis for the concept of **Messiah.** In 1 Samuel 2:10, the reference to the “anointed one” is particularly significant because it contributes to the developing biblical theology of **kingship and the divinely appointed ruler.**

1 Samuel 3:1 —(Dabar) — “Word”: 1 Samuel 3:1 states that: “The word of YHWH was rare.” Here, **dabar** refers particularly to the divine word or prophetic revelation coming from YHWH.

(Yaqar) — “Precious / Rare”: In 1 Samuel 3:1, the word carries the sense of **rarity**: “The word of YHWH was rare; visions were not frequent.” Thus, Yāqār can communicate not merely something valuable but something **uncommon or scarce.** The theological implication is that there was a period in Israel when **divine revelation had become rare.**

1 Samuel 3:1 —(Ḥazon) — “Vision” : In 1 Samuel 3:1, the statement that the word of God was rare and that visions were not common are parallel ideas. Both expressions point toward a **scarcity of prophetic revelation.** The narrative therefore establishes an important contrast: **Rare revelation → Samuel's prophetic calling → renewed revelation from YHWH.**

1 Samuel 3:4–10 —(Qara) — “To Call” : In 1 Samuel 3:4–10, YHWH calls Samuel. The repeated calling of Samuel is central to the narrative of his prophetic vocation. God calls: “**Samuel! Samuel!**” and Samuel gradually learns to recognize that the voice is the voice of YHWH.

1 Samuel 3:4–6, 8 — (Hinneni) — Here I am / Behold, I am here : **Hinneni** occurs in several important biblical call narratives. Examples include: **Abraham** — Genesis 22:1; **Moses** — Exodus 3:4; **Samuel** — 1 Samuel 3; **Isaiah** — Isaiah 6:8; The expression does not merely communicate physical location: “**I am here.**” It also carries the idea: “**I am ready; I am available; speak, and I will listen.**” Therefore, **Hinneni** expresses an attitude of **readiness, attentiveness, availability, and obedience before God**. In Samuel’s calling narrative, this word becomes particularly significant because Samuel moves from simply responding to Eli’s voice to learning to respond consciously to YHWH’s call.

1 Samuel 3:10 —(Shama) — “To Hear / To Obey”: In Hebrew, the concept of “hearing” often includes the idea of obedience. Therefore, in biblical theology: **Hearing** → **Obedience**. The foundation of Samuel’s prophetic vocation is that he first hears the voice of God.

1 Samuel 3:20 — (Nabi) — “Prophet”: “Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of YHWH.” This marks Samuel’s established prophetic identity and vocation in Israel.

1 Samuel 4–6 — (Aaron) — “Ark of the Covenant”: The Hebrew word for the Ark of the Covenant is Aaron. In 1 Samuel 4–6, the Ark is not presented as a magical object through which human beings can control God. The Israelites bring the Ark into battle, but they are defeated. Through this episode, the author teaches an important theological truth: **God’s presence cannot be controlled by human beings through an object**. The Ark signifies God’s covenantal presence, but it is not a magical instrument that can be manipulated for human purposes.

1 Samuel 7:3 — (Shuv) — “To Return / To Turn Back”: Samuel says to the whole house of Israel that if they return to the LORD with all their heart, they must turn back to Him. This is one of the most important Hebrew roots in the Old Testament vocabulary of **repentance**. Biblical repentance is not merely **feeling sorrow** or **regretting one’s actions**. It fundamentally means: **Repentance = turning back and returning to God**.