

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Insights into the Bible
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Is He talking to me? Yes, He is talking to you, my Son.
I Samuel, Chapters 2:12-3:21



Background to our Story

The First Book of Samuel

◆ AI Overview

The First Book of Samuel is a significant historical and prophetic book in the Hebrew Bible. It chronicles the critical transition of the nation of Israel from a loose confederation of tribes ruled by "judges" to a unified monarchy governed by kings.

Core Storyline and Characters

The narrative is woven around three primary figures who shaped this era:

Samuel: The last judge and first major prophet of Israel. He was born to Hannah, who dedicated him to God's service at the Tabernacle in Shiloh after years of infertility. Samuel eventually serves as the "king-maker," anointing both Saul and David.

Saul: The first king of Israel, chosen by God but eventually rejected for his repeated disobedience and lack of faith. His reign is marked by military victories followed by a tragic mental and spiritual decline.

David: A young shepherd and musician who rises to prominence after defeating the giant Goliath. Despite being hunted by a jealous Saul, David remains patient and faithful, eventually preparing to take the throne as the "man after God's own heart"

Cast of Characters - Who is Who in the story? (Part 1)

- Eli, the Priest
- Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas

- Samuel, the boy



Is He talking to me? Yes, He is talking to you, my Son.

I Samuel, Chapter 2:12-3:21

I Samuel Chapter 2

¹² Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the LORD.

¹³ Now it was the practice of the priests that, whenever any of the people offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand while the meat was being boiled ¹⁴ and would plunge the fork into the pan or kettle or caldron or pot. Whatever the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh. ¹⁵ But even before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the person who was sacrificing, "Give the priest some meat to roast; he won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw."

¹⁶ If the person said to him, "Let the fat be burned first, and then take whatever you want," the servant would answer, "No, hand it over now; if you don't, I'll take it by force."

¹⁷ This sin of the young men was very great in the LORD's sight, for they were treating the LORD's offering with contempt.

The Temple practice was that the Kohanim were not permitted to take their portion until the designated parts were placed on the Altar, but the attendants of Hofni and Phinehas would sometimes disregard this law and demand meat before performing the Altar service. Thus, they were not only depriving the owners of their rightful share, but they were also placing their own greed above their obligation to God, a grievous sin (Mahari Kara; Radak).

Malbim notes that here they did not seize the meat but demanded that the owners give it to them. This was an attempt to appease the owners, as if to say, "You choose what you will give us, and we will be satisfied with a smaller portion than we would get if we plunged our large forks into the pot. Also, by giving it to us now before you begin cooking, you will spare yourself the extra bother of salting and spicing our part when you put it into the pot." But despite this enticement, the people did not agree to violate the prescribed order of the service; they would rather have less meat for themselves than transgress the proper procedure. But the attendants ignored their protests (Malbim). The Rubin Edition of the Prophets: Samuel 1 & 2. Artscroll Series. 2002.

Bonus ? What was the sin of Eli's sons?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

¹⁸ But Samuel was ministering before the LORD—a boy wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁹ Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. ²⁰ Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, “May the LORD give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the LORD.” Then they would go home. ²¹ And the LORD was gracious to Hannah; she gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD.

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

The major commentators give two interpretations. The first follows the plain implication of the verse, that Hofni and Phinehas actually committed immoral acts with the unescorted women who came with offerings. It was common for women to be at the Tabernacle since a woman who gives birth or has experienced certain kinds of bodily discharges must bring offerings to complete the purification process (see Leviticus 12:1-8, 15:25-30).

The second interpretation follows the Sages (Shabbos 55b, Yoma 9a), that they did not actually do anything immoral, but that Scripture speaks of them in such very harsh terms because they were inconsiderate of the women. Instead of performing the service of the women's offerings as quickly as possible so that they could return to normal family life with their husbands, Hofni and Phinehas dawdled and delayed so that many women would have to stay at Shiloh for an extra night. For thus interfering in the relationship between husband and wife, Scripture describes Hofni and Phinehas as major sinners The Rubin Edition of the Prophets: Samuel 1 & 2. Artscroll Series. 2002.

²³ So he said to them, “Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. ²⁴ No, my sons; the report I hear spreading among the LORD's people is not good. ²⁵ If one person sins against another, God may mediate for the offender; but if anyone sins against the LORD, who will intercede for them?” His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the LORD's will to put them to death.

? What was the sin of Eli's sons?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____



? What is challenging about the second half of verse 25 (above)?

? Does it bring any association?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

²⁶ And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with people.

? What is the purpose of this verse about the “boy Samuel” in the middle of the narrative about Eli’s sons?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

²⁷ Now a man of God came to Eli and said to him, “This is what the LORD says: ‘Did I not clearly reveal myself to your ancestor’s family when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh? ²⁸ I chose your ancestor out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod in my presence. I also gave your ancestor’s family all the food offerings presented by the Israelites. ²⁹ Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?’

Bonus ? What was Eli’s sin?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

³⁰ “Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that members of your family would minister before me forever.’ But now the LORD declares: ‘Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained. ³¹ The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your priestly house, so that no one in it will reach old age, ³² and you will see distress in my dwelling. Although good will be done to Israel, no one in your

family line will ever reach old age. ³³ Every one of you that I do not cut off from serving at my altar I will spare only to destroy your sight and sap your strength, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life.

³⁴ “And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you—they will both die on the same day. ³⁵ I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his priestly house, and they will minister before my anointed one always. ³⁶ Then everyone left in your family line will come and bow down before him for a piece of silver and a loaf of bread and plead, “Appoint me to some priestly office so I can have food to eat.””

I Samuel Chapter 3

¹ The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

² One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel.

Samuel answered, “Here I am.” ⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

Bonus ? Why does Samuel run to Eli when he hears the voice of the Lord call him?

But Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down.

⁶ Again the LORD called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

“My son,” Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.”

⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

⁸ A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

? Why does Eli instruct Samuel to reply "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening" if he hears the voice of the Lord call him?

Bonus ? Why didn't Eli give the above instruction to Samuel after the first or second time he heard the voice of the Lord call him?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

Answer 5 _____

¹⁰ The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"

Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

? If God wishes to speak to Samuel and get his attention, why doesn't He speak to him directly? What is the need to wait for Samuel's reply: "Speak, for your servant is listening"?

¹¹ And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. ¹² At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. ¹³ For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. ¹⁴ Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

¹⁵ Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, ¹⁶ but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son." Samuel answered, "Here I am."

Bonus ? Why was Samuel afraid to tell Eli his vision?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

¹⁷“What was it He [God] said to you?” Eli asked. “Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything He told you.” ¹⁸So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, “He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes.”

¹⁹The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground. ²⁰And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through His word.

Bonus ? How did all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognize that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Bonus ? Who do you think is the most significant character in the story? Why?

Wrapping Up: Cast of Characters - Who is who in the story? (Part 2)

1. Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas: they are scoundrels and they don’t wish to change.
2. Samuel, the boy: he is good, and doesn’t have to change.
3. Eli, the Priest... failing as a father, succeeding as a mentor

Bibliography

The Rubin Edition of the Prophets: Samuel 1 And 2. Artscroll Series. 2002.