

THE BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF SAMUEL

Cast:

Narrator	Phineas
Hannah	Man
Elkanah	Prophet
Eli	God
Hophni	Samuel

ACT 1

NARRATOR: There was a man named Elkanah who lived in the hill country of Ephraim. He had two wives, Penninah and Hannah. Penninah had children but Hannah had none. When they went to the Tabernacle each year to offer sacrifices Penninah would often tease Hannah and say mean things to her. This made Hannah so sad that she not only cried, but she lost her appetite and would not eat any of the meat from the sacrifice, even though the rest of the family was feasting. Elkanah did not understand how much it bothered Hannah that she had no children.

ELKANAH: Hannah, why are you crying? Why won't you eat? Why is your heart so sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?

NARRATOR: Hannah was too upset to answer. She went over near the Tabernacle to pray. Eli, the priest was sitting near by. He watched as Hannah prayed to the Lord, asking Him to give her children. He saw her lips moving but her voice was quiet. Eli did not understand that she was praying. Hannah whispered her prayer.

HANNAH: O Lord God, if you will look kindly upon me and see my distress and remember me and give me a child, I will give him back to you and he will serve you all the days of his life.

NARRATOR: Eli did not realize Hannah was praying because he could not hear her voice. He spoke roughly to her.

ELI: Woman, what's wrong with you? Are you drunk? Put away your wine!

HANNAH: No, my lord, I am not drunk. I am very sad. I have been pouring out my heart to the Lord, asking him to hear my prayer.

ELI: Go in peace. May the God of Israel answer you and give you what you have asked for.

NARRATOR: So Hannah got up and was no longer sad. She went home trusting that God had heard her prayer. Sure enough, it was not long until she was expecting a baby. When the baby was born, she named him Samuel, which means "I asked the Lord."

The next year when it was time to go up to Shiloh to offer the yearly sacrifices, Hannah did not want to go.

HANNAH: As soon as the child is weaned, then I will go up. When I take Samuel to the Tabernacle he will stay there, and will serve God for the rest of his life.

ELKANAH: Do what seems best to you. Take him when he is ready.

NARRATOR: So Hannah waited until Samuel was about 3 or 4 years old. Then she got ready to present him to Eli at the Tabernacle. She took along some sacrifices: a bull and some flour and wine. After they had sacrificed the bull, Hannah took Samuel to Eli.

HANNAH: My lord, I am the woman you saw praying here several years ago. I prayed for a child and here he is. This is the child the Lord gave me. I promised God that I would give the child back to him, so here he is. Please let him live with you and learn how to serve the Lord.

NARRATOR: Then Hannah prayed a long prayer of praise to God. Here are a few things she said:

HANNAH: *There is none holy like the Lord. There is no rock like our God.
Do not talk proudly, for the Lord is a God of knowledge.
The bows of the mighty are broken, but the weak gain strength.
The Lord makes poor and makes rich.
He brings low and He exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust and makes them to sit with princes.
He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off.
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to his King,
and exalt the power of his Anointed One.*

NARRATOR: Then Elkanah and his family went home. But Samuel stayed at the Tabernacle with Eli.

ACT 2

NARRATOR: Now Eli's sons, Hophni and Phineas were wicked men. They had no regard for the Lord. They disobeyed the orders of God as to how the sacrificial meat was to be taken. They were supposed to put a three-pronged fork into the boiling pot and whatever came up was theirs. Hophni and Phineas did not like boiled meat. They wanted raw meat so they could roast it over a fire. They would bully the people who came to sacrifice, and would demand that the people disobey God and give them the meat before it had been properly sacrificed.

HOPHNI: Give us meat to roast. We will not accept boiled meat from you.

MAN: No, please let me burn the fat first, as God requires, then you may take as much meat as you want.

PHINEAS: No, you must give us your meat now, before you burn the fat. And if you won't give it to us, we will take it by force!

NARRATOR: And so the sin of these men was very great in the sight of God. They taught the people to disobey God.

Meanwhile, Samuel was growing up under the care of Eli. He listened to all the stories about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and the Judges. He learned the laws of Moses and all the rules about how to make sacrifices. Every year, Hannah would come to visit Samuel and would bring him a new coat. Eli would thank Hannah for what she had done and would say to Elkanah:

ELI: May the Lord give you more children, to reward you for giving this child to God.

NARRATOR: The Lord did give them more children. Hannah had three more sons and also two daughters. Samuel stayed at the Tabernacle with Eli was a very good student. Everyone noticed how wise Samuel was, and they expected that he would grow up to be an important prophet. One day, an old prophet came to see Eli. He had bad news.

PROPHET: Thus says the Lord: I have seen the wickedness of your sons, Hophni and Phineas. They cast greedy eyes on the sacrificial meat and take what is not lawful. And you have done nothing to stop them. In fact, you eat the meat they steal! The day is coming when I will punish your family. There shall never be an old man in your house ever again. Your sons, Hophni and Phineas will die on the same day. And then I will raise up a faithful priest who will do what is in my heart and mind. Everyone who is left from your house will come to him to beg for a morsel of bread to eat.

ACT 3

NARRATOR: The word of the Lord was rare in those days. There were not many visions. Eli was very old and he was going blind. Samuel was doing many of the chores in the Tabernacle. One night Samuel lay down to sleep on the floor of the Tabernacle, not far from the ark of God. In the middle of the night, God called to Samuel.

GOD: Samuel, Samuel!

NARRATOR: Samuel thought Eli had called him so he ran to Eli.

SAMUEL: Here I am, Eli! You called for me.

ELI: No, I did not call for you. Go back to sleep.

NARRATOR: So Samuel went and lay down again.

GOD: Samuel, Samuel!

NARRATOR: Again, Samuel ran to Eli.

SAMUEL: Here I am, Eli! You called for me.

ELI: No, I did not call you. Go back to bed!

NARRATOR: Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord in the same way he would in his later years. God would tell Samuel many things during the rest of his life, but this was the first time God had ever spoken to him, so he did not realize it was God.

GOD: Samuel, Samuel!

SAMUEL: Here I am, Eli, for I heard you calling my name.

ELI: Go back and lie down, and if you hear the voice again, say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

NARRATOR: Samuel went back and lay down again.

GOD: Samuel, Samuel!

SAMUEL: Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.

GOD: I am about to fulfill the prophecy I gave against Eli and his family. I am going to punish them for disrespecting me in front of all the people. I am going to destroy Eli's family.

NARRATOR: The next morning Samuel went about his chores as usual, and was afraid to speak to Eli. However, Eli wanted to know what God had said and told Samuel that he must tell him everything God had said. So Samuel did.

ELI: Truly, it was God speaking. Let God do what seems good to Him.

NARRATOR: The Lord appeared to Samuel many times after this, though we don't know exactly what he said. We do know that everyone in Israel knew that God had established Samuel as the leader of Israel, and everyone obeyed his words because they knew that Samuel's words came from God.