

The Steinsaltz Neviim

Neviim Translation and Commentary

Commentary by

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Book of **Samuel**

I Samuel

II Samuel



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Samuel

INTRODUCTION TO SAMUEL

The book of Samuel deals with the transitional period from the time of the judges to the era of the centralized monarchy. In essence it is a single book that was divided into two parts, I Samuel and II Samuel, by Christian scholars in the Middle Ages.

Although the book depicts broad historical events, it centers on three figures with humble beginnings who ascended to great heights: Samuel, Saul, and David. The lives of these three individuals and the complex relationships between them are the focus of the book. I Samuel presents the chronology of events from the birth of Samuel, when Eli was the High Priest, until the death of King Saul, while II Samuel continues with recording the life of King David until he is an elderly man.

Samuel, whose wondrous birth is recounted at the start of the book, advances through his own ability and talent to become a pivotal leader in the history of Israel. He is the first prophet to establish himself throughout Israel following the exodus from Egypt and the years in the wilderness. Indeed, the psalmist mentions Samuel in the same breath as Moses and Aaron: “Moses and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel among those who called His name.”¹ Samuel’s leadership signals an end to the decentralized period of the judges, which was characterized by its numerous haphazard, directionless events, and it marks the start of the era of a consolidated royal throne. It is Samuel who creates the foundation for the unification of all the tribes of Israel into a single body.

Saul, who was chosen as the first king of Israel, is portrayed in the book of Samuel as a mighty yet tragic figure. This modest, humble man becomes king over all Israel, but his soul is unable to remain intact and healthy through all the personal and general upheavals that he embodies.

The third figure is David, who is transformed over the course of the book from a young shepherd to the archetype of a king of Israel.

The internal processes of the people who populate the book of Samuel, their growth and the crises that befall them, their misgivings both as private and public individuals, and their historical influence, are described in greater detail than those of other figures in the Bible. Meanwhile, these three major personalities are surrounded by secondary characters, some of whom are graceful and appealing people in their own right, including active individuals who develop relationships with other important figures. The entire tapestry of this period covers roughly one hundred years. The variety and depth of these depictions of the external and internal lives of the main characters of this period are somewhat reminiscent of the book of Genesis.

As stated, the second half of this book is devoted to David. It describes King David’s deeds, struggles, and triumphs. II Samuel begins with a great national crisis, the fall and death of King Saul and his sons, when all that they had achieved came to nothing. The story of David is not merely a tale of the tortuous personal path of the persecuted leader of a small band of men who eventually became king over all Israel; it is also an account of the establishment of a kingdom of Israel that would last centuries. Ultimately, David overcomes many crises. His character is important not only for himself and his generation; to this very day “David, king of Israel, lives and endures.”² The book also includes three poetic works of King David, one of which³ also appears, with minor changes, in the book of Psalms (18). In these works as well, the personality and creative power of David shine forth, beyond his status as king of Israel.

At the end of this volume we have incorporated, in tandem with verses from the book describing specific events, various psalms that David sang in those circumstances. The chosen psalms are those with titles clearly indicative of the connection between their first recitation and David’s life.

Book of I Samuel

Samuel's Conception, Birth, and Consecration

I SAMUEL 1:1–28

dire. This was compounded by the mismanagement and unacceptable behavior of the two sons of the High Priest, who were responsible for the Tabernacle.

- 1 **1 There was a certain man from Ramatayim Tzofim,⁸ from the highlands of Ephraim, and his name was Elkana, son of Yeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Tzuf, a nobleman [Efrati].** According to tradition, Elkana was a Levite⁴ who lived in the hills of Ephraim. The title *Efrati*, literally Ephraimite, was a general term for one with elevated social status.⁵ Since Ephraim was considered a superior tribe, certainly in their own eyes and perhaps by others as well, the label Ephraimite connoted an individual from a good family.⁶
- 2 **He had two wives; the name of the first, Hannah, and the**



Highlands of Ephraim

name of the second, Penina. Since not many men at that time married two women, there must have been a special reason for Elkana to have done so.⁷ **Penina had children, but Hannah had no children.** Hannah was Elkana's first wife. When it became apparent that she was not bearing children, Elkana married a second woman so that he could have children. This explains the great difference in his relationships with his two wives.⁸

The events related in the first section of the book occur toward the end of the era of the judges, and reflect the characteristic elements of that time. During this time, the Tabernacle was situated in Shilo, but few of the population visited there regularly, and the spiritual situation was

- 3 **This man ascended from his city from year to year, or from one festival to another,⁹ to prostrate himself and to present offerings to the Lord of hosts** in the Tabernacle which was currently situated **in Shilo.** Apparently, Shilo was not a pilgrimage site for all Israel. Rather, it was mainly frequented by local residents who required its services.¹⁰ **There, the two sons of Eli the elderly High Priest, Hofni and Pinhas, were priests to the Lord.** In practice, they were the ones in charge of the Tabernacle.



Reconstruction of the altar at Shilo

- 4 **It was on the day, on a certain day, that Elkana presented offerings [vayyizbah];** he brought peace offerings, which are generally offered on festivals and other times of joy. A portion of these offerings was burned on the altar, another part was given to the priests, while the rest was eaten by the owners. **And he, Elkana, in accordance with his practice, gave portions to Penina his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters.** The term *vayyizbah* derives from the root *zayin-beit-het*, which usually appears in the context of a celebratory public or private meal.¹¹
- 5 **But to Hannah he would give a choice portion,** a large, significant portion.¹² Some explain that he gave her some of his own choice portion.¹³ **For he loved Hannah,** and he wished to express publicly his preference for her over his other wife, **but the Lord had closed her womb,** and she had not borne

שמואל א

א וַיְהִי אִישׁ אֶחָד מִן־הָרִמְתִּים צוֹפִים מֵהַר אֶפְרַיִם וּשְׁמוֹ אֶלְקָנָה בֶּן־יִרְחָם בֶּן־
 ב אֵלִי הוּא בֶּן־תַּחֲוֹ בֶּן־צוּף אֶפְרַתִּי: וְלוֹ שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֵׁם אַחַת חַנָּה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית
 ג פִּנְנָה וַיְהִי לַפִּנְנָה יְלָדִים וּלְחַנָּה אֵין יְלָדִים: וְעַלֶּה הָאִישׁ הַהוּא מְעִירוֹ מִיָּמִים ו
 ד יְמִימָה לְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת וּלְזַבֵּחַ לַיהוָה צְבָאוֹת בְּשֵׁלָה וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי בְנֵי־עֲלִי חֲפְנִי וּפְנִחָם
 ה פְּהֵגִים לַיהוָה: וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיִּזְבַּח אֶלְקָנָה וּנְתַן לַפִּנְנָה אִשְׁתּוֹ וּלְכָל־בְּנֵיהָ וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ
 ו זְמָנוֹת: וּלְחַנָּה יָתֵן מִנְּהָ אַחַת אַפִּים כִּי אֶת־חַנָּה אָהַב וַיְהוּה סָגֵר רַחֲמָהּ: וְכַעֲסָתָהּ
 ח צָרָתָהּ גַּם־פָּעַם בַּעֲבוּר הַדְּעֻמָּה כִּי־סָגֵר יְהוָה בְּעַד רַחֲמָהּ: וְכֵן יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה
 ט מִדֵּי עֲלֹתָהּ בְּבֵית יְהוָה כֵּן תִּכְעַסְנָהּ וּתִבְכֶּה וְלֹא תֹאכַל: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ אֶלְקָנָה
 י אִשָּׁה חַנָּה לָמָּה תִּבְכִּי וְלָמָּה לֹא תֹאכְלִי וְלָמָּה יָרַע לְבַבְךָ הַלּוֹא אֲנִכִּי טוֹב לְךָ

children. Consequently, he gave her only one portion, unlike Penina, to whom he gave multiple portions, for herself and her children.¹⁴ It was not uncommon for there to be some sort of rivalry between two women married to the same man.

- 6 Her rival, the other woman in the house, Penina, provoked her again and again^d in order to upset her,¹⁵ for the Lord had closed her womb.
- 7 So he, Elkana, would do year after year, keeping up his practice of giving Hannah a choice portion, each time she ascended to the House of the Lord, so she, Penina, would

provoke her, and she, Hannah, would weep and would not eat. Hannah felt humiliated and had no appetite. Even if Penina did not engage in blatant mockery, in Hannah's sensitive state any derisive remark, like: Perhaps share some of your large portion with your child, would inevitably lead to tears.¹⁶

- 8 Elkana her husband said to her: Hannah, why do you weep, and why do you not eat, and why is your heart grieving? I love you and am devoted to you. Am I not better to you than ten sons?

BACKGROUND

1:1| **Ramatayim Tzofim:** There are a number of opinions regarding the location of this place; the main ones are: the village of Rantis, on the western slopes of the highlands of Ephraim, about 2 km west of Beit Arye; Al-Ram, north of Jerusalem; and in northern Samaria, near Sanur.

DISCUSSION

1:6| **Her rival provoked her again and again:** The narrative is reminiscent of the relationship of Jacob and his wives, Rachel and Leah. Like the patriarch, Elkana preferred one of his wives to the other, and clearly displayed that love for the woman

who was barren. Furthermore, in both cases the shunned wife underscored her motherhood as an advantage over her rival (see Genesis 29:30–32; Rabbag; see also Genesis 16:4).

- 9 Hannah arose after eating in Shilo, and after drinking**, when the tense family meal had ended. **And Eli the priest was sitting on the chair near the doorpost of the Sanctuary of the Lord**, not in the Tabernacle itself. Perhaps Hannah greeted him, but in any case she did not pay much attention to him,
- 10 Hannah went inside as she was embittered,^d hurt, and forlorn, and prayed to the Lord, and was weeping.**
- 11 She vowed, saying: Lord of hosts,^d if You see the suffering of Your maidservant, and you remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and You give Your maidservant substantial offspring**, a worthy, strong child, then **I will give him**, consecrate him, **to the Lord all the days of his life, and a razor will not come upon his head**. Hannah vowed that the son born to her would be a nazirite, for whom it is prohibited to cut his hair or shave his beard.¹⁷ The mention of a strong child is perhaps an indication that Hannah had previously miscarried, which is why she now specifically requested a healthy baby.¹⁸
- 12 And it was as she was praying extensively before the Lord, Eli was watching her mouth**. Apparently, there were not many people in the vicinity, and Eli, who was sitting nearby, noticed her.
- 13 Hannah, she was speaking quietly in her heart**, as she did not want anyone to hear her expressing her innermost feelings; **only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard; and Eli therefore thought her to be drunk**, as drunkards sometimes talk to themselves, or think that they are speaking when they are actually not saying anything. When Eli saw a woman moving her lips as though she was talking, but emitting no sound, he assumed that she was intoxicated.¹⁹
- 14 Eli said to her: Until when will you become drunk** and act in an intoxicated manner? And if you are already drunk, **remove the influence of your wine from yourself**. It is unfitting to be drunk anywhere, certainly not in the house of God.²⁰
- 15 Hannah answered and said: No, my lord**, you mistake me. **I am an embittered woman; I did not drink wine or intoxicating drink** at all, **but instead I poured out my soul before the Lord**. Since I was talking to God, there was no need for me to raise my voice.
- 16 Do not deem your maidservant to be a wicked woman**. Do not think of me as an immoral woman who came drunk to the Tabernacle, **for it is due to the extent of my grievance**, the bitterness of my soul, **and my anger that I have spoken** at great length **until now**. Apparently, it was unusual at the time to recite such a long prayer.²¹
- 17** When Eli heard her answer given in an entirely sober manner, he regretted his accusation. **Eli answered and said: Go in peace**. Eli immediately added words of encouragement for the future: **And may the God of Israel grant your request that you requested of Him**. I do not know what you requested, but I bless you that God should give you your wish. With regard to this verse, the Talmud states that Rabbi Elazar said: From here the *halakha* is derived that one who suspects another of something that he has not done, he must appease him. Moreover, the one who suspected him must bless him.²²
- 18 She said: May your maidservant find favor in your eyes**. May your words come to pass. This was the polite response of one who had received a blessing or a compliment: I sincerely thank you for treating me favorably.²³ **The woman went on her way, and she ate as usual, and her face was no longer downcast as it was**. The feelings of sorrow, anger, and heartbreak that had accompanied her to Shilo now dissipated, perhaps due to her earnest prayer and the special blessing she had received from the High Priest. Now she had renewed confidence and hope. The last phrase in the verse literally means “and she had no more face,” as the term “face” in the Bible can refer to anger.²⁴
- 19 They, the whole family, arose early in the morning, and prostrated themselves before the Lord** upon their departure from the Tabernacle,²⁵ **and they returned, and came to their house to Rama. Elkana was intimate with Hannah his wife and on this occasion the Lord remembered her**.
- 20 It was with the passage of the seasons**, when another year had passed, **that Hannah conceived and bore a son; she called his name Samuel [Shemuel], for she explained: I requested him [she'iltiv] from the Lord.^d**

DISCUSSION

1:10| **She was embittered:** It is possible that had Penina not irritated her to such an extent, Hannah would not have been so distraught. In every society that promotes the rearing of children, a barren woman is considered deficient, and any insensitive comments are apt to upset her. With that said, it appears that Hannah's bitterness was not due solely to her social status; rather, she came to feel that she was personally

flawed. The Sages present Hannah's prayer in the following terms: Master of the Universe, of all the organs You created in a woman, You have not fashioned one in vain. Every organ fulfills its purpose. If so, these breasts that You placed upon my heart, for what purpose did You place them? Was it not in order to nurse with them? Grant me a child and I will nurse with them. You have created within me the female capacity to

give birth, and yet You do not allow me to actualize my essence (see *Berakhot* 31b; *Midrash Shmuel* 8; Genesis 30:21). In this context, Elkana's comment (in verse 8) can be understood as a message of encouragement, which he would repeat on a yearly basis. Alternatively, it is possible that in this specific instance her husband felt the need to stress her special place in his heart more than on other occasions, and perhaps he even

► *grew*

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מַעֲשֵׂהָ בְּנִים: וַתִּקַּס חַנָּה אַחֲרֵי אֲכָלָהּ בְּשִׁלְהָ וְאַחֲרֵי שָׁתָה וְעָלִי הַכְּהֵן יֹשֵׁב
 עַל־הַפֶּסֶא עַל־מְזוֹזֹת הַיֵּכָל יְהוָה: וְהִיא מָרַת נַפְשׁ וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל עַל־יְהוָה וּבִכָּה
 תִּבְכֶּה: וַתִּדְרֹךְ נָדָר וַתֹּאמֶר יְהוָה עֲבָאוֹת אִסְדָּאָה תִרְאֶה | בַּעֲנֵי אַמְתְּךָ וּזְכַרְתָּנִי
 וְלֹא־תִשְׁכַּח אֶת־אַמְתְּךָ וּנְתַתָּה לְאַמְתְּךָ זֶרַע אֲנָשִׁים וּנְתַתִּיו לַיהוָה כָּל־יְמֵי
 חַיָּו וּמוֹרָה לֹא־יַעֲלֶה עַל־דְּאִשׁוֹ: וְהָיָה כִּי הִדְבַּרְתָּה לְהַתְפַּלֵּל לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְעָלִי
 שָׁמַר אֶת־פִּיהָ: וְחַנָּה הִיא מְדַבֶּרֶת עַל־לִבָּהּ רַק שִׁפְתֶיהָ נִעֹזֶת וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשְׁמָע
 וַיַּחֲשֹׁבָה עָלַי לְשִׁכְרָה: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיָהּ עָלִי עַד־מָתִי תִשְׁתַּפְּרִין הַסִּירִי אֶת־יִינְךָ
 מֵעָלֶיךָ: וַתַּעַן חַנָּה וַתֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲדַנִּי אִשָּׁה קִשְׁת־רוּחַ אֲנֹכִי וַיִּין וְשִׁכְרִי לֹא שָׁתִיתִי
 וְאֶשְׁפֹּךְ אֶת־נַפְשִׁי לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: אֶל־תִּתֵּן אֶת־אַמְתְּךָ לִפְנֵי בַת־בְּלִיעַל כִּי־מֵרֹב
 שִׁיחִי וּכְעָסִי דִבַּרְתִּי עַד־הֵנָּה: וַיַּעַן עָלַי וַיֹּאמֶר לְכִי לְשָׁלוֹם וְאֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִתֵּן
 אֶת־שְׁלַתְךָ אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַלְתְּ מֵעַמּוֹ: וַתֹּאמֶר תִּמְצֵא שִׁפְחַתְךָ חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וְהִלַּךְ
 הָאִשָּׁה לְדַרְכָּהּ וַתֹּאכַל וּפְנִיָּהּ לֹא־הָיוּ־לָהּ עוֹד: וַיִּשְׁכַּמוּ בַּבֶּקֶר וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לִפְנֵי
 יְהוָה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־בֵּיתָם הָרַמְתָּה וַיִּדַע אֶלְקָנָה אֶת־חַנָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַיִּזְכְּרָהּ
 יְהוָה: וַיְהִי לְתַקְפוֹת הַיָּמִים וַתַּהַר חַנָּה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שְׁמוּאֵל כִּי

DISCUSSION

grew angry with her. After all, Penina was his wife as well, and her children were also his. The need to impose order and keep matters calm at home must have been a great burden for him. Consequently, Elkana stressed to Hannah that since she was loved, she should not be so sensitive. It should be noted that even if his intent was to raise her spirits, his statement quite possibly had the very opposite effect. Perhaps at first he would say to her something like: God willing, you will yet bear a child; if not now, then maybe next year. However, in the comment cited here he had accepted her situation as an

irreversible fact, implying to Hannah: You will be my beloved wife, while she will be the mother of my children. You should be happy with your lot, as it is perhaps the more pleasant and respectable of the two options (see Malbim, verse 8). Yet Hannah refused to accept her fate, and therefore she arose in bitterness and prayed to God.

1:11 | **Lord of hosts:** This is the first mention of this particular appellation of God in the entire Bible. The Sages explain that by using this name Hannah meant to say: Lord, You have all the

hosts in the world; is it difficult for You to grant me one son? (see *Berakhot* 31b)

1:20 | **She called his name Samuel [Shemuel], for I requested him [she'iltiv] from the Lord:** Hannah did not invent the name Samuel (see Numbers 34:20). Furthermore, her justification is difficult to understand, as the closest name to *she'iltiv* is Saul [*Shaul*] rather than Samuel. It appears that the original meaning of Samuel was "name of God" (*Shemo El*), and this was her way of saying that he would be called by the name of God, that is, he was consecrated and belonged to God (see Abravanel).

- 21 **The man Elkana and his entire household**, his family, **ascended to present the annual offering**, or the appropriate offerings for those dates, perhaps the festival offerings **to the Lord**, and the offerings for **his vow**, which he had pledged to bring over the course of the year.²⁶
- 22 **But Hannah did not ascend** with her son; **as she said to her husband: When the child will be weaned** from my milk and will be able to eat food, **I will bring him** to the Tabernacle, **and he will appear before the Lord**, and **he will reside there forever**. In the meantime, I will leave him at home and enjoy him. When he grows a little, I will bring him to Shilo and give him to God.²⁷
- 23 **Elkana her husband said to her: Do that which is good in your eyes**, remain here with the boy **until you wean him**; **but may the Lord fulfill His word**, that the child should mature and thrive.²⁸ **The woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him**.
- 24 **When she had weaned him she took him up with her** to the Temple, at the age of two or three, or perhaps a little older,²⁹ to mark the occasion in a celebratory fashion³⁰ **with three bulls, and one ephah of flour**, an ancient measure of volume, roughly equivalent to 22 g, perhaps slightly more, **and a skin of wine**, possibly an earthenware container,³¹ **and she brought him to the House of the Lord in Shilo, and the child was young**. He would act in the immature manner of a young child.

Hannah's Prayer

I SAMUEL 2:1–10

Following the wondrous birth, Hannah recites a grand, poetic prayer, centering on her expression of gratitude and praise for the greatness of God. In this prayer she expresses her realization that everything she requested was granted, and thanks God for His active presence in the world and for His providence.

- 2 **1 Hannah prayed, and said: My heart exults in the Lord, my glory is exalted**, my strength has increased and I have risen to a position of greatness, **in**, by the assistance of **the Lord**.³⁴ **My mouth is opened wide against my enemies**; I can say what I wish to them and they have no response; **because I rejoice** in the revelation of **Your salvation**. I believed in You even beforehand, but now I can exult at seeing the open display of Your deliverance.
- 2 **There is none who is holy like the Lord, as there is none** who responds and rescues **besides You**; **and there is no powerful rock like our God**. Despite God's transcendence, He does not remain distant from the world, but is constantly active in human affairs.³⁵
- 3 Hannah addressed her enemies: **Do not exceed, speaking with extreme haughtiness**, pretentiousness and conceit, as though you know and understand everything, **letting**³⁶ words of **arrogance**, or false statements,³⁷ **emerge from your mouth**, as in truth **the Lord is the God of knowledge**, He possesses all knowledge; **and only by Him** the **exploits** of the world are **assessed** and judged.³⁸
- 4 On the one hand, **the bow of the mighty men**³⁹ **is broken, and on the other hand, those who faltered are girded with strength**.⁴⁰
- 5 **The sated were hired for bread**. They do not even receive a wage for their labor, but merely bread to eat; **but in contrast, the hungry have ceased** to want food; to the extent that **while the barren has borne seven, the one with many children is miserable**.⁹ The word *ad* could also mean behold.⁴¹
- 6 **The Lord puts to death and brings to life; He lowers to the netherworld and He also raises people up** from there.
- 7 **The Lord impoverishes, and also makes rich; He humbles, and yet He also elevates**.
- 8 **He raises the impoverished from dust, He elevates the indigent**, the destitute who have nowhere to go, **from refuse heaps**, places of garbage and scraps, **to seat them**, the poor and needy, **with nobles, and He will bequeath them a throne of glory; for the pillars, the foundations, of the earth are the Lord's, and He established the world upon them**. The foundations of the world are in the hands of God, who can do with them as He wishes. He can raise up the world or bring it down,

Perhaps he was mischievous or precocious;³² in any case, his presence was felt in the Temple, which was a place mainly frequented by adults.³³

- 25 **They slaughtered the bull** as an offering, **and they brought the child to Eli** the priest.
- 26 **She, Hannah, said to Eli: Please, my lord; by your soul, my lord, I am the same woman who stood with you here to pray to the Lord**. Hannah had not previously told Eli the object of her prayer; now she revealed it to him:
- 27 **For this child I prayed; and the Lord granted me my request that I requested of Him**.
- 28 Since God has fulfilled my request, **I too have granted him to the Lord**, as my part of the petition; **all the days that he will be, he is granted and handed over to the Lord**. He, Samuel, **prostrated himself there to the Lord**, along with all those present.



Earthenware wine jug, Roman period

כא מִיְהוָה שְׁאַלְתִּינוּ: וַיַּעַל הָאִישׁ אֶלְקָנָה וְכָל־בֵּיתוֹ לִזְבֹּחַ לַיהוָה אֶת־זִבְחַת הַיָּמִים
 כב וְאֶת־נְדָרוֹ: וְחֲנָה לֹא עָלְתָה בִּי־אִמְרָה לְאִשָּׁה עַד יִגְמַל הַנֶּעֱר וְהִבְאֵתוּ וְנִרְאָה
 כג אֶת־פָּנָי יְהוָה וַיֵּשֶׁב שָׁם עַד־עוֹלָם: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ אֶלְקָנָה אִשָּׁה עָשִׂי הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינַיִךְ
 כד שְׁבִי עַד־גְּמֻלְךְ אֵתוֹ אֲךְ יִקָּם יְהוָה אֶת־דְּבָרוֹ וְתִשָּׁב הָאִשָּׁה וְתִינַק אֶת־בְּנָהּ
 כה עַד־גְּמֻלָּהּ אֵתוֹ: וַתַּעֲלֶהּוּ עִמָּהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר גְּמַלְתוּ בְּפָרִים שְׁלֹשָׁה וְאִיפָּה אַחַת
 כו קָמַח וְנֶבֶל יִיזַן וְתִבְאֶהוּ בֵּית־יְהוָה שְׁלוֹ וְהַנֶּעֱר נָעַר: וַיִּשְׁחֲטוּ אֶת־הַפָּר וַיָּבִאוּ
 כז אֶת־הַנֶּעֱר אֶל־עֲלִי: וַתֹּאמֶר בִּי אֲדֹנָי חַי נַפְשְׁךָ אֲדֹנָי אֲנִי הָאִשָּׁה הַנִּנְצָבַת עִמָּכָה
 כח בָּזָה לְהַתְּפַלֵּל אֶל־יְהוָה: אֶל־הַנֶּעֱר הִזָּה הַתְּפַלְלָתִי וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה לִי אֶת־שְׁאֵלָתִי
 כט אֲשֶׁר שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵעַמוֹ: וְגַם אֲנֹכִי הַשְׁאֵלְתִּיהוּ לַיהוָה כָּל־הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה הוּא
 ב א שְׂאוֹל לַיהוָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה שָׁם לַיהוָה: וַתִּתְּפַלֵּל חֲנָה וַתֹּאמֶר עֲלֵךְ לִבִּי
 ב בִּיהוָה רַמָּה קָרְנִי בִּיהוָה רָחַב פִּי עַל־אוֹיְבֵי כִּי שָׁמַחְתִּי בִּישׁוּעַתְךָ: אִינִי־קָדוֹשׁ
 ג כִּיהוָה כִּי־אִין בְּלַתְךָ וְאִין צוֹר כַּאֲלֵהֵינוּ: אֶל־תִּרְבּוּ תִדְּבָרוּ גְבוּהָ גְבוּהָ יֵצֵא
 ד עֲתָק מִפִּיכֶם כִּי אֵל דַּעוֹת יְהוָה וְלֹא נִתְּנָנוּ עַלְלוֹת: קִשְׁת גְּבָרִים חֲתָיִם וְנִכְשָׁלִים וְלוֹ
 ה אָזְרוּ חֵיִל: שְׁבָעִים בַּלְחָם נִשְׁכָּרוּ וְרַעֲבִים חָדְלוּ עַד־עֵקֶרָה יִלְדָה שְׁבָעָה וְרַבַּת
 ו בָּנִים אֲמַלְלָהּ: יְהוָה יִמְמִית וּמַחִיָּה מוֹרִיד שְׂאוֹל וַיַּעַל: יְהוָה מוֹרִישׁ וּמַעֲשִׂיר
 ז מִשְׁפִּיל אֶף־מְרוֹמָם: מִקִּים מַעֲפָר דָּל מֵאֲשַׁפֵּת יָרִים אֲבִיוֹן לְהוֹשִׁיב עַם־נְדִיבִים

DISCUSSION

2:5| **The one with many children is miserable:** Some infer from this phrase that some of Penina's children died, perhaps as a punishment for her harassment of Hannah (see Rashi; Radak; *Midrash Shmuel* 5:10). In any case,

Hannah described a new world, in which those who were previously successful and considered mighty had fallen by the wayside, whereas Hannah and those like her stood firm and happy, thanks to God's salvation. Her happiness at

finally bringing a child into the world is reminiscent of Rachel's reaction when she too was blessed with a son after many barren years: "God has removed my disgrace" (Genesis 30:23).

and render it a comfortable place for certain people and less so for others.

- 9 **He protects the feet of His holy ones** so that they will not stumble, **but the wicked will be lost in darkness**, due to their evil ways;⁴² alternatively, they will disappear and be lost in darkness; **for not through strength does man prevail**, but rather, the world is ruled by God's kindness, goodwill, and His special providence over His pious ones.⁴³

The Priests' Sins at the Tabernacle and the Curse of the House of Eli

I SAMUEL 2:11–36

- 11 **Elkana went to Rama to [al] his house.** Although *al* generally means “upon” or “with,” here it means “to.”⁴⁵ Alternatively, this phrase means: With his wife, in accordance with the statement of the Sages: His house, that is a reference to his wife.⁴⁶ After staying with his family in Shilo, Elkana departed and Hannah went with him. **The lad, Samuel, was serving the Lord before Eli the priest.** Samuel sought to assist Eli as best he could. Naturally, as a small child there was very little that he was able to do. However, he could be useful in performing various minor tasks.⁴⁸
- 12 **The sons of Eli were wicked men; they did not know the Lord,** and they had no wish to know Him. They did not follow in their father's path.
- 13 **This was the practice of the priests, Eli's sons, with the people: When any man would present a peace offering,** which was divided into three parts, some of it was for the altar, some for the priests, and the rest for the owners, **the lad of the priest would come while the flesh was cooking, with a three-pronged fork,** a kind of pitchfork used for lifting up meat, **in his hand.**
- 14 **He would thrust it,** the pitchfork, **into the pan [kiyor],** a large vessel for rinsing and cooking meat. See Zechariah (12:6): “Like a pan [*kiyor*] of fire among the wood.” This may be the source for the rabbinic Hebrew word *kira*, a stove. **Or he would strike the pitchfork into the kettle, or into the caldron or into the pot,** various types of cooking utensils,⁴⁹ the precise difference between which is unclear; **whatever the fork would bring up, the priest would take with it,** without discriminating between the portions. This is contradictory to Torah law, whereby the



Three-pronged fork used for sacrificial rites, Ako, fourteenth–thirteenth centuries BCE

- 10 **The Lord, His opponents,** those who rise up against Him, **will be broken; He will thunder in the heavens against him and strike him; the Lord will administer judgment to the ends of the earth.** Hannah concludes her prayer with a prophetic hope: **And He will give strength to His king, and exalt the glory of His anointed.** Perhaps my son will prepare the world for the forthcoming monarchy of Israel. Hannah is considered one of the seven prophetesses in the Bible.⁴⁴

This section describes the miserable state of affairs in the Tabernacle of Shilo at the time. Unlike Eli the High Priest, portrayed as a worthy, holy man who would offer guidance to those coming to the House of the Lord, and as one whose blessings would come to pass, his sons acted in a coarse manner. They would violently harass those who visited the Tabernacle. Eli attempted to dissuade them from that approach, but to no avail. Ultimately, Eli was informed of the harsh punishment that would befall his family in every generation.

priest is entitled to only specific portions of the offering, and the remainder belongs to the owner. Here the sons of Eli did what they wished and took any portion they chose.⁵⁰ **So they would do to all Israel who would come there, to Shilo.** The worshippers, who respected the priests, or at least treated them with courtesy, felt unable to object.



Cooking pot, Israel, Bronze Age

- 15 Furthermore, **even before the fat was burned** upon the altar, **the priest's lad would come and say to the man presenting the offering: Give flesh to roast for the priest, as he will not take cooked flesh from you but rather raw.** A peace offering was first slaughtered, and then it was cut into portions and its fat was burned on the altar, only after which the rest was permitted for consumption.⁵¹ These priests did not have the patience to wait.
- 16 **The man would say to him: Let them burn the fat today, now, and take for you as your soul desires, but he would say: No, for you shall give it to me now, and if not, I will take by force.** If someone would object that just as he does not taste from the meat until the fat has been burned on the altar, the priest should likewise wait until the conclusion of the offering before taking what he chooses, the priest's servant would respond that he is the one in charge and he will decide when he may take the meat.
- 17 **The sin of the lads,** perhaps this is referring to the sons of Eli themselves,⁵² or the priests' servants, who were possibly their own sons, **was very great before the Lord, as the men**

וְכִסָּא כְבוֹד יִנְחֹלֶם כִּי לִיהוָה מִצְקֵי אֲרֶץ וַיִּשֶׁת עֲלֵיהֶם תִּבְל: רַגְלֵי חֲסִידוֹ יִשְׁמֹר
 וְדָשָׁעִים בַּחֲשֶׁךְ יִדְמוּ כִּי-לֹא בִכַח יִגְבֵּר-אִישׁ: יְהוָה יַחַתּוּ מְרִיבֹו עָלוּ בַשָּׁמַיִם ב
 יִרְעִם יְהוָה יִדִּין אֶפְסֵי-אֲרֶץ וַיִּתֶּן-עֵז לְמַלְכּוֹ וַיִּרֶם קֶרֶן מְשִׁיחוֹ:
 וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶלְקָנָה הַרְמַתָּה עַל-בֵּיתוֹ וַהֲנַעַר הָיָה מְשָׁרֵת אֶת-יְהוָה אֶת-פְּנֵי עָלִי
 הַכֹּהֵן: וּבְנֵי עָלִי בְנֵי בְלִיעֵל לֹא יָדְעוּ אֶת-יְהוָה: וּמִשְׁפַּט הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת-הָעַם
 כָּל-אִישׁ זֹבַח וְזָבַח וְכֹא נֶעַר הַכֹּהֵן כְּבִשָּׁל הַבָּשָׂר וְהַמִּזְלֵג שְׁלֹשׁ הַשָּׁנִים בִּידוֹ:
 וְהִפָּה בַכִּיּוֹר אֹו בְדוֹד אֹו בַקְלַחַת אֹו בַפָּרוֹר כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲלֶה הַמִּזְלֵג יִקַּח הַכֹּהֵן
 בּוֹ כֹּכָה יַעֲשׂוּ לְכָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל הַפָּאִים שָׁם בְּשִׁלָּה: גַּם בְּטָרֶם יִקְטְרוּן אֶת-הַחֶלֶב
 וְכֹא ו נֶעַר הַכֹּהֵן וְאָמַר לְאִישׁ הַזֹּבַח תִּנְהַ בָּשָׂר לְעֹלוֹת לַכֹּהֵן וְלֹא-יִקַּח מִמֶּנָּךְ
 בָּשָׂר מִבְּשָׁל כִּי אִם-חֵי: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הָאִישׁ קִטֹּר יִקְטִירוּן פִּיּוֹם הַחֶלֶב וְקַח-לָךְ
 כֹּאֲשֶׁר תֵּאֱוָה נִפְשֶׁךְ וְאָמַר ו לוֹ כִּי עֲתָה תִתֶּן וְאִם-לֹא לְקַחְתִּי בַחֲזָקָה: וְתֵהִי לֹא
 חֲטָאת הַנְּעָרִים גְּדוֹלָה מְאֹד אֶת-פְּנֵי יְהוָה כִּי נִאֲצוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶת מִנְחַת יְהוָה:
 וּשְׁמוּאֵל מְשָׁרֵת אֶת-פְּנֵי יְהוָה נֶעַר חָגוֹר אֶפֹּוד בֶּד: וּמַעִיל קִטֹּן תַעֲשֶׂה-לוֹ
 אָבּוֹ וְהַעֲלֵתָה לוֹ מִיָּמִים ו יִמִּימָה בַעֲלוֹתָהּ אֶת-אִשָּׁה לְזֹבַח אֶת-זֹבַח הַיָּמִים:

scorned⁵³ the gift offerings of the Lord. They would not even eat the meat of the offerings as a proper meal, but in the manner of a group of bandits. The behavior of the priests conveyed disdain not only for those who came to the House of God but for the service of the Tabernacle itself.

18 In the meantime Samuel was serving before the Lord in the Tabernacle, a lad, and he was girded with a linen ephod, a

kind of apron that covered the lower part of the body, to the feet.⁵⁴

19 His mother would make him a small robe,⁵ and she would take it, a robe of this kind, up to him from year to year,⁵⁵ when she ascended with her husband to Shilo to present the yearly offering in the House of God.

DISCUSSION

2:19| His mother would make him a small robe: It was unusual for a small child to wear an ephod or a robe, as these garments were

generally donned by priests, Levites, and those worshipping God. However, since he was performing services in the Tabernacle, Samuel wore

an ephod (see Radak, verse 28; see, e.g., 21:10, 22:18; II Samuel 6:14).

- 20 Eli would bless Elkana and his wife**, when they came to the Tabernacle, and say: **May the Lord grant you offspring from this woman in place of the gift that he, Elkana, granted^D to the Lord.** You have given your son to God, and therefore you are unable to raise him yourselves. Consequently, may God bless you with more children.⁵⁶ **And they would go to his place.**
- 21 For indeed,⁵⁷ the Lord remembered Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters,^D and the lad Samuel grew with the Lord.**
- 22** The chapter returns to the events in the Tabernacle at Shilo: **Eli was very old, and he heard everything that his sons would do to all Israel.** Due to his advanced age, he was not always present in the Tabernacle, and therefore he did not witness all that went on there. However, he heard rumors of his sons' behavior.⁵⁸ Perhaps he also heard the cries, shouts, and arguments going on there. **And he also heard that they would lie with the women who would assemble at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.^D**
- 23 He, Eli, said to them,** his sons: **Why do you act in this manner, as I hear of your evil actions from all these people?**
- 24 Do not, my sons;** do not act in this manner;⁵⁹ **as the report that I hear that the people of the Lord are disseminating about you⁶⁰ is not good.**
- 25 If a man sins against a man, the judge will try and convict him, but if a man sins against the Lord, who will try him;** alternatively, who shall entreat forgiveness for him?⁶¹ **But his sons remained stubborn, and they would not heed the voice of their father because the Lord wished to put them to death.** It was decreed that they had to die for their sins. Perhaps their deaths would atone for all their sins, but in any case, their presence in this world was no longer wanted.⁶²
- 26** In contrast to them, **the lad Samuel was steadily growing and improving both toward the Lord and toward people.^D**
- 27 A man of God, a prophet, came to Eli, and he said to him: So said the Lord: Did I not appear to your father's house, when they were in Egypt under the house of Pharaoh?** Did I reveal Myself to them so that they should be priests for Pharaoh and his type of service? Alternatively, this question is connected to the verses below: Did I reveal Myself to them so that they should treat My offerings with contempt? Some explain this as a statement: Indeed I revealed Myself to them,⁶³ as Aaron served as a prophet to Israel in Egypt before Moses arrived to redeem the nation.⁶⁴
- 28 And did I choose it,** the house of your forefather Aaron, **from all the tribes of Israel to be priests for Me, to ascend upon My altar, to burn incense, to bear an ephod before Me, and I gave to your father's house all the fire offerings of the children of Israel?** These are either rhetorical questions or statements of fact.
- 29 Why do you kick at My feast offerings and at My gift offerings, which I commanded to be performed in My abode,** this Tabernacle; **and you honor your sons more than you honor Me, to fatten yourselves⁶⁵ from the first of all the gift offerings of Israel that are brought for the atonement of My people:⁶⁶**
- 30 Therefore – the utterance of the Lord, God of Israel: I had said in the past that your house and your patrilineal house would walk before Me forever, but now – the utterance of the Lord – it is inconceivable for Me^D to let you serve as priests for all time: For those who honor Me, I will honor, but in contrast, those who scorn Me will be lowly.**

DISCUSSION

2:20| **The gift that he granted:** The word “granted” is written in the masculine form, which seems odd, as it was Hannah who brought Samuel to God. Some explain that Eli was speaking of Hannah's heart (Rav Yeshaya of Trani). Alternatively, he meant that each of them, Elkana and Hannah, granted Samuel to God. Another possibility is that the phrase “for the gift that he granted to the Lord” is not part of Eli's blessing, but the narrator's explanation: Eli blessed Elkana because he granted Samuel to the Lord. There are other instances in the Bible as well where the grammatical gender is not as expected (see, e.g., Judges 4:10).

2:21| **And bore three sons and two daughters:** Some consider this a fulfillment of Hannah's prophetic song: While the barren has borne seven (verse 5). Although only five children are mentioned, it is possible that she had another one, or that the number seven was not meant literally, but was a poetic way of saying many (see *Pesikta Rabbati* 43; *Midrash Shmuel* 5:11; Rashi, Radak, and Ralbag, verse 5; see also Jeremiah 15:9).

2:22| **And that they would lie with the women who would assemble at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting:** Women would come to the Tabernacle for various reasons. Some wished to complete the purification process from the

ritual impurity of a woman after childbirth or a *zava*, which requires the bringing of offerings; others simply came to visit the Tabernacle. Some explain that these “women who would assemble” were not just ordinary women, but were ascetic women who would frequent the House of God, motivated by an intense devotion to holiness (see *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi; Radak; Ibn Ezra and Ramban, Exodus 38:8). In any case, the priests treated those women in a licentious, immoral manner. Although the Sages softened the plain meaning of the verse, it is possible that on occasion the priests actually engaged in sexual intercourse with the women (see Rashi; Radak; Abravanel; *Shabbat* 55b; *Yoma* 9a). It

► should

וּבִרְךְ עָלַי אֶת־אֱלֹקֵיךָ וְאֶת־אִשְׁתִּי וְאָמַר יְשִׁים יְהוָה לְךָ זֶרַע מִן־הָאִשָּׁה הַזֹּאת
 תַּחַת הַשָּׂאֵלָה אֲשֶׁר שָׂאֵל לִיהוָה וְהָלַכְוּ לְמִקְוָמוֹ: כִּי־פָקַד יְהוָה אֶת־חַנְּנֵה וְתַהַר
 וְתִלְדַּ שְׁלֹשֶׁה־בָּנִים וְשֵׁתֵי בָנוֹת וַיִּגְדַּל הַנְּעָר שְׁמוּאֵל עִם־יְהוָה:
 וְעָלִי זָקֵן מְאֹד וְשָׁמַע אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂוּן בָּנָיו לְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁכְּבוּן
 אֶת־הַנְּשִׁים הַעֲבָאוֹת פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לָמָּה תַעֲשֶׂוּן כַּדְּבָרִים
 הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי שׁוֹמֵעַ אֶת־דְּבָרֵיכֶם רָעִים מֵאֵת כָּל־הָעָם אֱלֹהִים: אֵל בָּנָי כִּי
 לֹא־טוֹבָה הַשְּׁמִיעָה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי שׁוֹמֵעַ מֵעֲבָרִים עִם־יְהוָה: אִם־יִחַטָּא אִישׁ
 לְאִישׁ וּפְלָלוּ אֱלֹהִים וְאִם לִיהוָה יִחַטָּא־אִישׁ מִי יִתְפַּלֵּל־לוֹ וְלֹא יִשְׁמָעוּ לְקוֹל
 אֲבִיהֶם כִּי־חָפֵץ יְהוָה לְהִמָּיֵת: וְהַנְּעָר שְׁמוּאֵל הָלַךְ וַיִּגְדַּל וְטוֹב גַּם עִם־יְהוָה
 וְגַם עִם־אֲנָשִׁים:

וַיָּבֵא אִישׁ־אֱלֹהִים אֶל־עָלִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה הִנְגַּלְהָ נְגִילִיתִי אֶל־בֵּית
 אָבִיךָ בְּהִיוֹתְם בְּמִצְרַיִם לְבֵית פְּרַעֲה: וּבַחֹר אָתוֹ מִכָּל־שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִי לְכַהֵן
 לְעֹלוֹת עַל־מִזְבְּחִי לְהַקְטִיר קֹטֶרֶת לְשֵׂאת אֵפוֹד לִפְנֵי וְאֶתְנֶה לְבֵית אָבִיךָ
 אֶת־כָּל־אִשֵׁי בָנָי יִשְׂרָאֵל: לָמָּה תִבְעֲטוּ בְּזִבְחִי וּבְמִנְחָתִי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי מֵעוֹן
 וְתִכְבְּדוּ אֶת־בְּנֵיךָ מִמֶּנִּי לְהַבְרִיאְכֶם מִרְאִשִׁית כָּל־מִנְחַת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַמִּי: לָכֵן
 נָאִם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָמַר אֶמְרָתִי בֵּיתְךָ וּבֵית אָבִיךָ יִתְהַלְכוּ לִפְנֵי עַד־

DISCUSSION

should be noted that this sin is omitted in the reproof of the man of God for their actions (see verse 27 ff). Either way, an atmosphere of general corruption and moral perversion prevailed in the Tabernacle, and instead of sacred, lofty acts it was full of empty rituals that focused on the consumption of meat and immodest behavior.

2:26| **And improving both toward the Lord and toward people:** He was viewed positively by God because he acted properly, and it was evident that he was admired by people as well,

because he was the only one pure of heart and innocent of wrongdoing in the Tabernacle at the time. The priests and their servants were rude and obtuse, and they followed the evil desires of their hearts, whereas Samuel was appreciated more and more by those who observed him.

2:30| **But now – the utterance of the Lord – it is inconceivable for Me:** After the death of Aaron's older sons, he was left with two remaining sons: Elazar and Itamar. The dynasty of High Priests began with Elazar and continued

through his son Pinhas and his descendants after him. For various reasons the High Priesthood was later transferred from the family of Elazar to Eli, who was from the family of Itamar. As a result of his sons' misdeeds, the man of God prophesied that Eli's family would lose its lofty status and become secondary (see Rashi; Radak; *Tanna DeVei Eliyahu Rabba* 11; see also I Kings 2:27; Radak, Ezekiel 40:46; commentary on Numbers 25:13).

- 31 **Behold, days are coming**, in the near or distant future,⁶⁷ **and I will cut off your arm**, your strength, **and the arm of your patrilineal house**, your family that rules with a firm grip over the Tabernacle and takes its consecrated items with force,⁶⁸ **from there being an old person**, or a dignified man,⁶⁹ **in your house**.
- 32 **You will look upon a rival**, an alternative priestly family, which will serve **in the abode**; alternatively, you will watch from a narrow, congested place,⁷⁰ **upon all the good that He will perform for Israel**, but you will have no share in that good;⁷¹ **and there will not be an old person in your house all the days**.
- 33 **But I will not eliminate for you any man from My altar**. Your descendants will continue to serve upon the altar, but they will be forced to watch as all the important roles are given to others. This will serve **to cause your eyes to yearn**, as you look on with impatience, **and your heart to become desolate** and saddened; **and furthermore, all of the majority of your house**, or
- those who grow and mature in your home, **will die as men**, at the height of their strength, without growing old.
- 34 **This will be the sign for you** that this prophecy is true, **that which will come upon your two sons, upon Hofni and Pinhas; on one day they will both die**. Then you will know that your family will no longer be the leaders in the Tabernacle.
- 35 **I will establish for Me a faithful priest, who will act in accordance with that which is in My heart and in My soul**. He will follow My wishes; **and I will build a faithful house for him, and he will walk before My anointed, the king,⁷² all the days, forever**.
- 36 **It will be that all who remain of your house will come to prostrate themselves^D before him**, the High Priest serving at that time, **for a gera^B of silver and a loaf of bread, and he will say**, submissively: **Please append me to one of the priestly services**; let me join them; alternatively, let me participate in some sort of service of God,⁷³ in order **to eat a portion of bread**.

The Initiation of Samuel as a Prophet

I SAMUEL 3:1–21

The prophecy of Samuel commences with a kind of folktale of a small child hearing a voice in the House of God. There is nothing extraordinary about the voice that he hears, in stark contrast to the prophetic visions of other prophets, e.g., Isaiah, who in some sense saw God, His throne, and His angels, in a very detailed and dramatic manner.⁷⁴

It should be noted that the prophets of the First Temple period generally experienced less colorful visions than those of the beginning of the Second Temple period.⁷⁵ It appears that to the extent that a prophet prophesied nearer to the period of Moses, father of the prophets, so was his vision less dramatic.

Samuel was entrusted with a very important mission as a prophet. In addition to addressing matters as mundane as informing people of the whereabouts of their lost property (9:20), he was an exceptional leader who successfully implemented many important social and political changes on the national level. Samuel was such a key figure that he is even deemed equivalent to Moses and Aaron.⁷⁶ The style of his prophecy, which is quite simple and straightforward, is indeed similar to that of Moses, who did not speak in lofty terms when he related his conversations with God or his depictions of Him. Likewise, Samuel describes speaking with God as one would refer to conversing with another human.⁷⁷

As one who was designated for the service of God from before his birth, Samuel did not live a normal life. While he did not remain in the Tabernacle all his life, he personified the quintessential servant of God. He was already residing in the Tabernacle when he learned to speak his first words, and he considered his work there as his mission in life. Aware of the importance of his task, he would deliver with the same plainness the word of God both in connection to minor issues arising in daily life, as well as those matters that would have a decisive impact upon the nation of Israel as a whole.

- 3 1 **The lad Samuel was serving the Lord before Eli**. It can be inferred from the previous section that the House of God did not function in an organized manner. It is also possible that the Levites did not have any defined status at that time. Although Samuel himself was a Levite (see commentary on 1:1), he was sent to the Tabernacle by his mother as a young child, and he served as a personal assistant to Eli the High Priest. **And the word of the Lord was rare in those days**, in contrast to later historical periods; **visions were not widespread**. Prophecy was very rare and absent from the public consciousness, which explains the misunderstanding described in the following verses.
- 2 **It was on that day**, on a certain day, **that Eli was lying in his place**, near the Sanctuary; **and his eyes had begun to dim;^D he could not see**.
- 3 **The lamp of God was not yet extinguished**. As the lamps of the candelabrum were not supposed to be extinguished at night,⁷⁸ it is possible that the verse is referring to some other lamp that illuminated the area, which did not have the laws and regulations attributed to the candelabrum.⁷⁹ **And Samuel was lying in the Sanctuary of the Lord, in which the Ark of God was**. Samuel presumably slept in an area of the Sanctuary in which sleep was permitted, rather than in the actual chamber where the Ark of God was situated.⁸⁰ According to some commentaries, the phrase “in which the Ark of God was” is not referring to the location where Samuel was sleeping, the subject of the immediate preceding clause, but rather to the location of the lamp. This interpretation is supported by the cantillation of the verse: There is a pause right after the phrase “And Samuel was lying down to sleep,” which indicates that the subsequent

עוֹלָם וְעַתָּה נֹאס־יְהוָה חֲלִילָה לִּי כִּי־מִכְבְּדֵי אֶכְבֵּד וּבִזֵּי יִקְלוּ: הִנֵּה יָמַיִם בָּאִים
 וְגִדַּעְתִּי אֶת־זֶרְעֶךָ וְאֶת־זֶרְעֶךָ בֵּית אָבִיךָ מֵהַיּוֹת זָקֵן בְּבֵיתְךָ: וְהַבִּטַּתְּ צַד מֵעוֹן
 כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־יִיטִיב אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה זָקֵן בְּבֵיתְךָ כָּל־הַיָּמִים: וְאִישׁ לֹא־
 אֶכְרִית לְךָ מֵעַם מִזְבְּחֵי לְכָלוֹת אֶת־עֵינֶיךָ וְלֹא־דִיב אֶת־נַפְשְׁךָ וְכָל־מִרְבֵּית
 בֵּיתְךָ יָמוּתוּ אַנְשֵׁי־מֵ: וְזֶה־לְךָ הָאוֹת אֲשֶׁר יָבֹא אֶל־שְׁנֵי בָנֶיךָ אֶל־חֲפְנֵי וּפִינְחָס
 בְּיוֹם אֶחָד יָמוּתוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם: וְהַקִּימֹתִי לִּי כִּי־נֶאֱמַן כֹּאֲשֶׁר בְּלִבִּי וּבְנַפְשִׁי יַעֲשֶׂה
 וּבְנִיתִי לוֹ בֵּית נֶאֱמָן וְהִתְהַלַּךְ לִפְנֵי־מְשִׁיחֵי כָּל־הַיָּמִים: וְהָיָה כָּל־הַנּוֹתֵר בְּבֵיתְךָ
 יָבֹא לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לוֹ לֹא־גֹזֶרֶת כֶּסֶף וְכֶפֶר־לֶחֶם וְאָמַר סִפְחָנִי נָא אֶל־אֲחַת הַפְּהֻנוֹת
 לֶאֱכֹל פֶּת־לֶחֶם: וְהִנֵּעַר שְׁמוּאֵל מִשְׁרַת אֶת־יְהוָה לִפְנֵי עָלִי וּדְבַר
 יְהוָה הָיָה יָקָר בְּיָמַיִם הָהֵם אֵין חִזּוֹן נִפְרָץ: וַיְהִי בְּיוֹם הַהוּא וְעָלִי שָׁכַב בְּמִקְוֹמוֹ
 וְעֵינָיו הִחְלוּ כִּהְיוֹת לֹא יוֹכֵל לְרֹאוֹת: וְגַר אֱלֹהִים טָרַם יִכְפֶּה וּשְׁמוּאֵל שָׁכַב

BACKGROUND

2:36| **Gera:** The *gera* was a small measurement of weight. The word is derived from *gargir*, a seed. It is similar to the term *karat*, which is still used in the sale of gold and diamonds, and whose original meaning was carob seed (see Ibn Ezra, first commentary on Exodus 30:13). Its use stems from the ancient practice of utilizing the seeds of grains or fruit as a measurement for small weights (see Ruth 3:15). *Gera* also appears in an inscription from the sixth century BCE, on a potshard found in Kadesh Barnea. In the Talmud the *gera* is referred to as a *ma'a*, which also originally meant a seed.

DISCUSSION

2:36| **It will be that all who remain of your house will come to prostrate themselves:** As a punishment for the contempt Eli's family had for the sacred service, the High Priesthood was to be taken from his descendants, and they would not be given any leadership role. Furthermore, since they lorded over people with violence, it was decreed that they would become subordinate and in need of the kindness of others; because they ate meat ravenously, they would go hungry for bread; and since they ate consecrated food before the proper time, they

would die prematurely. The Sages state that this prophecy was indeed fulfilled, as Eli's descendants would typically pass away at a young age (see I Kings 2:27; *Rosh HaShana* 18a; *Bereshit Rabba* 59a).

3:2| **And his eyes had begun to dim:** The verse is probably referring to a cataract, which leads to a steady deterioration of vision, typically during old age. In those days, treatment for this condition was certainly unknown, and ultimately the afflicted individual would become completely blind (see Rashbam, Genesis 27:1).