

## DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

**John Kitto, D.D., F.S.A.**

Twenty-Eighth Week - Tuesday

### SAMUEL LENT TO THE LORD

*"Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim Zophim, of the mountains of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah . . . And he had two wives: the name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. This man went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to Yahweh of hosts in Shiloh. . . . So Hannah arose after they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of Yahweh. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to Yahweh and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, 'O Yahweh of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to Yahweh all the days of his life, and no razor shall come his head'" (1 Samuel 1:1-3, 9-11).*

In the time of Samson the high priest seems to have been Eli, who probably also exercised the civic functions of judge. The last high priest whom the history presents to us is Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, who was Aaron's eldest son; and the succession to the high priesthood seems to be the inheritance of that line. But Eli is descended from Aaron's youngest son, Ithamar. We have no intimation of how the change took place. It was not from the failure of the line of Eleazar, for that line was restored to the priesthood in the person of Zadok in the time of Solomon.

Josephus places three high priests between Phinehas and Eli, the same who are set down by the names of Abishua, Bukki, and Uzzi in 1 Chronicles 6:50,51. They are placed in the line of Eleazar, and so Eli must have been the first high priest of the line of Ithamar. It is possible that when Uzzi died his son was too young to exercise the office of high priest; and as that office was too essential to the theocratic institutions to remain in abeyance, it may be that Eli was appointed to the priesthood in his place, being the eldest representative of the line of Ithamar.

When Hannah went to the tabernacle to pour out her grief before the Lord, Eli was sitting "on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the LORD." It would appear this was where he probably sat as high priest and judge to give advice in cases of difficulty and to hear and decide any cases that might be brought before him.

Now we learn that Hannah prayed moving her lips only and not speaking aloud. This is the first instance of unuttered prayer recorded in Scripture. Prayer is almost always oral in the East, even in public; and that this was the case in Israel, at least at the holy place, is shown by Eli hastening to the conclusion that she had taken too much wine at the feast--in fact, that she was drunk. He therefore rebuked her. She, however, humbly vindicated herself, and Eli finding he had been mistaken then said, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him." Hannah did go in peace and was sad no more. Her faith sustained her, being persuaded that God had accepted her prayer. In due time she had a son and called his name Samuel, which means, "asked of God."

From that time Hannah did not go up with the family to Shiloh at the festivals, rather waiting for the child to be weaned, saying, "Then I will take him, that he may appear before Yahweh and remain there forever." This would suggest a protracted age for weaning if he was then to be of a fit age to be taken up and left at the tabernacle. The Jewish commentators generally take the period to have been two years, and we know that the time was sometimes extended to three years or more. But even three years seems too early for the child to be taken from the mother and left in the care of strangers at the tabernacle, especially if we consider that his destination was to render some service there.

There may therefore be something in the observation of an old writer (Comestor) that there was a threefold weaning of children in old times: the first from the mother's milk when they were three years old; the second from their tender age and the care of a nurse when they were seven years of age; and the third from childish ways when they reached the age of twelve. We incline to the seven years, which is certainly not too early; for Hannah expected that Eli would speedily call to mind their previous interview when she reappeared at the tabernacle with Samuel.

After the event had been commemorated by proper offerings and sacrifices, and Hannah had given vent to a full heart in an exulting hymn, she returned with Eli to Ramah, leaving Samuel in the care of Eli. She did not, however, discontinue her maternal cares for him: "Moreover his mother used to make him a little robe, and bring it to him year by year when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice." While her diligent fingers worked on that robe, how pleasantly her thoughts dwelt on that son who was to wear it. She hoped great things for him, as mothers do; but her highest aspirations for him could hardly reach that exalted pitch of real greatness in Israel which awaited him.

Old Eli became greatly attached to Samuel, and he perhaps found some consolation in his reverent affection and endearing ways to offer some consolation under the grief and disappointment which the profligate career of his own sons occasioned. So impressed was he by the fine qualities of this child and his pious parents that he bestowed upon Hannah and Elkanah his solemn blessing, praying that they might have rich returns in kind for the child they had so faithfully and entirely *lent* to the Lord. And so it came to pass that Hannah afterwards had three sons and two daughters. This was large interest for her "loan." But the Lord is a very

bountiful paymaster. Amid all the fervid speculations that inflame the world, to lend to Him remains the best investment which anyone can make of anything that he possesses.