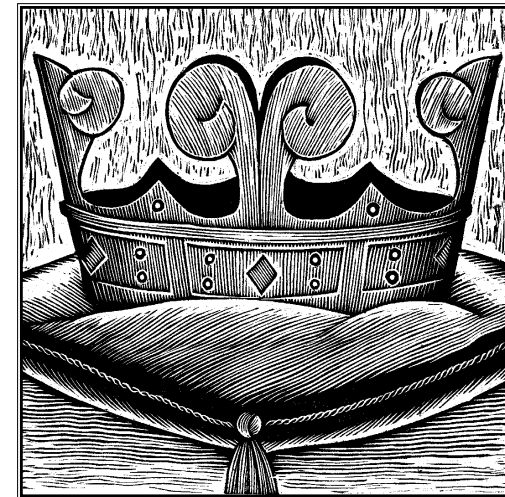


1 & 2 SAMUEL

THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY



**HARRY
MOWVLEY**

A BIBLE COMMENTARY FOR EVERY DAY

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PBC 1 & 2 SAMUEL: INTRODUCTION

The two books of Samuel form part of a much larger work which includes 1 and 2 Kings. They take their name from the person who dominates the first fifteen chapters, though after that Samuel recedes and eventually disappears. The rest of the book is concerned with the beginnings of monarchy in Israel. First Saul was anointed king by Samuel. His reign was not an unlimited success and he was followed by David, whose rise to power is described. The second book of Samuel then outlines the reign of David almost to his death and deals with the problems encountered within his family. It raises the question as to which of his sons should succeed him and tells what happens to them. Eventually in 1 Kings 1, on David's death, he is succeeded by Solomon. The rest of the books of Kings traces the fortunes of the united Israel under Solomon and then of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah up to the exile in Babylon in 587BC.

There is a strong possibility that the books of Joshua and Judges also form part of this larger work, in which case we have a long story which extends from the time of the settlement of the tribes in the promised land to their exile from it. It is important to see 1 and 2 Samuel as part of this larger whole.

Date

It is obvious that the final form of this long account cannot have been written until after the final event it records. Since it closes with the note that King Jehoiakin was released from prison in Babylon in the thirty-seventh year of the exile, that is, in 562BC, the whole book was not completed until after that. This means that the Jews were still in exile when it was written.

Purpose

Not all the Jews were taken into exile. In fact, Jeremiah 52:28–30 provides us with some numbers of those carried off—3023 in 597, 832 in 587 and 745 in 582—a total of 4600. If these figures are correct it means that only a relatively small proportion of the population of Judah went into exile. The land and its capital were not left uninhabited. Those who were taken to Babylon were the élite, the leaders of the nation, so that there was little danger of an uprising in Judah. However, most of the peasant farmers continued to live in

Judah and to work their land, but without any effective leadership.

There was much activity among the exiles as they sought to understand and come to terms with what had happened to them. To many it seemed that God had deserted his chosen people or else he was no longer capable of protecting them. In either case, the temptation to abandon faith in the Lord and to worship the apparently superior gods of Babylon must have been very strong. But there were those in exile who interpreted events differently. Ezekiel, himself a priest as well as a prophet, understood the exile to be the result not of weakness or lack of concern on the part of the Lord, but of the sin of the people of Judah. Between 597 and 587BC he spent his time warning the people in exile that there was worse still to come because the disloyalty to the Lord was still continuing. Once Jerusalem had fallen in 587 he regarded the judgment of God as complete and could encourage the exiles with the news that they would soon be free to return. God would restore them. The prophet writing in Isaiah 40—55 also saw the exile as due to the judgment of God but at the time he was writing, say 550BC, the judgment had been carried out and they could look forward to God leading them home again (Isaiah 40:2ff).

It is also almost certain that at some point during the exile the story from creation to the point of entry to the promised land was written, with the needs of the exiles in mind. It was intended to encourage them to maintain their own identity and their own traditions in an alien culture. This writing was one of the sources of the first five books of the Old Testament, although tradition has attributed it to Moses.

The writer of 1 and 2 Samuel, and indeed of Joshua through to 2 Kings, was engaged in a similar task of trying to come to terms with and to explain the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Judean leaders. Although we may speak of ‘a writer’ it may well be that the book is the work of more than one person, sometimes called a ‘school’ of writers. Whether these people were in exile in Babylon or had been left behind in Judah is hard to decide, and opinions differ. It doesn’t make much difference to our understanding of the books. What is important is to understand that they were written for the benefit of people during that time of exile, to help them to make sense of what had occurred and still to believe in the Lord and worship him alone.

The nature of the books

The books of Samuel and Kings are often referred to as the ‘historical books’, though in the Jewish tradition they are known as the Former Prophets. The term ‘historical books’ is not wrong but it can be misleading. If what we have said above is correct, then the purpose of the books was not simply to provide a detailed, impartial account of events from the past; it was to teach a lesson.

It is, of course, exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to write a history of anything which is purely factual and neutral. Even neutral observers write from the point of view of their neutrality. Suppose we were to try to write a history of Britain from 1979 to 1997. There are certain events which we should certainly be compelled to include—the miners’ strike, the Falklands War, the Gulf War, various pieces of legislation, to mention a few. But first of all we should have to decide which events were important enough to warrant inclusion, because it would be absurd to think that we could write about everything that happened to everybody. In other words, there has to be a process of selection. We have to decide what is important, not only to us but to those who will read what we have written. However, what we regard as important may not be the same as what someone else would want to include. The choices we make are bound to be somewhat subjective.

Not only what we include but what we say about the events we do include will depend on our point of view. A history written by a Tory would be different from that written by a Labour or Liberal Democrat supporter, because history requires not just a recounting of events, but some assessment of them, some evaluation. In our modern world the use of tape-recorders and careful records places some limit on our freedom, but they still leave room for subjective judgments.

In fact, of course, many writers dealing with this period may well be doing so to make a point either supporting or criticizing what happened during those years. Then, while keeping to the facts, the interpretation of those facts will vary according to the purpose of the writer. In such a case impartiality is not a prime consideration.

Now, imagine a writer and a group of supporters who wish to write a history of Israel and Judah from 1000 to 582BC. First they will have very few written sources and those they have will not be neutral. Any oral sources, stories passed on by word of mouth for many generations, may well have been coloured over the years by the beliefs and

prejudices of those who have told them. Further, the writer's intention is not to write a history as a sort of academic exercise for the Jewish national curriculum. Nor is he writing out of general interest. He is writing with a purpose and that purpose is to help his people to come to terms with what has happened. Why are the chosen people in exile? What does this say about God? What does it say about human behaviour? What does it say about national politics? What can we learn from it about the future?

Only with certain qualifications may we call these books 'historical books'. They deal with events in history, but their manner of doing so is determined by their intention.

The author(s)

There is a strong likelihood that the books of Samuel went through a number of 'editions' before they reached their present form and therefore to speak of *an* author is slightly misleading. However, those who shared in the project had a common aim. It is quite impossible to give a name to the authors or editors of these books, but it is possible to say something about the group to which they belonged. It is widely believed that they were 'Deuteronomists'. By this is meant people who were immersed in the teachings of the book of Deuteronomy. This book reflects the views of a group of people from northern Israel who lived there just before the end of that kingdom in 722BC and moved to Judah after that. Whether they wrote it before they moved or after is uncertain and doesn't matter much from our point of view. The book presents a picture of a restored, united Israel with one religious centre where people worship only the Lord. It speaks of the Lord's love for his people, his choice of them, his deliverance of them from Egypt and his settlement of them in the promised land. It calls for obedience to him from those he has chosen. If that is forthcoming they can be assured of his blessing and continued prosperity, but if they disobey they will be punished. The relationship between the Lord and his people is defined as a 'covenant' which demands obedience and exclusive worship in response to his love. The heart of the book, in chapters 12—26, sets out the way in which Israel is to express its obedience and to fulfil its obligations within the covenant. It is not so much a 'law code' as a book of instruction as to what it meant to respond to God's love and so keep the covenant.

The Deuteronomic 'school' fostered these beliefs but during the early part of the seventh century there was no opportunity to spread them in Judah because the nation was dominated by the Assyrians, who insisted on their subjects adopting Assyrian religious beliefs and practices. King Manasseh, who reigned for more than fifty years, had little option but to comply with their demands. Whether he did so willingly or reluctantly, it is hard to say. His death coincided with a weakening of Assyrian control and the opportunity arose for Judah to return to traditional religious worship of the Lord. We are told that King Josiah began the process of reform and that a book was found in the temple in Jerusalem which gave clear direction to the reforms (2 Kings 22). The things he did, such as removing all shrines except the central one in Jerusalem, correspond so closely to the teachings of the book of Deuteronomy that very many scholars believe that the reforms were actually based on that book. The reforms have often been called the 'Deuteronomic Reforms'.

This reform movement soon came to an end when Josiah was killed in battle and Judah reverted to its former ways. The Deuteronomic group still existed and when Judah eventually fell to the Babylonians they felt that their warnings had been justified. While others were shocked and shattered by what had happened, they believed this was the just reward for persistent disobedience and unfaithfulness to the Lord.

The books of Joshua through to 2 Kings therefore set out to show, from this point of view, the reasons for the defeat and destruction of Jerusalem and the exile in Babylon. It is this 'theology' which undergirds the books with which we are concerned here, 1 and 2 Samuel, as well as the rest.

Sources

But where did the writer find all the information? The only source he mentions is the book of Jashar. In 2 Samuel 1:18 we are told that the lament which David sang over the death of Saul and Jonathan was recorded in the book of Jashar. The same source is mentioned in Joshua 10:13, where the poem about the sun standing still on Gibeon's hill is attributed to it. We can only guess from this that it probably contained a collection of poems. In the book of Kings we are told that more information about a king may be found in the 'Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel' (2 Kings 14:28). This suggests that

there were some court records available to the writer which he was able to draw on. Beyond these two sources we know of no others.

But court records were hardly likely to contain the actual words of people in conversations or the words of prayers. So, if they were not recorded, were they really passed on by word of mouth for several hundred years, from one generation to another? It may be that we have to admit that the writer himself wrote what he believed the various speakers might have said. For instance, in 1 Samuel 2, Hannah sings or recites a psalm. The psalm she sings refers to the king (v. 10) and so it can hardly have been used in this form by Hannah, for at that time there was no king. The song she is said to have sung must have come from a later time. What seems to have happened is that the writer felt it to be right and appropriate that Hannah should sing a song of thanksgiving for her baby son and so he used a song which was familiar to him in the sixth century, but which was also appropriate to Hannah's situation. This is not to cast doubt upon the incident itself. After all, some expression of thanks would be absolutely natural. It is simply to suggest that the description of the incident is couched in the writer's own language and perhaps coloured by his beliefs. After all, we have already seen that the writer was not interested in an accurate, neutral account of events, but in helping his contemporaries to learn from the past.

Some of the events described can be confirmed or otherwise by external sources. This applies more to 1 and 2 Kings than to 1 and 2 Samuel, but if there is agreement between 1 and 2 Kings and external sources, this surely adds credibility to what is written in 1 and 2 Samuel. Though the story may be told in the writer's own words and in order to fulfil his aims, there is no reason to doubt the outline of the story itself.

Sometimes it looks as though the writer had at his disposal more than one account of the same event. In 1 Samuel 8—12 there seem to be different attitudes towards the monarchy. In some places Samuel appears to be eager to anoint a king; in others he is reluctant. Again, there seem to be two accounts of the way David entered the court of Saul. In one he was a skilled musician who could calm Saul when he was attacked by bouts of madness; in the other he fought against Goliath and was taken on by Saul as his armour bearer. There is little point in arguing which is correct. The author has done his best to bring his different sources together and make a consistent

story out of them. If we think we can sometimes 'see the joins', so be it. But the author intended his book to be read as it now stands. He was no fool who just included stories because he happened to have them. He was a skilled storyteller who could weave his sources together in such a way as to make a coherent whole. However much we may analyse them, we must always look at the story as it now stands, because that is what the author intended us to do.

His skill is shown in other ways, too. His characters are carefully drawn so that they come over to us as real people. There are goodies and baddies but mostly they are a mixture of the two, and this is so true to life. There are ambiguities about Samuel. David himself is full of ambiguities, sometimes selfish, often generous. His motives are never very clear but are always mixed. Joab is a hard man, cruel and heartless, yet unfailingly loyal almost to the end. It is all very real and all very human.

He knows how to get the best out of a story, often saving the 'punch-line' until the most telling moment. He introduces a person or an event some time before the main story, so keeping us in suspense. He holds contrasting pictures before us, for instance Saul and Jonathan, so that one offsets the other and the contrast is heightened. Indeed our author is a very skilful storyteller.

Inspiration

There are those who find all this talk of sources irrelevant. The book which we possess has been written by someone who was 'inspired' by God. By this, some mean that God told the writer what to write and he wrote it. So God knew all about the conversations, some of them very private, and told the writer exactly what had been said by whom to whom. Those who take this view have no difficulty over sources, but there are difficulties when two parts of the story seem to conflict. Ways have to be found to overcome this problem. While respecting these views, the present writer has a different understanding of inspiration. The author of 1 and 2 Samuel was certainly inspired by God and when we read the books we too are inspired by the same God. But divine inspiration does not mean that human characteristics are suspended. The author was using the gifts God had given him to tell the story of his people in such a way that it might help them to understand and to deal with their situation. The interpreter is using the gifts God has given him or her to show the

relevance of that message for today. So God is involved in the whole process but he does not override us in such a way as to lift the responsibility from our shoulders. The author had to use his skills to tell his story in a way that would help his readers, and trust that God would use what he had done. The interpreter must do the same, relying on God for help, but recognizing that, because of his or her humanity, the interpretation may be flawed.

The succession narrative

There is one large section of the book which the writer seems to have taken almost without adaptation from an existing source. 2 Samuel 9 to 1 Kings 2 is often referred to as ‘the succession narrative’ for reasons which are fairly obvious. The chapters trace the fortunes of David’s family, especially his sons. Since David was only the second king and was no relative of Saul his predecessor, there was as yet no tradition within Israel itself of sons succeeding fathers as king. Other nations, as well as some Canaanite cities, had kings and so Israel would not be ignorant of what happened there when a king died. It was probably assumed that one of David’s sons would succeed him, but which? Indeed, in the story of 2 Samuel as we have it, God had promised that David’s sons would reign after him for as far into the future as could be seen (2 Samuel 7). The succession narrative tells of David’s adultery and then of the birth to Bathsheba of Solomon, and it hints strongly that Solomon would succeed David for it says that ‘the Lord loved him’. However, there were other sons who may be thought to have a prior claim since they were older, some born to David while he was still king of Judah only at Hebron, and others born after he had captured Jerusalem. The narrative tells of the struggles of some of these sons to stake their claim to the throne when David died.

These quarrels within the family are explained as a consequence of David’s adultery with Bathsheba and the ‘murder’ of her husband. Yet she was the mother of Solomon. The whole narrative is an intriguing story. Throughout, the Lord is active but mostly behind the scenes. He is not often mentioned. Things tend to work themselves out according to their own inner dynamic, yet behind it all he is active. This view of God’s activity in the world is typical of the so-called Wise Men or sages. In much of the book of Proverbs consequences follow acts in an almost automatic way. If you do this,

this will follow. However, this natural correlation of act and consequence is no accident; it is all part of God’s plan and he is behind it. For this reason it is widely believed that the succession narrative originated among the Wise Men and was used virtually unchanged by the author of 2 Samuel. The underlying theology of obedience leading to prosperity, and disobedience leading to adversity, was congenial to him.

We are then led to ask how the intimate details of David’s family life, especially his affair with Bathsheba, came to be known to the wise men. These were not events which would be talked about openly by the king or his wife. Nevertheless, such secrets have a habit of leaking out within court circles, of which the wise men were almost certainly a part. (See the commentary for further discussion.)

If we are right in saying that the purpose of the writer was to show how the downfall of Jerusalem and the exile in Babylon were due not to the failure of the Lord but to the persistent sin of his people, and especially in high places, then here was a rich source for the writer to use.

Text and translation

The earliest Hebrew manuscripts that we possess come from the seventh or eighth century AD, that is, over a thousand years after the book was first written. Since during that time all copies were made by hand, there was ample opportunity for error, either accidental or deliberate. Against that, we know that the copyists were extremely careful and they had various devices for ensuring that their copies were accurate. The discovery of the scrolls near the Dead Sea has shown us just how accurate the copying was. Therefore, nowadays we are reluctant to assume an error has been made simply because we cannot fully understand the Hebrew. There are places where, on other grounds, it seems wise to read a different sequence of letters, but this must be done rarely and carefully.

The texts were read in the synagogues and there are some places where the rabbis felt unable to pronounce a certain word and so read something slightly different. When they came across the letters YHWH they always read the word ‘Lord’. Most modern translations follow their example and have ‘LORD’, spelled in capitals. Similarly, they preferred not to read the word Baal and often read *bosheth* instead, which means ‘something shameful’.

Further, the texts were translated first into Greek and then into Syriac and Latin for the benefit of those who could not read Hebrew. The Greek translation, known as the Septuagint, was probably made about 300BC for Greek-speaking Jews in Alexandria in Egypt. There are places where the Greek translation differs significantly from the Hebrew text. Then we have to decide whether the Greek translators had a different text before them, or whether they mistranslated the Hebrew, or whether they couldn't understand it and so wrote something which they thought made sense. The footnotes in the New Revised Standard Version draw attention to these differences and to the way in which the modern translators have handled them. Occasionally we shall refer to these in the commentary.

The most significant difference between the Greek and the Hebrew texts occurs in the story of David and Goliath, where no less than nineteen verses of the Hebrew are missing from the Septuagint (1 Samuel 17:12–31). Opinions differ as to whether the longer Hebrew text is the original and for some reason or other the Greek translators omitted the verses, or whether the shorter Greek text was original and later Hebrew copyists added the verses to reconcile the two accounts of the way David entered Saul's court. Most English translations print the longer text. (See the commentary for further information.)

Modern translators, therefore, sometimes have difficult decisions to make. There are other problems too. Some Hebrew words are used only once, or maybe twice, in the whole Old Testament and, since there are hardly any other Hebrew documents from this period, we have few means of deciding their meaning. Sometimes there are similar words in other ancient languages; sometimes we have to rely on the early translations; sometimes we can only guess the meaning from the context in which the word is used. But it has to be said that these occasions are rare.

Translation is a difficult art and various modern translations sometimes show significant differences which affect the meaning of a story. A word in one language is rarely the exact equivalent of a word in another. Or rather, a word in one language has all sorts of associations which are different from the associations its equivalent has in another. Moreover, the precise meaning of a word is often determined by the way it is used and the company it keeps. It is always a good idea, therefore, to look at more than one translation. However, in order to avoid too much confusion the present commentary is based

on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with reference from time to time to the Revised English Bible (REB).

It would be useful to have a map of Palestine to hand as you read. Plate 6 in the Westminster Bible Atlas or Map 3 in the New Revised Standard Version would be appropriate.

Harry Mowley

AN UNHAPPY FAMILY

A childless woman

The story begins with a family. There is a man with his two wives, one of whom is unable to have any children. Elkanah means something like ‘God has acquired’, but, though names are sometimes significant, this one does not seem to have any special significance. We know nothing of his ancestry other than what we are told here. He was an Ephraimite and Ephraim was the most important of the twelve tribes, descended from one of the two sons of Joseph and settled in the central part of the land of Canaan, west of the Jordan.

Then, as now, childlessness was regrettable but for slightly different reasons. It meant that there would be no one to care for the husband and wife in their old age. Moreover, it wasn’t just that Hannah wanted a baby to fulfil her maternal instincts. Children, in those days, were a sign of God’s blessing and the highest blessing was to have no less than seven sons. To be childless was therefore a sign of God’s disfavour. It was difficult for Elkanah also. The Israelites had no belief in a life after death. The most they could hope for was that their name would live on, especially in their children, but if there were no children then death was the end of everything. For both man and wife childlessness was a severe misfortune. Therefore, sometimes a kind of surrogacy was practised. In the same situation Sarah offered her maid to Abraham so that he could have children (Genesis 16:1–6). In the present case Elkanah had a second wife and already had children by her but not by his favourite wife. Monogamy was not the rule in those days. Kings and well-to-do people could have several wives. Imagine these two women living under the same roof. There was bound to be jealousy. Peninnah made fun of Hannah but the story has nothing to say about Hannah’s attitude to Peninnah.

The family at worship

Things came to a head when they all went up to the shrine at Shiloh to make their sacrifice (v. 3). Shiloh was an important place of worship. It was where the ark of the covenant was kept and this was regarded as the throne of the invisible God who had led them

through the wilderness after bringing them out of Egypt. Some sacrifices were burned completely on the altar, the whole offered to God as an expression of homage to him. Others were part-burned and the rest of the meat was shared between the offerer and his family. So Elkanah shared the meat with Peninnah and Hannah but offered twice as much to Hannah (v. 5). This favouritism only increased Peninnah’s anger and she taunted Hannah. The Hebrew actually says she ‘thundered’ at her. To her credit, in the story, Hannah made no active response. She wept and went off her food. It was no comfort to be told by Elkanah that she always had him (v. 8).

Hannah’s prayer

Hannah not only wept; she also prayed, but she did so silently. The prayer as recorded is a remarkable one (v. 11). She promised that if God would give her a child she would dedicate him to God’s service at the shrine. So it wasn’t so much that she wanted the joy of bringing up a child. She was prepared to forgo that if her disgrace of childlessness could be removed. The child would be a Nazirite, a term not much used in the Old Testament which means ‘dedicated to God’. In Numbers 6 there are set out regulations which Nazirites should follow. They were to drink no wine (see Amos 2:11–12) and they were not to cut their hair, as in the case of Samson who was also a Nazirite and whose mother had also been unable to have children (Judges 13:2–5).

There is a recognition here that children are a gift from God. They belong to God and are given to parents on trust. Hannah’s willingness to give up her son is echoed in Mary’s acceptance of God’s will for her son (Luke 1:35–38). It is a reminder that children are not a possession to be enjoyed selfishly. They belong to God and are held on trust, a trust to be discharged faithfully.

A PRAYER

Lord, keep us free from jealousy when others have things which we long for and have not. Help us to receive your gifts with gratitude as you entrust them to our care.

GOD'S GIFT RETURNED

Eli may be forgiven for thinking that he had a drunken woman on his hands. Hannah was obviously distraught and her lips were moving. Eli couldn't hear anything because she was praying silently. He couldn't see what she was saying, although he was watching her lips, because his sight was already poor. She would probably have been swaying with the intensity of her prayer. He therefore accused her of coming to worship drunk (v. 13).

However, when she explained herself, he accepted her explanation. She had been pouring out her 'soul' (v. 15). This is a word which sometimes means 'appetite' and expresses the idea of 'desiring' or 'longing'. Once he understood this and realized how urgent her prayers had been he pronounced a priestly blessing over her and promised the fulfilment of her prayer. The change in her demeanour is striking (v. 18). It shows how seriously the priest's words were taken because he was seen as God's mouthpiece. In many of the psalms there is a similar change of mood from lamentation to thanksgiving (e.g. Psalm 6:8) which may have been brought about by a priest's pronouncement.

Answered prayer

When they returned home Elkanah and his wife had intercourse again and this time Hannah became pregnant (v. 19). The verb 'to know' is often used in this sense in the Old Testament. God 'remembered' her. This does not mean that it had slipped his mind and then suddenly he thought of her again. The word 'remember' nearly always means that the person who does so *acts* in accordance with what is remembered. The son who was eventually born was given the name Samuel. This name means something like 'the name of God', but it was chosen because it sounds very much like the word which means 'to ask'. Quite often in the Old Testament, names given to people and places depend upon their sound even more than upon their actual meaning. So, Hannah had 'asked' for a child and she was given 'Samuel'.

Shiloh revisited

The Old Testament Law demanded that all males should visit the sanctuary three times a year for the three main festivals, the feasts of Passover, Weeks and Tabernacles (Exodus 3:17; 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:16). However, the journey to Shiloh was apparently an annual one and the women went too. While Samuel was a baby he and his mother were not expected to make the journey to Shiloh. The process of weaning him would take two or three years and so some time elapses between verses 23 and 24. Elkanah agreed to the delay but, according to the NRSV translation, makes a strange comment. Why should he wish for God to 'establish his word' when he had already fulfilled his promise by giving them a son? It is more likely that he would encourage Hannah to fulfil her promise to dedicate her son to the Lord. There is some evidence to suggest that we should read 'your word' rather than 'his word'. The REB understands it in this way. Perhaps he was afraid that she might go back on her promise and be tempted to keep Samuel for herself.

He need not have worried, for as soon as Samuel was old enough she took him to Shiloh and left him there (v. 24). To make the fulfilment of her vow she took a bull for sacrifice as the Law laid down in Leviticus 22:17–25. It didn't have to be a bull; it could have been a sheep or a goat. So either Elkanah and Hannah were quite well-to-do or they were making a considerable sacrifice in our modern sense of the word as well as in the literal sense.

The NRSV translation of verse 28 says that Hannah 'lent' Samuel to the Lord, but the dedication of him as a Nazirite suggests more than a loan. Actually there is another play on that word 'to ask'. The Hebrew word used here could be translated literally as 'she caused to ask', but in the few other places where it is used it seems to mean something like 'to hand over'. It surely has this meaning here. The writer has chosen this rather unusual word because of its similarity to the name Samuel and because Hannah had 'asked' for him.

For REFLECTION

How often do we make promises to God and then, when we have received what we asked for, forget all about it? Do we sometimes promise more than we are prepared to give?

Vows are meant to be kept.