

## THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL

*1 Samuel 1; 2:1-11*

Review the general character of the period of the Judges and speak of Samuel as the last of the Judges and the only one recognized as leader by the whole land. The story of the child Samuel is so touching and so well known that the work of his later life is often overlooked in our Sunday school teaching.

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### Doctrinal Points

*Our whole life needs to be organized around worship of the Lord. We need to preserve or regain our childhood state of simple trust and obedience.*

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### Notes for Parents

The story of the child Samuel is one of the most loved stories in the Old Testament. The longing of his mother for a son and her vow to devote him to the Lord can be understood by every woman, and the obedient, trustful nature of the child appeals to us all. It is a touching and beautiful story.

But often we fail to appreciate it fully because we do not so well know the dark background against which it stands out in the Bible. In our studies of the period of the Judges we saw how quickly the Israelites forgot their God, who had done so much for them, once they had gained the position in the world for which they had longed. The ark and the tabernacle are not once mentioned in the book of Judges. Before Joshua died, he had set up the tabernacle at Shiloh in the center of the land and the people had promised always to serve the Lord. In our chapter for today we find that the tabernacle is still at Shiloh, that there is still a high priest of the line of Aaron, and that at least some of the people still bring sacrifices to the tabernacle regularly. But most of the people have fallen away into the worship of the idols of the land, and even Eli's sons,

the assistant priests, have become corrupt.

Can we not see in this a common experience? We are brought up to go to Sunday school and church, but when we leave the control of our parents and establish ourselves in homes of our own, we become absorbed in our daily tasks and responsibilities and drift away from the worship of the Lord from whom all that is good in our lives has come. We think we know enough to live good lives, and it is not until some serious trouble strikes that we realize our actual weakness and need of our Heavenly Father.

What shall we do? Our immediate resort is to the things we were taught and believed in our childhood and to an effort to recapture our simple faith. Samuel appears on the scene. He is not a warrior. He is first an obedient child and later a priest and a prophet. He is the last of the Judges and the only one recognized by the whole people as their appointed leader. It is obvious from the first that the Lord is with him and speaks through him.

So it must be with us. We must turn from our reliance on our own judgment and strength and acknowledge that our only salvation lies in simple trust in the Lord and obedience to His commandments. Hundreds of years after the time of Samuel, the Lord said to His disciples: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Samuel was to live to old age and to anoint the first two kings of Israel.

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### Primary

This is a simple story and easy to tell. The story of Hannah's prayer and vow should be told as an introduction. Then attention should be centered on the tabernacle at Shiloh—the fact that it was still there and that a descendant of Aaron (Eli) was high priest. The children will be interested in the two wives and their differences, and in Hannah's promise.

You remember the ark, don't you? It was the gold-covered chest made to hold the two tablets of stone on which the Lord had written the ten commandments with his own finger. And do you remember the tabernacle, or tent, which was made at Mount Sinai to

hold the ark and to be the church of the children of Israel?

It is a long time since we have heard of the tabernacle.

At the time of our story today, the tabernacle is set up at Shiloh near the center of the Holy Land.

From the time the people left Mount Sinai, where the commandments were given, the ark and the tabernacle were always in the center of their camp or in the center of their line of march when they were traveling. After they conquered the Holy Land, and before they settled in their homes, Joshua set up the tabernacle at Shiloh, and there it stood for many years. The priests carried on the worship there, and the high priest was always a descendant of Aaron. You remember that Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first high priest. At the time of our story for today the high priest was an old man named Eli.

The last and greatest of the Judges was Samuel.

He was the only one who was Judge over the whole land.

He was also the only one who was a prophet.

Who was Samuel's mother?

How did she happen to come to the tabernacle at Shiloh?

What did she ask the Lord to give her?

What did she promise if her prayer was granted?

Did she keep her promise?

After that, every year when they came to Shiloh to worship, Hannah brought Samuel a new little coat which she had made for him.

Because she kept her promise, the Lord gave her three more sons and two daughters.

Samuel grew up helping Eli in the tabernacle. When he was grown up, he became Judge over all the land; the Lord spoke to the people through him, so he was also a prophet. You should remember him as the last of the Judges.

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### Junior

Remind the class of the construction and purpose of the tabernacle and have them look up and read Joshua 18:1. Review the general characteristics of the period of the Judges, and introduce Samuel as the last of the Judges. The class will remember the story of an earlier Judge, Samson, who was also a Nazirite,

and should read first Hannah's vow (verse 11) and then the laws for the Nazirite in Numbers 6:1-5. Emphasize Samuel's later greatness.

What book follows the book of Joshua in the Bible?

Who were the Judges?

How was this period different from the earlier ones?

You will notice that we have passed over the book of Ruth. It is a beautiful story of something which happened in the time of the Judges, and you should read it some time, for it tells of the birth of the grandfather of David. But it has no continuous internal meaning to the Lord and to our spiritual development; so we do not study it in Sunday school.

The characteristic of the period of the Judges was that "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6). This shows us the reason why the ark and the tabernacle are not once mentioned in the book of Judges. The people were looking to themselves for direction instead of to the Lord. When we think we are wise enough to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong, the Lord and the church seem to drop out of our minds. But they are there all the time hidden deep within our minds and hearts. So we find now that the ark and the tabernacle are still there in the center of the land. Look up Joshua 18:1.

Where had Joshua set up the tabernacle?

Who was the high priest at the time of Samuel's birth?

Who had been the first high priest?

Even though most of the people had turned to idol worship and forgotten the Lord, there were still some faithful ones who tried to keep the laws of Moses and who went regularly to the tabernacle to worship. Samuel's parents were such people.

What were their names?

What did Hannah ask of the Lord?

What did Eli think when he saw her praying?

What did Hannah promise to do if her prayer was granted?

How did she keep her promise?

We may well imagine that it was not easy for Hannah to give up the child for whom she had waited so long. Read chapter 2, verses

18-21 to see how she kept in touch with him and how the Lord rewarded her for her faithfulness.

In the book *On Holy Ground*, William L. Worcester helps to make the story of Samuel very real to us. He says in part:

We must imagine ourselves in Shiloh, “the place of rest,” in the tribe of Ephraim, on a little hill with a meadow about it, shut in by higher hills, a little off the line of travel. There are ruins on the hill. At the time of our story a town was here, and in a place by itself stood the tabernacle, the sacred tent which was made at Mount Sinai, according to the pattern shown to Moses in the mount, and was set up at Shiloh by Joshua when the land was conquered.

We remember the tabernacle: its open court with the altar of burnt offering and the laver; its walls of upright planks and its coverings of curtains making the holy place for the table and lamp and altar of incense, and the most holy place for the ark of the commandments. The old priest Eli had care of the tabernacle. He was more than ninety years old and his eyes were dim. Some of the people still came each year to worship, perhaps especially in the spring, at the season of the Passover. But Eli’s sons who were priests were not good men and robbed the people of their offerings.

And a little boy helped the old priest at the tabernacle; his hair was long and he wore a linen ephod or vest like a priest. He helped at the altar, and went within the tabernacle to arrange the bread on the table, or to trim the lamp in the morning, or to light it in the evening, so that it would burn bright in the Lord’s house all night. While the lamp was burning, Eli and Samuel slept near by, perhaps under the overhanging curtains of the tent. And in the morning Samuel opened the doors or the curtains of the tabernacle to the sunshine.

Samuel was to be a Nazarite. Read Numbers 6:1-5 to see what some of the laws for a Nazarite were. The hair, which is the outmost thing in the human body, pictures the letter of the Bible, which is the outmost of the Word of God. The Nazarites were commanded not to cut their hair or beards as a picture of the fact that anyone who is really devoted to the Lord’s service will try to keep every bit of the Law as given in the commandments. Samuel grew up to be completely obedient to the Lord. He was the last and greatest of the Judges: not a warrior like the others, but a priest and a prophet.

### Intermediate

The necessity of going to the tabernacle should be stressed with this class, along with the fact that the disorganized state pictured by the book of Judges results in neglect and perversion of worship. Call attention to our reason for passing over the book of Ruth. This is our first opportunity to point out that some books of the Bible, while interesting and valuable, have no continuous internal meaning.

The book of Judges appears as a series of almost unrelated stories. This is not hard to understand when we see it as a picture of the time in our lives when we are trying to go our own way without looking to the Lord for direction. Our lives then are just a series of incidents with no apparent pattern or orderly development.

We have passed by the short book which follows the book of Judges in our Bible—the book of Ruth, which is a picture of everyday life in the time of the Judges. It is a beautiful story and worth reading for itself, but our teachings tell us that it has no internal meaning.

With the book of I Samuel we suddenly return to the tabernacle. Joshua 18:1 tells us that the tabernacle was set up at Shiloh in the center of the Holy Land immediately after the completion of the conquest, but in the book of Judges the tabernacle is not once mentioned. In much the same way, people often forget about the church when they are absorbed in their own ideas and activities.

But the Lord, as we have often learned, always preserves deep within us the “remains” of good and truth which have been stored up in our childhood and youth. So in our lesson today we find that the tabernacle is still there at Shiloh in the center of the land. Eli, a descendant of Aaron, is high priest, and a few faithful people, like Elkanah and Hannah, still bring their offerings regularly.

The story of Samuel is a familiar one. It is in itself a beautiful picture of the orderly beginning and development of life. Every child should, like Samuel, be devoted to the Lord even before he is born and be brought early to the church and dedicated to the service of the church. He should be taught to perform willingly the



little services of which he is capable. Then he is prepared to hear the voice of the Lord when it speaks to him, and to obey it. There are many things in the story of the little Samuel which remind us of the childhood of the Lord Himself. The Lord was taken to the temple when He was eight days old, “his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover,” and when at the age of twelve He went with them, He tarried behind in the temple and talked with the learned men there. Of course the whole story of Samuel, like the rest of the inspired Word, in its inmost sense speaks of the life of the Lord.

Hannah’s vow (1:11) points to the fact that Samuel’s life was grounded in obedience to the commandments in their letter, for the hair corresponds to the outmost and, in a prophet, to the letter of the Word. Samson’s strength was in his hair and Samson was also a Nazarite. For the law of the Nazarite see Numbers 6:1-21. Because Samuel’s use was in the tabernacle, his strength was spiritual strength and was constant, and produced results more important and far-reaching than did Samson’s physical victories.

We may perhaps think of Samuel as the Lord speaking to us out of our childhood faith when as adults we finally come to acknowledge our own weakness and need of the Lord’s direction. After the confused and disorganized period represented by the time of the Judges, it is this alone which can begin to unify our lives and bring them into order. Samuel was to be the last of the Judges, for he would anoint the first king and later the second, establishing the kingdom. It is the recognition of our need to obey the Lord in simple faith which leads us to adopt higher and higher principles for the guidance of our lives.

Samuel alone of the Judges was recognized by the whole people as the one who spoke for the Lord. The fact that he was devoted to the Lord’s service even before his birth and that his call by the Lord came to him when he was very young also clearly indicates that he represents the Lord’s voice speaking to us out of our early religious training. The Lord tells us, “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.”

(Luke 18:17)

*Basic Correspondences*

Samuel = the Lord speaking to us as adults  
out of our childhood states of faith  
the hair = the outmost, the letter of the Word

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**Senior**

Emphasis here should be on the transition from the period of the Judges to the period of Kings, with Samuel—our childhood state of innocence and obedience—as the connecting link. Draw the parallel between Samuel’s early life and that of the Lord, as suggested in the Adult notes.

Samuel was the last of the Judges. His life and work began a new period of unification and development, and it is significant that in the story of his birth we suddenly return to the tabernacle. The ark and the tabernacle are not mentioned once in the book of Judges, but we now find that they are still at Shiloh in the center of the land, where Joshua had set them up, that there is still a high priest of the line of Aaron, that the tabernacle rites are still being carried out, and that there are still some people in the land who come faithfully to the tabernacle to offer sacrifices and to worship the true God. This is true in our lives. So long as we are permitted by the Lord to remain in this world, the possibility of spiritual life is still not entirely dead in us; there are some remains through which we may be reached if we choose. As the Lord said to Elijah many years later, when he was in despair at Horeb (I Kings 19:18), “Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.”

But the general face of the situation was that of neglect of the Lord. And even in the priesthood there was corruption. Eli, the high priest, was a good man but weak. His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who assisted him and would supposedly succeed him, were evil men, robbing the Lord of the offerings brought by the people and committing other evils. The whole situation reminds us of the



condition of the church hundreds of years later at the time of the Lord's birth, and there are many things in the story of the little Samuel which clearly image the Lord's childhood.

The two wives of Elkanah, Hannah and Peninnah, recall to us the story of Leah and Rachel, and the still earlier story of Sarah and Hagar. In each case the beloved wife is late in bearing children and the less beloved looks upon her with contempt. We have learned to see in this our own slowness in developing spiritual fruits, and the arrogance of the material part of us with its obvious productivity. But in each case the late fruit of the beloved wife becomes greater than the children who have preceded him in time.

We think of Samuel as representing the beginning of our mature consciousness of our own weakness and need of the Lord. The whole of the ancient Hebrew nation is present in our lives when we come to maturity—all the tendencies to materialism, to the worship of idols of one sort or another, to self-esteem and self-will, to profanation of holy things, to weak acquiescence in the sins of our times and companions. But Samuel is in us, too: the voice of the Lord speaking through our stored-up states of childhood trust and faith and obedience, through the Word planted in our memories in childhood. This is what we have to build on to begin the process of regeneration which is the work of our adult lives. Without this "Samuel state" the lamp of God would indeed go out in all of us (I Samuel 3:3).

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### Adult

There are several good discussion topics here: the disastrous results of self-confidence, particularly upon our worship; the Lord's preservation in us of our good childhood states; the harm we do to others as well as to ourselves when we neglect or misuse our worship; the meaning of the Lord's words about becoming as a little child; and the difference between the innocence of ignorance and the innocence of wisdom.

With the first book of Samuel we come to a new stage in the history of the church or of the person who is trying to live the regenerate life. The wars in the book of Judges picture the various

temptations which assail those who have found their home in the Holy Land—that is, who have become settled in the desire and practice of living according to divine laws—but who have allowed themselves to become overconfident and careless and to slip back somewhat into the ways of the world about them. These temptations are both external and internal and they take many forms. We yield to them almost unconsciously at first; they grow upon us until we find ourselves subject to them and find we must take active measures against them. In the book of Judges the state of the people becomes worse and worse until, in the last chapters, the tribe of Benjamin—which represents spiritual or interior truth—becomes perverted and is almost destroyed. So sometimes we allow ourselves to “backslide” through constant yielding to small or subtle temptations until we find ourselves in a bad spiritual state and almost robbed of the sense of the internal meaning of life which makes conjunction with the Lord possible. A new beginning must be made if we are to be saved. We must return for a time to a condition of simple trust and obedience and allow this to lead us to a new peak of spiritual living.

The story of the child Samuel has always been one of the best loved of the Bible stories. *The Sower* beautifully points out its lesson for parents and children of all time. Parents should realize that all children are loaned to them by the Lord to prepare for His service, and should dedicate them to that service as Hannah dedicated Samuel. Children should see in Samuel a beautiful picture of simple trust and obedience and willing service. There are many similarities also between the early life of Samuel and that of the Lord, even to the expression (I Samuel 2:26), “And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with the Lord, and also with men.” Compare this with Luke 2:52.

But the story has a wider application than that to physical childhood. Our childhood states of innocence, trust, and obedience are covered up as we grow older, but they are not lost. No matter how far we have wandered from them, if we realize the barrenness of our state and look to the Lord as Hannah did for a new birth,

promising new consecration, the childhood states can be revived in us and lead us to new developments of spiritual living. This is very plainly told to us by the Lord when He says, “Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven,” (Matthew 18:3-4) Samuel’s early ministry in the tabernacle is a picture of our return to a humble state of mind, in which we read the Word in simplicity, enter into the services of worship with genuine sincerity, and look to the church for guidance, as Samuel looked to Eli. Then we put ourselves in a state in which the Lord can speak to us and prepare the way for new growth. “And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him” (I Samuel 3:19).

The picture of the little Samuel is so striking and so touching that the dark background against which it stands out is often overlooked. Eli, the high priest and descendant of Aaron, is an old man and his sight is dim. He has turned over the conduct of the tabernacle worship to his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who are “sons of Belial” who “knew not the Lord.” They profaned the sacrifices of the people by taking more than their due portion of the offerings and by taking it even before sacrifice was made to the Lord. “Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.” (I Samuel 2:17) Eli is warned by a “man of God” that the priesthood will be taken from his house. He has remonstrated with his sons, but has not exerted his authority to put a stop to their evil practices. He is judged “because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.” This is a picture of a state in which worship is degraded by being used for self-interest and self-exaltation, and when the high priest in us—that inner dictate which relates us to the Lord—does not take steps to correct the evil, although it sees it.\* It has

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\*This was also clearly the condition of the church when the Lord came into the world, and it is interesting to note that one of the two members of the Sanhedrin who accepted the Lord came from Samuel’s birthplace. These

become dim of sight and is no longer able to receive directly the voice of the Lord. In I Samuel 2:17, quoted above, there is the suggestion of the harm which such a state does to others as well as to ourselves. Many people are turned against the church by the self-seeking and hypocrisy they see in some of its members. Our duty to keep our worship sincere and to live according to the teachings of the church is not for our own salvation alone. The Lord's service requires of us constant watchfulness and ever-renewed devotion. We must be on our guard against the thought that we are "saved" and cannot go astray as others may.

The Lord, in the letter of the Word, had promised the priesthood to Aaron, and his seed forever. Now He takes it from them. "I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever; but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." (I Samuel 2:30) This degenerate state of worship is contrasted directly with the simple obedient service of Samuel, to whom the Lord can speak. Samuel's parents, like Mary and Joseph, were among those who made the prescribed pilgrimages to the tabernacle regardless of the corruption of the priesthood. They represent in us the remains of the sincere desire to serve the Lord from which a new beginning must come. In comparison with our more sophisticated worldly attitudes toward the church they are ignorant; but they have the fundamentals of true religion, humility and obedience. In AC 9325<sup>8</sup> there is an interesting statement of this thought in reference to the church in connection with Hannah's prophecy (I Samuel 2:5): "By 'the barren' are also signified those who are not in good because not in truths, and yet long for truths that they may be in good; as is the case with the upright

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two—Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who like Eli did not "for fear of the Jews" oppose their worldly associates—were simple in heart and able to recognize and cherish the Messiah (John 19:38-42). *Arimathea* is a later form of *Ramathaimzophim*. The word means "twin watchtowers," suggesting an ability to lift the thought above the level of the world because goodness is united to truth.

nations outside the church; as in [Isaiah 54:1, Psalm 113:7-9, I Samuel 2:5]. In the above passages by ‘the barren’ are meant the Gentiles who are summoned to the church, and to whom the church is transferred when the old church ceases, that is, when those who before had been of the church are no longer in faith, because in no charity . . . ‘To bear seven’ denotes to be regenerated to the full.”

All the beautiful stories of children throughout the Bible teach this same lesson. Humility and obedience are the only means of conjunction with the Lord. “And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.”

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### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*Arcana Coelestia*, n. 6148<sup>5-6</sup>: “As a representative church was instituted with the posterity of Jacob, therefore in one person conjointly was represented the Divine good and the Divine truth which proceed united from the Lord. But on account of the wars and of the idolatry of the people, these two offices were at first divided, and they who ruled over the people were called ‘leaders,’ and afterward ‘judges’; while they who officiated in holy things were called ‘priests,’ and were of the seed of Aaron, and Levites. Yet afterward these two offices were joined together in one person, as in Eli and in Samuel. But because the people were of such a character that a representative church could not be instituted among them, but only the representative of a church, by reason of the idolatrous disposition which prevailed among them, therefore it was permitted that the two offices should be separated, and that the Lord as to Divine truth should be represented by kings, and as to Divine good by priests. That this was done at the will of the people, and not of the Lord’s good pleasure, is manifest from the word of Jehovah to Samuel (I Samuel 8:7 ff.). The reason why these two offices were not to be separated, was that the Divine truth separated from the Divine good condemns everyone; whereas the Divine truth united to the Divine good saves.”

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### Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- I. Why do we not study the book of Ruth? *no inner sense*
- P. Who was the last of the Judges? *Samuel*

THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL

- J. Who were Samuel's parents? *Elkanah and Hannah*
- J. Where was the tabernacle at this time? *Shiloh*
- P. Who was the high priest? *Eli*
- P. What promise did Hannah make? *if she had a son, to give him to the Lord*
- J. How did she keep it? *brought Samuel to live with Eli*
- P. Where did Samuel grow up? *at Shiloh*
- I. Why did the people get into so much trouble in the time of the Judges?  
*forgot the Lord*
- S. What does Samuel represent in us? *the Lord's Word to us through our  
childhood remains*