

## THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL

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Lessons: *I Samuel 1*

The first verse of the book of Samuel tells us that there was once a man whose name begins with “EL.” The man's name was **El**kanah, and this is the story of the birth of his son whose name ends with “EL.” This is **Samuel!**

Whenever you see the letters “EL” in a name in the Word, you will know that it has something to do with God. The name of the place **Bethel** means “house of God.” The name **Eli** in this chapter means “My God.” The name of the man in this story, **El**kanah, means “God has created.” And the son he had was named **Samuel**. This means “asked of God.” His mother named him that saying, “Because I have asked for him from the Lord” (*I Samuel 1:20*).

There are other stories in the Word in which the giving of a name shows thankfulness to the Lord. When Judah was born (his name means “praise”), his mother said, “Now I will praise the Lord.” Therefore she called his name Judah” (*Genesis 29:35*). The prophet Nathan’s name means “gift,” and can you guess what the name of the disciple Nathana**el** means? It has “EL” at the end, and means “gift of God.”

This is a particularly beautiful story in which we see that Elkanah loves Hannah very much and that they want a baby. Hannah prays and prays for a baby boy, and promises, “I will give him to the Lord” (*I Samuel 1:11*). This story of her giving or lending her child to the Lord has an important message for us. She said happily, “For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition which I asked of Him, therefore I also have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the Lord” (*I Samuel 1:27, 28*).

The thing for us to think about is that every child, wherever born, really belongs to the Lord. We are told in the Writings that every little child, wherever born . . . is received when he dies by the Lord and educated in heaven” (*Heaven and Hell 329*). “The Lord is the one only Father to all in heaven,” and that is why it is said in Matthew: “One is your Father, He who is in heaven” (*Matthew 23:9*).

Does this mean that parents are not to have the joy of feeling that their child belongs to them? No, it does not mean that. The Lord loves to give. Our very life belongs to Him. But He loves us to have the feeling that our life is our own. And when we have children, it is the Lord who gives that very strong love we feel for them. He gives it to us so that we may enjoy it fully and use it as wisely

as we can. And we use that love wisely when we remind ourselves that all things really do belong to the Lord.

It is often said when a father and mother come to have a child baptized, that “it is in the Divine Providence of the Lord that this child was born and that she (or he) is committed to your care, so that by life in the world she (he) may be prepared for life in heaven.” (See the section on Baptism in the Liturgy.)

Parents know that when they have a child, the child will not be theirs forever. They know that the child will grow and have a home and probably a married partner. And since love takes delight in seeing the happiness of the one who is loved, parents are not sad when the child becomes independent and no longer needs their care. Swedenborg saw parents in heaven who met their children and rejoiced that it was well with them, and reminded them that the Lord is the Father of us all (*Conjugal Love* 406).

There is a wonderful truth which you can understand at least a little. It has to do with whether you belong to the Lord or whether you belong to yourself. The closer you come to the Lord, the more you will feel that you belong to yourself, and yet the more you will **know** that you belong to the Lord (*Divine Providence* 42-45)! You are supposed to have **both** kinds of happiness. The happiness of belonging to yourself means that you are absolutely free to do what you love to do. This is the way the angels feel. They are always doing what they love to do, and so they feel that they are their own masters. And yet, they see very clearly that they belong to the Lord.

Belonging to someone else is a special joy. When you get married and love someone the way Elkanah loved Hannah, then the two of you belong to each other. You belong to those who love you, in a way. And never forget that you belong to the One who loves you with a powerful, never-ending love. You belong to the Lord.

**NOTE:** *This talk on the birth of Samuel is a particularly good one for the subject of prayer. We notice the phrase “ought to pray daily and this with humility” from Arcana Coelestia 5135:2.*