

“The Lord . . . Bringeth Low, and Lifteth Up”: Hannah, Eli, and the Temple

Julie M. Smith

The First Book of Samuel is a carefully crafted story that, when read closely, impresses upon the reader the importance of temple covenants. In the first chapter, we meet Hannah: a regular Israelite woman who lives some distance from the holy sanctuary.¹ She is devastated by her infertility, and it certainly doesn't help that her husband's other wife torments her about her barrenness. We also meet Eli: as high priest and judge, he lives in and has responsibility for the sanctuary. The natural expectation is that the house of the Lord will be central to Eli's life and that he will be a righteous man with an important role in the history of his nation; for Hannah, on the other hand, it seems that the temple will be peripheral at best, and she appears unlikely to leave any mark at all even on the history of her own family, let alone the nation. However, it will not take long for the story to completely reverse those expectations and teach the reader important lessons about the temple in the process. This paper explores this surprising turn of events and its implications for understanding temple worship, covenants, and songs of praise.

Julie M. Smith has an MA in biblical studies and homeschools her children near Austin, Texas.

Hannah's Sorrow

The first chapter paints a portrait of Hannah as a woman who focuses her life on the temple, despite overwhelming difficulties. She lived in a chaotic time of moral relativism: in Hannah's day, "there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). The situation within her own family is also deeply troubling to her; she weeps often in the face of her own infertility, especially as Peninnah, her husband's other wife, makes a regular habit of using their yearly trips to the sanctuary to "provoke" Hannah and "make her fret" over her childlessness (1 Samuel 1:6). Hannah's husband, Elkanah, asks her, "Am I not better to thee than ten sons?" (1 Samuel 1:8). Scholars have understood that question in different ways: it is perhaps a kind-hearted effort to soothe Hannah's mind, but it may also be interpreted as a self-centered dismissal of her concerns.² Either way, he is trying to encourage Hannah to become content with her situation. Hannah, however, has something else in mind: she takes her sorrow to the temple in an effort to change her circumstances.³ She vows that if she is blessed with a son, that child will serve the Lord. At this point, the reader expects Hannah to find relief, but she has one more challenge to face: because Hannah prays silently, Eli accuses her of drunkenness (see 1 Samuel 1:13–14). We might expect this to be the straw that breaks Hannah's back, but instead she responds to Eli politely but firmly. Her response—cleverly explaining that instead of being drunken from having *taken in* wine, she was rather *pouring out* her spirit to the Lord (see 1 Samuel 1:15)—introduces the theme of reversals that will be so prominent in Hannah's story in the next chapter.

Note that Hannah—instead of flashing out at Peninnah, being disappointed in Elkanah's passive acceptance of her barrenness, or becoming offended at Eli's false accusations—focuses her attention instead on the temple and, more specifically, on her ability to enter into covenants. The story includes no response to Peninnah or Elkanah at all and only a modest, straightforward statement to Eli; despite the slights that Hannah would have felt from them, she chooses to focus on the Lord and on temple covenants.⁴ We might suspect that Hannah prayed silently, which was contrary to usual practice,⁵ because of the personal nature and depth of her anguish, but her silent prayer also reminds the reader that Hannah sees this issue as being solely between her and the Lord. She chooses not to get into a dispute with Peninnah, Elkanah, or the priest. Instead, she

silently pours out her soul to the Lord. She sees a covenant with the Lord as the antidote to her emotional distress.

Hannah’s Joy

Hannah is soon blessed with a baby boy, whom she names Samuel. While this would have brought her joy, it may also have brought a measure of anguish as well: she had vowed to give this child to the service of the Lord. It must have been enormously difficult for Hannah to keep this covenant. Under the best of conditions, it would mean having her young child live far away from her and under the care of others. But she would not have the best of conditions: for Hannah, keeping her covenant meant turning this young child over to the care of Eli. Hannah may not have known the full extent of the wickedness of Eli’s family at this point, but she probably would have had at least some inkling of the situation, given the public nature of the sins of Eli’s sons (see 1 Samuel 1:22). Perhaps Hannah entertained the idea that surely the Lord would understand if she decided to keep Samuel at home; this would violate her covenant, to be sure, but at home she could guard against unwholesome influences. However, Hannah was true to her word and brought young Samuel to live and serve in the sanctuary. With this decision, she becomes a model of keeping covenants even under the most difficult of circumstances.

There is another aspect to Hannah’s understanding of the temple that literally gets lost in translation. When Hannah is telling her husband about her plans to go to the temple in 1 Samuel 1:22, the King James Version says that she will bring Samuel to the temple so that he may “appear before the Lord.” But the Hebrew text can be translated as having Samuel going to “see the face of the Lord.”⁶ It is likely that the text was softened by later hands uncomfortable with the idea of seeing the Lord’s face in the temple, but that idea appears to better reflect Hannah’s understanding of temple worship.

In the very same narrative, there is another issue with the text: when Hannah tells her husband about her plan to take Samuel to the temple when he is weaned, Elkanah agrees and says (in the KJV and the Masoretic Text, the traditional Hebrew text), “Only the Lord establish his word” (1 Samuel 1:23). This sentence has puzzled interpreters because it is unclear what word of the Lord would be referenced here.⁷ The Dead Sea Scrolls’ version of that phrase concerns not the word of the Lord but rather the words of Hannah: Elkanah tells Hannah, “Only may the Lord fulfill what your mouth has uttered.”⁸ That

reading makes more sense in context, since there is no specific word of the Lord in this story to which this phrase could refer. If the latter reading is more accurate, it sheds an interesting light on the text: Hannah has made a vow and will sing a song of praise in the next chapter. The fact that her words will be verified by the Lord strengthens our picture of Hannah as a woman possessed of a prophetic gift and a close connection to the Lord.

Chapter 2 begins with a hymn by Hannah. Note first the timing of this song: it is not at Samuel's birth but rather several years later at his dedication to the temple. Once again, Hannah has focused her attention on the keeping of covenants: this is the time for praising the Lord, even more so than the time of the birth of her long-awaited child. Also note the setting: she sings this song at the sanctuary itself (compare 1 Samuel 1:24 with 1 Samuel 2:11). Just as Hannah brought her sorrows to the temple in chapter 1, she now brings her joy to the temple. In fact, we can read the entirety of Hannah's story as a chiastically structured commentary on temple vows:

- A Hannah takes her sorrow to the temple (1:10)
- B Hannah makes a covenant (1:11)
- C Hannah defuses a potentially contentious interaction with a high-status man (1:12–16)
- D Her desire is granted (1:17–20)
- C' Hannah defuses a potentially contentious interaction with a high-status man (1:27–28)
- B' Hannah keeps her covenant (1:27–28)
- A' Hannah takes her joy to the temple (2:1–10)

Note that the centerpiece of this structure is the Lord granting Hannah's desire for a child. The fulfillment of this desire is literally and metaphorically surrounded by the making (1:11) and keeping (1:27–28) of covenants. But those covenants are literally and structurally separated from the fulfillment of her desire by trials—in this case, the trials are the potentially contentious situations with her husband and Eli the priest. The careful reader concludes that making and keeping covenants leads to the fulfilling of righteous desires, but it does not insulate one from the challenges of life. Rather, those trying situations appear to be an essential part of the process. Also

note that the story that began in sorrow ends in joy, continuing the parallel structure in the sense that they are both Hannah’s emotions, but Hannah’s faithfulness and endurance leads her from sorrow to joy.

No less important than the song’s setting and structure is its content. The main theme is reversals: “The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength” (1 Samuel 2:4). “They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble” (1 Samuel 2:5). Lastly, “The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up” (1 Samuel 2:7). Throughout her song of praise, Hannah mentions multiple examples of reversals in order to develop the theme that the Lord is capable of causing these stunning changes to happen.⁹ The immediate context for her praise song is her transition from a sorrowing, barren woman to a joyful mother, but the song also has greater implications. Hannah shares her testimony that though the Lord’s changes might begin with the small and simple matter of a woman having a baby, they can affect the entire world. As Stanley D. Walters describes it, “The prayer opens with Hannah and closes with the King. It opens with her own personal praise and closes with a confident assertion of God’s victory over every adversary and of his sovereign rule. It opens in Shiloh; it closes at the ends of the earth. It opens with a local reversal; it closes with a cosmic reversal. It opens in the present age; it closes with the age to come.”¹⁰ And the focus is, as always, on the temple as the hinge upon which these changes pivot; it is her experience with praying and making a vow in the temple that changes the course of Hannah’s life and, as we will see, the course of her nation, as Samuel assumes an important role in the political and religious realms.

Another important theme in Hannah’s song is found in its concluding lines: “The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed” (1 Samuel 2:10). This is a very significant use of the word *anointed*: it is the first time in the Old Testament that the word is used to refer to someone that will be sent by the Lord in a saving capacity (as opposed to previous uses of the word, limited to the book of Leviticus, where it refers to the anointed priest; see Leviticus 4:3, 5, 16; 6:22). It is also the only time that a prophecy of the coming Anointed One is spoken of by a regular Israelite, let alone a woman. It is therefore possible to read this part

of the praise song as the exercise of a prophetic gift on Hannah's part; this view fits nicely with the temple setting and her position as a covenant-keeping and temple-focused woman, one who sees her own challenges and struggles as part of a larger context. Note also that her song begins with a reference to her horn (a symbol for strength) and ends with a reference to the horn of the Anointed. Hannah has linked her strength to the strength of the Lord's Anointed.

The hymn clarifies an important aspect of Hannah's story: she does not want a child for her own selfish ends. After all, she has already been assured by her husband that he is worth more to her than ten sons. And she will not enjoy the personal companionship or financial security that a son might bring if Samuel is living in another town—even as a child—and if he is serving in the temple for his entire life. Hannah's reasons for wanting a child seem then to have more to do with that child's ability to serve the Lord and change the world. Peninnah sees children as a bargaining chip used for status in a family, and Elkanah sees them as providing worth and companionship, but Hannah sees them as improving the world through service to the Lord. These contrasts heighten our appreciation for Hannah's view of the role of children compared to the views of the people around her. But the contrast with Eli is even starker.

Eli's Fall

Throughout this text, the writer has carefully interwoven Hannah's story with Eli's story in order to encourage the reader to ponder the contrasts. It has already been noted that the backgrounds of Eli and Hannah lead the reader to expect that Eli will be focused on the temple and Hannah will not, but the story presents precisely the opposite scenario. Even in the smallest details, we find a sharp contrast between Hannah and Eli. Note that Eli is always pictured sitting or lying down passively, unlike Hannah, who travels, prays, gives birth, vows, sings, and sews. First Samuel 1:9 contains a particularly compelling juxtaposition of Hannah's activity with Eli's passivity: "Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the Lord."

Eli's first act in the story is to make a mistake: he sees Hannah's innovation of silent prayer and assumes that she is intoxicated. As Eli speaks to Hannah, he is cast in the role of a messenger of the Lord who announces the birth of an important person; this is evidenced by the fact that his words to

Hannah are in a poetic form as well as by the expectations for the scene in which Eli and Hannah interact. But rather than being a divine messenger with special knowledge to give to Hannah, he instead knows less than she does, as evidenced by the false accusation. The structure of the story leads the reader to expect an angel, but instead there is a very mistaken man. The portrayal of Eli is unsympathetic from the very beginning, but it deteriorates even further in chapter 2, where Hannah begins her song of praise to the Lord. The text immediately pivots to tell us that Eli’s sons did not know the Lord (1 Samuel 2:12). The contrast with Hannah’s family is heightened by the fact that Eli’s sons are described as “sons of Belial” (1 Samuel 2:12), which means that they are wicked or worthless men. Hannah, when falsely accused by Eli, said that she should not be counted as a “daughter of Belial” (1 Samuel 1:16). The two references to Belial encourage the comparison, and the idea of being a son or daughter of Belial draws our attention to the theme of parenting in these stories.

Eli has sons who have been called to serve in the temple, but they abuse that role. Their behavior is truly shocking: as priests, they are to carefully follow the law of Moses to ensure that the sacrifices are properly performed in the sanctuary. They instead violate this sacred trust, take the best portions of the sacrificed meat for themselves, and, when questioned, threaten violence (see 1 Samuel 2:13–16). They seem to want to pick and choose the very best parts for themselves—a far cry from Hannah, who faithfully accepts whatever obstacles the Lord sends her way. Not only are their actions prohibited and a form of theft, but they also make a mockery of the sacred rituals that were instituted in order to prepare the Israelites to understand the Atonement of Jesus Christ.¹¹ The writer of this chapter heightens the contrast between Eli’s sons and Samuel by breaking into the middle of the account of Eli’s sons’ wickedness to tell us that Samuel served the Lord faithfully (1 Samuel 2:18). There is a clear contrast between sacrifice, as performed by Hannah, and personal gain masquerading as sacrifice, as performed by Eli’s sons.

In the middle of the story of Eli’s sons, we get a final reference to Hannah: each year, she brings a new “little coat” to Samuel (1 Samuel 2:19). This is probably ritual clothing that he would have worn as he served in the temple.¹² We see here a strong contrast with Eli’s sons, who used their authority in the temple to take that which did not belong to them. Hannah, who has no formal role, chooses instead to give more to the temple each year than was

required of her by choosing to outfit her son for his duties—as if the sacrifice of her son to the temple was not already enough. This detail also serves to keep Hannah in the story—and in her son’s life—past the point where we might have expected the spotlight to shift entirely to Samuel. It is probably no coincidence that her continual involvement in her son’s life is centered on preparing him for his role in temple worship. These yearly donations of new clothing echo the scene in which Hannah brought Samuel to the temple for the first time: instead of withholding or even just bemoaning the sacrifice of her son, she instead also brought meat, flour, and wine to give to the temple (see 1 Samuel 1:24). Hannah is someone who always gives more to the Lord than is strictly necessary. The contrast with Eli’s sons puts Hannah’s own continual sacrifice into sharp relief.

The contrast between the path of Hannah’s son and that of Eli’s sons is made even starker as the text once again swings from Samuel and Hannah’s service in the temple to Eli’s sons’ sins in their capacity as priests. We learn that Eli’s sons have been engaged in inappropriate relationships with female temple workers (see 1 Samuel 2:22).¹³ Eli lectures his sons, but his words have no effect. The story again pivots to Samuel’s growth in righteousness. What is perhaps most stunning at this point is that Samuel is able to live morally when surrounded by such unrighteous leaders within the temple itself. The reader is left to conclude that Samuel’s faith comes from the collaboration of Hannah and the Lord in raising and guiding him. The chapter ends with a man of God coming to Eli to tell him that, because he has honored his sons above the Lord, both sons will die on the same day and the Lord will raise up a faithful priest from another line (see 1 Samuel 2:29, 35).¹⁴ Note the contrast with Hannah, who honored the Lord above her son by choosing to remain true to the covenant that she had made, even when it meant not enjoying her son’s presence. Eli, on the other hand, has clearly not been faithful to his own obligation to ensure that the temple sacrifices are properly executed and that his sons behave righteously. We will later find out that Eli has poor eyesight, and this seems to be a metaphor for his lack of insight and his inability to see things as they really are. (There is a hint of this in 1 Samuel 1:16, where he doesn’t seem to recognize Hannah.) Hannah, on the other hand, shows prophetic insight and a deep understanding of the Lord’s will in her song. The contrast between Hannah and Eli could not be greater in their personal righteousness and in the effects of their choices on their children. The very

themes of reversal found in Hannah’s song of praise are evident in her own life as her devotion to the temple allows her to give birth to the prophet who will supplant Eli’s failed line of authority.

Samuel’s Rise

Once again, the author continues to switch between Eli’s story and Samuel’s story in order to emphasize the contrast. As soon as the Lord’s messenger departs, we return to Samuel’s story and find that the fall of Eli’s family is mirrored by the rise of Hannah’s family. Chapter 3 begins with the idea that there was very little revelation at this time: “And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision” (v. 1). (The NRSV reads: “The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.”) The end of the chapter (and the beginning of chapter 4, where the thought is continued) reflects a complete change: “And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel” (1 Samuel 3:19–21; 4:1). How does this remarkable transition occur? Chapter 3 tells the story of Samuel learning to discern the voice of the Lord as he serves and lives in the holy sanctuary.

Samuel is not at first able to recognize the voice of the Lord, but the Lord is patient with him and Samuel is eventually able to respond and learn. While Eli gives him a little bit of guidance through this process, we also see Eli continue his physical decline—we are told that he has vision problems—and the reader sees that the difference between Eli’s sons and Samuel is great and growing. The credit seems to belong to Hannah, particularly as her insightfully prophetic concept of reversals is seen when the Lord tells Samuel about the impending fall of Eli’s house. So when Samuel takes up the prophetic mantle and shares this word with all of Israel, he is preaching about the same kind of reversals that his mother sang about in the temple.

In chapter 4, all that was prophesied comes to pass: Eli’s sons die, Eli dies, and the ark of the covenant is lost in battle to the Philistines. This final blow would have been particularly troubling to the Israelites because they understood that one of the functions of the ark was to provide a place—a mercy seat—where the Lord could visit with the high priest in the temple’s Holy of Holies

(see Leviticus 16). They probably wondered how the Lord could visit them without it. Of course, the Lord had already raised up a prophet—Samuel—who could deliver the Lord’s words to them. And it was not Samuel but his mother, Hannah, who originally anticipated the need of a child to serve the Lord for his entire life and who dedicated her own child to fill this need. When we meet Samuel again in chapter 7, he exhorts the Israelites to turn away from idolatry. And he anoints Israel’s first and second kings—a complicated issue to be sure,¹⁵ but he nonetheless fulfills the role of a prophet in Israel.

Hannah’s Long Shadow

But Hannah’s story is not quite over. She, unlike Eli, casts a long shadow not just on her son’s life or on her immediate circumstances but also over the rest of the Bible. Note that 2 Samuel (which was not originally divided from 1 Samuel) ends with a song of praise—this time from the lips of David, but with remarkable similarities in language and theme to Hannah’s song.¹⁶ David’s song also has reference to a rock, to sons of Belial (specifically mentioned twice in Hannah’s story but not in her song), and to the ideas of exalting and debasing and killing and making alive. But where Hannah’s song speaks of reversals and a future hope, David’s song is full of praise for victories already achieved. In other words, Hannah’s hopes are fulfilled in David’s words. By bookending the books of Samuel with these two songs, the author has encouraged us to view Hannah as the initiator of the Davidic dynasty; in this sense she is parallel in importance with David, as Hannah’s influence on Samuel becomes manifest in Samuel’s anointing of David. Additionally, framing a history book with hymns makes clear that this is not a random chronicle of events but rather a sacred history in which the role of the Lord is clear and profound.

It is most significant, then, that these books of Israel’s history begin not with kings, courts, and battles but rather with the personal, emotional struggles of an average woman. The genesis of the Davidic dynasty is to be found not on the battlefield but in a barren woman’s prayer in the temple. This broken-hearted woman makes covenants that benefit not only herself and her family but also her nation.

We also find allusions to Hannah in the examples of several women in Luke’s Gospel. Elisabeth, who is also tried by her barrenness, is, as Hannah was, blessed with a child who will have an important role to play in ushering

in a king. Both Hannah and Mary have the rare experience of recognizing the coming Messiah (see Luke 1): Mary’s song of praise after finding out that she will be the mother of the Son of God is very similar to Hannah’s song, especially given that both have reversals as a theme and both women take their babies to the temple.¹⁷ When Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, they meet Anna (*Anna* being the Greek form of the name *Hannah*), a woman who is identified as a “prophetess” (Luke 2:36) who never leaves the temple but instead prays for the anticipated Messiah to come. When she is introduced to this infant Messiah, she rejoices and prophesies. The parallels to Hannah are many: they have the same name, the same gender, the same location (the temple), similar prophetic gifts, and a similar desire for God to raise up a righteous person who will set their world right. It seems that this constellation of similarities between Hannah and Elisabeth, Mary, and Anna is part of the well-recognized effort in Luke’s Gospel to emphasize the role of regular, even dispossessed, people in welcoming the reign of the Messiah. It encourages us to read Hannah as one of the Old Testament templates of this desire for the Messiah and adds meaning to Hannah’s own story.

One more New Testament event resonates with Hannah’s story: on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2), Peter prays in a way that his audience did not anticipate (Peter is speaking in tongues; Hannah prayed silently) and is he is accused of public drunkenness when he is actually engaged in spiritual communication (just as Hannah was). Peter clarifies and then prophesies of the reversals in the time to come, just as Hannah did. We might conclude that Hannah’s story is once again a template—this time for Peter on the day of Pentecost. Just as Peter opened up a new time of increased spiritual witness, Hannah had done the same thing by preparing her child to become a prophet.

Hannah can also be seen as part of a group of women—including Miriam, Deborah, Mary, and Emma Smith—who were given special assignments related to the creation and compilation of praise songs. There appears to be a multi-dispensational tradition of women having a unique role in worshipful music, song, and prayer.¹⁸

Conclusion

The traditional reading of 1 Samuel 1–3 is of a barren woman who rejoices when she is blessed with the baby for whom she has earnestly prayed. While this is certainly an accurate and legitimate approach to the key events of the text, there is more to the story. By focusing on the contrast that the writer draws between Hannah's and Eli's families, we are able to find a potent commentary on the role of temple-based covenants. Hannah's story shows a rise in fortune that accompanies righteous choices, while Eli's fate reveals the devastating consequences that accompany sinful choices. This theme of reversals is highlighted in Hannah's own song of praise. And all of these choices—along with the song that commemorates them—are centered on the sanctuary and the idea of temple service. In Hannah we find a woman of low social status who struggles mightily with a challenging family dynamic: infertility compounded by a fecund sister-wife. Eli also grapples with a difficult family situation—unrighteous sons—but he does so from the high social standing of the high priest. The reader expects that Eli's physical and social proximity to the temple would make it central in his life (and peripheral for Hannah), but instead it is just the opposite: Hannah uses the temple as a refuge, with a focus on making and keeping covenants. There is a failure of priesthood leadership in Israel, and Hannah remedies it through committing her son to the service of the temple. Note that Eli's lack of oversight of his children is tied to military defeat (see 1 Samuel 4), while Hannah's desire for a son to serve in the temple leads to a new chapter of Israel's history, one with prophetic leadership and strong kings. There are interesting ramifications here about the ability of true temple worship to pierce the veil between the sacred and the secular. Note also that both Hannah's and Eli's lines innovate: Hannah through silent prayer, the use of the word *anointed*, and Samuel's anointing of a king; and Eli through modifying the sacrificial rituals to his family's own personal benefit. There is a commentary here on innovation: it is not condemned, but it must be done according to the will of the Lord and not for personal gain.

Hannah is able to change people: we see her changing her husband's and Eli's minds. But Eli is unable to change his sons' minds regarding their wicked behavior. Hannah's faithful worship gives her power. Note that Eli seems willing to police the temple to protect it from inappropriate behavior

from people like Hannah (where he is wrong in his accusations), but he is unwilling to police inappropriate behavior when the source is his own sons. In other words, he seems to privilege family relationships over the sanctity of the temple. Hannah does just the opposite in her willingness to dedicate her son to the temple.

Hannah is living in difficult political and personal circumstances. But she chooses to focus on the Lord and the sanctuary and, by doing so, is able to change not only her own life but also the course of her entire nation.

Notes

1. 1 Samuel 1:7 refers to this shrine in Shiloh as “the house of the Lord.” It is where Hannah’s family worships and offers sacrifices (see 1 Samuel 1:3), and it is also called a temple (see 1 Samuel 1:9). It is a tabernacle, or “tent-shrine,” and a precursor to the temple that will later be built in Jerusalem. While the historical distinction between the shrine at Shiloh and the temple should be maintained, I will refer to this structure as a temple throughout this paper, because it appears to fulfill the same function in Hannah’s life.

2. For example, Jo Ann Hackett writes that Elkanah’s statement shows a “lack of understanding for Hannah’s unhappiness” and appears to be “naïve or even insensitive,” but she acknowledges that it also “implies the possibility of a relationship in which love was more important than childbearing.” Jo Ann Hackett, “1 and 2 Samuel,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 89. Robert Alter finds a “double-edged poignancy,” as the statement “at once express[es] Elkanah’s deep and solicitous love for Hannah and his inability to understand how inconsolable she feels.” Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 4.

3. While this concept is more than familiar to Latter-day Saints, it is not an idea that we find specifically in the Old Testament, where the temple is primarily a location for offering sacrifices, not explicitly for aid with personal issues or emotional comfort. In this instance, the story does imply that Hannah sought and received emotional comfort from the temple, and so we begin to get a glimmer of a theme that will develop throughout the narrative: Hannah is an innovator. Perhaps Hannah was thinking of the role that the temple plays in changing an individual’s status (for example, from a layman to a priest or from a sinner to a “covered” sinner through offering a sacrifice), and she could have been hoping to change her status from barren to mother.

4. Note that these temple covenants are not identical to modern Latter-day Saint practice. Hannah is not entering into a covenant as part of the formal, prescribed temple worship but rather is initiating a covenant of her own (see 1 Samuel 1:11).

5. Prayers were normally offered out loud. The story itself implies that Hannah's prayer was regarded as unusual: Eli "marked" (or watched) her mouth as she prayed because it caught his attention. The narrator explains to the reader that Hannah "spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard," and Eli is so unfamiliar with the idea of silent prayer that he assumes that Hannah is drunk (1 Samuel 1:12–13).

6. As Robert Alter explains, "The anthropomorphism of this ancient idiom [that is, the concept of seeing the Lord's face] troubled the later transmitters of tradition sufficiently so that when vowel points were added to the consonantal text, roughly a millennium after the biblical period, the verb 'we will see' (*nireh*) was revocalized as *nirah* ('he will be seen')." Alter, *The David Story*, 7.

7. See Stanley D. Walters, "Hannah and Anna: the Greek and Hebrew Texts of 1 Samuel 1," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107, no. 3 (September 1988): 385–412.

8. Alter, *The David Story*, 7.

9. For more on the themes of Hannah's song, see Hackett, "1 and 2 Samuel," 89. See also Alter, *The David Story*, 9.

10. Stanley D. Walters, "The Voice of God's People in Exile," *Ex Auditu* 10 (1994): 76.

11. See 2 Nephi 25:24; Jacob 4:5; and Mosiah 16:14 as instances where Book of Mormon prophets explain that the purpose of the law of Moses was to prepare the people to understand the Atonement of Jesus Christ. See also Julie M. Smith, "Point Our Souls to Christ: Lessons from Leviticus," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 1 (2009): 67–82.

12. See N. L. Tidwell, "The Linen Ephod: 1 Sam. 2:18 and 2 Sam. 6:14," *Vetus Testamentum* 24, no. 4 (October 1974): 505–7.

13. According to Douglas K. Stuart, the women here play a formal role in temple worship. The only other reference to female temple workers in the Old Testament is found in Exodus 38:3, where, as Stuart explains, a "quite fascinating detail is also included here: one that presumes some common knowledge that Moses and his audience shared, but that we do not. At some point after the tabernacle was built, certain women were employed to serve at its entrance—a practice that probably continued as long as the tabernacle was in use, judging from the mention of it in 1 Sam 2:22, hundreds of years after the time of the present description. How were these women chosen, and what exactly did they do? We have no firm information." Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2 of *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, Kenneth A. Mathews, and David S. Dockery (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006), Kindle edition, chapter 7.

14. As Ralph W. Klein explains, verse 35 "announces the establishment of a faithful priest, who is not to be Samuel, as one might expect, but is clearly Zadok, David's other priest, who came to preeminence under Solomon. The Zadokites or sons of Aaron are the sure house (dynasty) referred to in the text." Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel* vol. 10 of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 27.

15. See 1 Samuel 8 for Samuel's initial reluctance for Israel to have a king.

16. See Randall C. Bailey, "The Redemption of YHWH: A Literary Critical Function of the Songs of Hannah and David," *Biblical Interpretation* 3, no. 2 (1995): 213–31.

17. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 357–61.

18. See Julie M. Smith, “‘I Will Sing to the Lord’: Women’s Songs in the Scriptures,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 56–69.