

# FIRST SAMUEL

Establishing the Throne of David

**STUDY GUIDE**

Fr. Jeffrey Kirby, STD

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## WELCOME TO FIRST SAMUEL

When we took over the production of Catholic Scripture Study several years ago, many outstanding programs had already been completed on most of the prominent books of the Bible: Genesis, John, Revelation, Exodus, and more. In the last several years, our team added the Gospels of Luke and Mark, as well as the book of Isaiah and a thematic study on the biblical names of Jesus, titled *Jesus Revealed*.

When we sat down at our yearly meeting to discuss the next book to do, someone said, “Why not Samuel?”

I wrongly assumed we already had a study on Samuel, considering how important a book it is in the story of salvation history.

I was sorely mistaken. No such program existed . . . until now.

It was one of the easier decisions I ever made to give my team the go ahead and begin producing this program you are about to embark on. The thrill, adventure, and importance of Samuel makes for an outstanding and vital study for any Catholic seeking to deepen his or her knowledge of Scripture. Within its narrative arc, we encounter the stories of Eli, Hannah, Samuel, Saul, Jonathan, and King David himself.

This particular study chronicles First Samuel and is thus given the appropriate subtitle *Establishing the Throne of David*, for this is the primary event in the book. And what an important event it was! David’s kingdom would pave the way and serve as a model of Christ’s kingdom that he would come to found centuries later.

My good friend and colleague Father Jeffrey Kirby has done an outstanding job of mining the riches found in this important book of the Bible and introduces you to the compelling narratives of some of the Old Testament’s most famous figures. Additionally, in the second half of each session, he takes the scriptural accounts and applies them to your everyday life, showing you their relevance and potential for guidance in our own confounding world.

I hope and pray you will enjoy your time spent on this study and find it as a critical instrument to buttress your faith and trust in God.

*Conor Gallagher, Publisher*



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# UNDERSTANDING YOUR GUIDE

*What's inside your Study Guide for First Samuel: Establishing the Throne of David? Here's an overview.*

## Study Sessions

The *Study Guide* is divided into eighteen study sessions. Each session is further divided into a “Self Study” section and a “Group Study” section. These sections are designated (along with the session number) by the caption in the colored bar along the outside edge of each page.

*The following elements appear in each of the eighteen sessions of the Study Guide:*

### SELF STUDY

The first section of each session, designated as “Self Study,” helps you prepare individually for the group study. Before coming together with the other participants, you can spend some time on your own reading the scriptural text, reflecting on the study notes in this section, and looking ahead to the questions for group discussion. Your group may have you write the responses to the questions you can answer before the session in order to prepare for a more rewarding group discussion.

**Optional use of the self study section:** We highly recommend that you prepare for the group experience by using the “Self Study” section. But we recognize that busy schedules don't always allow for that possibility. So even if you're sometimes unable to prepare ahead of time, the group session recaps, videos, and discussions will still offer you valuable insights into the scriptural text. As you view and listen, you can still take part in the conversation and take notes on the videos and discussions. In addition, as time allows, you can always go back to review the material in the book.

### Session Readings

The scriptural citations at the bottom of the opening page of each session identifies the specific readings to be studied in that particular session. The scriptural texts quoted in the Study Guide and Leader Guide come from the Revised Standard Version-Second Catholic Edition (RSV-2CE) translation of the Bible. Other Catholic versions are available, but you should be aware that the wording of the biblical text will vary in other translations.

Non-Catholic Bibles typically lack seven books that are found in the Catholic Bible. So make sure the version you choose is an approved Catholic Bible such as the RSV-2CE or one of the editions of the *New American Bible* (NAB). The Douay-Rheims (DR) version is also an approved translation and an old favorite of many Catholics, but keep in mind that some of its older



language may seem unfamiliar, and many of its books have names that differ from more contemporary translations.

### **Introduction**

A short description of the scriptural passages being studied introduces the session.

### **Prayer to Prepare for Study**

Prayer should be an integral part of every aspect of our lives, especially when we embark on a study of Scripture. We must ask God for the knowledge, wisdom, diligence, and humility necessary to understand his Word, and for the grace to change our lives by responding in faith and obedience to what he says. The words of this prayer—inspired by Ephesians 1:17–18—reflect in a beautiful and concise way the goals of this study. You will find them at the beginning of every “Self Study” section.

### **Study Notes**

These extensive notes are in many ways the “meat” of this Bible study. They provide insights into the historical, cultural, moral, and wider biblical context of the entire passage under study. They will help you understand and reflect upon what you read in the Gospel, offer occasional comments on the text by the Church Fathers and other saints, and provide answers to common questions about difficult or puzzling passages.

## **GROUP STUDY**

The second section of each session, designated as “Group Study,” takes you and the other participants in your group through your study together. It includes prayers, videos, questions for reflection or discussion, and other aids to study: definitions of key words that may be unfamiliar, quotes from the saints and Church documents, and relevant citations from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC).

### **Opening Prayer**

The opening prayer is for the group to pray together. It’s inspired by Psalm 119 and is prayed at the beginning of each session.

### **Teaching Video**

The Teaching Video is hosted by Fr. Jeffrey Kirby and moves, for the most part, chronologically through First Samuel. Occasionally he will cover the same chapter more than once, focusing on the different themes and subject matters present in that chapter. While the study notes cover the entire text designated for each session, this video offers a more focused approach. We encourage you to take notes on the lines provided under various topical headings drawn from the video presentation. We recommend this activity to help you remember what you have heard.

In the second part of the video, Fr. Kirby changes focus towards a “Life Application” approach, delivering a pastoral reflection where he examines the text from the perspective of how it applies and how it can influence our own lives. We recommend that you simply listen instead of taking notes on this video.





### **Small Group Discussion**

If your study has ten or more participants, you may hold discussions in small groups of five to seven. Each small group will have its own discussion leader prepared to guide the group. The small group discussion for each session will respond to two sets of questions: “Digging Deeper” and “Life Application.”

### **Digging Deeper**

The “Digging Deeper” questions prompt you in two ways: First, the questions help you recall some of the insights you have learned in reading the scriptural passage and the study notes. Second, the questions help you reflect more deeply by considering some wider issues raised by what you have learned.

### **Life Application**

The “Life Application” questions are posed to help you consider how you might apply to your own life the key points from each session. Answers to these questions will vary according to the life circumstances of each participant.

### **How Then Shall We Live?**

The section serves as a summary of the pastoral reflection part of the video. Since you haven’t taken notes on the video, we recommend that you silently review this section to prepare for responding to the challenges in “Living It Out.”

### **Living It Out**

This section prompts you to pray, then discern and write down the changes that God is asking you to make in your life, especially over the course of the next week, based on what you have learned. You’ll be given three to five minutes to sit quietly and reflect on the challenges you face in this regard. Then you’ll have an opportunity to share what you’re thinking and feeling if you’re comfortable doing so.

### **Closing Prayer**

Each session will close with the group praying aloud together the prayer provided, which is inspired by Hebrews 12:22–24.

## **ADDITIONAL STUDY AIDS**

Arranged throughout both the “Self Study” and the “Group Study” portions of the guides are special sections with additional relevant information and insights. These are intended to supplement your knowledge and enhance your understanding of the scriptural passages being studied:

### **Words to Know**

A list of key words or phrases that defines terms that might be unfamiliar or expounds upon their basic meaning.

### **Catechism Connections**

Citations for relevant passages from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.



### **Rome to Home**

Relevant excerpts from Church documents such as papal pronouncements and statements of ecumenical councils.

### **Voices of the Saints**

Relevant quotes from saints throughout history.

## **My Personal Checklist**

At the beginning of the first group session of *Mark: The Gospel Through the Eyes of Peter*, you'll have the opportunity to review "My Personal Checklist: Before the Study" (p. XI), which is a list of some personal benefits that we hope you will receive through this experience. You'll have a minute or two to follow the instructions on the page.

At the end of the last session of the study, you'll have the opportunity to review "My Personal Checklist: After the Study" (p. XX) so you can reflect on the areas in which you have grown personally through the study. You'll have a minute or two to follow the instructions on the page. *Both of these checklists are for your use only; they should not be shared with anyone else unless you choose to do so.*

# MY PERSONAL CHECKLIST

## *Before the Study*

Here are some personal benefits you can receive through this study of *First Samuel: Establishing the Throne of David*. Check all those you hope to receive. At the end of the study, you'll have a chance to review the list again to reflect on the areas in which you've grown.

*This checklist is for you only. It will not be shared with anyone else unless you choose to do so.*

- I want to know God more personally and intimately through studying his Word.
- I want to understand the significance of First Samuel and its place in the story of salvation history.
- I want to learn about the role of the judges and the prophets in salvation history, how they differ and why Samuel is so important as the link between the two.
- I want to discover the parallels between Hannah and the Virgin Mary and see how God repeatedly uses women once thought to be barren to carry out his divine plans.
- I am curious to learn about Eli the priest and his wayward sons, whose weakness and disobedience greatly offended God and jeopardized the salvation of the Israelite people.
- I am interested to see the importance of discipline in the spiritual life and what First Samuel can teach us about it.
- I want to discover the history and motivations of the Israelite people demanding a king “like all the other nations.”
- I want to discover how the call of Samuel can be a lesson in discerning my own vocational call from God.
- I want to know what is meant by the term “an exodus faith.”
- I want to learn about the early days of Saul and follow his story all the way to his demise, seen primarily through his disobedience and envy.
- I want to understand the ritual importance, symbolism, and history of anointing someone.
- I want to learn about the surrounding pagan cultures that came into contact with the chosen people about this time, how they warred with the Israelites and led them into idol worship.
- I want to read about the capture of the ark and how that affected the “soul of Israel.”
- I want to learn what *herem* (Hebrew for “the ban”) is and why it is one of the most controversial parts of the Bible.
- I want to read about the humble beginnings of David and why he was “a man after God’s own heart,” following his story all the way to the establishment of his throne.
- I want to come to understand what it means that “God looks upon the heart” and how I can learn to do the same.
- I want to know just how big Goliath really was!
- I want to be shown the importance of friendship through the lens of David and Jonathan’s close-knit relationship.
- I want to follow the story of Saul’s manhunt for David and how the young future king was able to evade capture so many different times.
- I want to discover how to show mercy to others, using David’s sparing of Saul’s life as a foundation for a merciful heart.
- I want to know what the bread of the Presence is and discover its ties to the Eucharist.
- I want to be introduced to the mysterious and righteous priest-king of Salem, Melchizedek, and see how he is connected to the Davidic priesthood.
- I want to see the parallels between David and the Messiah and learn how the Davidic kingdom is a type for the Church.



Anointing of David (oil on canvas), Thiel, Carl (1835-1900), Bradford Art Galleries and Museums, West Yorkshire, UK, (C19th), Bridgeman Images



SESSION 1

INTRODUCTION  
TO FIRST SAMUEL

*Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature . . . ;  
for the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the  
outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.*

1 SAMUEL 16:7

SESSION READINGS

PSALMS 132

ACTS 2:29–36

## Introduction

The first book of Samuel is a beautiful and moving narrative full of discernment, divine callings, boldness, intrigue, regression, betrayal, endearment, succession, and continued blessing. The book begins with the life stories of Samuel and Saul, each of whom plays a significant role in salvation history. Their lives and callings, however, point us to the esteemed and divinely-beloved David. Thus, First Samuel begins the broad panorama of David's life, throne, and legacy.

This most important book of the Old Testament picks up the story of salvation at the end of the era of the judges, who were the selected military leaders called to purify the promised land of idolatry after the Israelites' return from Egypt. Samuel comes as the last judge of the confederation of Israel. He is chosen by God to serve as the first prophet of Israel. As a prophet, Samuel initiates a new era of God's revelation to humanity.

Called, sent, and protected, Samuel will be the divine instrument by which the Israelite confederation of tribes becomes a kingdom, and by which the throne of David is established as a new institution. This institution would usher in the long-awaited Messiah, the anticipated Lord and Savior, ensuring he would be known and recognized when he came.

This session provides an overview of First Samuel. It describes the book's place at the end of the time of the judges and the beginning of the Israelite kingdom. It explores the book's authorship, narrative style, and possible intentions, and sets the overall stage for a thorough study of First Samuel.

## Prayer to Prepare for Study

*Heavenly Father, Lord of Glory, send your Holy Spirit upon me. Bless me with your wisdom and revelation as I dare to study your words and deeds. Open the eyes of my heart. Enlighten my mind. Help me to hear you and to see the beauty of your ways. Show me Jesus, who is your divine son and the son of David. Lead me. Guide me. Help me to understand you and to do whatever you ask of me. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

—Inspired by Ephesians 1:17–18

## Study Notes

*These notes provide insights to help you understand and reflect upon the biblical text.*

- ✦ The accounts contained in First Samuel come at a pivotal time in salvation history. God's people were ransomed from Egypt, purified in the desert for forty years, and then were led by God into the land promised to their ancestors. When the Israelites returned to the promised land, they were a loose confederation of twelve tribes and tension was common among them.
- ✦ When the Israelites returned to the promised land, it was occupied by the Canaanite peoples. God commanded his people to purify the land of the idolatry and barbarous behavior of the Canaanites. He called Israel to restore the land to the covenant he had made with



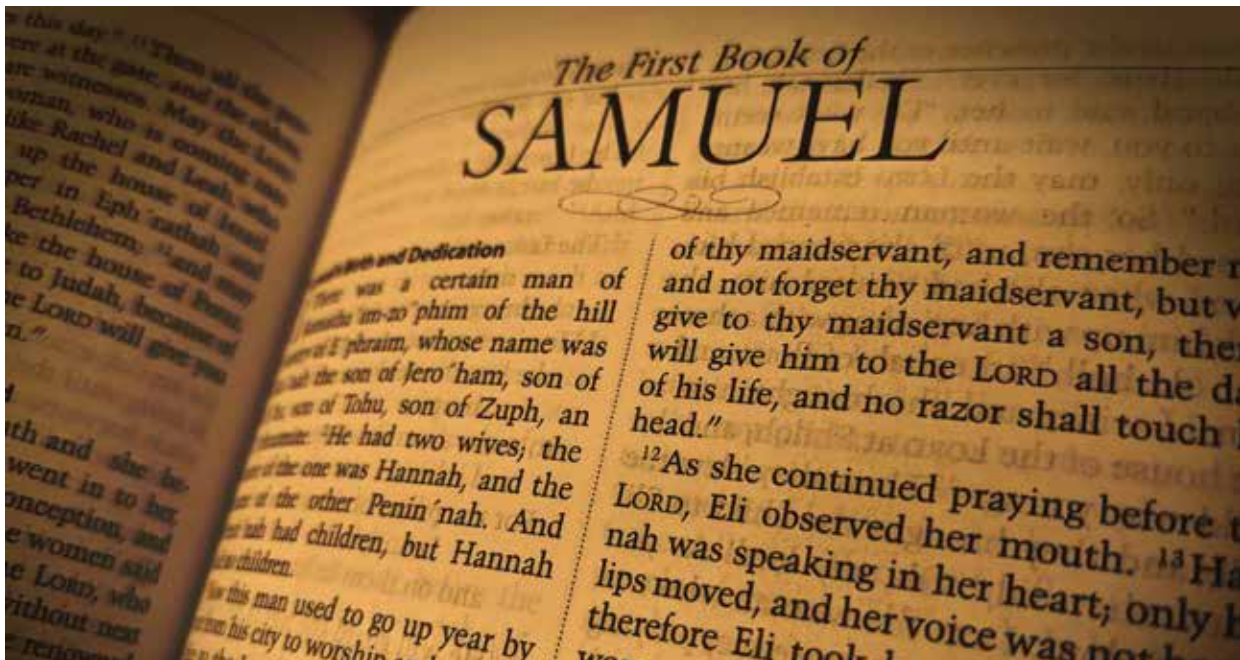
them. This led to military conflict with the Canaanite peoples. The leaders of these various military campaigns were called judges, since they not only led the armed forces but also interpreted the application of God's law and covenant.

- ✦ There were fourteen judges in all. The last judge was Samuel.
- ✦ During Samuel's ministry, there was an external threat of occupation and absorption into the Philistine empire, which actively fought to take over the promised land. This external threat was compounded by internal religious corruption. Such corruption, particularly reflected in the lives of the sons of Eli the priest, weakened the confederation of the Israelite tribes, since their covenant institutions were their only source of unity.
- ✦ Samuel was called to be the first of Israel's many prophets. The office of the prophet was new. It was also unique to Israel among the nations, since the prophets were not only seers but miracle workers. The prophets received and communicated divine teaching, developed the understanding of the covenant, and held a moral authority that rivaled (or even surpassed) that of the king.
- ✦ Saul and David were both anointed by Samuel as the first and second kings of Israel. Saul's lineage and his rule were both taken from him because of disobedience to divine instructions that were given through Samuel.
- ✦ First Samuel covers about a century, from the birth of the prophet Samuel to the death of Saul, that is approximately 1070 to 970 BC. It is a theological history of how Israel moved from a confederation of twelve tribes into a united kingdom. As a political history, First Samuel is also a defense of King David's throne and legitimate authority, since it shows how he is not a usurper of the crown but rather God's chosen one to replace Saul because of his disobedience. First Samuel displays in great length the loyalty and devotion that David had for Saul and his severe grief over his death.
- ✦ The healthy tension between king and prophet was a peculiar reality to Israel. Both were anointed, both held a divine office acknowledged by the other, and both were revered by the people. The interplay between these two offices provides the arena for some of the more dramatic events in First Samuel.
- ✦ Such a notion of dual authority did not exist among the pagan nations. In many respects, this co-leadership of Israel paved the way for our contemporary notion of a balance of power in government.
- ✦ Tradition identifies the prophet Samuel as the principal author of First Samuel, up until his death, which is recorded in chapter 25. After chapter 25, tradition indicates that the book was completed by the prophets Nathan and Gad. Contemporary historical criticism of the book, however, indicates a series of court scribes wrote the book during the later reign of King David.
- ✦ While authorship is debated, it is generally agreed that First Samuel is most likely a redaction of several recorded or orally passed down accounts of the various events in the early monarchical period of Israel.



- ✦ In light of this possible redaction, the dating of First Samuel is sporadic. Since the book implies knowledge of the forthcoming division of the Davidic kingdom in 930 BC, it is possible that the book was not fully composed until after that date. Although, editorial revisions were possibly made in the seventh or sixth century BC in order to flow within a Deuteronomist narrative. Such a later narrative sought to give a unitive theological perspective to Israel's life in the promised land. As such, the Deuteronomist history included the books from Joshua to Second Kings (excluding the book of Ruth).
- ✦ Originally, First and Second Samuel were a single edition under the simple title Samuel. It was the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, that divided the books into two and combined them with First and Second Kings so that First Samuel was actually known as First Kingdoms.
- ✦ The place chosen in the text to divide First and Second Samuel (also known as First and Second Kingdoms) was Saul's death. This followed the custom of ending books with the death of a prominent figure in the narrative.
- ✦ Contemporary Bibles keep the Septuagint's division of the books into two volumes but restores the ancient Hebrew title to the book—hence First Samuel.
- ✦ First Samuel is the ninth book of the Christian Bible. It is placed after the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. In Hebrew thought, First Samuel is considered a part of the former prophets, while Christian thought identifies First Samuel as a historical book.
- ✦ First Samuel is one of the fourteen narrative books, which are Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, First Samuel, Second Samuel, First Kings, Second Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, First Maccabees, Luke, and Acts of the Apostles. While the Bible contains seventy-three books, these fourteen narrative books contain the principal account of salvation history. First Samuel is an essential account of one of the most crucial moments of transition in the history of Israel.
- ✦ First Samuel is best approached as a unified story consisting of three main sections, each surrounding the lives of the book's three main figures. Chapters 1–7 pertain to the life and vocation of Samuel, chapters 8–15 are about Saul, and chapters 16–31 are filled with the stories of King David.
- ✦ Although First Samuel is focused on Samuel, Saul, and David, it does contain an impressive array of other figures, who will all play important roles in the ongoing saga of the early monarchical period. Some of these figures include Hannah, Eli, Jonathan, Goliath, Michal, Ahimelech, Abigail, and several others. The list of names indicates that God is at work in the lives of many people in this transitional time.
- ✦ As a narrative, First Samuel is noted for its plot development, theological history, artistic imagination, and vivid accounts of the emotions, weaknesses, and intentions of its characters.





- ✦ Although King David is mentioned in Ruth, he is only truly introduced into salvation history in First Samuel. After this endearing introduction as shepherd, victim, and king, David replaces Moses as the predominant figure in the Old Testament narrative.
- ✦ Throughout its narrative, First Samuel contains events, prophecies, and symbols that will be fulfilled by the Lord Jesus, or used by him in his public ministry, to show that he is the heir of David's throne and the long-awaited Messiah.

*To prepare for small group discussion, turn ahead now to this session's "Digging Deeper" and "Life Application" sections.*



## Rome to Home

God's revelation of himself in history in order to enter into a relationship of loving dialogue with man, gives new meaning to the whole human journey. History is not a mere succession of centuries, years or days, but the time span of a presence that gives full meaning and opens it to sound hope.

Where can we read the stages of this Revelation of God? Sacred Scripture is the best place for discovering the steps of this process. . . . In reading the Old Testament we can see how God intervenes in the history of the chosen people, the people with whom he made a covenant: these are not fleeting events that fade into oblivion. Rather, they become a "memory"; taken together they constitute the "history of salvation", kept alive in the consciousness of the People of Israel through the celebration of the salvific events.

—Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, December 12, 2012



## Opening Prayer

*Heavenly Father, you have called us together in your Son. Speak to us. Send your Holy Spirit upon us. Help us to hear you. Make your face shine upon us and teach us your ways. Let your words be a lamp to our feet and a guide to our hearts. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

—Inspired by Psalm 119

## Teaching Video

*Here are some key highlights from the presentation, with room to take notes to assist you in the group discussion.*

### **First Samuel: A story of pivotal transition in salvation history**

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### **The roles of the judge and the prophet**

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### **The authorship and dating of First Samuel**

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### Three figures dominate the story of First Samuel: Samuel, Saul, and David

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### David replaces Moses as the predominant figure of the Old Testament

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### David's legacy and throne are significant to the coming of the Messiah

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## Catechism Connections

*These readings from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) will deepen your understanding of this session's presentations and discussions. The numbers identify the relevant paragraphs in the Catechism.*

- ✦ The gradual revelation of God to humanity: CCC 53, 65
- ✦ The role of God's providence in human affairs: CCC 302–8
- ✦ David as king “after God's own heart”: CCC 2579
- ✦ The Deuteronomic tradition of prayer: CCC 2697–99

## Small Group Discussion

### DIGGING DEEPER

1. Why is the context of salvation history so important if we are to fully understand First Samuel? How can this context help us to better appreciate God's words and deeds in First Samuel?

First Samuel is a “transitional” book. As such, we have to know the context from which it is emerging so that we can appreciate the transition. If we don't understand where Israel has been, what it has been undergoing, then we cannot fully appreciate where God has led his people. The context is essential since the book is an account of a pivotal transitional period.

2. Why should we pay attention to the authorship and dating of First Samuel?

The traditional authorship is significant since it's attributed to the prophets Samuel, Nathan, and Gad. This shows the prophetic significance of First Samuel. The Deuteronomist revisions are also significant since it seeks to show a unitive message of Israel's time in Canaan, from Joshua to Second Kings. By knowing this, we can see the desire for a consistent account of God's actions and words among his people.

The dating of First Samuel is significant since it indicates a post-divided kingdom perspective and a later Deuteronomist revision. These help us understand the intentions of the human authors and the labor involved in the compiling of the book.

3. Before the monarchy, Israel was a confederation of twelve tribes. How did this help Israel? How did it hurt? What else was happening at the time of Samuel's ministry that harmed the confederation?

The confederation was a blessing since it stressed that God himself was the king of Israel. By being a confederation, there was no sole ruler of all Israel. The judges controlled the military conditionally but usually relied on goodwill among the various leaders of the tribes to accomplish tasks or campaigns. With there being no centralized ruler of Israel, therefore, an emphasis was given to the sovereignty of God over Israel. The problem, however, was that the tribes were in constant tension and strife. In addition, the Philistines posed an external threat as they sought to absorb Israel into their empire. Finally, the religious institutions that united the tribes were weakened by unchecked corruption.

4. How do the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David present an outline to First Samuel?

The lives of these three great figures form the basis of First Samuel: chapters 1–7 pertain to the life and vocation of Samuel, chapters 8–15 are about Saul, and chapters 16–31 are filled with the stories of King David. By studying the lives of these three men, we will have a full study of First Samuel.



5. How is First Samuel an argument for David's legitimacy as king?

First Samuel seeks to establish the credibility of David since some critics might look at him as a usurper who sought both Saul's demise and his crown. First Samuel, however, goes to great lengths to show David's extreme deference and affection for Saul. Many times, David could have taken Saul's life and yet refused since Saul was God's anointed. When Saul did die, David grieved his loss. First Samuel also recounts how Saul lost both his legacy and his throne by disobedience and pride. David sought to obey God and rejoice in his law. As such, David was chosen by God to replace Saul as king. In these ways, First Samuel "sets the record straight" about David's intentions and posture toward Saul. It also establishes credibility for his crown.

### LIFE APPLICATION

1. How does your relationship to God define who you are?

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2. In what ways do the Scriptures help you make sense of certain situations that arise in your life? Can you give examples?

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3. Why do you think there is a stigma about Catholics not knowing the Sacred Scriptures? Do you think it's a fair assessment?

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4. What are your preconceived impressions of First Samuel? How well do you know it? What are you looking forward to learning about it?

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## Voices of the Saints

*In all your affairs lean solely on God's Providence, by means of which alone your plans can succeed. Meanwhile, on your part work on in quiet co-operation with Him, and then rest satisfied that if you have trusted entirely to Him you will always obtain such a measure of success as is most profitable for you, whether it seems so or not to your own individual judgment.*

—St. Francis de Sales

## How Then Shall We Live?

*Silently review the following summary of Fr. Kirby's reflection to prepare for the "Living It Out" meditation and discussion.*

Who are we?

It is a question that is as complicated as it is simple. We know the answer, but it is difficult to put into words.

The most concise and yet complete answer is that we are children of God. Our relationship with God—this Father/child relationship—is what defines us. It gives us our identity.

The Sacred Scriptures help us see that. We discover our own identity in the biblical stories and characters, most especially in the narrative heavy book of Samuel. No matter where we are or what we are going through, the Scriptures are always there, guiding us, helping us to make sense of life. It is the breathing word of God, a love letter written to us by the divine hand, in order for us to understand who we are before him, so that we can understand the sufferings and the joys of life, the triumph and the failures.

As Catholics, we are often accused of being neglectful of our Scripture when compared to our Protestant brothers and sisters, and there is some merit to this. Too often we turn to other sources to look for answers or inspiration, or perhaps we are just indifferent to Scripture.

No more! The Word of God must run through our blood. It must give us our identity. If we root our lives in Scripture, we will never forget who we are before God: his children.



## Living It Out

*On your own, spend three to five minutes praying, discerning, and writing down the specific ways that God might be calling you to make changes in your life. Share and discuss afterwards only if you feel comfortable doing so.*

Consider this week how God is calling you to . . .

- ♣ Renew your relationship with him through the Sacred Scriptures.
- ♣ Assess what role Scripture plays in your daily life.
- ♣ Focus on a current troubling or difficult situation you are going through and consider how Scripture might help you make sense of it.

## Words to Know

**Confederation of Tribes:** The social and political structure of Israel before the establishment of the monarchy under King Saul.

**Covenant Institutions:** The priesthood, worship, holy days, and other aspects of the ceremonial law of Israel. When Israel was a confederation of tribes, the covenant institutions were the only source of unity.

**Septuagint:** The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Its structure and translation adjusted the names and placements of portions of the Old Testament books, including First Samuel.

**Deuteronomist:** A historical editing that occurred in the seventh or sixth century BC from the book of Joshua to Second Kings (excluding Ruth). The revision sought to present a unitive account of Israel's time in Canaan.

**Canaan:** The promised land; the land first promised to the patriarch Abraham and revered as the ancestral home of Israel. It was referred to as Canaan since the Canaanite peoples occupied it while the chosen people were in Egypt and in the desert.

**Philistines:** The gentile people who waged war against God's people and sought to absorb Israel into its empire. The most famous Philistine is Goliath the Giant.

## Closing Prayer

*Heavenly Father, we have come to Mount Zion, to your place of blessing. We have sought to hear your voice and to dwell with you in the heavenly Jerusalem. We ask you to bless our efforts to know your words and deeds so that we can love you more and serve you more generously. Enlighten us. Teach us. Guide us. Show us your way. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*



| *The Infant Samuel*, c.1853 (oil on canvas), Bury Art Museum & Sculpture Centre, UK, Bridgeman Images





SESSION 2

THE BIRTH AND  
DEDICATION  
OF SAMUEL

*O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your maidservant, and remember me, and not forget your maidservant, but will give to your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life and no razor shall touch his head.*

**1 SAMUEL 1:11**

**SESSION READINGS**

**1 SAMUEL 1; 2:1–10**

## Introduction

The First Book of Samuel begins at a time of crisis. The gentile Philistines present an external threat to Israel, and the internal corruption of its covenant institutions causes both danger and instability. First Samuel, therefore, initiates the narrative that will show the necessity and credibility for a monarch over Israel. And yet, of all the places where such a story could begin, First Samuel takes us to an obscure family in Ephraim who are worshipping God in the midst of a serious feud.

First Samuel contains no editorial introduction. We just walk in, like unexpected house guests, into the home and havoc of this simple family. We're introduced to the Levite Elkanah and his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Hannah is barren and ostracized by her family. Hurt by the mockery of the second wife, and feeling downcast in her soul, Hannah turns to God.

The ark of the covenant dwelled in Shiloh at this time. Hannah went to worship there and plead her cause before Yahweh. Eli the priest misunderstood the holy woman, thinking her to be drunk, but then blessed her. Hannah conceived by the goodness of God and named her son Samuel. She dedicated him to God's service and sang her beautiful hymn to God's praise. Hannah's hymn is an Old Testament antecedent prayer of Mary of Nazareth's own *Magnificat*, with both hymns declaring God's kindness to the lowly and his love for those in need.

## Prayer to Prepare for Study

*Heavenly Father, Lord of Glory, send your Holy Spirit upon me. Bless me with your wisdom and revelation as I dare to study your words and deeds. Open the eyes of my heart. Enlighten my mind. Help me to hear you and to see the beauty of your ways. Show me Jesus, who is your divine son and the son of David. Lead me. Guide me. Help me to understand you and to do whatever you ask of me. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

—Inspired by Ephesians 1:17–18

## Study Notes

*These notes provide insights to help you understand and reflect upon the biblical text.*

- ♣ God's transformation of Israel did not begin with powerful leaders or military victories but with the humble prayers of Hannah, a barren woman. This context demonstrates the way in which God works among his people and how he brings about his greatest blessings.
- ♣ First Samuel has an immediate beginning. There's no prelude or introduction. The author begins and leads us right into the inner workings of a family from Ephraim. Colloquially, we could say the family is fighting (1 Sm 1:5–8) and they're on their way to church, and we've been put right in the backseat so that we can watch the show. This is an Old Testament version of reality TV! This personal approach reflects First Samuel's beautiful epic style and



its engaging description of the twists and turns of people's lives, their agonies and vulnerabilities, sufferings and joys. It demonstrates the book's emphasis on discerning God's deeds and words within the lives of his people. In this way, First Samuel is an easy read and has been described as one of the more enjoyable of the narrative books of the Bible.

- ✦ Hannah was the favored and first of two wives to the Levite Elkanah (cf. 1 Chr 6:27). Although polygamy was uncommon at the time, it was practiced among wealthier men, which indicates that Elkanah was most likely of affluent means.
- ✦ Elkanah most likely had two wives since Hannah was unable to have children. This possibly is supported by the names of his wives: Hannah's name in Hebrew means "attractive," while Peninnah's name means "fertile." Despite her infertility, Hannah is the more revered and cherished of the two wives.
- ✦ Hannah's story is one rooted throughout the Old Testament narrative—namely, the barren woman blessed by God with a miraculous birth. This same story is seen in the life of the matriarch Sarah, as well as in the life of Rachel. It is particularly pressing in the story of the judge Samson, whose own mother was barren (cf. Jgs 13:1–24). The story of Samson, who was also consecrated to God at birth, would have been within recent memory of Hannah's life.
- ✦ The barren woman, therefore, is a highly charged biblical symbol of humanity's fruitlessness and vulnerability in a fallen world. Such a barren woman distressed at prayer, who receives new life, was a further symbol of Israel's summons to rely on God, to offer true worship, and to be open and welcoming of new life from God through docility and obedience to his covenant.
- ✦ Peninnah is described as a "rival" to Hannah (1 Sm 1:6). This is a very uncommon designation to use for a family member, even one with whom there's great animosity. This indicates the strained relationships within Elkanah's family and the serious division between the two wives.
- ✦ It is argued that the dynamics of Elkanah's family is a parable of the future of Israel. Hannah is the beloved and yet is barren. Peninnah has children but no affection. Hannah wants a child, which is eventually given, but he will be consecrated to Yahweh. As a parable, Hannah reflects Israel, who is loved by God but has no king. Peninnah is a symbol of the gentile nations, who have kings but no favor from God and who are true rivals to Israel. Yahweh will eventually grant Israel a king, but the monarch will belong to him.
- ✦ Although wealthy, we have no basis to assert any social prominence to Elkanah or his family. There is little reference to him outside of this portion of Scripture.
- ✦ The family resided in Ramathaim-zophim in the hill country of Ephraim. This was about twenty miles from Shiloh, where the ark of the covenant rested. It's uncertain whether this is the same place as the "Ramah" that's named elsewhere in First Samuel as the home of the prophet's family. In New Testament times, this area was called Arimathea and was the home of the secret disciple Joseph of Arimathea (cf. Mt 27:57).



- ✦ At the time of Elkanah, the ark of the covenant (which contained God's presence on earth) dwelt in a temple in Shiloh (1 Sm 1:9). This was a temporary temple during the settlement period that became known for its corruption (cf. Jgs 18:31; Jer 7:1–15; 26:6–9). This was before the Temple in Jerusalem. Shiloh itself was also in Ephraim and was about twenty-five miles from Jerusalem. Elkanah made an annual pilgrimage to this house of the Lord. This annual visit doesn't appear to be in conjunction with any of the set feasts and so may have been a private practice, perhaps to make a common "peace offering" (cf. Lv 7:11–17).
- ✦ For the first time in the Bible, God is called "the LORD of hosts" (1 Sm 1:3). The term appears to be assumed and well-known in the narrative. As Israel is in battle to preserve its identity, it would seem a popular title since "hosts" is a reference to armies, both of angels and of man. The title expresses the infinite power and resources of God. It later becomes very popular in the Psalms and in the prophetic writings. It is echoed in every Mass during the Sanctus before the Eucharistic Prayer.
- ✦ There is a passing reference to Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sm 1:3), the sons of Eli the priest, who mock and blaspheme God. They are a juxtaposition of Hannah and her future son, Samuel, who will revere and honor God and his covenant. Mother and son stand as exemplary Israelites, which is a prophetic glimpse of the Lord Jesus and his own Mother later in salvation history.
- ✦ Hannah makes a vow before God that no razor would touch her son's head (1 Sm 1:11). This is a reference to the Nazirite vow (cf. Nm 6:1–21) in which a person is consecrated, or set apart, to the service of God. As such, they drank no wine and their hair was not cut. The judge Samson, whose story parallels Samuel's, was also under the Nazirite vow (cf. Jgs 13:2–7, 24). It is also believed that later in salvation history, St. John the Baptist, whose story also follows that of Samuel's, was under the Nazirite vow (cf. Lk 1:7–15).
- ✦ The priest Eli accuses Hannah of drunkenness. If true, such drunkenness would have been a grave offense in the temple (cf. Lv 10:9). Eli's rash judgment is an indication of his distracted heart. It's interesting that while Hannah prayed, Eli was sitting and watching others pray (1 Sm 1:12).
- ✦ Hannah's reply to Eli's accusation of drunkenness are her first recorded words in First Samuel (1:15–16). And her words are both humble and endearing. Rather than getting defensive, the holy woman basically responds, "I've got my issues, but alcohol isn't one of them. I'm stressed out, but I'm not a woman of loose morals" (v. 15). The response disarms the priest, and with no further clarification, he offers her a blessing.
- ✦ In Hannah's response, she indicates that she is not a "daughter of Beliel," oftentimes loosely translated as "a base woman" (1 Sm 1:16). Beliel is a demon associated with lawlessness and a lack of virtue. Hannah's reference to the fallen angel is an indication of the supernatural worldview of her day.
- ✦ Although weak and corrupt, Eli is a priest of the living God and his blessing carries weight. He added his voice to Hannah's prayer (1 Sm 1:17).



| *Hannah Prayer*, woodcut for “*Die Bibel in Bildern*”, 1860. Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1794–1872).

- ✦ Hannah named her son Samuel (1 Sm 1:20). The Hebrew *shemu'el* can mean two different things: either “the name of God” or, more casually, “the one who is of God.” The spoken name sounds like the verb that could mean both “to ask” and “to lend.” In this way, the child’s name indicates both essential actions of his holy mother. Hannah asked for a son and she lent him to the service of God (vv. 26–28). In this posture of petition and surrender, Hannah reflects the virtues that will be exemplified by the Blessed Virgin Mary later in salvation history.
- ✦ After offering her son to the Lord’s service, Hannah sings (1 Sm 2:1–10). It is a beautiful image of the holy woman, having given everything she loved to the living God, lifting her voice and singing a prayer of praise, gratitude, and deliverance. It follows a structure of reverse fortunes. The barren has now born seven children. The bows of the mighty are broken while the feeble have strength. The satisfied are now hungry, while the hungry are unsatisfied. The poor are rich, while the rich are empty. And the reverse parallels continue. In this way, the hymn indicates the surprising work of God, which cannot be controlled by any person and which always exceeds expectations.
- ✦ Rooted in deep Israelite tradition, Hannah’s hymn begins a time of transition for God’s people. As her hymn inaugurates a new era, so David’s hymn at the end of his life will indicate its decline (2 Sm 22:1–51). Both Hannah’s and David’s hymns, as well as other hymns of the Old Testament, such as Moses’s hymn (Dt 32), inspire the *Magnificat*, the grand hymn of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the dawn of human redemption (Lk 1:46–55).

To prepare for small group discussion, turn ahead now to this session's "Digging Deeper" and "Life Application" sections.



## Rome to Home

Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman's womb. The mother is filled with wonder at this mystery of life, and "understands" with unique intuition what is happening inside her. In the light of the "beginning", the mother accepts and loves as a person the child she is carrying in her womb. This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings—not only towards her own child, but every human being—which profoundly marks the woman's personality.

—Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 18

## Opening Prayer

*Heavenly Father, you have called us together in your Son. Speak to us. Send your Holy Spirit upon us. Help us to hear you. Make your face shine upon us, and teach us your ways. Let your words be a lamp to our feet and a guide to our hearts. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

—Inspired by Psalm 119

## Teaching Video

*Here are some key highlights from the presentation, with room to take notes to assist you in the group discussion.*

### **The symbolism of a barren woman**

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**The geographical highlights of Ephraim**

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**Levitical worship in Shiloh**

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**Hannah's vow and the Nazirite consecration**

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**Samuel's name and Hannah's song**

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## Catechism Connections

*These readings from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) will deepen your understanding of this session's presentations and discussions. The numbers identify the relevant paragraphs in the Catechism.*

- ✦ The place of holy women and prayer: CCC 489
- ✦ Sacrifice, promises, and vows: CCC 2099–103
- ✦ Hannah and models of prayer: CCC 2578
- ✦ Prayer as perseverance in love: CCC 2742–45
- ✦ Filial boldness in prayer: CCC 2610

## Small Group Discussion

### DIGGING DEEPER

1. What is the family situation in which Samuel is born? How does this unassuming family in the hills of Ephraim reflect the mysterious ways of God?

**Samuel's father is a Levite with two wives. Hannah is the first and favored wife but is barren. As such, Elkanah has a second wife. The second wife mocks and humiliates Hannah, who is vexed and distressed by her barrenness. She turns to God and asks for a son. The simplicity and fallenness of the family indicate God's presence in the ordinary workings and affairs of his people. Although Samuel will bring about one of the most critical transitions in Israel's existence, he is not born to a prominent family, or a military commander, or a virtuous family. He is born into a regular family with problems and real issues.**

2. What is the spiritual lesson of God's work happening through the prayers of a wounded and broken woman?

**The stages of salvation history are brought about by the supplications and offerings of the powerless, the helpless, and the vulnerable. God cannot work through the hearts of those who think they do not need him. He is able to bring about his greatest graces and actions through the lives of those who know they are broken and who know how desperately they need him. As Hannah will sing, "He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the dung heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor" (1 Sm 2:8).**





3. How do the dynamics of Elkanah's family serve as a parable or foreshadowing of the future of Israel?

Hannah is the beloved and yet is barren. Peninnah has children but no affection. Hannah wants a child, which is eventually given, but he will be consecrated to Yahweh. As a parable: Hannah reflects Israel, who is loved by God but has no king. Peninnah is a symbol of the gentile nations, who have kings but no favor from God and who are true rivals to Israel. Yahweh will eventually grant Israel a king, but the monarch will belong to him.

4. What is the status of the ark of the covenant? Why is it in Shiloh? What is Eli's posture as priest of the living God?

During the settlement period, which followed the reconquest of the promised land, the ark of the covenant was housed in a temporary temple in Shiloh. It appears that the tabernacle was replaced by this makeshift temple. The ark's presence in Shiloh indicates the prominence of Ephraim, which had become a mega-tribe among the northern tribes. Jerusalem will not become the center of worship until the monarchy and the building of the Temple by Solomon.

Eli is sitting and distracted in the Shiloh temple. He and his sons will be denounced by God for their corruption and blasphemy. This is a bit of a foreshadowing. Later, among the prophets, the Shiloh temple will become a symbol for corruption and false worship.



| *The high priest Eli (detail), Painting by Lambert Doomer (1624-1700), 1668, Musee des Beaux Arts. Photo © Photo Josse / Bridgeman Images*



5. What was the Nazirite vow? Why was it made? What leaders in salvation history have been under the vow?

The Nazirite vow is described in the book of Numbers (6:1–21). It set apart an individual, or consecrated him, to the service of God and involved several stipulations, including not drinking wine, celibacy, and refraining from cutting one’s hair as a sign of exclusive service to God. It was not a common vow (some took a temporary vow but it was unusual in Samuel’s case, his being a lifelong vow) but an emblematic one. Whenever the vow was invoked, it was a clear sign that God’s providence and power was being sought in a profound way. The vow was usually not for life, but it could be lifelong. It was usually made by the person himself, although there are accounts where others made the vow for some of God’s chosen ones. The vow was made for unconditional service to God. It usually indicated that someone had received a specific mission from God. Many leaders in salvation history were under the Nazirite vow, including the judge Samson, the prophet Samuel, and St. John the Baptist.

6. Describe the “reverse fortunes” of Hannah’s hymn. In contrast to the ways of the world, how does the song explain the providence and ways of God?

The reverse fortunes found in Hannah’s song are opposite parallels: the rich will be poor, the poor will be rich. The barren will have seven sons. The humble will be exalted, the exalted will be humbled. The juxtaposition shows that the ways of God are beyond human control, manipulation, and machination. God will bless those who seek him, who are vulnerable before him, and who know they are helpless without him. Unlike the worldly person who relies on himself and his own strength, Hannah’s hymn reminds us of our need for God and the importance of approaching him with empty hands.

### LIFE APPLICATION

1. The world is full of stories of barren couples who miraculously and unexpectedly conceived, or experienced an inspirational adoption, or devoted their lives to a great cause. Do you know any such stories that you can share with the group?

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2. Why do you think God would withhold a blessing or an answered prayer? How is his will often accomplished in an even greater way by other (or delayed) means?

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3. What brings you peace when you realize a prayer is not going to be answered the way you had hoped? How do you come to terms with God's will in such instances?

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## Voices of the Saints

Look at the mothers who truly love their children: how many sacrifices they make for them. They are ready for everything, even to give their own blood so that their babies grow up good, healthy and strong.

—St. Gianna Beretta Molla

## How Then Shall We Live?

*Silently review the following summary of Fr. Kirby's reflection to prepare for the "Living It Out" meditation and discussion.*

The pain associated with not being able to bear children is deep and real. There are those who would give up their home and all their possessions to have a child, and their wounds are made worse by a society that too often views children as an unwanted burden, shunning God's greatest blessings.

God clearly knows the plight of these wounded souls. Look at how much he accomplished through women who were thought to be barren, including Hannah, the mother of Samuel. She was blessed with a child, but not all couples are so lucky.

Couples praying for children are praying for a virtuous thing, telling God they are willing to sacrifice themselves—their finances, their time, their energy, their sleep—so that others may have life. But sometimes the sacrifice God is asking us to make doesn't always align with the one we are willing to make.

It's difficult to understand God's will when it doesn't follow ours, not just in the case of barrenness but in all things. We can suffer from confusion, self-pity, and resentment when prayers are not answered. To keep from succumbing to these dark thoughts, we must first vow to accept God's will no matter what. Then, we must assess what he might be calling us to do with our time, talent, and treasure in light of not receiving what we asked for. He is pleased that we are willing to selflessly give, but we must answer the selfless call he has put before us. What is he asking us to do? Remember, our lives are lived on his terms, not ours.

And if we take stock of where we are, we will see that he has given us blessings in other ways. Never fall to the delusion that he does not hear your prayers. He does. Now let us vow to always listen in return to his call.

## Living It Out

*On your own, spend three to five minutes praying, discerning, and writing down the specific ways that God might be calling you to make changes in your life. Share and discuss afterwards only if you feel comfortable doing so.*

Consider this week how God is calling you to . . .

- ✦ Pray for a couple you know who is struggling to have children.
- ✦ Come to terms with an unanswered prayer and vow to accept God's will.
- ✦ Think back on something you prayed for that was answered in a different or unexpected way, and how that result was far more blessed than what you ever could have imagined.



## Words to Know

**Levite:** A member of the priestly tribe of Levi. The Levites were consecrated for service and led the worship of Israel. Samuel's father, Elkanah, was a Levite. As such, Samuel was of a priestly lineage. The book of Leviticus is named after the Levites and is the collection of Israel's ceremonies and festivities.

**Ark of the Covenant:** A "gold box" that contained the presence of God on earth. It was cared for by the Levites.

**Shiloh temple:** A makeshift house of worship to house the ark of covenant during the settlement period. Due to its scandalous character, it later become a synonym for false worship and corruption.

**Ephraim:** The largest of the northern tribes; become a "mega-tribe" that absorbed several other tribes. Ephraim was the nemesis to Judah in the south. It was the home of the Shiloh temple.

**Beliel:** The demon of lawlessness denounced by Hannah (often translated as "base woman").

**Nazirite Vow:** The special consecration contained in the Mosaic Law in which someone is dedicated to God's service. As a sign of their consecration, Nazirites did not drink alcohol and did not cut their hair. Samuel was dedicated as a Nazirite by his mother, Hannah.

## Closing Prayer

*Heavenly Father, we have come to Mount Zion, to your place of blessing. We have sought to hear your voice and to dwell with you in the heavenly Jerusalem. We ask you to bless our efforts to know your words and deeds so that we can love you more and serve you more generously. Enlighten us. Teach us. Guide us. Show us your way. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

—Inspired by Hebrews 12:22–24