

Who was Elkanah in the Bible?

Elkanah is the name of a couple of men in the Bible (Exodus 6:24; 1 Chronicles 6:23). The better-known Elkanah was the father of the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1-8; 1 Chronicles 6:25-26). The name Elkanah means “God has created” or “God has taken possession.” The Bible describes this Elkanah as the son of Jeroham, from the tribe of Levi, living in the days of the judges (Judges 17:6).

Elkanah had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah had borne children to Elkanah, but Hannah was barren. Despite the fact that in those days a wife’s value was tied to her childbearing abilities, Elkanah loved Hannah and was grieved for her sadness. As in most polygamous marriages, there was rivalry between the two women. Peninnah taunted Hannah about her childlessness year after year until Hannah could take it no more.

Elkanah tried to help Hannah’s situation, but he could offer her no true relief from her sorrow. One year during their yearly pilgrimage to Shiloh to offer sacrifices to the Lord, Hannah went to the tabernacle and began to pray so earnestly that it caught the attention of Eli, the priest. She made a vow to the Lord saying, “Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head” (1 Samuel 1:11). She prayed so fervently, yet silently, that Eli thought she was drunk. She corrected him and explained her deep desire for a son, and the priest replied, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him” (verse 17).

Hannah and Elkanah did conceive, and she gave birth to a son she named Samuel, meaning “asked of the Lord.” The next year she told Elkanah that she would not be going to

Shiloh with him until the boy was weaned and then she would keep her vow and present him to the Lord. Elkanah had faith in his wife's devotion and allowed her to do as she thought best. Through these glimpses into the life of Hannah and Elkanah, we can deduce that he was a kind man, faithful to the Lord, and loving toward his wife (Ephesians 5:25; 1 Peter 3:7).

When the boy Samuel was weaned, Hannah and Elkanah traveled back to Shiloh to present their son to Eli the priest. The boy would live there, learning to minister before the Lord. Every year, his mother brought him a new robe, and each year Eli blessed Elkanah and Hannah, saying, "May the Lord give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the Lord" (1 Samuel 2:20). The Lord did as Eli asked, and Elkanah and Hannah went on to have three more sons and two daughters.

Elkanah is mentioned again in the genealogies of the tribes listed in 1 Chronicles 6:25-34. His great-grandson, Hemen, grandson of Samuel, was one of the musicians who ministered in the tent of meeting before the temple was built. Because Elkanah, along with Hannah, was willing to offer this special son, Samuel, to the Lord, God blessed both the boy and his parents. Rather than force his own will on his wife, Elkanah was sensitive to her relationship with God and set his own desires aside in deference to her convictions.

Though we know little about Elkanah, his willingness to allow his little son to leave home and live at the house of the Lord demonstrated a deep trust in God. Elkanah's devotion may have had an impact on Samuel's own attitude toward his calling (1 Samuel 3:1-10). Elkanah must have been proud of his firstborn son as he watched Samuel grow up to become one of Israel's major prophets. It was Samuel who crowned Saul the first king

of Israel (1 Samuel 10:1) and later anointed a shepherd boy who would become Israel's greatest king (1 Samuel 16:12-13).