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SAMUEL HEARD OF GOD: THE FAMILY ADVENTURES OF ELKANAH AND HANNAH

Summary: The family struggles of Elkanah and Hannah offer new perspectives on dealing with the increasingly common issue of infertility. This paper employs critical analysis to uncover the historical and geographical context of the biblical event of Samuel's birth. Through hermeneutical analysis, it examines other biblical texts addressing infertility, questioning whether medicine truly fulfils the desire for a child. Additionally, a philological approach is employed to examine the meanings of place names and personal names, underscoring the symbolic significance of these events. The aim of this paper is to present the biblical example of confronting infertility, focusing on the story of Hannah and Samuel, while briefly comparing it with the infertility of Sarah and Rachel. The hypothesis states: Absolute trust in God and the dedication of one's entire life to Him give meaning to every form of family struggle. Given the first divine commandment, "Be fruitful and multiply", the question arises as to why God allows such struggles in the first place. Furthermore, it appears that a child is a reward for fulfilling a vow and that women have a diminished role in the reproductive process. Hannah's story marks a shift in both the ancient and contemporary cultural and religious understanding of motherhood.

Keywords: infertility, jealousy, suffering, artificial insemination, prayer.

Introduction

The family drama that unfolded in the household of Elkanah and Hannah contains a series of details that are often overlooked. These events are recorded in the First Book of Samuel, which serves as a continuation of the Book of Judges and a prelude to the Books of Kings. Elkanah was a God-fearing man who, in addition to Hannah, also had another wife, Peninnah. This is the first detail

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often passed over – the issue of polygamy. While it was normal at the time, it nevertheless caused significant problems. The second often-overlooked detail is that Hannah was mistreated by Peninnah because she was childless, yet Elkanah loved her more (1 Sam 1:5). Hannah's infertility was considered a great shame, causing her much suffering. The third significant detail concerns Hannah's approach to her problem – unlike Sarah (Gen 16:1–2) and Rachel (Gen 30:3), who gave their maidservants to their husbands, and unlike Rebekah, whose husband prayed on her behalf (Gen 25:21), Hannah took the initiative herself. She prayed directly to the Lord, assuming a role akin to that of a priest, asking for a child (1 Sam 1:10). The story of Hannah can serve as a point of reflection even today. One in six couples worldwide struggles with infertility, and a different, biblically inspired perspective might offer a better solution than the increasing reliance on medical technology to achieve conception through artificial means.

1. The Historical-theological context of the Book of Samuel

First and foremost, it is important to note that the Books of Samuel originally formed a single book in the Hebrew Bible. The division into two books occurred with the Greek translation, which also grouped them with the Books of Kings. Scholars highlight that the text of Samuel is one of the most poorly preserved in the Old Testament, yet it represents a unique blend of historiography, literary poetics, and ethical and theological perceptions (Garsiel, 2011). There were multiple Hebrew versions of the Books of Samuel, leading to five distinct sections: a) Samuel (1 Sam 1–7), b) Samuel and Saul (1 Sam 8–15), c) Saul and David (1 Sam 16–2 Sam 1), d) David (2 Sam 2–20), and e) Appendices (2 Sam 21–24). Consequently, 1 Samuel serves as a continuation of the Book of Judges, while 2 Samuel leads into the Books of Kings.

Within 1 Samuel, two main themes emerge. The first theme is the history of Israel through the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David. The second theme centres on the sanctuary at Shiloh and the Ark of the Covenant (Carson, France, Motyer, Wenham, 1994). Over three generations, significant political changes took place. The monarchy was established, centralizing Israel under a single rule, ultimately leading to the rise of David's dynasty. Shiloh, once the site of the Ark of the Covenant, was replaced by Jerusalem, which has remained a centre of faith, power, and politics to this day. As a result, leadership transitioned from the tribe of Ephraim to Benjamin and finally to the tribe of Judah (de Vaux, 2014, p. 229).

Some critics argue that although the book is named after Samuel, his role diminishes by the middle of the narrative, as the author shifts focus to David (Smith, 1904, p. 16). However, others present an alternative perspective, por-

traying Samuel as a theocratic leader akin to Moses. The entire nation gathered at his command, and he wielded authority surpassing that of a king (1 Sam 7; cf. Matt 7:29). This depiction of Samuel as a judge and liberator has its origins in the circumstances of his conception, in which his mother, Hannah – an infertile woman – played a crucial role. Here, parallels can be drawn with God's promise of salvation to Israel. Thus, the stories, events, and characters within the Books of Samuel intertwine with the broader narrative of God's kingdom on Earth. These accounts reveal not only the methods but also the reasons behind God's shaping of history (de Vaux, 2014, p. 229).

Through inspired writers, God grants these events their deepest meaning. Therefore, beyond political and secular history, one can also speak of the history of God's divine plan (Višaticki, Milišić, 2012, p. 229). The fulfilment of this divine plan is also reflected in the spatial characteristics of these events, making it essential to briefly mention them.

2. Geographical-theological context of the Book of Samuel

An essential aspect of biblical events is their spatial context. It must be understood that, for the people of the Old Testament, space was a place of encounter with God. The relationship between God and man shaped the spaces in which biblical events took place. The Israelites built altars and sanctuaries, which were identified with God's presence – His "enthronement" in space (Berković, 2009, p. 52)[1]. These places then became sacred and later turned into pilgrimage sites (Modrić, 2013, p. 83).

The geographical scope of the story of Samuel extends from Ramah and Shiloh through Hebron in the south to Jerusalem, where the United Kingdom under David's rule was ultimately established. Ramah or Ramathaim (Hebrew: Ramathayim Tsowphiym רָמָתַיִם צוֹפִים)[2] was the birthplace of Samuel[3]. His father, Elkanah, and mother, Hannah, would travel annually from Ramah to Shi-

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[1] Starting from Abraham's history, building a sanctuary required only a stone and a tree (an altar). From the time of Moses onwards, the holy place became the Tent of Meeting, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, until it was ultimately fulfilled in the construction of the Jerusalem Temple. In all these forms of sacred architecture, one spatial constant remained unchanged – the elevation, a place set apart from others, where God dwells (cf. Lujić, 2016, p. 89).

[2] Ramathaim derives from two Hebrew words: ramah (הָמָר), meaning "height" or "elevation", and tsaphah (הָפָצ), meaning "to lean forward" or "to look into the distance". A loose translation would render it as "double elevation of the observer" (Amerl, 1997, p. 436).

[3] Several settlements bore the name Ramah, leading to difficulties in pinpointing its exact location. It remains uncertain whether Samuel was born in Ramah of Ephraim or Ramah of Benjamin (1 Sam 1:1,19; 2:11; 7:17; 25:1) (Dodig, 2020, p. 164).

loh[4] to worship God (1 Sam 1:1–7). Shiloh, located in the territory of Ephraim, was the place where the priest Eleazar and Joshua divided the Promised Land (Josh 18:1). More importantly, it became one of Israel's most significant sanctuaries (Josh 21:2). Shiloh was a pilgrimage site (Hebrew: hagg)[5] visited during Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles (de Vaux, 2014, p. 295).

It was at Shiloh that Hannah prayed for the birth of Samuel and dedicated him to God (1 Sam 1:24–28), and Samuel himself grew up there (1 Sam 2:18–21). Shiloh held a strategic position, being situated on a high ground in the hill country of Ephraim. It remained the sanctuary of the Ark of the Covenant during the time of the Judges (1 Sam 1:3) until it was briefly replaced by Kiriath-Jearim near Hebron,[6] where David was anointed king, and later by Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:6–10).

For the Israelites, a sacred place was more than just a geographical location – it was holy ground where they felt God's presence and shaped their identity accordingly. At the same time, their religious understanding was deeply rooted in space, which they, in turn, shaped through their beliefs and religious practices (Pardon, 2017, p. 248).

3. Elkanah and his two wives (1 Sam 1:1–8)

The Book of Samuel represents the transition from the time of the Judges to the time of the Kings. In this transitional period, one of the central themes is Elkanah and his family, who, with their pious life, represented a picture of the "holy family". Elkanah[7] had two wives[8], Peninnah and Hannah, and like

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[4] The Hebrew word Shiyloh (שִׁילֹה) means "the one whose is peace", "peaceful", or "peacemaker" (Dodig, 2020, p. 172). It can also mean "sent" or "a gift from God" (Amerl, 1997, p. 437).

[5] The word hagg (Deut 16:16; Exod 10:9; Lev 23:41) in Hebrew signifies both a feast and a pilgrimage. The roots of this custom trace back to the time of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt when they requested permission to perform a religious service (Exod 5:1–5; 7:16, 27; 8:16; 9:1). This highlights the deep connection between religious celebration and pilgrimage, which ultimately shaped Jewish identity (Rebić, 1984, p. 520).

[6] Hebron (Mamre; Kiriath-Arba, Hebr. "City of Four" – Gen 23:2; 35:27; Josh 14:15) is located in the hill country of Judah (Josh 20:7; 21:11), at an altitude of 870 to 1000 meters above sea level. It is notable for the Cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah are buried (Gen 23; 25:5–11; 49:29–33; 50:1–14). Hebron was the first capital of the Jewish kingdom before Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:1; 1 Chr 11:1) (cf. Dodig, 2020, p. 143).

[7] The name Elkanah comes from two Hebrew words: 'el (אֵל), meaning "strong power", "strength", or "God", and qanah (קָנָה), meaning "to raise", "to create", or "to possess". Several translations of his name exist: the first meaning is "God has redeemed" or "God has obtained" (Exod 6:24), while the second is "God's zeal" or "zeal for God" (cf. Hitchcock, Roswell, 1869; Potts, 1922, p. 80).

[8] It is assumed that having two wives was a sign of wealth (cf. Carson, France, Motyer, Wenham, 1994).

any devout family, they made an annual pilgrimage to Shiloh (1 Sam 1:1–3). Since Elkanah was a Levite and could not personally offer sacrifices, his piety was reflected in his regular visits to Shiloh, especially considering the extremely poor character of the two priests, Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sam 2:12–17). However, Elkanah believed that the sacrifice offered was an effective means of transmitting God's grace (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, 1893, p. 176). The text further reveals that behind the story lies a microcosm of human drama and family complications. The first observation draws attention to polygamy. Although polygamy was not forbidden (Deut 21:15–17) and during that time everyone lived as they saw fit (Judges 21:25), it seems that it still created tensions within the family (1 Sam 1:4–7). The second observation reveals the character of Hannah, a woman excluded from the joy of motherhood, which led to continuous torment from Peninnah.

3.1. The struggles of Hannah and Peninnah (1 Sam 1:4–8)

As previously mentioned, entire families made an annual pilgrimage to the sanctuary to participate in worship during festivals. Families offered animal sacrifices, and after the sacrifice, a portion of the meat was returned to the worshipers, who customarily ate it at a communal feast before the Lord. Further details are provided in 1 Sam 2:13–16. When Elkanah offered a sacrifice, he gave a larger portion of the remains to Peninnah and all her sons and daughters, while only a single portion was given to Hannah, as he had no children with her.[9] These portions of meat were highly valued and, in this case, led to favouritism, jealousy, bitterness, and distress. Verse 6 states that her rival provoked her bitterly to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. Peninnah's behaviour was highly inappropriate. However, disputes in polygamous households were common, and the most prevalent cause was always jealousy over the husband's superior affection, as in the case of Hannah (cf. Gen 21:9–10; 30:1,15) (Carson, France, Motyer, Wenham, 1994).

3.2. The problem of infertility in the Old Testament

Infertility in the Bible is an interesting phenomenon, given that the beginning of the Bible speaks of the imperative "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28; 9:1,7; 35:11), which sometimes seems like a reward for fulfilling the covenant

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[9] In some translations, the text reads, "To Hannah, he gave a worthy portion", that is, a larger share, following the Eastern custom of showing respect to dear or honoured guests (1 Sam 9:24; cf. Gen 43:34) (cf. Carson, France, Motyer, Wenham, 1994).

promise (Gen 17). The study of biblical texts on human reproduction and infertility suggests that the relationship between man, God, and woman is a place of connection but also of conflict (Vivian, 2022, p. 270). First, analysing the role of man in conception, some authors (Stiebert, 2012, p. 218; Erbele-Küster, 2017, p. 106; Quick, 2021, p. 46) suggest that the male seed (Heb. zera), which simultaneously denotes offspring (cf. Gen 3:15; 17:7–10; Exod 28:43; Deut 1:8; 4:37; Ezra 2:59:2), is parallel with "agricultural seed", implying that the woman is perceived as the soil into which the seed is sown. This reflects a specific monogenetic[10] approach to childbirth. In this sense, in Babylonian poetry, a barren woman is compared with an abandoned field (Stol, 2000, p. 1–2). However, according to this approach, male infertility can also be discussed (cf. Ruth 1:1–5)[11]. Secondly, if the father, the man, provides the seed, a parallel is drawn with God the Father, who shapes the child in the woman's womb (cf. Job 10:8–12; Ps. 139:13–16; Jer. 1:5), reflecting the connection between monogenetic and monotheism (Vivian, 2022, p. 274). Thus, "agricultural" metaphors become an image of the reciprocity between man and God as creators and woman and land as the created. This aligns with the pervasive cultural and patriarchal atmosphere of that time (Vivian, 2022, p. 269). The creation account states that God created male (Heb. zakar) and female (Heb. neqebah), which literally means that God "remembers" and "opens" (cf. Gen 1:26–27; Gen 21:1; 30:22). In connection with this, in several biblical stories, God is said to open[12] a woman's womb (Gen 17:18; 18:13–14; 30:22; 1 Sam 1:19–20; Luke 1:24–25). However, it is important to note that while God "opens the womb", He does not close it – rather, it is naturally closed until He chooses to open it as a blessing (Moss, Baden, 2015, p. 69)[13]. The Psalms also suggest that "opening the womb" is not only a blessing but also a divine reward: *Yes, sons are a gift from the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward* (Ps 127:3) and a reward for a man who walks

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[10] The monogenetic understanding of reproduction in the Hebrew Bible implies that the mother does not contribute to the essence of the child but is merely the one in whom the seed is planted; she nurtures and gives birth to it but is not the source of the seed herself (Delaney, 2001, p. 454; Levine, 2002, p. 341; Chapman, 2016, p. 122).

[11] An analysis of the potential etymological heritage of the names of Naomi's sons, who have no children with Ruth and Orpah, highlights that the names of both their husbands imply transience. Mahlon may be etymologically linked to the Hebrew verbal root ḥālā ("to be sick"). Kilion could be associated with a similar form found in Isa 10:22 and Deut 28:65, which appears to carry a meaning similar to "destruction" (Schipper, 2016, p. 82) and could be etymologically connected to the Hebrew verb kālā, meaning "to stop, perish, disappear." Perhaps their names were meant to suggest that they were less than ideal reproductive candidates (Koepf, 2012, p. 61).

[12] The Hebrew pathach (פָּתַח) means "to open wide, loosen, plough, carve" (The Word, Bible Software, version 5.0.0.1450).

[13] The authors refer to the text about Leah and Rachel, whose wombs were closed by their fault (Moss, Baden, 2015, p. 56–57).

in God's ways: *Your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the inner rooms of your house; your children will be like olive branches, as they sit all around your table* (Ps 128:3) (Vivian, 2022, p. 275).

3.3. The problem of infertility today

The issue of infertility remains highly relevant, important, and challenging in modern society. It appears that nearly one in six couples worldwide faces infertility, affecting about 15–17% of partnerships (Aničić, 2007, p. 182). In the past, couples struggling with infertility had limited options, but today, medical technologies offer hope, including hormonal therapy, in vitro fertilization[14], and intracytoplasmic sperm injection. These processes are often lengthy and expensive, significantly impacting couples psychologically and emotionally, as they do not guarantee success. We seem to live in a world where people believe they have the right to have a child at any cost, in the way and time they choose. This raises the question of how much medicine, from a Christian perspective, can truly provide what belongs to humanity. Infertility represents a complex life crisis on multiple levels. Beyond physical and emotional challenges, couples face societal expectations and pressure. Thus, infertility is far more than just a medical issue. Medical solutions do not address the root cause and fail to take a holistic approach, treating infertility as an isolated problem rather than part of a whole. Peterson (1985, p. 23–25) outlines three characteristics of the medical perspective: 1) human life is reduced to mere cell fusion (production), 2) the physician is seen as a bringer of happiness, fulfilling desires without questioning the meaning of infertility, and 3) the complete neglect of the human being, who, beyond being material, also possesses profound depths. While medicine appears to offer a solution, it often uncritically promotes a life free of suffering, human dominance, and unnatural control over all processes. The Christian message does not condemn the human desire for progress but seeks to awaken a holistic understanding of humanity – one that collaborates not only with a partner, but also with God.

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[14] In vitro fertilization (IVF) – The Catechism of the Catholic Church (No. 2377) states that IVF is "morally unacceptable" because it separates the marital act from procreation and establishes the "dominance of technology" over human life. Donum Vitae compares IVF to abortion, saying that "through these procedures, with apparently opposing purposes, life and death are subjected to the decision of man, who thus decrees himself as the giver of life and death". More information at: *Hrvatska Katolička Mreža* [online], access: 10.07.2025, <https://hkm.hr/zivot/koji-je-stav-katolicke-crkve-o-umjetnoj-oplodnji/>.

4. What Hannah does despite Peninnah's jealousy – Sequence of events

In the following text, we read that Hannah is downcast and desperate, refusing to eat (cf. 1 Sam 1:7). Elkanah notices her sadness and asks, *Am I not more to you than ten sons?* (1 Sam 1:8), thereby raising the issue of infertility and the possibility of deepening their relationship (Aničić, 1999, p. 199). It seems that Elkanah feels personally responsible for compensating for Hannah's lack of children and is more compassionate than any other husband of a barren woman in the Bible. On the other hand, it appears that Elkanah has lost hope of having children with Hannah, as he does not pray to God on her behalf, unlike Isaac (cf. Gen 25:21) (Berlin, 2004, p. 228). However, in this case, Hannah seeks God's help herself. Examining biblical texts that discuss the struggles of barren women, Hannah[15] seems to be the only woman who acts like a patriarch or leader of Israel, directly addressing God, praying, and making a vow that if her prayer is answered, her son will serve the Lord all his life (1 Sam 1:9–11). Such people were known as Nazirites – consecrated individuals (Num 6:1; Judg 13:5)[16] who vowed never to cut their hair, a visible symbol of their dedication to God. In the same way, Hannah promised that her son would be a lifelong Nazirite.

Her prayer was observed by Eli, the high priest in Shiloh, who, seeing her lips move but hearing no words, initially accused her of drunkenness. However, after hearing her explanation, he blessed and supported her prayer (1 Sam 1:12–18).

4.1. The birth of Samuel – God fulfils prayers

The continuation of the text describes Samuel's birth. Verses 19–20 intertwine human and divine actions. In one sense, Samuel's birth was entirely natural, yet Hannah's barrenness being overcome was purely God's work. Hannah had no doubt that God had answered her prayer.

A Midrashic story tells of how the news spread that an extraordinary child named Samuel would be born – one who would be very wise and God-fearing. Because of this, many women at the time named their sons Samuel, hoping that

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[15] The name Hannah has several meanings that could suggest her life role. First, the name Hannah in the Bible also appears as a male name. It is mentioned in Genesis 36:2 as Anah (עֲנָה) and in Judges 3:31 as Anath (עֲנָת), meaning "answer." Additionally, the name Hannah is hidden within the names Chanan 1) (חָנָן) Chr 8:23) and ChananYah (חֲנַנְיָה), which could mean "to bend or bow in kindness towards the inferior, to plead; or "grace, mercy, she who is favoured; God has given favour" (The Word, Bible Software, version 5.0.0.1450; Amerl, 1997, p. 395; Potts, 1922, p. 30–31).

[16] Nazirites fulfil their vows through three rules: first – dedication to God, allowing God's power to work within them; second – renouncing an easy life; and third – special belonging to God, for example, when a mother dedicates her child (Cazelles, 2014, p. 149).

their child would be the blessed one. Despite the many boys named Samuel, observers concluded that the expected Samuel had not yet been born. Then, on Rosh Hashanah, Hannah bore a son and named him Samuel. The child grew in goodness and strength, leading people to recognize that he was the one they had awaited.

The name Samuel could be interpreted from the Hebrew root *sha'al*, which sounds like the phrase *asked of God,* aligning with Hannah's name (Hebr. *Hannah*: answer, prayer, God has given favour). However, this interpretation would more closely relate to the name Saul. A more accurate meaning of Samuel's name would be *Shem-El*, meaning *name of God.* Perhaps the biblical author is emphasizing that Samuel was truly a man sent by God, unlike Saul (Carson, France, Motyer, Wenham, 1994).

There is also an interpretation regarding the seven occurrences of the root שאל (*sha'al*) in the legend of Samuel's birth. For instance, Eli blesses Hannah with the words: *Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him (אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַל שְׁאֵלָה);* Hannah gives birth to a son and names him Samuel (שְׁמוּאֵל), saying, *Because I have asked (שָׁאַל) him of the Lord.* When she brings the child to the temple, she declares, *I prayed (שָׁאַלְתִּי) for this child, and the Lord has granted (שָׁאַל) my petition. Therefore, I have given him (שָׁאַל) to the Lord as long as he lives: he is given (שָׁאַל) to the Lord.*

This suggests that the root *sha'al* provides a stronger etymological basis for Saul's name than for Samuel's (Na'aman, 2017, p. 59). It implies that the story of Samuel might actually be a story about Saul[17]. However, the debate remains unresolved due to a lack of evidence. Na'aman (2017, p. 57–58) offers a connection to Shiloh, suggesting that the word *Shiloh* (שִׁילֹה) may derive from the root[18] שאל with the suffix –ō, meaning *oracle inquiry.* This is fitting since Shiloh was indeed a temple, a sacred place. According to Na'aman, the seven references to *sha'al* in Samuel's story relate to Shiloh, where the most significant events occurred. The name Shiloh appears three times (1 Sam 1:3, 9, 24), and by adding seven indirect references to its root, the author strengthened the connection between the narrative and the holy place, emphasizing the fulfilment of God's promise.

The chapter concludes with Hannah fulfilling her vow, with Elkanah's full consent, dedicating Samuel to God. They also brought other gifts and offerings to Shiloh (v. 24), but their greatest sacrifice was leaving the young child at the sanctuary (Carson, France, Motyer, Wenham, 1994).

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17 The discussion on the root of the word can be found in: Hempel, 1930; Lods, 1932.

18 Similarly, this has been confirmed in other biblical names and toponyms derived from the same verbal root (e.g., Shelah [Gen 38:5,11], Shealtiel [Hag 1:12,14; 2:2], and Mishal [1 Chr 6:59]) (Na'aman, 2017, p. 57–58).

4.2. Hannah's Song of Praise

The second chapter begins with Hannah's song of praise, thanking God for answering her prayer. Due to its many stereotypical images, some commentators believe that Hannah's song was a later psalm placed in her mouth by the biblical writer. It seems likely that her original words were expanded.

Most of the prayer focuses on God and His deeds in a broad sense – there is no one like God. He weakens the mighty and strengthens the weak. He enriches the poor and impoverishes the rich. God can bring about any reversal, just as He did for Hannah. The biblical author likely used the song as a whole to provide a theological perspective on the events in 1 and 2 Samuel (Jamieson, 1871, p. 599).

This is evident in the final verse: *He will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed.* Just as Hannah's first prayer foreshadowed Samuel's rise over Eli's sons, this line anticipates the future reign of David (Berlin, 2004, p. 232).

4.3. Resolving peripeteia through Hannah's devotion to God

Hannah was Elkanah's favoured wife (cf. 1 Sam 1:5; *Hannah* = Engl. *favoured* = Hebr. חַנָּה), which some authors see as a reason for her barrenness, especially in comparison to Sarah and Rachel, who were also beloved yet childless (Hedman, 2016, p. 35). Unlike her predecessors, Hannah does not complain to her husband or her rival, nor does she give her maidservant to Elkanah to bear children on her behalf. Instead, she fully entrusts her fate to God.

The importance of Eli's blessing is also emphasized, as Hannah ceases to weep after receiving it (cf. 1 Sam 1:18). Additionally, she becomes the heroine of her own story – Elkanah speaks to her rather than the other way around (v. 8), her rival Peninnah torments her (vv. 5–7), and her barrenness leads to sorrow rather than anger or jealousy (v. 10). She resolves the family drama through silent prayer and direct communication with God.

This persistent, silent prayer led Eli to initially believe she was drunk, as prayers in ancient times were always spoken aloud (Berlin, 2004, p. 230). According to rabbinic tradition, Hannah was the first to use the title *Lord of Hosts* (v. 11), possibly signifying her prophetic and spiritual status (Hedman, 2016, p. 28).

Ultimately, Hannah receives another blessing from Eli, leading to the birth of five more children (1 Sam 2:20–21)[19]. Thus, her story is not a guarantee that God will always remove barrenness or other struggles, but rather a testament to the power of trustful prayer throughout life's challenges. The biblical text highlights how God overcomes not just infertility, but all family hardships.

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[19] God doubles prayers, especially if a vow made to Him is fulfilled (cf. Job 42:10).

Conclusion

By examining the historical, geographical, and religious context of the Book of Samuel, as well as the biblical narrative of infertility, emphasis is placed on a holistic approach to this theme. It is important to consider not only the issue itself but also history, space, and the cultural-religious atmosphere of a people. The ways in which biblical materials related to the difficult topic of infertility are adopted in religious discourse open a new perspective on the co-operation between man and woman, as well as between God and woman.

Today, one in six couples faces infertility problems, and solutions are primarily sought in medicine. However, these solutions address only physical deficiencies, without questioning the spiritual and emotional reasons behind them. Medical solutions fulfil an immediate desire, often without consequences, without taking responsibility, and without reflecting on the meaning of such suffering. The idea that everyone has a "right" to a child, in the way and time they wish, is a flawed stance because man is not and cannot be the master of life.

Here, Hannah's story offers an incentive for reflection. It emphasizes the importance of firstly working on the relationship between a man and a woman ("Am I not worth more to you than ten sons?"). Furthermore, despite the common belief that a woman is solely responsible for infertility, Hannah's character reveals that the key lies in taking the initiative – not blaming anyone or involving a third party, but instead laying everything before God, praying earnestly, and making a lifelong vow. This introduces an element of responsibility, as a child cannot be merely the fulfilment of a temporary desire but must be seen as an event that encompasses the spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of a person.

The metaphor that a woman is merely the "soil" that is "ploughed" and into which the "seed is placed" is concerning, even within Christian circles. Hannah breaks this allegory by showing that a spiritual and emotional stance, along with an intimate relationship with God – and ultimately with one's spouse – can give true meaning to suffering, personal struggles, and all forms of family challenges.

The question of why God allows infertility remains open, especially considering that His first command was, "Be fruitful and multiply". However, it seems that through this, the Bible seeks to highlight the open, sincere co-operation between God and humanity and the way in which a person can become more aware of the value of life on earth.

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Samuel, do którego modlił się Bóg: rodzinne przygody Elkany i Anny

Streszczenie: Rodzinne zmagania Elkany i Anny oferują nowe perspektywy radzenia sobie z coraz powszechniejszym problemem niepłodności. W niniejszym artykule zastosowano analizę krytyczną, aby odkryć historyczny i geograficzny kontekst biblijnego wydarzenia narodzin Samuela. Poprzez analizę hermeneutyczną bada inne teksty biblijne dotyczące niepłodności, kwestionując, czy medycyna rzeczywiście spełnia pragnienie posiadania dziecka. Ponadto zastosowano podejście filologiczne, aby zbadać znaczenie nazw miejsc i imion, podkreślając symboliczne znaczenie tych wydarzeń. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie biblijnego przykładu konfrontacji z niepłodnością, skupiając się na historii Anny i Samuela, a jednocześnie krótko porównując ją z niepłodnością Sary i Racheli. Hipoteza głosi: bezwzględne zaufanie Bogu i poświęcenie Mu całego swojego życia nadają sens każdej formie zmagań rodzinnych. Biorąc pod uwagę pierwsze przykazanie Boże: „Bądźcie płodni i rozmnażajcie się", pojawia się pytanie, dlaczego Bóg w ogóle pozwala na takie zmagania. Ponadto wydaje się, że dziecko jest nagrodą za wypełnienie przysięgi, a kobiety odgrywają mniejszą rolę w procesie rozrodczym. Historia Hannah wprowadza zmianę zarówno w starożytnym, jak i współczesnym kulturowo-religijnym pojmowaniu macierzyństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: niepłodność, zazdrość, cierpienie, sztuczne zapłodnienie, modlitwa.