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A Model of Challenge: The Rabbinic Understanding of Hannah's Prayer in I Samuel

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March 1, 2007

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for rabbinic ordination.
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Los Angeles, CA

In loving memory of

My great-grandmother Etta Dordek

And her heroic cousin Hannah whose name I bear

זכרונן לברכה

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Acknowledgements

Great-Grandma Etta helped me choose Hannah as my Hebrew name when I was ten. Hannah was the name of a distant cousin she remembered from her childhood in Poland. Hannah was the community midwife, and baked challah for the poor on Shabbat.

The Hannah of the Bible, like my namesake, was a quietly courageous woman: with just a few words, prayed quietly to God, she altered the course of Jewish history. Along the way she also transformed notions of Jewish prayer.

I brought a love of Midrash and a love of Hannah's prayer to Dr. Barth hoping that I somehow had a thesis topic. Little did I know that the Rabbis shared my fascination with Hannah, even creating new versions of her conversation with God. Thank you to Dr. Barth for giving up part of his sabbatical to pour over texts with me, to give structure to my ideas, and to help me uncover the link between the midrashim. Thank you to all of the HUC faculty and staff who have helped me reach this point.

Thank you to my HUC classmates. We have truly formed a family these past six years. A toast to Thursdays, walk-and-works, and windowless rooms. And thank you to my family, for celebrating each step of this journey with me.

Chapter 1: Introduction

יהוה צבאות אם ראה תראה בעני אמתך
וזכרתני ולא תשכח את אמתך
ונתתה לאמתך זרע אנשים
ונתתיו ליהוה כל ימי חייו
ומורה לא יעלה על ראשו

Adonai Tzevaot, if you look clearly at the frustration of Your maidservant,
and remember me, and do not forget Your maidservant,
and give to Your maidservant a male seed,
then I will give him to Adonai all the days of his life,
and a razor will never be upon his head.
- I Samuel 1:11

Hannah, with this one statement, influences Jewish history forever. This prayer, encompassing merely a single verse in the book of Samuel, provides a model of spontaneous, personal prayer that has, and will, inspire generations. Attracted to the powerful simplicity of this prayer, I set out in this thesis to explore how the Rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash respond to this prayer. Do they explore and analyze the words of Hannah's prayer? Do they allow a woman's prayer to serve as a model of prayer?

The Rabbis do indeed have many things to say about Hannah's prayer. They play with her language, they extract principles from her actions, and they grant her a high status among our biblical ancestors. In the following chapters I will examine the language of the biblical text, and then delve into the rabbinic material that uses Hannah's narrative, seeking a broad understanding of how the Rabbis craft Hannah's character and words.

Hannah's Story

In the opening lines of I Samuel, readers familiar with the Bible encounter a well-known pattern: two rival wives - one is fertile and one, the favored one, is barren: Peninah bears their husband Elkanah many children, while Hannah remains barren. Robert Alter notes that the introduction of the characters in I Samuel 1 "immediately alerts the audience to the unfolding of the familiar annunciation type-scene."[1] Hannah's barrenness, and the later birth of Samuel, do fit into this biblical motif, yet as with any manifestation of a biblical motif, it is in the details and small variations that readers can learn the most.

In the case of Hannah, it is in the way in which she confronts her troubles that we find gems of meaning. Hannah, as described by Leila Bronner, approaches God with a "curious combination of assertiveness and humility:"[2] Hannah prays, leaving a single line of prayer for future Jews to read and use over and over again. Eugene Peterson writes, "Ordinary Hannah, marginal Hannah, unordained Hannah comes into view at this moment as one of our premier exemplars of prayer."[3]

The Book of Samuel

The Hannah narrative, contained completely within two chapters, opens the book of Samuel. The narrative of the book of Samuel, divided into I and II Samuel, chronicles the shift from the rule of the Israelites by a series of judges, to the rule of kings.[4] The

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[1] Robert Alter, *The David Story.* New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999, 3. In *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* Robert Alter compares the type-scenes of Homeric literature with patterns in Biblical narrative. Events in a "type-scene" follow a fixed pattern, and Alter comments that many Biblical narratives "are dependent on the manipulation of a fixed constellation of predetermined motifs." Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative.* New York: Basic Books, 1981, 51.

[2] Leila L. Bronner, "Hannah's Prayer: Rabbinic Ambivalence," *Shofar, Winter 1999, 17:2,* 36-48. pg. 37.

[3] Eugene Peterson, *First and Second Samuel.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999, 20.

[4] The division of Samuel into two parts is not seen in the Hebrew Bible until 1517. Ralph W. Klein, *Word Biblical Commentary V. 10: I Samuel,* Waco: Word Books, 1983, xxv.

character of Samuel links these two periods, taking a prophetic role in the Temple at Shiloh, followed by anointing Saul, and later David, as kings of Israel.

The book of Samuel is usually considered part of the Deuteronomistic history, suggesting a late dating.[5] However, Alter suggests that the Deuteronomistic editor did little more than redact the existing text: "The compelling conclusion is that the Deuteronomistic editors did no more with the inherited narrative than to provide some minimal editorial framing and transition..."[6] The canonized text shows evidence of redaction after the division of the Israelite kingdom into two: Israel and Judah. Robert Alter puts the final editing during the time of King Josaiah in the seventh century B.C.E.

Regardless of how scholars date the final redaction of the material, most agree that the author incorporated previously written material.[7] Goldman points to the use of state records describing David's wars, and national literature such as the song attributed to Hannah in I Samuel 2.[8]

Prayer in the Hebrew Bible

Spontaneity and depth of personal feeling make Hannah's prayer stand out in the context of prayer in the Hebrew Bible. Hannah is not alone in offering a spontaneous prayer, yet the dominant form of communication with the divine described in the Bible is formalized, collective ritual. Moshe Greenberg notes, "The ways of human communication with God appear more contingent upon mediation and prescription; indeed the most prominent forms of worship and prayer in the Bible seem to leave little

[5] See Klein for more information on the Deuteronomistic History.
[6] Alter, *The David Story* 211.
[7] Samuel Goldman, *Samuel,* London: Soncino, 1951, ix. Klein xxx.
[8] Goldman ix.

room for free, simple, spontaneous expression."[9] While Hannah prays in the sanctuary, a place set aside for communication with the divine, she is far removed from any formal offer of sacrifice, as made clear by the bewilderment of the priest: Eli, who acts as the chief mediator between the people and God at Shiloh, has no initial understanding of Hannah's actions. Rosenberg comments, "Even the professional man of God is unable to detect the channels of divine-human rapport being established."[10]

Biblical Methodology

In examining a biblical text, a scholar approaches it with a particular type of analytic lens in order to systematically move through the material with a sense of consistency. Modern Biblical scholarship includes a number of these analytic lenses. For example, scholars may probe the Bible with a literary, historical, or feminist lens.[11] Each lens makes salient particular features within a text.

In addition, scholars may approach a text with a specific ideology or objective. For example, Christian and Jewish scholars read material in different ways as an inherent part of their scholarly training and purpose. In my examination of the Biblical material from I Samuel, on which all the subsequent rabbinic literature depends, I will cite scholars using diverse lenses, and bringing diverse ideologies to bear on the material. It is important to acknowledge that the Biblical scholarship quoted is not monolithic.

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[9] Moshe Greenberg, *Biblical Prose Praye*, Berkeley: University of California, 1983, 4.
[10] Quoted in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, Ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, Cambridge: Belknap, 1987, 124.
[11] For detailed descriptions of methods of Biblical scholarship, consult Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

All of the translations from I Samuel included here are my own. The translation of this material, as cited in the rabbinic texts examined, is consistent throughout. Translations of all other Biblical citations follow the *New JPS Translation.*[12]

Midrashic Methodology

The bulk of the primary source documents in this study are from collections of midrashim. Midrash is a category of rabbinic literature using the Bible as its primary source. Porton writes that midrash "stands in direct relationship to a fixed, canonical text..."[13] While the biblical text is essential to the formation of midrashic texts, midrash as a genre is not a formal textual analysis of the biblical material: "Midrash is not 'objective' professional exegesis...Midrash is primarily a religious activity."[14] Understanding midrash as a religious discipline allows us to read the texts for clues to the authors' intentions, in addition to seeking a greater understanding of the source text.

Working with midrashim poses a number of methodological challenges. First, midrashic works are not composed by single authors, but are rather collections of midrashim gathered together around an organizing principle. This fact makes it nearly impossible to date specific texts or attribute them to a specific authority. Stemberger cautions placing an importance on dating texts: "One must always remember in principle the hypothetical nature of such dates, since too many of the relevant criteria are subjective."[15] Often, the only date that can be set with much accuracy is the date of a collection's final redaction.

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[12] *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh,* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003.
[13] Quoted in H. L. Strack and G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash,* 256.
[14] Strack and Stemberger 259.
[15] Strack and Stemberger 53. See Strack and Stemberger pages 52-54 for further discussion.

Many scholarly works on midrash attempt to trace the evolution of a single idea or narrative through midrashic collections. Scholars look to peculiarities of language, citations of material in outside sources, and attributions of authorship for clues. An additional factor that contributes to midrashic analysis is the repetitive usage of material in the context of the midrashic collection.[16] The same story may appear in collections of exegetical midrashim, based on line by line exegesis of a specific biblical book, and homiletical midrashim, organized around the first verses of scriptural readings for Shabbatot or festivals.

In this study, my focus is not on the evolution of a specific text, but on gaining an understanding of the general rabbinic attitude toward Hannah. For this reason I will in essence totalize the relevant rabbinic material, largely ignoring its context within a midrashic collection and its historic relationship to similar midrashim. By grouping material instead by theme, I hope to find commonalities among texts that address Hannah, leading us to an understanding of how the rabbis create a portrait of Hannah as a model of prayer.

My analysis of individual midrashim will often mention the immediate context of a passage dealing with Hannah. Therefore, it is still important to have some knowledge of the midrashic collections cited. Texts are drawn from the following collections:[17]

I. Aggadat Bereshit:[18] A collection of twenty-eight homilies based on Genesis. Each homily contains three parts: one on Genesis material, one on texts from

[16] Barth notes, "An exegetical comment, mashal or story can show up in formally and programmatically diverse Rabbinic texts in connection with quite different characters, verses, or subject matter, provided a key word or situation allows for the link to be made" (3). Lewis M. Barth, "Textual Transformations: Rabbinic Exegesis of Gen. 22:14," *Bits of Honey: Essays for Samson H. Levey,* Ed. Stanley F. Chyet and David H. Ellenson, Scholars Press: Atlanta 1993, 3-23.

[17] The following information is from Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash.* See this work for more extensive descriptions of these collections.

the prophets, and one on material from Psalms. Rav, a tenth century authority, is often credited with compiling this text.

II. Genesis Rabbah:[19] One of the oldest collections of exegetical midrashim. Organized according to Genesis, Genesis Rabbah contains a mixture of short exegetical explanations, aggadic interpretations, and parables. Scholars date this collection to the fifth century.

III. Midrash Shmuel:[20] A thirty-two chapter work on the book of Samuel. Scholars recognize the material as early, but cannot come up with a conclusive date. All the rabbis cited in the text are Palestinian.

IV. Midrash Tanchuma:[21] R. Tanchuma, a fourth century Palestinian rabbi, is the authority most often cited in this collection. Midrash Tanchuma is a series of homilies based on the Torah. It was most likely redacted soon after Tanchuma's time, around the year 400 C.E.

V. Pesikta Derav Kahana:[22] A collection of sermons for feasts and special Shabbatot. The bulk of the material was probably compiled during the fifth century, but the text did not reach its final form for centuries.

VI. Pesikta Rabati:[23] A collection of sermons for feasts and special Shabbatot. Pesikta Rabati is difficult to date because it was compiled from a number of disparate sources. Scholars suspect the collection was formalized in the sixth or seventh century.

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[18] Strack and Stemberger 339-340.
[19] Strack and Stemberger 300-308.
[20] Strack and Stemberger 390-391.
[21] Strack and Stemberger 329-333.
[22] Strack and Stemberger 317-322.
[23] Strack and Stemberger 322-329.

VII. Seder Olam:[24] An ancient text covering history from Adam through the end of the Persian period. This collection was redacted early in the rabbinic period, as is evidenced by references to the text in the Talmud.

Just as it is difficult to date midrashic material, it is also difficult to attribute the material to a specific author. Throughout this study I will use "the Rabbis" as a generic term for the authors of the text under discussion. This phrase is used with the understanding that the rabbis represented in these texts span hundreds of years and large geographic areas. The collections themselves often attribute passages to specific rabbis. In these cases, I may discuss the text using the name of the cited authority. As with "the Rabbis," citing a rabbi's name is done with an understanding that this attribution may not be accurate.

[24] Strack and Stemberger 354-355.

Chapter 2: The Biblical Text

The rabbinic authors of the Talmud and Midrash possessed a deep knowledge of biblical material, and used this knowledge in complex and clever ways. Before turning to the rabbinic usage of Hannah's prayer, it is important to closely examine the biblical text itself. This chapter attempts to outline key ideas and textual issues found in I Samuel, in preparation for examining the rabbinic material that creatively constructs arguments and stories using these ideas and issues.

Translation: I Samuel 1:10-13[25]

י וְהִיא מָרַת נָפֶשׁ וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל עַל־יְהוָה וּבָכֹה תִבְכֶּה׃
יא וַתִּדֹּר נֶדֶר וַתֹּאמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אִם־רָאֹה תִרְאֶה | בָּעֳנִי
אֲמָתֶךָ וּזְכַרְתַּנִי וְלֹא־תִשְׁכַּח אֶת־אֲמָתֶךָ וְנָתַתָּה לַאֲמָתְךָ זֶרַע
אֲנָשִׁים וּנְתַתִּיו לַיהוָה כָּל־יְמֵי חַיָּיו וּמוֹרָה לֹא־יַעֲלֶה
עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ׃
יב וְהָיָה כִּי הִרְבְּתָה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְעֵלִי שֹׁמֵר אֶת־פִּיהָ׃
יג וְחַנָּה הִיא מְדַבֶּרֶת עַל־לִבָּהּ רַק שְׂפָתֶיהָ נָעוֹת וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא
יִשָּׁמֵעַ וַיְחְשְׁבֶהָ עֵלִי לְשִׁכֹּרָה׃

1:10 And she was bitter in her soul, so she prayed to Adonai, while weeping heavily.
1:11 And she vowed a vow saying, "Adonai Tzevaot, if you look clearly at the frustration of Your maidservant, and remember me, and do not forget Your maidservant, and give to Your maidservant a male seed, then I will give him to Adonai all the days of his life, and a razor will never be upon his head.
1:12 And it happened, because she continued to pray before Adonai, that Eli watched her mouth.
1:13 For Hannah was speaking from her heart: only her lips quivered, but her voice was not heard, so Eli thought she was drunk.

[25] I have chosen to provide a translation and critical notes for this short selection both for the richness of the biblical text itself, and in preparation for the prevalence of these verses in the rabbinic material discussed in later chapters.

Critical Notes

1:10

bitter in her soul The phrase מָרַת נָפֶשׁ poses a challenge for translating. While מרה is consistently translated as "bitter," the translation of נפשׁ varies by both translator and context. The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* lists "throat," "breath," "desire," "person," and "soul" among the many possibilities for נפשׁ.[26] While "soul" is the appropriate translation for only a select number of occurrences, it seems to be the appropriate choice for this verse because of Hannah's emotional state: "Only the group of passages that speak of the misery and sorrow...of the נפשׁ may be unequivocally and always appropriately translated 'soul' in accord with English usage."[27]

מרה appears in the construct state (מרת) with נפשׁ fifteen times. BDB[28] translates the phrase as "bitterly wretched." However, given the arguments made by the theological dictionaries, I felt it was important to retain "soul" because it connects with the image of Hannah praying from her heart in verse 13. In addition, I chose to retain the translation of מרה as "bitter." "Bitter" seems to encompass the feeling of jealously that Hannah may have felt toward Peninah, while "distressed" or "wretched" do not capture that sense.

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[26] *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* Ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998. Entry on נפשׁ.
[27] Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament, Vol. 2.* Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997, 148. A similar argument is made in *Theological Dictionary* 509.
[28] Francis Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon,* Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004, 659.

Other occurrences of מָרַת נָפֶשׁ in the Bible capture similar themes, referring to the loss of children rather than to barrenness. In II Samuel 17, King David and his men are described as מרי נפש, and are compared to a bear that has had her cubs taken from her: "*You know," Hushai continued, "that your father and his men are courageous fighters, and they are as* ***desperate*** *as a bear in the wild robbed of her whelps."*[29] Elsewhere in the Bible, Job tells his visitors twice that he is speaking from the bitterness of his soul: *I will complain in the bitterness of my soul; I will give rein to my complaint, speak in the bitterness of my soul.*[30]

bitter ***in her*** *soul* "In her" is not explicitly in the Hebrew. However, all translations add some extra English words in order to make a smooth transition from the pronoun "she" to the phrase מָרַת נָפֶשׁ. Some translations chose to begin the verse with "in," but I felt that beginning with "she was" emphasized that bitterness was a state of being that consumed Hannah.

she ***prayed*** *to Adonai* The reflexive verb להתפלל can mean to pray, intervene, or intercede. While all three options are appropriate for Hannah's actions toward God, "to pray" is the most common translation when followed by על.

while ***weeping heavily*** These few verses from I Samuel 1 contain multiple examples of repetitive verb roots. Here, the root בכה appears twice: first in the form of an infinitive absolute construct, and second as a finite verb: ובכה תבכה. The appearance of the infinitive absolute "emphasize[s] the finite verb in the modal

[29] II Samuel 17:8a. Hushai described David and his men in this way when Absalom is in pursuit of them.
[30] Job 7:11; 10:1.

imperfect, strengthening the force of the obligation."[31] Everett Fox translates this type of construct in the pattern *verb, yes, verb.* I chose to translate occurrences of doubled roots as an indication of extreme action. Driver comments on this form as it relates to Samuel, "The expression of a condition is often emphasized by the addition of the infinitive absolute."[32]

1:11

*And she **vowed a vow*** This phrase is another example of the same verb root appearing in two consecutive words. I chose to translate ותדר as "vowed" to emphasize the root repetition. In this example the second appearance of the root is a noun. While this is different than the phrases containing an infinitive absolute, it suggests a similar strengthening of the action. This particular phrasing is "the usual formula introducing a vow narrative."[33] For example, the same phrasing appears in Genesis in reference to Jacob: *Jacob then made a vow, saying, "If God remains with me..."*[34] This reference to Hannah is the only feminine form of the phrase.

saying A number of translations skip ותאמר in their translations. Including its meaning helps to set up Eli's interruption of Hannah's speaking by illustrating that Hannah was in an active state of praying.

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[31] *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 248.
[32] S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913, 12.
[33] *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 242. Also see this selection for more detailed information on the נדר.
[34] Gen 28:20

Adonai Tzevaot Hannah is the first Biblical character to address God using this name.[35] צבאות can be translated as either "armies" or "hosts." I chose to retain a transliteration of the Hebrew to allow more flexibility for interpretation. The Rabbis, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, interpreted צבאות in a number of ways. BDB notes that this name was first used in writing around the time of King David, reflecting David's status as a warrior.[36]

*if you **look clearly*** אם־ראה תראה is an additional example of an infinitive absolute paired with a finite verb. "Clearly" reflects the double root and intensifies Hannah's request of God. NJB translates this phrase, "should you condescend to notice."[37] I felt this translation seemed more brazen than the original Hebrew text merited.

*at the **frustration** of your maidservant* Affliction, frustration, and poverty are all possible translations of עני. I considered using "poverty" to demonstrate that Hannah was poor because of lack of children. However, I felt that "frustration" more accurately reflected the emotion that would drive her to appear in the temple sanctuary.

*at the frustration of your **maidservant*** BDB notes that אמה is used when addressing another person with a "token of humility. This appearance of אמתך is the first

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[35] This innovation is discussed later in the chapter.
[36] BDB 839. Dvora Weisberg adds nuance to BDB's description: "Although it depicts God as the leader of hosts and has military allusions, it is often used in non-military situations and seems to be a common reference for God in the period of the monarcy." Dvora Weisberg, "Men Imagining Women Imagining God: Gender Issues in Classical Midrash," *Agendas for the Study of Midrash in the Twenty-First Century,* Ed. Marc Lee Raphael, Williamsburg: College of William and Mary, 1999, 69.
[37] *The New Jerusalem Bible.*

of three times that Hannah humbles herself in her address to God. The Rabbis will take special note of the threefold repetition of this title.

*and remember **me** and do not forget your maidservant* Hannah's use of "me" in the midst of repeated references to herself as "your maidservant" brings our attention back to Hannah. While Hannah seems to be attempting to construct a formal prayer, her passion breaks out when she reverts to referring to herself as "me."

*and **remember** me and **do not forget** your maidservant* The use of two verbs with nearly identical meanings (remember and not forget) highlights the intensity of Hannah's demands.

*and will **give** to your maidservant a male seed, then I will **give** him to Adonai* The parallel use of the root נתן makes clear the tension in Hannah's request: she wants God to give, but will then give back.

*and will give to your maidservant a male seed, then I will give him **to Adonai*** "To Adonai" addresses God in the third person. The verbs in the prayer are in the second person, showing that Hannah is directly addressing God. The impersonal titles of maidservant and Adonai seen in this phrase formalize the language of her prayer.

*for all the days of his life and **a razor will never be upon his head**.* The identical phrase occurs in Judges 13:5 in reference to Samson. In Judges, however, a messenger of God instructs Samson's mother not to shave Samson. Here, in contrast, Hannah vows to not shave Samuel's hair without God placing any requirements

on her. The construction of עלה על in this setting is an example of an inanimate object going against something.[38]

1:12

And it happened "And it happened" is the translation used by NKJB.[39] Introducing the verse with this phrase shows that Eli noticed Hannah because she continued to pray.

*as she **continued** to pray before Adonai* הרבתה is from the root to "multiply" or "increase." "Continued" is a way to smoothly connect the word with the infinitive "to pray." הרבתה also suggests that Hannah's prayer may have extended beyond the words recorded in the text.

*that Eli **watched** her mouth.* The choice of שמר to describe Eli's actions is noteworthy because the verb "to see" would have equally made sense. The choice of שמר adds an official level to Eli's observances: שמר is often connected with the observance of commandments. Perhaps שמר foreshadows Eli's disapproval of Hannah's praying.

1:13

*For Hannah was **speaking from her heart*** The meaning of לב in the Bible is multifold. Varying usages of לב suggest that it was at times thought to be the seat of intellect, while at other times, the location of feelings.[40] In the case of Hannah, it appears that heart is used here as a place of emotion. Westermann notes,

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[38] BDB 748.
[39] *New Kings James Bible.*
[40] Jenni and Westermann 639.

"Emotionally accentuated appeals based on trust made to a person by God or by another person make ready use of the word."[41]

The phrase דבר על־לב is used in settings where a character is "seeking attention" or "offering comfort."[42] While this construction is used in a number of places, the usage in this verse is unique. In other instances, one party is trying to affect a second party. For example, in Judges 19:3 the phrase describes a man wooing a woman by "speaking to her heart." In Hosea 2:16 God "speaks to Israel in her heart." In contrast, Hannah is acting on her own heart, perhaps seeking to console herself.

*only her lips **quivered*** The majority of translations translate נעות as "moved." The BDB provides "quiver," "waver," and "tremble" as possible translations for נעות.[43] These possibilities convey an additional level of emotion than "moved."

Characterizing Hannah's Speech

Hannah's prayer, while described as a spontaneous response to her emotional distress, looks similar to other categories of biblical speech. The opening phrase, ותדר נדר, "and she vowed a vow" first points us toward the form of a vow. וידר נדר, according to *The Theological Dictionary,* is the typical introduction to a vow.[44] There is then, according to *The Theological Dictionary,* an explicit or implicit identification of the vow as being directed toward God. Hannah opens her vow with a direct address, יהוה צבאות, "Adonai Tzevaot." Next, the speaker introduces the condition required

[41] Jenni Westermann 639.
[42] *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* , entry on לב.
[43] BDB 631.
[44] On pages 247-248, the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* describes a typical vow structure.

by the vow with the word אִם, "if," and addresses the condition directly to God. I Samuel 1:11 continues to fit this pattern: Hannah begins with אִם, "if," and addresses God in the second person. Hannah concludes her prayer, following the established pattern, by making a promise.

While the vow is the logical form to turn to first, a number of scholars have pointed out the similarity between Hannah's prayer and Lament Psalms.[45] Lament Psalms, such as Psalms 6 and 31, communicate the extreme distress of men reaching out to God for help. Similarly, Hannah pours out her suffering to God, seeking a response.[46] Klein, in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, lists common features of Lament Psalms: 1) address to God; 2) description of distress; 3) plea for redemption; 4) statement of confidence; 5) confession of sin or innocence; 6) pledge or vow.[47] Hannah's prayer, while dramatically shorter in length than a typical psalm, incorporates a number of these features: she addresses God directly, she tells God she is suffering, and she makes a vow.[48]

A final form to examine is the petitionary prayer. Greenberg, in his work on biblical prayer, outlines the general form of a petitionary prayer: 1) Address; 2) Self-deprecation; 3) Petition; 4) Motivation.[49] Greenberg writes, "It is a natural pattern, deriving logically from the circumstances of the prayer. The pray-er needs a good that

[45] Ralph W. Klein, *Word Biblical Commentary, Waco*: Word Books, 1983, and Mary Callaway, *Sing, O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash,* Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986.
[46] See Callaway 49-51 for a more complete analysis comparing Hannah's prayer to the genre of Lament psalms.
[47] Klein 4.
[48] Interestingly, many of the rabbinic versions of Hannah's prayers, which will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, incorporate other characteristics such as "statement of confidence," and "confession of innocence."
[49] Greenberg 10.

only God can bestow."[50] Hannah's prayer, which can certainly be described as petitionary, also bears a similarity to Greenberg's pattern. Hannah addresses God as *Adonai Tzevaot,* she humbles herself through the repeated use of maidservant, and she petitions for a child. Finally, she provides motivation by connecting into God's interest in having people to serve God in the Temple. She creates a joint interest for a child between herself and God.

On a literary level, the comparison of Hannah's prayer with the typical structure of biblical vows, lament psalms, and petitionary prayers, helps to show how the biblical author created Hannah's narrative using pre-established patterns. These comparisons also help characterize Hannah's state of mind: the similarities between Hannah's words, and lament psalms and petitionary prayers, accentuate Hannah's level of grief. Like the speakers in lament psalms and petitionary prayers, Hannah sees God as her only option for seeking relief from her troubles. The structural parallels with vows also add weight to Hannah's promises to God. Her vow to dedicate Samuel seems more official when placed in the structural context of a vow.

Hannah's Independence

Hannah is just one example of a barren woman to whom God grants a child. Hannah, though, is unique in her level of independence. She repeatedly defies the norms of society. Athalya Brenner notes, "Hannah is unlike other biblical female figures who share her predicament. She is a female subject who dares to make a bargain with God,

[50] Greenberg 11.

and the bargain is accepted."[51] Hannah steps out of her expected role when she enters the sanctuary at Shiloh alone.

Comparing Hannah's story to that of other barren women in the Bible helps draw out Hannah's unique qualities. To begin, let us examine the typical components of a passage describing a barren woman giving birth or the annunciation of an important birth. Robert Alter describes three primary components of an annunciation type-scene: 1) Report of barrenness; 2) Promise of birth; 3) Cohabitation resulting in birth.[52] Hannah's story has both similarities and differences to this structure. I Samuel does include both a report of barrenness, and of cohabitation: *Hannah was childless; Elkanah knew his wife and Adonai remembered her.*[53] Hannah's story, however, is particularly remarkable in Alter's middle section. The "promise of birth" does not take place in the form of a divine messenger announcing an approaching birth. Rather, Hannah seeks out God's promise. And while God never formally makes a promise, the resulting birth of Samuel suggests that God agreed to Hannah's request.

The most prominent barren women who precede Hannah in the Hebrew Bible are Sarah and Rachel. Genesis records their reactions to infertility. Unlike Hannah, Sarah and Rachel take concrete actions that involve other people. Sarah, then Sarai, offers her maidservant Hagar to Abraham. She recognizes that God played a role in her barrenness, but does not deal with God directly: "Look, Adonai has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid..."[54] Rachel, similarly, offers her maidservant Bilhah to Jacob. Rachel reacts with anger, but she directs her anger toward Jacob, rather than God. She cries to

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[51] Athalya Brenner, "Introduction," *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings.* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, 17.
[52] Alter, *David Story* 4.
[53] I Samuel 1:2, 19.
[54] Gen 16:2

him, "Give me children, or I shall die."[55] Sarah and Rachel's solutions make Hannah's reaction more surprising. The Bible does not record Hannah speaking to Elkanah, as Sarah and Rachel spoke to their husbands. Rather, she is silent when Elkanah asks if her sadness is a result of her barrenness. Hannah breaks her silence only to God.[56]

Hannah's silence with her family can be seen as a sign of her resilience. Year after year she endures the taunts of Peninah, yet she does not lash out. Instead, the Bible tells us that each pilgrimage Hannah "wept and would not eat."[57] Yairah Amit extends this reading of Hannah's virtue by noting that Hannah remains at the family meal despite her despondence: "Hannah's remarkable sensitivity and capacity for suffering are expressed in the fact that she did not leave the table immediately but, rather, continued to respect the occasion of the family sacrificial feast and only afterwards dared to stand up and leave."[58] Hannah is able to fulfill her role in Elkanah's family, despite her tremendous pain.

Language of Hannah's Prayer

Examining the words attributed to Hannah is particularly important because of the preponderance of speech in these opening chapters of I Samuel. Carol Meyers notes: "The frequent use of dialogue and direct speech in the construction of the Hannah story also affords her the measure of visibility and individuality that is more concomitant of reported speech than of descriptive narration."[59] Readers are able to know Hannah's character through her speech.

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[55] Gen 30:3
[56] See Bronner for further detail about how other barren women react
[57] I Sam 1:7
[58] Yairah Amit, "Am I not more devoted to you than ten sons?: Male and Female Interpretations," *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings.* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, 75.
[59] Carol Meyers, "Hannah and her Sacrifice: Reclaiming Female Agency," *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings.* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, 99.

The language of Hannah's prayer demonstrates that Hannah is a woman who is strong in her faith, and acts on it independently. The very first phrase of her prayer, addressing God, is an innovation. As noted earlier, Hannah is the first biblical character to use the term יהוה צבאות, "Adonai Tzevaot," in direct reference to God. The term appears for the first time in the Bible only eight verses earlier, in an explanation of Elkanah's yearly pilgrimage.[60] Yet, it is Hannah who first utters this particular name of God in prayer.

Hannah's boldness continues in the demands she places on God. Hannah commands God לא־תשכח את־אמתך, "do not forget Your maidservant."[61] This request is in sharp contrast to Jacob's interpretation of Rachel's barrenness.[62] Jacob tells Rachel that God מנע ממך פרי־בטן, "denied you fruit of the womb."[63] When examining these two explanations of barrenness side by side, it becomes apparent that Hannah's words are more accusatory than Jacob's words. Jacob implies that God has actively chosen not to open Rachel's womb, while Hannah seems to chastise God for ignoring her; Hannah seems to approach God with a case of injustice. In fact, Hannah's words to God are heavily weighted to one side:[64] Hannah lists three conditions for God, and vows only one promise in return: She asks that God 1) look upon her suffering, 2) remember her, and 3) grant her a child. If God does these things, Hannah vows that she will dedicate Samuel to Temple service.

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[60] I Samuel 1:3
[61] I Samuel 1:11
[62] *Soncino Books of the Bible: Samuel,* Ed. Rev. Dr. A. Cohen, London: Soncino Press, 1994, 4.
[63] Gen 30:2
[64] Antony F. Campbell, *I Samuel.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003, 41.

Merely the notion that a woman would approach God in order to bargain seems audacious. Yet, nowhere in the narrative does God indicate that Hannah was impudent in her request. On the contrary, Hannah is rewarded with additional children following the dedication of Samuel.[65] One possible way to understand God's acceptance of Hannah's words is to realize that Hannah softens her demands and vow by calling herself God's maidservant. In the single verse, I Samuel 1:11, that encompasses Hannah's words in their entirety, Hannah refers to herself as God's servant three times; each time she requests action from God she humbles herself. In addition, Hannah's promise to give God something in return for God fulfilling her requests, is perhaps better than Hannah praying to God and offering nothing: "By casting her prayer in the form of a vow, she involves herself responsibly, even sacrificially, in her prayer, for she both asks and gives."[66] Hannah puts her own role as mother on the line, even as she asks God to make her a mother. The silence of God further serves to strengthen Hannah's voice. Hannah speaks to God, but God does not respond. Samuel's birth is the only indication that God heeded Hannah's bargaining.

The tenor of Hannah's speech is forceful, as she makes decisions on her own. Jobling writes, "She assumes the right to make her own vow to YHWH regarding this child and to carry it out, and at no point is this right questioned."[67] In general, the Bible frowns on women making vows. Numbers 30 discusses the importance of fulfilling vows, but qualifies the power of a vow made by a woman: A father or husband has the

[65] I Sam 2:21
[66] Peterson 19.
[67] David Jobling. *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry, I Samuel.* Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998, 172.

power to annul a woman's vow.[68] This ruling in Numbers would permit Elkanah to cancel Hannah's vow; yet the text shows Elkanah going along with Hannah's directions.

A small hint that Elkanah might be uncomfortable with the control Hannah exerts by making her own vow appears after Samuel's birth. In I Samuel 1:23 Elkanah allows Hannah to stay home with the infant Samuel and tells her, יקם יהוה את־דברו, "May Adonai fulfill His word."[69] Elkanah's words are misspoken, for Hannah's desire to remain at home until Samuel is weaned is actually a reflection of Hannah's words entirely, rather than God's words. The text of the Septuagint reflects the speakers more accurately, reading here, "the utterance of your mouth."[70] Whether or not Elkanah crediting God with Hannah's request reflects his discomfort with Hannah's vow, he takes no action to stop her.

Not only Hannah's speech, but also her body movement, place Hannah at the center of the narrative. For example, Hannah stands while her family and the priest sit. First, Hannah rises from the meal, leaving Elkanah and Peninah seated.[71] Second, the text specifically notes that Eli sat, while Hannah stood next to him.[72] Verses 12-13 also pay particular attention to Hannah's physical body. In these two verses, describing Eli's observations of Hannah, Hannah's mouth, heart, lips and voice are mentioned. These body parts help readers more fully realize that we are seeing into Hannah's mind: we not only hear her thoughts, but physically "see" inside of her.

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[68] Num 30:4-9
[69] I Sam 1:23
[70] *JPS* footnote h-h. The difference in meaning is also evident in the translation used by some Christian English Bibles (REB), where Eli hopes that God will fulfill Hannah's words.
[71] I Sam 1:9
[72] I Sam 1:9, I Sam 1:26. In the first reference the narrator describes Eli as seated, while in the second reference Hannah herself recalls that she stood. In rabbinic literature, sitting is a sign of status: people rise in the presence of sages to show respect (See Kiddushin 32b). Although this may also be the case in I Samuel, the contrast between Eli sitting and Hannah standing adds to the pattern of Hannah's movement.

The Barrenness of Hannah and Israel

The story of Hannah's barrenness, and Samuel's birth, play a significant narrative role, as indicated by its placement at the opening of the book of Samuel. The narrative acts as a bridge between Judges and Kings. Callaway writes, "The function of the birth narrative is to emphasize the role of Samuel as the last link to the golden age before the monarchy, and the prophet who tried to dissuade Israel from taking the disastrous step of choosing a king."[73] The birth narrative highlights Samuel's importance by connecting his birth with a significant interaction between a human and God.

One reading of Hannah's story suggests that so much attention is given to her plight because it is a metaphor for Israel's plight:[74] Hannah's barrenness is paralleled to Israel's barrenness and "the story of Hannah's barrenness opens to the story of Israel's barren future."[75] The metaphor and the story do connect in the end, with Hannah's child helping to bring about the end of Israel's barrenness: "Hannah's anxiety over having no children, even though Elkanah loves her, parallels Israel's anxiety over having no king in spite of the care and love of God."[76] Hannah's prayer, which appears to be about a personal, family issue, grows into a prayer about national hopes.

Hannah's vow reinforces this interpretation: Samuel does not actually answer a couple's desire for a child because his mother dedicates Samuel to God, and consequently, to the welfare of the people. What does Hannah intend by asking for a child she plans to give up? Jobling suggests that "what she wants is a son *in the service*

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[73] Callaway 40.
[74] See Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History II, I Samuel,* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989, 18-30. See Callaway's chapter, "Jerusalem Our Mother," for more information on metaphors of Israel as a woman.
[75] *The New Interpreter's Bible: Volume 2.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998, 959.
[76] *The New Interpreter's Bible* 973.

of YHWH, a son being prepared for a position of leadership in Israel."[77] Suggesting that Hannah's desire is to create a leader for Israel is a powerful claim, and puts her in an important leadership role. Jobling further notes that the story of Hannah, placed in the opening chapter of I Samuel, directly follows Judges, and more importantly, a line of strong female characters introduced in Judges.[78] Noting this, he emphasizes that Hannah allows for the role of the judge in Israel to last another generation: "As the initiative-taker in her story she is the cause of the restoration and glorification of judgeship in Samuel."[79]

It is possible to read Hannah as the woman who allows the position of judges to last another generation. However, Samuel's role, as the prophet who ordains the first of Israel's kings, makes it possible to also read Hannah as the woman who leads Israel to monarchy. This reading is supported by the placement of Hannah's story at the beginning of Samuel, rather than at the end of Judges. Hannah's prayer upon the dedication of Samuel to the Temple also reinforces this reading: the song ends with a reference to God's appointed king.[80] Antony Campbell writes, "The concluding song sweeps from Hannah's joy to Israel's joy in its God, and Israel's future security under its king."[81]

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[77] Jobling 132.
[78] Jobling 169.
[79] Jobling 171.
[80] I Sam 2:10
[81] Campbell 39.

Chapter 3: Directing Their Hearts: *Berakhot* 31

A Jew who resolves to pray completely and correctly three times a day, must adhere to dozens of liturgical regulations in the process, including regulations covering everything from words to movement.[82] The Rabbis of the Mishnah extend their interest past these details, to the pray-ers' state of mind: Prayer is not only about the mechanics, but is also about the relationship between a person and God. In *m Berakhot* 5:1 the Rabbis rule that a person should not rise to recite the *Amidah* unless he is in a condition of כובד ראש, "a respectful state of mind."[83] Proper prayer requires a person to be attuned to God with an appropriate level of reverence. The mishnah states the goal of pious men is שיכוונו לבם, "that they direct their hearts," to God.[84]

As the Rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud respond to this mishnah, they begin to extend the purview of the mishnah from a general comment about state of mind to include multiple specific points about prayer practice.[85] For example, the gemara deals with whether a prayer space should include windows, how much time should be left between prayer recitations, and whether a person can stand for the *Amidah* while laughing.[86]

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[82] There are many comprehensive works on Jewish liturgy. The following works provide an overview of liturgical development: A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and Its Development,* New York: Sacred Music Press, 1932. Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History,* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993.

[83] Ber 30b, line

[84] See Tzvee Zahavy's article, "Kavvanah for Prayer in the Mishnah and Talmud," for further discussion on kavvanah and related terms in rabbinic literature. Tzvee Zahavy, "Kavvanah for Prayer in the Mishnah and Talmud," *New Perspectives: Religion, Literature, and Society in Ancient Israel, Vol. 1,* 1987, 37-48.

[85] A shorter version of this passage also occurs in the Jerusalem Talmud, *Berakhot* 4.

[86] Ber 31a

Hannah's prayer is brought up in response to just such a question. The gemara uses the fact that Hannah's prayer was silent to refute the position that a person must pray out loud.[87] The underlying assumption is that God accepted Hannah's prayer, and therefore silent recitation of the *Amidah* must be permitted. The irony of this logic is that the biblical text tells us exactly what Hannah said, and her words were certainly not the words of the *Amidah* or any other prewritten words: Hannah prays spontaneously, yet the rabbis transfer the conditions of her prayer to the conditions of one reciting the established structure of the *Amidah.*

Rules for Prayer

The dialogue structure of the gemara seems to suggest that this previous mention of Hannah interests R. Hamnuna. The use of Hannah's prayer to answer one question prompts R. Hamnuna to exclaim,

כמה הלכתא גברוותא איכא למשמע מהני קראי דחנה, "What a number of important laws can be understood from these verses of Hannah!"[88] This exclamation launches the section of gemara that is most relevant for our study. What follows in the gemara is a virtual line-by-line exegesis of Hannah's prayer, where the gemara derives lessons and laws from each phrase in the I Samuel narrative.[89] The presence of this section is noteworthy. First, the Rabbis of the Talmud rarely spend such a concentrated amount of time on a series of biblical verses. The Talmud typically uses biblical references to back up points, rather than as an outline from which to form points. Systematically commenting on the verses of a biblical text is more typical of the genre of

[87] Ber 31a, lines 52-53.
[88] Ber 31a, lines 56-57.
[89] The Hannah narrative extends through Chapters 1 and 2 of I Samuel. The verses quoted by the this talmudic text are confined to Chapter 1.

exegetical midrash. Second, the main character throughout this passage is a woman, and the Rabbis are using her to educate men. David Biale suggests, "the male authors of canonical texts often projected onto women points of view, sometimes subversive and radical, that they were not prepared to express as their own."[90] Using a woman as an example may have allowed the Rabbis to teach more revolutionary ideas.

The Rabbis' exegesis does not follow the order of the text. Rather, the Rabbis begin in I Samuel 1:13, with a key phrase that occurs toward the end of Hannah's initial scene: הִיא מְדַבֶּרֶת עַל־לִבָּהּ, "For Hannah was speaking from her heart".[91] The Rabbis explain that this verse teaches, מכאן למתפלל צריך שיכוין לבו, "it is necessary for one who is praying to direct his heart."[92] While this interpretation begins an extended focus on Hannah, it also connects the section with the larger context of the gemara passage. The mishnah relates that pious men try to direct their hearts before praying. Here, the gemara reintroduces the practice as a law, by listing it after R. Hamnuna's exclamation that Hannah's prayer is a source of *halacha.*

Three additional laws follow in quick succession from the successive biblical phrases. From the fact that Hannah moved her lips we learn, למתפלל שיחתוך בשפתיו, "one who is praying should distinctly form (his words) with his lips."[93] Similarly, from Hannah's silence we learn אסור להגביה קולו בתפלתו, "one is forbidden to raise up one's voice during the

[90] Weisberg 65. Quoting David Biale, *Eros and the Jews.* Berkeley, 1997, 9.
[91] I Sam 1:13
[92] Ber 31a, lines 57-58.
[93] Ber 31a, line 58.

Tefilah."[94] As mentioned above, the Rabbis previously used Eli's inability to hear Hannah's words as a refutation of the suggestion that a person's voice must be heard during prayer. Using the same verse twice, to make slightly different interpretations, allows the Rabbis to closely delineate the volume of praying: a person may pray silently, but only when clearly forming the words with his lips, and a person may not pray loudly.

The third law in this string is that a person cannot pray while intoxicated: שכור אסור להתפלל, "one who is drunk is forbidden to pray."[95] The Rabbis derive this law from the biblical record of Eli's observation: ויחשבה עלי לשכרה, "so Eli thought she was drunk."[96] Further on in the text, the Rabbis use the hermeneutical technique of *hekesh* to hammer in the seriousness of this law by comparing drunkenness to idolatry.[97] Rabbi Eleazar links the phrase בת־בליעל, "daughter of wickedness," in I Samuel,[98] with בני־בליעל, "sons of wickedness,"[99] in Deuteronomy. The Deuteronomy text refers to idolatry, thus enabling the Rabbis to compare the sin of praying while intoxicated to the sin of idolatry.

The irony of all of these rulings is that Eli approaches Hannah because he believes she is not praying in an honorable manner. Eli is so disturbed that Hannah's lips are moving even though her voice is silent that he accuses her of drunkenness. Yet, the Rabbis use her behaviors and his accusation as sources of spiritual guidance. While the Rabbis do not discuss the narrative on a general enough level for readers to understand

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[94] Ber 31a, line 58.
[95] Ber 31a, line 59.
[96] I Sam 1:13.
[97] *Hekesh* is a particular type of analogy that relies on the connection of two subjects in one passage. See Mielziner 152-153 for further information. Moses Mielziner, *Introduction to the Talmud,* New York: Bloch, 1968.
[98] I Sam 1:16.
[99] Deut 13:14.

their opinion of Hannah, it seems that they are operating under an assumption that Hannah's prayer is a positive example of prayer.

The Rabbis extract a fourth rule from Hannah's second interaction with Eli. When Hannah returns to Shiloh to dedicate Samuel to the priesthood she tells Eli, אני האשה הנצבת עמכה בזה, "I am the woman who stood with you here."[100] The Rabbis understand from this that both Hannah and Eli were standing, and therefore, R. Joshua b. Levi teaches from this verse that one cannot sit within four *amot* of a person praying the *Amidah*.[101]

Legal Precedence

R. Hamnuna's excitement over the number of laws demonstrated by Hannah's actions is not an exaggeration. Indeed, a number of the laws extracted from the text in this gemara passage are found in future legal codes, and claim *Berakhot* as their source. For example, Maimonides, in *Hilchot Tefillah*, makes the following ruling about the volume of a person's prayer:

> השוויית הקול כיצד לא יגביה קולו בתפלתו
> ולא יתפלל בלבו אלא מחתך הדברים בשפתיו
> ומשמיע לאזניו בלחש...
>
> Controlling the voice. What is this? One should not raise his voice during his *Amidah,* and one should not pray in his heart. Rather, one should pronounce the words with his lips, and make it audible to his ears in a whisper...[102]

Maimonides' law combines two rulings in the gemara passage: one should not raise one's voice, and one should distinctly form the words of prayer. While it is not Maimonides practice to cite his sources, the commentary on the Mishneh Torah, the

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[100] I Sam 1:26.
[101] Ber 31b, line 38.
[102] *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Tefilah* 5:9

Kesef Mishnah, cites our Talmud chapter and includes the excerpt quoting R. Hamnuna. The *Kesef Mishnah* again cites the Hannah passage for a Maimonidean law that corresponds to the final prayer law extracted from the Hannah narrative by the talmudic authors:

> תקון המקום כיצד... ואסור לישב בצד העומד בתפלה או לעבור לפניו עד שירחיק ממנו ארבע אמות.
>
> A fixed place. What is implied?... It is forbidden to sit beside one who is standing during the *Amidah* or to pass in front of him, until one is at a distance of four *amot.*[103]

The *Kesef Mishnah* locates this law directly in *Berakhot*, where the rabbis derive the law from Hannah and Eli's positions during prayer.

Some of the other laws generated in the *Berakhot* passage are also found in later legal codes, but cite other talmudic passages as their primary sources. For example, while the prohibition of a person praying while drunk is mentioned in the *Berakhot* passage, another, more substantial passage, is cited as the talmudic precedent for the laws concerning drunkenness.[104]

Although only a few of the talmudic rulings derived from Hannah serve as primary sources for later legal codes, it is significant to see that Hannah is cited as the source for even these few: a woman becomes the model for male prayer.

Rebuke

The gemara text continues its examination of Eli's interaction with Hannah, but launches its commentary in a new direction. After noticing her strange behavior Eli asks

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[103] *Hilchot Tefillah 5:6.*

[104] The *Kesef Mishnah* cites Eruvin 64a as the source for *Hilchot Tefillah 4:17.*

her, עד מתי תשתכרין, "How long will you be drunk?"[105] The gemara, citing Rabbi Eleazar, uses Eli's question as a demonstration of rebuke. The gemara rules, לרואה בחברו דבר שאינו הגון צריך להוכיחו, "one who sees in his fellow something that does not look right is required to reprove him."[106] This ruling marks a departure from the discussion on prayer, and instead deals with human interactions; from a focus on relationship with God, to relationships with other people. In addition, this *halacha,* by using Eli to prove a point, seems to challenge the lessons derived a few lines above. The gemara uses Hannah's prayer as a model. Yet, by using Eli's question as an example of rebuke, the Rabbis imply that Hannah's prayer does indeed look wrong. It is also possible that the Rabbis assume Eli is incorrect in his rebuke, but that Eli remains an example of a person following an instinct to rebuke.

The discussion of proper behavior in relationships and dealing with a rebuke continues throughout the passage. Rabbi Eleazar is quoted two additional times. First, he rules that Hannah's defense of herself is proof that a person should respond to false accusations: לנחשד בדבר שאין בו שצריך להודיעו, "one who is suspected of something he did not do, needs to make that known."[107] Second, we learn that an accuser who discovers the accusation is false, must attempt to reverse the wrong. Rabbi Eleazar instructs that a person should לפייסו, "appease," the neighbor, as well as לברכו, "bless him."[108]

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[105] Ber 31a, line 59.
[106] Ber 31a, line 60 - 31b, line 1..
[107] Ber 31b, lines 9-10.
[108] Ber 31b, lines 16-17.

During the second step of this model of rebuke, where the accuser responds to the charge, the Rabbis amplify Hannah's criticism of Eli. In the biblical text, Hannah's comments only reflect her own state. She tells Eli, לא אדני...ויין ושכר לא שתיתי, "No, my lord...I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink."[109] In the gemara, Hannah not only defends herself, but challenges Eli's authority. She tells him, לא אדון אתה בדבר זה, ולא רוח הקודש שורה עליך, שאתה חושדני בדבר זה, "You are not a lord in this matter, and the Holy Spirit does not rest upon you, that you can suspect me in this matter."[110] Hannah's claim that the Holy Spirit does not rest on Eli challenges his very identity as a priest and especially as a prophet. In I Samuel, God punishes the House of Eli for corruption. By expanding Hannah's statements, the Rabbis seem to add their own criticism of the priesthood – made particularly strong by placing the words in the mouth of a woman.

Challenging God

The gemara continues to show Hannah as a woman who is not afraid to challenge authority. After standing up for herself against Eli's accusations, the Rabbis portray Hannah as repeatedly challenging God. The gemara greatly expands on her biblical vow, having Hannah bring four separate arguments before God to end her barrenness. Bronner describes these stories as "Hannah trying different tactics to attract the attention of God."[111] Weisberg describes Hannah in more aggressive terms: "Overall, Hannah's

[109] I Sam 1:15.
[110] Ber 31b, lines 3-5.
[111] Bronner 42.

prayer...is a direct assault on a God whose decisions leave Hannah dissatisfied...her plea to God is rooted in her assumption that God must behave justly."[112]

Hannah's first argument appeals to God's power. In essence, she tells God that because God is omnipotent, granting her one child should be a simple task: since God created everything, creating one more child should be simple.[113] Following Hannah's claim that God should be able to provide a son, the gemara introduces a parable that strengthens her argument.[114] The gemara compares Hannah to a poor man, and God to a king.[115] The poor man comes before the king, who is holding a feast, and begs for a single morsel of bread.

In Hannah's next argument to God the Rabbis of the gemara grant Hannah knowledge of Biblical law. In a continuation of the rabbinic exegesis of Hannah's prayer, the Rabbis begin this challenge with the single phrase אם־ראה תראה, "If you look clearly," and turn it into a threat. According to the gemara, Hannah challenges God that if God does not pay attention she will feign impropriety by secluding herself with a man other than her husband.[116] Hannah details this threat by listing the steps that would follow such an action. First, the authorities would force her to drink מי סוטה, "the waters of the *Sotah*."[117] As described in Numbers 5, a husband who suspects his wife of adultery can bring her before the priests to be tested. The priests administer a ritual to

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[112] Weisberg 71.
[113] Ber 31b, lines 22-23.
[114] See Stern for a lengthy discussion on the role of parables in rabbinic literature. Stern describes the parable as follows: "A parable suggests a set of parallels between an imagined fictional event and an immediate, "real" situation confronting the parable's author and his audience." David Stern, *Parables in Midrash,* Cambridge: Harvard University, 1991, 5.
[115] This parable is a common form known as the "King-mashal," where the protagonist is depicted as a king, and other characters become members of the king's court. (Stern 19)
[116] Ber 31b, lines 26-27.
[117] Ber 31b, line 27.

test her guilt, including compelling the woman to drink "the water of bitterness that induces the spell."[118] A woman who is guilty of adultery suffers swelling, while a woman who is innocent "shall be unharmed and able to retain seed."[119] Hannah, according to the Rabbis of the gemara, understands this verse to mean that an innocent woman who drinks the *Sotah* waters will conceive a child. Hannah counts on God fulfilling the parts of this ritual because God does not break the words recorded in the Torah: אי אתה עושה תורתך פלסתר, "You will not make Your Teaching (Torah) a fraud."[120] Weisberg comments, "God will be forced to allow her to conceive rather than permit his Torah to be mocked."[121] In the end, Hannah proves to God that if God does not bestow her with a son willingly, she can manipulate God's system in order to get a child for herself.

The gemara credits Rabbi Eleazar with this story of Hannah's brazenness, and credits Rabbi Ishmael with supporting evidence. Rabbi Akiba, however, is credited with questioning the validity of Hannah's claim, pointing out that if this reasoning is correct, then every barren woman would fake adultery.[122] Rabbi Akiba's statement brings up a reasonable concern, and suggests a level of trust he holds in the system: surely God's laws would not allow for such egregious misuse of the system. After raising his concern, Rabbi Akiba provides an alternative understanding for the verse from which Rabbi Eleazar extracted Hannah's challenge. Akiba states that אם־ראה תראה, "If you look clearly," is an example of the idea that the Torah is written in words humans can

[118] Numb 5:24.
[119] Numb 5:28.
[120] Ber 31b, line 27.
[121] Weisberg 70.
[122] Ber 31b, line 30.

understand: דברה תורה כלשון בני אדם, "The word of Torah is like the language of human beings."[123] Using this assumption, Akiba removes the tone of challenge from Hannah's comment and understands the comment as colloquial language.

Hannah's third challenge again portrays Hannah as a woman versed in law. This time, Hannah is knowledgeable of rabbinic laws - laws the Rabbis created long after the time of Hannah. The notion that a biblical character follows rabbinic law is not unique to this text.[124] Hannah's knowledge of law, while chronologically inconsistent, helps to reinforce her as a character of model piety. As with Hannah's second challenge, the Rabbis use the text of Hannah's speech as a base. Rabbi Jose poses the question, שלש אמתות הללו למה, "Why these three "maidservants?"[125] referring to the repetition of אמתך, "Your maidservant," in Hannah's prayer.[126] As I noted in the previous chapter, the repetition of this title may emphasize Hannah's humility before God. For Rabbi Jose, the fact that there are *three* instances of the phrase is significant: He adds to Hannah's dialogue with God by relating that Hannah refers to the three mitzvot required by women: *niddah, challah,* and the lighting of candles.[127] Hannah asks God, "Have I transgressed any one of them?" implying that because she has kept these commandments, God should not withhold motherhood from her. Rashi clarifies the connection made between the three appearances of אמתך, "Your maidservant," by noting that מת, "death," is found in the center of the word. The three mitzvot required

[123] Ber 31b, line 32. The irony of attributing this comment to R. Akiba, is that R. Ishmael is credited with this comment, said in opposition to R. Akiba. Mielziner 126.
[124] Further on this gemara passage is another example of anachronization: Eli threatens to punish Samuel with death for offering a teaching in front of his teacher. The notion that a disciple cannot offer a teaching in front of his teacher is a rabbinic law, found in Eruvin 63a.
[125] Ber 31b, line 33.
[126] The phrase "Your maidservant" occurs three times in I Sam 1:11.
[127] The three mitzvot to which women are obligated is outlined in Shabbat 32a.

by women are also the three mitzvot for which a woman is liable for death if she does not fulfill them, as noted in the next section of the gemara.[128]

Rabbi Jose claims that Hannah tells God,

שלשה בדקי מיתה בראת באשה, ואמרי לה: שלשה דבקי מיתה, "You created in woman three tests of death, and some say three causes of death..."[129] This quotation creates a wordplay between the words בדקי, "tests," and דבקי, "causes," identical words except that the first two letters are reversed. The Talmudic technical phrase ואמרי לה, "and some say," indicates that there is disagreement about Hannah's exact wording. The inclusion of this wordplay brings out the Rabbis' voices. They are playing with the language of Hannah's prayer, using their own techniques of textual analysis to add to Hannah's story. The difference in meaning created by choosing either בדקי or דבקי is already steps removed from Hannah's language as cited in the Bible.

Toward the end of the gemara's analysis of Hannah's prayer, the Rabbis describe a fourth argument with which Hannah challenges God. R Eleazar, in the name of R. Jose,[130] returns to the line היא מדברת על־לבה, "For Hannah was speaking from her heart,"[131] as a way of explaining that Hannah was praying על עסקי לבה, "about the concerns of her heart."[132] This clarification of the biblical phrase precedes a new version of Hannah's prayer to God, where Hannah asks about God's creation of women. Hannah

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[128] Rashi on שלש אמתות.
[129] Ber 31b, lines 33-34.
[130] Following the introduction of this law, the gemara quotes an additional teaching brought by R. Eleazar in the name of R. Jose. This law, concerning fasting on Shabbat, is not consistent with the context of the chapter. Rather, it is an example of אגב גררא, an incidental citing of a rule whose primary source is in another location.
[131] I Sam 1:13
[132] Ber 31b, line 46.

suggests to God that every aspect of God's creation has a purpose. Therefore, Hannah claims, God should give her a child so that her breasts can serve their function: תן לי בן ואניק בהן, "Give me a son and I will nurse with them."[133] Similar to Hannah's challenge to God that granting her a son should be easy for God, this challenge also relies on God's role in creation: God created everything, and God should ensure that all things work in the way God intended them. In the course of putting forth this version of Hannah's challenge, the Rabbis move from the use of לב, "heart," as part of an idiom, to the use of לב as a body part. Callaway says of this technique, "clearly the rabbis enjoyed themselves in their clever and fanciful interpretations of simple biblical idioms..."[134]

The gemara transitions out of discussing Hannah's prayer by linking Hannah's prayer with Moses and Elijah. The gemara lists these three characters as people who הטיח/הטיחה דברים כלפי מעלה, "hurl words at God toward Heaven." In Hannah's case, the gemara describes Hannah as "hurling words" because she prayed על *(al)* God rather than אל *(el)* God. The Rabbis interpret the difference of one letter as changing the meaning from "to God" to "against God."

The notion of Hannah speaking against God is a natural extension of the Rabbis' descriptions of Hannah bargaining and challenging God. However, it seems surprising that the Rabbis do not make further comments on their interpretation of ותתפלל על ה', "so she prayed to/against Adonai."[135] The straight translation of

[133] Ber 31b, line 48.
[134] Callaway 129.
[135] I Sam 1:10.

הטיחה דברים, "hurled words," has a negative connotation. However, the Rabbis' use of Hannah's prayer might suggest that Hannah "hurling words" at God was acceptable. The Rabbis' linking of Hannah with Elijah and Moses suggests the same thing. Despite the Rabbis' lack of commentary on Hannah's seeming attack against God, the linking of Hannah's demanding prayer to God with that of two great prophets of Israel, boosts Hannah's credibility as a model for prayer.

Hannah as Prophetess

Hannah requests זרע אנשים, "male seed," from God.[136] The Rabbis focus on the wording of her request for a son, and search for a reason to explain Hannah's choice of זרע אנשים rather than a simpler phrase such as בן זכר, "son." The Rabbis suggest a number of explanations. One explanation in particular may offer insight into Hannah's character. R. Samuel suggests that זרע אנשים means זרע שמושח שני אנשים, "A seed that anoints two men," playing off of אנשים as a plural noun, and applying the rule that a plural is limited to two.[137] R. Samuel continues by explaining that the "two men" refer to Saul and David. If his interpretation is correct, this would suggest that Hannah knew about her son's future importance when she asked God for a זרע אנשים. In this gemara the Rabbis do not extend R. Samuel's comment to imply prophecy. However, elsewhere in rabbinic literature Hannah is called a prophetess. This topic will be discussed in the following chapter.

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[136] I Sam 1:11.

[137] Ber 31b, line 35. מיעוט רבים שניים is the principle that the limit of a plural noun is two. Therefore, אנשים refers to two men.

Chapter 4: Aggadic Images of Hannah

The *Berakhot* passage analyzed in the previous chapter exposes readers to a multitude of commentaries on Hannah's character, and on her prayer itself. The talmudic passage is largely organized as an exegesis, walking readers through the biblical verses. A number of midrashic collections include texts that are identical to, or variations of, sections of the *Berakhot* material. These midrashic collections do not concentrate on expounding on a large passage concerning Hannah. Rather, we can follow snippets of material similar to that gathered in *Berakhot* as the midrashic authors weave Hannah into other biblical material. In these passages, we are able to see an expansion of the Rabbis' characterization of Hannah by tracing where they cite her story.

This is not to say, however, that the Rabbis ignore the textual difficulties of the I Samuel text. *Midrash Shmuel,* in particular, attempts to wrestle with issues of language. In the following excerpt from *Midrash Shmuel* the Rabbis do not add new aggadic material, but instead seek to explain a phrase from Hannah's prayer. Operating under the assumption that the Bible includes no extraneous language, the Rabbis want to explain the double appearance of בכה, "crying," in I Samuel 1:10.[138] The Rabbis account for the two occurrences of the verb root by explaining that all of Hannah's actions are כפלים, "doubled." They bring four additional examples to prove their theory:

> כעסה בכפלים, וכעסתה צרתה גם כעס, מנתה
> בכפלים, ולחנה יתן מנה אחת אפים, בכיתה בכפלים,
> ובכה תבכה, ראייתה בכפלים, אם ראה תראה, נדרה
> בכפלים, ותדר נדר.

[138] As explained in Chapter 2, I Samuel 1 includes many examples of a repeated verb, where an infinitive absolute is followed by an imperfect form.

> Her misery was doubled: *Moreover, her rival, to make her miserable, would taunt her...*(1:6). Her portion was doubled: *And to Hannah he would give one portion with two faces* (1:5). Her crying was doubled: *while weeping heavily* (1:10). And her sight was doubled: *look clearly* (1:11). Her vow was doubled: *And she vowed a vow* (1:11).[139]

All of the examples, with the exception of one, have a clear doubling of words. In the case of Hannah's מנה, "portion," the Rabbis have to be more creative. The biblical text seems to be clear that Hannah receives only one portion of the sacrifice, while Peninah and her children get many. However, the word אפים is difficult to translate. In fact, the NJPS translation even notes that the translation of this word is uncertain.[140] The authors of this midrash use the principle of מיעוט רבים שניים, "the limit of a plural is two," to interpret that it refers to two faces.[141] This stretch in meaning is not necessary to make the case that all of Hannah's actions are doubled, for it is actually Elkanah who doles out the portions. However, the Rabbis are playing with the text to strengthen their exegesis.

A Model of Prayer?

A number of midrashim, using similar techniques as seen in *Berakhot,* use Hannah's prayers as models of prayer, and as models for how to approach prayer. In *Tanchuma,* on *Parashat Vayera*, the Rabbis turn to Hannah's second prayer in I Samuel 2, which Hannah recited upon dedicating Samuel to God's service at Shiloh.[142] The Rabbis use her prayer in the context of a discussion on the structure of the *Amidah.* The text provides a number of explanations for why the *Amidah* contains eighteen blessings.

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[139] Midrash Shmuel 1:9

[140] New JPS translation, footnote to I Samuel 1:5.

[141] Stanley Gewirtz, *Biblical Hebrew Grammer and Syntax,* 1984. Gewirtz's text (VI-10) includes a listing of nouns in the form of a dual number construct, indicated by the ending ים_ . אפים can be translated in the singular, "nose," or in a pair, "nostrils." See note in Chapter 3 for more information on מיוט רבים שניים.

[142] *Midrash Tanchuma, Vayera 1*

An anonymous voice then asks, ולמה מתפללין בראש השנה תשעה ברכות, "Why does one pray nine blessings during Rosh Hashanah?" Rabbah bar Hanina immediately answers: כנגד תשעה אזכרות שאמרה חנה בתפלתה, "this corresponds to the nine mentions of the divine name that Hannah said in her prayer..." The nine mentions of the divine name refer to the nine appearances of the four-letter name of God in Hannah's second prayer.[143]

Rabbah bar Hanina's use of Hannah's prayer as a guide for the Rosh Hashanah *Amidah* is contextually appropriate. The story of Hannah, and Samuel's birth, is the traditional Haftarah reading for Rosh Hashanah.[144] In addition, some texts suggest that Hannah, along with Sarah and Rachel, conceived on Rosh Hashanah. *Rosh Hashanah 11a* suggests this fact using the hermeneutical technique of *gezera shava*:[145]

> בראש השנה נפקדה שרה רחל וחנה, מנלן? אמר רבי אלעזר: אתיא פקידה פקידה, אתיא זכירה זכירה: כתיב ברחל (בראשית ל) ויזכר אלהים את רחל, וכתיב בחנה (שמואל א א) ויזכרה ה', ואתיא זכירה זכירה מראש השנה, דכתיב (ויקרא כג) שבתון זכרון תרועה. פקידה פקידה - כתיב בחנה (שמואל א ב) כי פקד ה' את חנה, וכתיב בשרה (בראשית כא) וה' פקד את שרה.
>
> On Rosh Hashanah, Sarah, Rachel and Hannah were visited. From where do we know this? Rabbi Eleazar said: It is derived from the two occurrences of visited, and from the two occurrences of remembered. As it is written about Rachel, *And God remembered Rachel* (Gen 30:22), and about Hannah, *And Adonai remembered her* (I Samuel 1:19). And there is a similar occurrence of remembered about Rosh Hashanah: as it is written, *complete rest remembered by loud blasts* (Lev 23:24). The two occurrences of visited: It is written about Hannah, *for Adonai*

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[143] I Sam 2:1-10

[144] Genesis 21 and Samuel I were not the original readings assigned to Rosh Hashanah. By the time of the Babylonian Talmud both portions are connected with the New Year, but not as a universal custom: b. Megillah 31a. See Elbogen for more information on the evolution of Torah reading.

[145] Mielziner defines *gezera shava* as "an analogy based on identical or similar words occurring in two different passages of Scripture. Mielziner 146.

> *visited Hannah* (I Samuel 2:21), and it is written of Sarah, *And Adonai visited Sarah* (Genesis 21:1).[146]

To link the three women with Rosh Hashanah the Rabbis must use a series of analogies. The women are linked to each other by citing "remembered" and "visited." Both terms are found in reference to Hannah, and in either the reference to Sarah, or the reference to Rachel. The link to Rosh Hashanah is then made by citing the Leviticus passage describing how Rosh Hashanah is "remembered" through the blast of the shofar. The Rabbis' wordplay is exactly that – play. The subject of "remembered" changes between the barrenness texts and the Leviticus text. In the first two texts God is the actor, remembering Rachel and Hannah. In the third text, "remember" is the verb used to explain a ritual that the people will conduct.[147]

As we saw in the text of *Berakhot,* the Rabbis turn to Hannah to derive guidelines for attitudes about praying. In *Pesikta Rabati,* the Rabbis use Hannah's prayer as an example of the mode of approaching God, instructing that people should be cautious. In the opening of the passage, God actually gives the instructions[148]:

> אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא היו זהירים מברכים אותי על כל דבר, ואם הייתם זהירים בברכות אף אני בא אצליכם ומברך אתכם שנאמר בכל מקום אשר אזכיר את שמי אבוא אליך וברכתיך (שמות כ' כ"א)
>
> The Holy One, Blessed be He, said, those who take care, bless me for everything. And if you are careful with the blessings, then I will come to you and bless you, as it is said, *In every place where I cause to have my name remembered, I will come to you and bless you.* (Exodus 20:21).

Hannah is brought as just one example of approaching God cautiously:

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[146] b. Rosh Hashanah 11a

[147] Mielziner refers to this type of analogy as an "exorbitant *gezara shava*" because it links passages that appear to have nothing in common. As in our passage, Mielziner notes that this type of analogy is frequently introduced with the word אותיא, "That is derived from." Mielziner 147.

[148] *Pesikta Rabati 43:2.*

ואף חנה על שהייתה תדירה להיות עולה ומתפללת בבית המקדש ומתחננת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא שמע תפילתה ופקדה, מניין, ממה שקרינן בענין כי פקד ה' את חנה.

And so with Hannah: for she constantly ascended to pray[149] in the sanctuary and sought mercy before The Holy One, Blessed be He. He heard her prayer and visited her. From where do we know this? From what we read in the biblical passage: *For Adonai visited Hannah* (I Samuel 2:21).

Hannah's prayer can be fit into this model of cautious prayer: she approaches God seeking mercy. Yet, seeing Hannah's prayer as cautious is markedly different than other rabbinic texts we have examined, which depict Hannah as a skillful bargainer who brings carefully articulated arguments before God, rather than cautious supplications.

An aspect of approaching God with the correct attitude is entering into prayer with the proper heart. In the same text as just cited, R. Tanhuma carefully lays out a series of verses to demonstrate the importance of the heart:

כי פקד ה' וגו' כך פתח ר' תנחומא בר אבא קרוב ה' לכל קוראיו לכל אשר יקראוהו באמת רצון יראיו יעשה ואת שועתם ישמע ויושיעם (תהלים קמ"ח י"ח וי"ט), קרוב ה' לכל קוראיו יכול לכל, ת"ל לכל אשר יקראוהו באמת. אך טוב לישראל אלהים (שם תהלים ע"ג א') יכול לכל, ת"ל לברי לבב (שם תהלים ע"ג). טוב ה' (איכה ג' כ"ה) יכול לכל, ת"ל לנפש תדרשנו (שם איכה ג'). אשרי אדם עוז לו בך (תהלים פ"ד ו') יכול לכל, ת"ל מסילות בלבבם (שם תהלים פ"ד).

For Adonai visited etc. (I Samuel 2:21) Thus R. Tanhuma bar Abba began: *Adonai is close to all who call Him, to all that call Him in truth. The will of those that fear Him, He will do. And their vows he will hear and save them.* (Psalms 148:18, 19) One might think, *Adonai is close to all that call Him,* but the Torah says, *for all who call Him in truth.* One might think, *Thus God is good to Israel* (Psalms 73:1), but the Torah says *for a strong heart.* One might think, *Adonai is good* (Lamentations 3:25), but the Torah says, *for a soul that seeks Him.* One might think,

[149] תדירה להיות עולה ומתפללת is an example of a hendiadys: the verbs of "going up" and "praying" are linked, creating an exaggerated or emphasized meaning.

> *Happy is the man whose strength is in You* (Psalms 84:6), but the Torah says, *in whose hearts are the paths (to Torah).*

In each example, R. Tanhuma quotes two excerpts from the same source. The first quotation appears to grant God's good will to everyone. The second quotation, however, narrows God's good will to those with the proper mindset.[150] The series of texts create a list of requirements, including honesty, a strong heart, and one who follows a path of Torah.

After a lengthy discussion of David as an example of R. Tanhuma's principle, the text proposes Hannah as an additional example:

> דבר אחר רצון יראיו יעשה מי היה, זו חנה שנתפללה לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ולא הוציאה הקדוש ברוך הוא ריקם מתפילתה, אלא שמע הקדוש ברוך הוא את תפילתה ונתן לה כל מה שביקשה הימנו.
>
> Another interpretation. *The will of those that fear Him, He will do.* Who was this? This is Hannah, for she prayed before the Holy One, Blessed be He, and He did not let her go out, the Holy One, Blessed be He, empty-handed from her prayer. Rather, the Holy One, Blessed be He, heard her prayer and gave her all that she had requested from Him.

This text does not include citations that prove Hannah's proper attitude, most likely assuming that the intended reader of this text would have known that when Hannah went before God הוא מדברת על־לבה, "she spoke from her heart."[151] Rather, the text moves directly to the proof that God responded to Hannah's prayer. This text exaggerates God's attentiveness by suggesting the idea that God decided to answer Hannah's prayer even before she left the Temple grounds: "He did not let her go

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[150] The technical term ...יכול...תלמוד לומר demonstrates that the second quotation in each pair is correct. This term introduces a hypothesis to be rejected: You might think *x*, but you would be wrong because the Torah says *y*. Adin Steinsaltz, *The Talmud: The Steinsaltz Edition, Reference Guide,* New York: Random House, 1989, 117.

[151] I Sam 1:13.

out...empty-handed." In the biblical text, the text does not inform the reader that God chose to remember Hannah until the actual point where God allows her to conceive upon her family's return home from their pilgrimage.[152]

While Hannah's prayer serves as a model, some rabbis chose to use it as a deterrent. In *Midrash Shmuel* Hannah's prayer is brought as an exception to a rule:

> רבי חגי בשם רבי יצחק אין שואלין עניות במקום עשירות שמתוך כך קפצה חנה לנדרים.
> R. Haggai in the name of R. Yitzhak: they should not ask for trivial things in a place of wealth. The exception to this is Hannah entering into vows.[153]

The notion that trivial things should not be brought into places of grandeur is a concept found in the Talmud.[154] Here, the authors of this midrash use this principle to explain Hannah's actions, without setting her up as a model. Hannah's request is merely an exception to the rule. By labeling Hannah's actions as an exception, R. Haggai can discourage people from offering "trivial" prayers in the Temple without needing to discount the actions of an important Biblical character.

Appealing to God's Sense of Order

In *Berakhot 31b* R. Eleazar and others imagined alternative versions of Hannah's prayer at Shiloh. The vast collections of midrashim contain additional examples, and variations on arguments made in *Berakhot.* In many of the prayers recorded, Hannah appeals to God's sense of order. She cites rules of nature, rabbinic law, and other Biblical narratives, hoping that God will act on the inconsistencies she is bringing to light. Stemberger suggests that "attributing to the [biblical character] a knowledge of the

[152] I Samuel 1:19.
[153] *Midrash Shmuel* 2:1
[154] *b. Ketubot 106b.*

entire Bible and of the future," is one characteristic of the Rabbis' creative historiography.[155]

In *Aggadat Bereshit 29* the rabbis go right to the body's natural cycle of procreation. The text connects a verse from Isaiah referring to birth, with God's visiting Hannah:

> כי פקד ה' את חנה (ש"א שמואל א' ב כ"א). זש"ה האני אשביר ולא אוליד (ישעי' סו ט), זו חנה, שנאמר עד עקרה ילדה שבעה (ש"א שמואל א' ב ה).
> *For Adonai visited Hannah* (I Samuel 2:21). This is what the text is saying: *Shall I who bring on labor not bring about birth?* (Isaiah 66:9) This is Hannah, as it is said *While the barren woman bears seven...* (I Samuel 2:5).[156]

The quotation from Isaiah used here does not actually refer directly to human birth. Rather, Isaiah is using the metaphor of Zion giving birth to explain God granting Zion success. The authors of *Aggadat Bereshit* use the logic of the Isaiah quotation to explain the meaning of "And God visited Hannah:" God causes labor, and follows labor with birth.

In *Midrash Shmuel*, Hannah herself is shown to use a similar logic. In an interpretation of "If you will truly see,"[157] the Rabbis have Hannah expand her words: אם ראה בצערי, תראה בעיבורי, אם ראה בעיבורי תראה בלידתי, "If you understand my pain, you will see to my pregnancy. If you see to my pregnancy, you will see to my delivery"[158] As in the example brought above, Hannah's speech assumes that God follows a set pattern: God will feel moved by Hannah's pain and will allow Hannah to conceive; and birth is the natural conclusion to pregnancy. Reading the first

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[155] Strack and Stemberger 260.
[156] *Aggadat Bereshit 29, N'vi'im*
[157] I Sam 1:11
[158] *Midrash Shmuel 2:6.*

occurrence of the verb as "understand" helps to clarify the meaning of the midrash's explanation. God can "see" Hannah so clearly that God is able to "understand" her experience.

In *Pesikta Rabati,* in an explanation for Hannah referring to God as *Adonai Tzevaot,* Hannah addresses her very identity as a human being:

> אמר רבי יהודה בר' סימון אמרה חנה לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא רבונו של עולם יש צבא למעלה יש צבא למטה, הצבא של מעלה אינם לא אוכלים ולא שותים ולא פרים ורבים ולא מתים אלא חיים לעולם, והצבא שלמטה אוכלים ושותים ופרים ורבים ומתים, ואיני יודעת מאיזו צבא אני, אם משל מעלה או משל מטה, אם מצבא של מעלה אני, לא אהיה לא אוכלת ולא שותית אלא ולא מולידה ולא מתה אלא חיה לעולם כשם שהם חיים לעולם, ואם מצבא של מטה אני, אהא אוכלת ושותית ומולידה ומתה כשם שהם אוכלים ושותים ופרים ורבים זהו ה' צבאות
>
> R. Judah son of R. Simeon said: Hannah said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, there is a host above, there is a host below. The host above do not eat, do not drink, do not procreate, do not die, but rather live forever. And the host below eat, drink, procreate and die. And I do not know from which host I am, whether from above or below. If I am from the host above, I should not be eating or drinking, nor giving birth or dying. Rather, I should live forever as do they who live forever. And if I am from the host below, I should eat and drink, bear children and die, as do they who eat, drink, and procreate. This is *Adonai Tzevaot.*[159]

Hannah's argument is simple and concise: God is ruler over two types of hosts: those who live above and those who live below.[160] Hannah argues that she must be one or the other. If she is human, she should bear children; if not, than she should stop eating and drinking, and will live forever. While the text ascribed to R. Judah does not point this out, it is significant to note that Hannah refrains from eating whenever her family comes

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[159] *Pesikta Rabati 43:3.*

[160] Hannah's division of the plural צבאות into two parts is based on the rule of מיעוט רבים שניים.

to the Temple.[161] This fact, which the authors of the midrash may have assumed readers would know, bolsters Hannah's argument. Perhaps her fasting was a test of the argument that she could be one of the hosts above.

A similar argument about two types of hosts appears in *Aggadat Bereshit 53*, where Hannah asks for a sign from God indicating her status as a heavenly being:

> אמרה לו חנה רבש"ע יש לך צבא למעלה וצבא למטה, אם מצבא של מטה אני תן לי בנים כשם שאמרת, ברוך תהי' מכל העמים לא יהיה בך עקר ועקרה (דברים ז יד), ואם מצבא של מעלה אני, עשה אות שאהי' קיימת כשם שלמעלה חיים וקיימין, לכך נאמר ה' אלהי צבאות.
>
> Hannah said to Him: Master of the Universe, You have a host above and a host below. If I am from the host below, give me sons as you said, *You shall be blessed above all other peoples: there shall be no sterile male or female among you* (Deut 7:14). And if I am from the host above, give a sign so that I may exist like those above live and exist. For this reason it is said, Adonai, God of hosts.[162] [163]

As in other midrashim explored above, the Hannah of this midrash is well-versed in the Torah, here drawing from a passage in Deuteronomy outlining the plethora of rewards that a faithful Israel will experience. Hannah's demonstration that she is familiar with God's own words makes Hannah an able challenger to God.

Pesikta Rabati, in the text introduced above, provides an additional connection to *Adonai Tzevaot*, even attributing the explanation to the same rabbi: R. Judah son of R. Simeon. In this case, R. Judah's explanation combines aspects of midrashim we have seen elsewhere. The text begins with the connection to ה' צבאות, "Adonai of hosts:"

דבר אחר ה' צבאות א"ר יהודה ברבי סימון בפעמי

[161] I Samuel 1:7 notes that each year, Peninah's taunts led to Hannah refraining from partaking in the sacrificial feast.
[162] I did not italicize "Adonai, God of hosts" because it alters the biblical text by inserting אלהי.
[163] *Aggadat Bereshit 53, N'vi'im*

רגלים עלתה חנה לבית המקדש וראתה את
כל ישראל שם, אמרה לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא רבונו
של עולם כל הצבאות האילו יש לך ואין לי אחד בהם.
אם ראה תראה וגו' (שם שמואל א' א') אם ראה
מוטב ואם לאו תראה שלא בטובתך, אמרה לפניו
מוטב שתראה בטובה קודם שתראה שלא בטובה

Another idea: *Adonai of hosts.* R. Judah son of R. Simeon said: At the times of the pilgrimages, Hannah would go up to the sanctuary and she would see all of Israel there. She said to the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, You have all of these hosts, but not one of them is mine. *If you look clearly, etc.* (I Samuel 1:11) *If you look*, good, but if not, *you will clearly see* that which is against Your will. She said before Him: It is better that You will see what is good, than seeing what is not good...[164]

Here, R. Judah claims that Hannah's use of צבאות, "hosts," refers not to the hosts above and below, but to the many Israelites she would see on pilgrimage. Despite this difference, Hannah's argument is still based on her own understanding of what it means to be a human: the many Israelites gathered are the children of other women. Hannah asks, "Where is my child?"

R. Judah, in the continuation of the text, forms the next piece of Hannah's argument by citing a piece of Hannah's biblical vow: אם ראה תראה, "If you look clearly..." R. Judah plays with the infinitive absolute followed by the imperfect, showing that the two appearances of the root "to see" represent two options that Hannah places before God: if God hears her plea, God will only see what is pleasing to God's sight; if God does not respond, Hannah will place before God something that is not good. This play on "to see" acts as a threatening introduction to the text already discussed in

[164] *Pesikta Rabati 43:3.*

Berakhot 31b, where Hannah threatens to hide away with a man other than her husband, drawing upon herself suspicion of adultery.[165]

In another section of *Aggadat Bereshit*, the Rabbis use a biblical analogy, originally created by God, in a new way. In Ezekiel 17, God teaches Ezekiel an allegory through which to speak to the people:

בן־אדם חוד חידה ומשל משל אל־בית ישראל, "O Mortal, propound a riddle and relate an allegory to the House of Israel."[166] The midrash explores the meaning of a small piece of this allegory:

> וידעו כל־עצי השדה כי אני יהוה השפלת עץ גבה הגבהתי
> עץ שפל הובשתי עץ לח והפרחתי עץ יבש
> Then shall all the trees of the field know that it is I Adonai who have abased the lofty tree and exalted the lowly tree, who have dried up the green tree and made the withered tree bud.[167]

While it is clear from the context of the allegory that the exalted, lowly tree refers to Israel, the authors of the midrash explore a number of alternative possibilities. The final possibility they explore is the story of Hannah:

> ד"א הגבהתי עץ שפל זו חנה. הובשתי עץ לח זו פנינה,
> דכתיב ורבת בנים אומללה (ש"א שמואל א' ב ה).
> הפרחתי עץ יבש זו חנה. כי פקד ה' את חנה וגו'.
> Another interpretation, *I exalted the lowly tree* - this is Hannah. *I abased the lofty tree* - this is Peninah: as it is written, *the mother of many is forlorn* (I Samuel 2:5). *I made the withered tree bud* - this is Hannah. *For Adonai visited Hannah, etc.*[168]

The Rabbis weave together an external quotation with pieces of the Hannah narrative. A unique feature of this section of the midrash is that the Rabbis not only connect two previously unrelated texts, but make assumptions about the meaning of the text from I

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[165] *Midrash Shmuel 2:6* contains a condensed version of this text.
[166] Eze 17:2
[167] Eze 17:24
[168] *Aggadat Bereshit 29.*

Samuel in the process. The quotation from I Samuel 2:5, ורבת בנים אומללה, "the mother of many is forlorn," is taken from Hannah's lengthy prayer following Samuel's dedication. The images of a barren and fertile woman are part of a larger vision of God's deliverance. These women are not explicitly labeled as Hannah and Peninah. In this midrash, the Rabbis make two analogies concerning Peninah – first to the "lofty tree," and then to "the mother of many."

This passage in *Aggadat Bereshit* brings another external verse, this time from Psalms, to bear on Hannah's argument before God:

זכרני ה' ברצון עמך פקדני בישועתיך, "Remember me Adonai when You favor Your people, visit me when You deliver them."[169] The Rabbis place this verse in Hannah's mouth, by placing her in the context of an annual pilgrimage. The opening of I Samuel establishes that Hannah has come up to Shiloh with her husband on pilgrimage, along with many other Israelites. According to this midrash, the sight of the other pilgrims inspires Hannah's prayer:

> כיון שראתה חנה את כל ישראל אמרה לפני הקב"ה, רבון כל העולמים הרי שעה שתתרצה לי, זכרני ה' ברצון עמך פקדני בישועתך, ושני דברים שאמרה עשה הקב"ה שתיהן, היא אמרה זכרני ה' ועשה שנאמר ויזכרה ה' (ש"א שמואל א' א יט). היא אמרה פקדני בישועתיך. ועשה, שנאמר כי פקד ה' את חנה.
>
> When Hannah saw all of Israel, she said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of all the worlds, this is the hour in which you will show favor to me, *remember me Adonai when You favor Your people, visit me when You deliver them* (Psalm 106:4). And two things which she said, the Holy One, Blessed be He did both of them: She said *remember me*, and He did, as it is said *Adonai remembered her* (I Samuel 1:19). She said, *visit me when You*

[169] Psalms 106:4.

> *deliver them,* and He did, as it is said, *For Adonai visited Hannah.*[170]

Hannah appeals to God by connecting herself with God's people: Just as God shows love to all of Israel, God should show love to Hannah.

In other midrashim, Hannah must resort to naming specific people, rather than connecting herself with the larger people of Israel. In one passage from *Midrash Shmuel* the Rabbis provide an additional version of Hannah's prayer in which Hannah appeals to God's sense of justice. In this version of her prayer, Hannah lists other barren Biblical pairs to whom God granted children. Hannah contrasts Abraham and Sarah, who acted according to God's will, with Ahab and Jezabel, who were idolaters:

> שרה עשתה רצונך ונתת לה בן לתשעים שנה, איזבל
> בת כומרין היא מולידה שבעים בנים
> Sarah did your will and you gave her a son at ninety years old,
> Jezabel daughter of idolatrous priests bore seventy sons.[171]

Although Hannah does not mention herself in this prayer, the implied message to God is that Hannah follows God's will, and therefore deserves a child: if a sinner like Jezabel can bear seventy sons, certainly God can grant Hannah one.

A Member of a Select Few

In the midrash just cited, Hannah connects herself to other barren women. Many midrashim focus on Hannah's identity as one of the seven archetypal barren women. The seven women include, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, Hannah, the mother of Samson, and Zion. The inclusion of Zion plays on the image of a feminine Israel, dependent on

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[170] *Aggadat Bereshit 29, N'vi'im*
[171] *Midrash Shmuel 2:1.*

God's love. Isaiah 54, a text used in some of the midrashim below, creates an elaborate allegory of Israel as a barren spurned woman whom God has chosen to take back.[172]

Aggadat Bereshit is one midrashic collection that enumerates the seven barren women, providing textual citations to back up this label.[173] In the following excerpt, the text enumerates the women by connecting them with the days of Creation. Callaway notes that this text is an example of a double hermeneutical analogy: first, the seven women are connected, and then the seven women are connected as a group to the days of Creation.[174]

The opening lines of the passage transform the words of Hannah's prayer into a prayer for Zion. Added to Hannah's prayer is the hope that God will remember, and not forget, Zion just as God will respond to Hannah's prayer by granting her a child.

> ותדר נדר ותאמר אם ראה תראה אני עקרה וציון
> עקרה, שנאמר רני עקרה (ישעי' נד א), אם ראה לי,
> תראה אף לציון, וזכרתני, לי, ולא תשכח את אמתך,
> לציון. שבע עקרות הן כנגד שבעת ימי בראשית
>
> *And she vowed a vow saying, "...if you look clearly* (I Sam 1:11), I am barren and Zion is barren, as it is said, '*Sing, O barren one*' (Isa 54:1). If you look at me, you will look also to Zion. *Remember me, and do not forget Your maidservant* - to Zion. There are seven barren women, corresponding to the seven days of Creation...[175]

Hannah's virtuousness is magnified by the Rabbis' transformation of Hannah's prayer for herself into a prayer for a nation.

The last sentence of this excerpt jumps off of the connection made between Hannah to Zion to introduce the list of seven barren women, of which both Hannah and

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[172] Callaway highlights the importance of the barren woman in the Isaiah text, noting that this is a unique example of a barren woman described on her own, separate from a birth narrative. Callaway 63.
[173] David Stern comments on the technique of exegetical enumeration, where the number of occurrences is noted, followed by a lists of verses illustrating each instance. Stern 174.
[174] Callaway 119.
[175] *Aggadat Bereshit 53, N'vi'im*

Zion appear. Unfortunately, Hannah's connection to the fifth day does not further enhance our understanding of Hannah's character. As with most of the seven barren women in this passage, the connection made between Hannah and a day of Creation is accomplished through a reference to her son. The Rabbis compare Samuel's travels to those of the birds created on the fifth day.

In another enumeration of the seven barren women, found in *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana,* the Rabbis link the barren women through the use of a single verse from Psalm 113: מושיבי עקרת הבית אם הבנים שמחה הללויה, "He sets the childless woman among her household as a happy mother of children, halleluyah."[176] Although the midrash itself does not quote the final word of the verse, "halleluyah," it is important to note that the verse contains seven words, which strengthens the connection made between this verse and the seven barren women. The connection used in the midrash is to systematically connect two words from the verse, עקרת, "barren woman" and הבנים, "children," with each of the seven women. The following excerpt illustrates this technique with Hannah:

> ד"א מושיבי **עקרת** הבית (תהלים קיג:ט), זו חנה, ויהי לפנינה ילדים ולחנה **אין ילדים** (שמואל א' א:ב). אם **הבנים** שמחה (תהלים קיג:ט), ותהר ותלד שלשה **בנים** ושתי בנות (שמואל א' ב:כא).
>
> Another idea. *He sets the childless woman among her household* (Psalms 113:9), this is Hannah: *Peninah had children and Hannah was childless* (I Sam 1:2). *As a happy mother of children* (Psalms 113:9), *she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters* (I Sam 2:21).[177]

[176] Psalm 113:9
[177] *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana 141*

In this case, עקרת, "barren" and אין ילדים, "had no children" are regarded as synonymous, allowing the Rabbis to connect Hannah with the Psalms verse. This concession brings to light that in I Samuel itself Hannah is in fact never referred to as עקרת, "barren."

The link between Psalm 113:9 and the group of barren women highlights God's image as one who saves people, particularly because the previous verse in Psalm 113 describes lifting up the needy. Callaway suggests that this is the goal of the midrash: "The interest of the midrash is in the barren women as examples of those whom YHWH has raised up from a condition of deprivation and humiliation to a state of being blessed and joyful."[178] The Rabbis pass over the pain of being barren, turning their attention instead to God's ability to redeem.

In *Genesis Rabbah,* the barren women are again grouped together and portrayed as having a unique relationship with God. The matriarchs are barren because God wants to be close to them:

> ולמה נתעקרו האמהות ר' לוי משם רבי שילא דכפר תמרתא ורבי חלבו בשם ר' יוחנן שהקב"ה מתאוה לתפלתן ומתאוה לשיחתן שנאמר (שיר שיר השירים ב) יונתי בחגוי הסלע יונתי בחגוי למה עקרתי אתכם בשביל הראיני את מראיך השמיעיני את קולך
>
> Why were the matriarchs barren? R. Levi, in the name of R. Shila from Kefar Tamarta, and R. Helbo, in the name of R. Johanan: for The Holy One, Blessed be He, desired their prayers and desired their words, as it is said, *O my dove, in the cranny of the rocks* (Songs of Songs 2:14). My dove in the cranny, why have I made you barren? In order to *let me see your face, let me hear your voice.* [179]

[178] Callaway 121.
[179] *Genesis Rabbah 45:4.*

This excerpt introduces a new level of intimacy between God and the barren women. The matriarchs' barrenness is separated from any fault or reality of their lives, and instead shifts to God's own needs – to hear from, and see, the barren women.

This text is especially salient when examining Hannah's barrenness, because Hannah actually fulfills God's desire: she appears before God at the Temple, and she speaks directly to God. Put side by side with this text, Hannah's behavior, which is seen as radical by Eli, becomes a model of answering God's call.

A similar text is found in the Talmud, *Yevamot 64a,* where again the Rabbis explain barrenness through God's desire to hear their prayers. In this text, R. Isaac places the barren women in the general category of righteous people, and then compares the prayers of the righteous to a pitchfork:

> למה נמשלה תפלתן של צדיקים כעתרז? מה עתר זה מהפך התבואה ממקום למקום, כך תפלתן של צדיקים מהפכת מדותיו של הקב"ה ממדת רגזנות למדת רחמנות.
>
> R. Isaac said: Why are the prayers of the righteous compared to a pitchfork? Just as a pitchfork turns the grain from place to place, so to the prayers of the righteous turn the dealings of the Holy One, Blessed be He from an attribute of anger to an attribute of compassion...[180]

This comparison between prayers and a pitchfork implies that not only does God desire to hear the prayers of the righteous, but also that the prayers of the righteous are efficacious, reversing the attributes upon which God acts. While this text in *Yevamot* does not specifically use Hannah's prayer as a proof text, the text supports the importance of Hannah's prayers, implying that they truly played a role in the birth of Samuel.

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[180] *b. Yevamot 64a-b.*

In *Pesikta Rabati* the prayers of the righteous are part of a test. Using a text from Proverbs as a launching point, the Rabbis question why God

צורף את הצדיק לפי מעלליו, "tests a righteous man according to his deeds."[181]

The Rabbis then list Sarah, Rebekah, and Hannah as examples of righteous people whom God has tested, including the length of time God made them barren:

> וחנה צירפה (אותה) הקב"ה אף היא לפי כחה, וכמה צירף אותה, אמרו רבותינו תשע עשרה שנה
> And Hannah: the Holy One, Blessed be He also tested her according to her strength. And for how long did He test her? Our Rabbis say nineteen years.[182]

The text continues by working out how the Rabbis came up with the number nineteen. An interesting note about the text is the change in vocabulary. In the initial question, God tests a person according to his deeds. God tests Hannah, however, according to her strength. The switch raises a number of questions: Does the performance of deeds give a person strength? Hannah specifically prays to God. Why doesn't the text recognize that in its language?

A similar text is found in *Midrash Shmuel.* Here, the phrase which precedes the listing of the righteous people uses "strength:"

הוא מיסר את הצדיקים כל אחד ואחד לפי כחו., "He delivers the righteous, each according to his strength."[183] In this version of the text the Rabbis conclude that God visited Hannah when she was 130 years old.

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[181] The verse from Proverbs 27:21 reads: And a man is tested by his praise.
[182] *Pesikta Rabati 43:5*
[183] *Midrash Shmuel* 2:6.

From Barren Woman to Prophetess

In some midrashic materials, Hannah's status goes beyond her association with the seven barren women or her role as Samuel's mother. Some texts designate Hannah herself as a prophetess. In *Seder Olam* the Rabbis provide proof texts for 48 prophets and 7 prophetesses. Interestingly, the seven prophetesses do not fully overlap with the identities of the seven barren women.[184] The text first provides a proof text for the prophets as a group:

> ומנין שכל האבות והאמהות נקראו נביאים, שנאמר ויתהלכו מגוי אל גוי וממלכה אל עם אחר וגו', אל תגעו במשיחי ובנביאי אל תרעו (דברי הימים א טז)
>
> And where is it from that all the patriarchs and matriarchs are called prophets? It is said, *and they went from nation to nation and from her kingdom to another nation, etc. do not ...* (Chronicles 1:16)...[185]

The text continues with proof texts for individual characters. Hannah's prophetic ability is linked to her poetic prayer recited upon Samuel's dedication at the temple:

ובחנה נאמר ותתפלל חנה ותאמר עלץ לבי בה', "And about Hannah it is said: *And Hannah prayed and said, 'My heart exults in Adonai.'* (I Samuel 2:1)."

The text in *Seder Olam* does not fully explain why this quotation proves Hannah's prophetic abilities. *Megillah 14a*, however, includes an almost identical text, and expands on the proof text for Hannah:

> חנה - דכתיב (שמואל א' ב') ותתפלל חנה ותאמר עלץ לבי בה' רמה קרני בה', רמה קרני ולא רמה פכי. דוד ושלמה שנמשחו בקרן - נמשכה מלכותן, שאול ויהוא שנמשחו בפך - לא נמשכה מלכותן.
>
> Hannah: As it written, *and Hannah prayed and said, My heart exults in Adonai, my horn is high through Adonai* (I Samuel 2:1).

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[184] The seven prophetesses identified by *Seder Olam* are Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Hannah, Avigail, Hulda, and Esther.

[185] *Seder Olam 21.*

> *My horn is high,* and not my flask. David and Solomon were annointed with a horn - their rule would be lengthened. Saul and Yehu were anointed with a flask - their rule would not be lengthened.

The Rabbis suggest that Hannah's prayer prophesies the success of Israel's future kings. By using the word horn, rather than flask, Hannah foresees which kings will succeed, and which will fail.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Hannah in the book of Samuel stands at the center of a dramatic birth narrative, delivering readers into an era of dramatic change for the nation of Israel. Through her painful appeal to God Hannah sets herself apart from other biblical women, who remain largely nameless and silent. Yet, it is the Rabbis who give form and depth to Hannah's character. Through exegetical analysis and hermeneutical devices, they change her from mother to model.

The rabbinic texts gathered in this thesis are not monolithic in their portrayal of Hannah: not only do they put different words in her mouth, but they place her within different sub-groups of biblical women. However, an image of Hannah as a model of prayer emerges from these various texts. The material in *Berakhot* is the clearest example of a text that represents Hannah as a model, because the Rabbis draw out binding laws from her actions. We can trace a line from Hannah's prayer through these rabbinic texts into medieval law codes. The *Berakhot* material also sets Hannah up as a model because of the connection the Rabbis make between Hannah's מדברת על־לבה, "speaking from her heart," and the intention a person must bring to prayer. Therefore, the Rabbis of the Talmud use Hannah as a model for both the mechanics and emotions of prayer.

Acknowledging that Hannah becomes a model of prayer necessitates a brief look at gender: Hannah's identity in the Bible, and through much of the rabbinic material presented here, rests on her role as Samuel's mother, and her role as one of a group of significant biblical women. However, when Hannah is held up as a model pray-er, her

gender is no longer significant. Bronner comments, "[the Rabbis] use her prayer to teach how all people, male and female, should pray. Despite their marked gender consciousness, the rabbis never once comment on the fact that Hannah is female when discussing her brilliant aptitude for prayer."[186] Hannah is not a model for women, but a model for all people.

The Rabbis' most creative writings surrounding Hannah are the alternative versions of her prayer. These prayers strengthen the case that Hannah is a model of prayer because of her level of knowledge. When put together, these texts portray a woman who is aware of both the text of the Torah and rabbinic law: the Hannah created by the Rabbis can quote Torah and Talmud to God. Each time the Rabbis retroject rabbinic law into Hannah's mouth, they add weight to her character.

Through these creative prayers the Rabbis also craft the model of prayer which they want Hannah to embody. This model seems to be to pray with a combination of humility and challenge. Both elements are evident in Hannah in the Bible itself: The repetition of אמתך, "your maidservant," sets up Hannah's subservience to God, while the structure of the vow seems to boldly challenge God to agree to her conditions.

The duality continues in the words of the Rabbis, even within the same midrashic collection. In *Pesikta Rabati* the Rabbis use Hannah as an example of one who approaches God cautiously, reporting that Hannah constantly went before God seeking mercy. A short while later in *Pesikta Rabati,* the Rabbis show Hannah crafting an argument against God around the notion that there are two types of hosts in the world.[187]

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[186] Bronner 37. In her article, Bronner also addresses the question of squaring this image of Hannah with the rabbinic exclusion of women from primary prayer settings.
[187] *Pesikta Rabbati 43:2, 3.* See Chapter 4 for a discussion of these texts.

The Hannah that approaches God cautiously also approaches with carefully constructed arguments.

These arguments suggest that the Rabbis' understanding of prayer includes a willingness to challenge God. One might suggest that the Rabbis reserve the structure of prayer which includes challenging God for people with special status. After all, in *Berakhot*, the Rabbis group Hannah with Moses and Elijah as examples of characters who "hurl words" at God.[188] However, the prevalence of versions of Hannah's prayer, which include dramatic challenges to God's consistency and justice, demonstrate that the Rabbis were not afraid to represent Hannah as a positive model.

We could stack many of the remaining midrashim on top of the two examples above, some emphasizing Hannah's humble appeal for a child, and others emphasizing Hannah's challenging, intelligent arguments. Together, these two stacks depict the complexities of effective prayer in the minds of the Rabbis. Hannah, with her humble entreaties and legalistic demands for a child, successfully negotiates these complexities, providing the Rabbis, and us, with a powerful model of prayer.

[188] Ber 31b.

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