

The Second Day of Christmas: Samuel in Luke

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 December 2018

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] Welcome back. I hope you had a wonderful Christmas day yesterday with friends and family and that the celebrations were memorable. Today, St Stephen's Day or Boxing Day or the second day of Christmas, whatever you call it, I'm going to be continuing my series in the echoes and the symmetries of the biblical narrative surrounding the Nativity.

And so there are a number of narratives that we have and various connections with the Old Testament and elsewhere in the New. Today, I'm going to be continuing from yesterday's podcast where I explored the connections between two nativities within the story of Luke.

The first nativity of Christ's birth and his incarnation and the second nativity of his death and resurrection, his rebirth from the grave. Today, I'm going to be exploring a different connection, one that particularly takes us back to the Old Testament and to certain themes that are at play within the New.

And these themes are seen in the connection between 1 Samuel and the beginning of Luke's gospel. Now, if you've read the beginning of 1 Samuel and you paid attention, a number of the themes within that text are very familiar and they meet us again at the beginning of Luke's gospel.

There's a woman who's barren, who's not giving birth, Elizabeth. In the case of Luke and in the case of the Old Testament, it's Hannah. There are a number of other themes.

[1 : 24] There's the priest who loses perception. Eli is going blind and Zechariah is struck dumb. Another connection.

We see further connections in the setting of the story. The setting is in the temple. The temple and a story concerning the promise of a child given in the temple.

Again, that's an interesting setting. The characters involved, an unfaithful or a priest lacking perception and a woman who struggles in prayer. Again, similar themes.

The beginning of Luke's gospel focuses upon two key women, upon Mary and Elizabeth. And here we see the leader of the people in their worship is not a man with great spiritual perception in his answer to the angel.

Whereas in the Old Testament, again, we see a similar situation. We have a similar response. Mary's song. Mary's song, the Magnificat, and then the prayer of Hannah.

[2 : 25] These are very similar prayers or songs. As you read through them, you'll see a number of connections in different ones of the statements within it. Further things to notice.

There is a character that appears at the presentation of Jesus in the temple. Anna, who has been a widow and she's 84 years of age. Seven times twelve.

Perfect multiplication of the number of Israel of twelve. Anna and Hannah are connected characters. What other connections can we recognise?

The way that the story is told, it draws echoes of certain of the ways in which characters like Samuel are described. Samuel is described in his growth in a couple of points.

And those descriptions should be quite reminiscent. And the child Samuel grew in stature and in favour both with the Lord and men.

- [3 : 33] And you see this repeated at another point. At the end of chapter 3, verse 19.
- So Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. We see very similar things within the story of Luke. The description of John the Baptist.
- So the child grew and became strong in spirit and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel. And then later on concerning Jesus.
- And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men. And earlier on. And the child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him.
- So both of these cases we see a child who is the response to prayer. We see a woman praying in the temple, Hannah. We see a priest, or Hannah and Anna.
- [4 : 31] We see a priest who lacks perception in some respect. We see a barren woman whose womb is opened. And we see something of the deeper picture of Samuel start to surface.
- Now why Samuel? Why this connection between these two characters? Well, Samuel was the prophet that established the kingdom. And so the connection between Samuel and the story of John the Baptist should not surprise us.
- John the Baptist is a new Samuel. And in certain respects, Jesus himself has similarities to Samuel. As we'll see later on within the story of Luke, where there are the signs of the kingdom.
- And Christ declaring the start of this new kingdom in a similar way to the way that Samuel described the establishment of the kingdom and setting apart Saul. But there's more going on here.
- And that connection, I think, helps us to see with greater clarity the significance of this character of the new David. The one who's born in David's city. The man from Bethlehem.
- [5 : 36] The child from Bethlehem. Who will inherit the throne of his father David. And so we have the prophet. The Samuel who's going to establish this kingdom. Who grows in wisdom and knowledge and in stature before God and men.
- And he lives in the wilderness. And he's preparing the way. And when the new David comes on the scene, he will be the one that leads. He's the one who will anoint this new David.
- And so the anointing of the David occurs just before Jesus goes into the wilderness. Forty days tempted by Satan. Just as after the anointing of David by Samuel, David stood against Goliath for 40 days.
- Or Goliath stood against Israel for 40 days and then was defeated by David. So there are similar themes. Elsewhere within the story of Samuel, we see further connections. I think these are often pointed out by Catholic apologists.
- So we see, for instance, that David brings the Ark of God into Jerusalem. And he talks about who is he that the Ark of God should come to him.
- [6 : 46] We have him leaping and dancing before the Ark. We have a period of time where the Ark rests in the house of someone, Obed-Edom, for three months.
- And all these different themes help us to see part of the significance of what is taking place. In Christ coming to the womb of Mary and then Mary going to the house of Elizabeth.
- The hill country of Judea, again a significant site. And within that location, we see John the Baptist leaping in his mother's womb. Just as David leaped before the Ark.
- Now these can be used to support certain Marian themes within Catholic or Orthodox thought. But on that account, just because people are using them in this way, does not mean that we should not recognise these connections.

They're definitely there. And those connections are significant. That Christ is coming in the womb of Mary. Christ has come as the Spirit has overshadowed Mary.

[7 : 48] And there is this Ark-type theme. Mary is carrying this child who will be the one who will deliver his people. And then as David leapt before the Ark being brought into Jerusalem, so John the Baptist in his mother's womb leaps before the child, Jesus, who is brought before him.

So we see a number of themes being connected here. Jesus is in some respects like Samuel. John the Baptist is in some respects like Samuel. We often think about typology as creating one-to-one matches.

It's far more complicated than that. It's one of the reasons why I prefer the analogy of music. Because there are many things at play. And sometimes, in some respects, Jesus is like Samuel. In some respects, Mary is like Hannah.

She's the one who sings Hannah's prayer. She's also the one who is blessed and favoured. But then we also see Elizabeth is like Hannah in other respects. She's the one who gives birth to the prophet who will establish the kingdom.

Who will lead the way, anoint the one who will establish the kingdom. She's the one who has her womb opened. Her womb opened as she was once barren. Mary isn't barren.

[9 : 01] She's a virgin. And there are similar themes there. But there are some differences as well. Again, it's significant to notice that these stories begin with women struggling in birth.

And that is a common theme within the Old Testament. At key junctures within history. Whether that's the start of the Exodus or the start of the kingdom. The story begins with women struggling in birth. It's not an accident that here again, at the beginning of the Gospel, we should find similar themes coming to the surface.

As we see this connection between Jesus and John the Baptist and between David and Samuel and all these themes that are at play, we can see more clearly how Jesus is the son of David.

He's not just the son of David by genetics, by descent. He's also the son of David as the one who lives out the pattern of David's life.

He's the one who fulfills the types and the shadows that we see within the story of David. He's the one who will walk where David walked and fulfill what David started.

[10 : 03] And as we see these particular connections, it will help us to read the Gospel better. We read the beginning of the Gospel and we have this sense, I've heard this story before, there's something familiar about this.

These characters are not entirely novel to me. And I recognize something's going on, but I can't quite put my finger on it. And that familiarity with the story is often a result of these specific sorts of parallels, these symmetries, these types and these echoes.

As we look more closely and we trace the lines of these, we'll be able to understand a bit better what's going on. There are many more ways in which this will be fleshed out, and I'll flesh out some of this within the next few days.

But for a start, this is something we need to notice. It's something that heralds a change, a turning of the tide, that something's going to change, that the birth of this child is an embryo, the change in Israel's fortunes.

We see this within the story of Hannah, that Hannah's response is not just to think about her rival wife and how she's been vindicated in that relationship, how her approach has been taken away, as Elizabeth talks about.

[11 : 17] There's that. There's that more intimate scale of the drama of that person's life. But then that's related to a great drama of Israel, that Israel is going to be delivered, that the rich and the haughty and the lofty are going to be brought low, and the poor and the downtrodden, those who have been mistreated are going to be raised up, that there's going to be a turning of the tables, and the birth of these children herald that.

And so as the birth of Samuel heralded something new, so we see this almost bifurcation of this symbolism of Samuel in the figures of Elizabeth and Mary, John the Baptist and Jesus, and these themes starting to percolate.

And as we explore those themes, I think we'll begin to see that something is afoot, that all these signs of God at work are being played out again.

These are familiar to us if we've read the Old Testament carefully. And here we see them being played out on a bigger scale. It's not just going to save Israel. He will be the saviour of all mankind.

He's not just going to be the one who brings about the kingdom. He's the one who's going to bring about the liberation of all flesh from the fall. He's the one who comes not just as the king, in the case of David, but as the one who's the Lord, the Lord of all, the one who created all things, and the one who will redeem all things.

[12 : 42] And so as we look through this story, I believe it gives us a deeper sense of what God is doing at Christmastime. We'll get into some further themes tomorrow, but I hope this has been helpful.

And Lord willing, I'll see you again soon. God bless and enjoy your day.