HANNAH IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

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The Hannah pericope features representative characteristics of a narrative: a plot structure with an exposition, a conflict and resolution; a comparison and contrast of characters; and a narrator’s evaluative point of view. The narrative is dialogical; the narrator cites the words of Elkanah (1 Sam 1:8, 23), Hannah (1 Sam 1:11, 15–16, 18, 22, 26), and Eli (1 Sam 1:14, 17). The pericope also contains linguistic forms that are characteristic of biblical narratives, such as chronological markers and multiple examples of waw conjunctions, articles, and object markers. Similar to other biblical narrators, the narrator of the Hannah story is omniscient. The narrator knows the precise words uttered by Hannah, Elkanah, and Eli, is aware of a particularly personal and private matter – that the Lord shut up Hannah’s womb, and the narrator is even cognizant of the thoughts of the characters in his story, for Eli thought that Hannah was drunk.

In this narrative, Hannah’s character zone is greater than others, including her rival wife Peninnah and the story’s male characters, Elkanah, Hannah’s husband, Eli the chief priest of the Shiloh cultus, and Samuel,1 the boy destined to become one of Israel’s great prophets. The Hannah story is much more than a birth narrative in which all events are designed to lead up to the hero’s birth, for the episodes focus on Hannah, a relatively obscure woman who would rise to fame because of her great faith in Israel’s God. The Hannah-centric nature of the narrative is as follows – Hannah’s husband, his genealogy and his piety (1 Sam 1:1, 3); Hannah and the rival wife’s introduction (1 Sam 1:2; Hannah is mentioned first); the priests of the temple (1 Sam 1:3); Hannah’s closed womb (1 Sam 1:5); Hannah’s depression (LXX

1 As Carol Meyers, “The Hannah Narrative in Feminist Perspective,” in Joseph E. Coleson and Victor H. Matthews (eds.), “Go to the Land I Will Show You”: Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young (Eisenbrauns, 1996), 120, points out, Hannah’s name is referenced more than any other characters in the scriptural unit 1 Sam 1:1–2:21. She is referenced fourteen times, versus Elkanah (eight times), Samuel (three times), and Eli (ten times). For additional evidence of Hannah’s active role in the narrative, see Ibid., 121–122.
1 Sam 1:6); Hannah’s weeping (1 Sam 1:7); conflict between Hannah and Peninnah (1 Sam 1:5–7); Elkanah and Hannah’s serious conversation followed by eating and drinking (1 Sam 1:8–9); Hannah’s prayer and vow (1 Sam 1:10–12); Hannah and Eli’s first interaction (1 Sam 1:13–18); the Lord’s remembrance of Hannah and her conception (1 Sam 1:19–20); Hannah’s decision to remain at home during Elkanah’s second pilgrimage to nurse Samuel (1 Sam 1:21–24a); Hannah’s journey to take Samuel to Shiloh’s temple and present him to Eli, fulfilling her vow (1 Sam 1:24–28a); Hannah’s worship (4QSam a 1:28b); and Hannah’s Song (1 Sam 2:1–10).

The chief goal of this paper is to examine Hannah’s relative position in the narrative in view of the Masoretic Text (MT), 4QSam a, and the Septuagint (LXX), which present three parallel editions of the Hannah narrative. Each of the three witnesses exhibit individual readings of the narrative and its characters, especially Hannah. LXX, for example, uniquely has Hannah saying “Here am I,” a formulaic expression that is generally attributed to males; MT is the sole witness that has the Lord establishing his word rather than Hannah’s; and 4QSam a is non-aligned with its statement that Hannah worshipped the Lord in Shiloh (after presenting Samuel to Eli). These and other readings concerning Hannah are not the result of mechanical or textual variants caused by putative scribal errors, although such variants are common in this narrative. Rather, each of the three texts has distinguishable ideological or theological elements that are demonstrative of parallel editions.

The three witnesses’ variant understandings of Hannah and her position in the cultic setting of the narrative are manifest in the texts’ explicatory pluses, deviations of divine names, variant details regarding the temple system, contextual clarifications, peculiar words and expressions, chronological sequence differences, anachronistic details or inconsistencies, style differences, and deviating nomistic terms.

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3 For a comprehensive list of textual variants, together with comments and notes, see Frank Moore Cross, Donald W. Parry, Richard J. Saley (eds.), Qumran Cave 4, XII, 1–2 Samuel (DJD XVII; Oxford, 2005). See also P. Kyle McCarter, 1 Samuel. A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary (AB 8; Garden City, N.Y., 1980); Eugene Ulrich, The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus (HSM 19; Missoula, Mont., 1978).