

1 Samuel 1

May 8, 2022



SCRIPTURE

¹ There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite^[a] from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ² He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

³ Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD. ⁴ Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵ But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. ⁶ Because the LORD had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. ⁷ This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. ⁸ Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

⁹ Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the LORD's house. ¹⁰ In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. ¹¹ And she made a vow, saying, "LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

¹² As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³ Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴ and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine." ¹⁵ "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. ¹⁶ Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

¹⁷ Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

¹⁸ She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.



¹⁹ Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. ²⁰ So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel,^[b] saying, “Because I asked the LORD for him.”

²¹ When her husband Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfill his vow, ²² Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, “After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the LORD, and he will live there always.”

²³ “Do what seems best to you,” her husband Elkanah told her. “Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his^[d] word.” So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

²⁴ After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull,^[e] an ephah^[f] of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. ²⁵ When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, ²⁶ and she said to him, “Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. ²⁷ I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. ²⁸ So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD.” And he worshiped the LORD there.

COMMENTARY

1:1-3. Israel entered Canaan under the capable leadership of Joshua. At Joshua’s death the coastal plain of Canaan had not yet been conquered (Josh. 13:2-6). Before Israel could occupy this region, the Philistines invaded and captured it. The Philistines and Israelites battled for supremacy in Canaan. Unfortunately the Philistines enjoyed numerous military advantages. Foremost was the superiority of their military technology. Hence as the Book of 1 Samuel opens, the shadow of the Philistine menace hangs over Israel.

Furthermore, numerous other enemies, such as the Amalekites, also threatened God’s covenant people. To defend against these recurring threats, Israel relied on the emergence of charismatic leaders known as judges. An organized government did not exist. The era was a time of economic and political instability for God’s people.

1:4-5. Every year Elkanah took his family to worship at Shiloh. Although Solomon did not build the temple at Jerusalem until many years later, a place for worshiping God was earlier established at Shiloh. Eli served as the priest at this sanctuary and was assisted by his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Although the inspired biblical writer did not identify the exact nature of Elkanah’s sacrifice, some Bible commentators suggest it



was a communion sacrifice or a fellowship offering. With such offerings, the worshipers would eat part of the animal offered in sacrifice. Elkanah would give portions of the meat to his family members. Because of his love for Hannah, Elkanah gave her a double portion.

1:6-7. Although Hannah already was distressed by her inability to bear children, her rival kept provoking her. The derision continued year after year. Hannah was so upset by Peninnah's taunts that she cried and lost her appetite.

Although Hannah was deeply troubled by her rival's prolonged ridicule of her, she did not lose her faith in God. She endured hardship and prayed for God to help her in her situation. She regularly went with the others in the family to worship at Shiloh. Hannah persevered in the midst of trying circumstances.

1:8. Elkanah attempted to console Hannah, suggesting to her that he was better to her than "ten sons." The reference to "ten sons" suggests the ten sons born to Jacob during Rachel's period of barrenness (see Gen. 29:31–30:22). The patriarchal allusion also suggests a parallel between Jacob's love for Rachel and Elkanah's for Hannah.

1:9. When Hannah left the family celebration, Eli was sitting on a chair—a sign of authority—at the doorposts of the sanctuary. Though too old to participate in the active leadership of the worship center (see Num. 8:23-26), Eli was still able to sit at the entrance to the "holy place," much as elders would sit at the city gate in ancient Israel (Deut. 21:19; Josh. 20:4; Ruth 4:2). This position may have permitted him to act simultaneously as a judge (see 1 Sam. 4:18 and Deut. 16:18) and a protector of worship.

According to the text, Eli's exact location was at the "doorpost of Yahweh's Holy Place." This phrase suggests that the Shiloh worship center was a structure of some architectural permanence (see also Judg. 18:31). Other Scriptures suggest that a tent was a central part of the worship site there (Josh. 18:1 and Ps. 78:60). Perhaps the earlier tabernacle set up at Shiloh in Joshua's day had been supplemented by a building during the days of the judges; alternatively, a smaller ceremonial tent may have housed the ark within the holy of holies.

1:10. Hannah wept and prayed to the Lord "in bitterness of soul," a phrase used elsewhere to characterize the psychological pain experienced by one who has been deprived of a child through death (see Ruth 1:13; 2 Kings. 4:27; Zech. 12:10) or who is experiencing great personal physical suffering (see Job 3:20 and Isa. 38:15). Relief from this sort of pain is never pictured in the Hebrew Bible as coming from a human being; in each case divine intervention was the only remedy. Wisely, Hannah also went to the Lord for help.

1:11. Hannah's prayer was specifically addressed to the omnipotent deliverer of those in distress, "the Lord Almighty." Her pain had made her a theologian—no character in



Scripture prior to Hannah had ever used this term to address the Lord. In her prayer she implicitly recognized that the Lord alone is the giver of life. She also understood that the proper position of a believer in relation to the Lord is that of absolute subjection; three times she referred to herself as “your servant,” a term used elsewhere to describe a female household slave. Furthermore, she recognized that a relationship with the Lord involves giving, not just taking. She made a vow—an act without parallel for women elsewhere in Hebrew narrative but conditionally permissible for a married woman (see Num. 30:6-8)—to “give [him] to the Lord for all the days of his life.”

1:12-18. Eli misread Hannah’s anguish as drunkenness and scolded her for her apparent disregard of the holy place. Hannah immediately clarified the situation with Eli. The depth of Hannah’s anguish and resentment over her situation had come to the surface.

1:19. The tender words the Lord remembered her remind the reader that ultimately it is God who brings new life within the womb. In the Old Testament, to “remember” means not simply to think about someone but to act on their behalf.

1:21-23. The passage stresses Elkanah’s exemplary piety. He faithfully led his family to participate in annual Torah-prescribed pilgrimage festivals and voluntarily made vows and then fulfilled them (Deut. 23:21). Although the Torah explicitly gave him the right to nullify Hannah’s vow regarding Samuel’s service in the Shiloh sanctuary, he chose instead to confirm her vow to the Lord, even though it meant losing the firstborn son from his beloved wife’s womb. This latter act places him in a category with Abraham, who gave over his son Isaac (Gen. 22). Though Elkanah and the remainder of the family made their annual pilgrimage to Shiloh, Hannah chose to remain at Ramah to care for the infant Samuel. She maintained this practice each year until the boy was weaned, perhaps a total of three years.

Hannah indicated that when the child appeared (literally) “before the face of Yahweh,” he would “live there always” (v. 22). The phrase “appear before the face of Yahweh” is found elsewhere only in the Torah (Exod. 34:24) and refers there to annual sacrifice pilgrimage or solemn assembly meetings. Thus Hannah apparently was saying, “When he finally does go on the annual pilgrimage, he will never return home; he will stay at the pilgrimage site as long as he lives.”

Perhaps the most prominent catchphrase in the story of Samuel is “before the Lord.” Samuel was to live “before the Lord” always, and this he actually did (see 7:6; 10:19; 11:15). This presents a stark contrast with the life of Saul, who was “before the Lord” only during his anointing by Samuel. At the same time, this phrase strengthens the comparison of Samuel with Moses, of whom it was said that he spoke “face to face” with the Lord (Exod. 33:11). The “word” Elkanah prayerfully asked the Lord to “make good” (v. 23) cannot be discerned from the text; perhaps it was an otherwise unknown divine promise made to Elkanah and Hannah when they made their vows.



1:24-28. In this passage Hannah is shown actively fulfilling her preconception promise to the Lord. Though the entire family was involved in the journey to bring Samuel to Shiloh, only Hannah was the subject of the key verbs in the passage: she “took” (v. 24) Samuel and a generous offering with her and “brought” him to the sanctuary complex; finally, she “said” the words that committed Samuel to Eli’s care. Significantly, however, Hannah was not the subject of the verbs describing the sacrificial event accompanying Samuel’s entrance into permanent service. Undoubtedly this is because females were not permitted to perform these actions.

MAIN POINT

Humble prayer fosters dependence on God and submission to His will.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Finish the following sentence:

“The longest and hardest I’ve ever prayed for something was . . .”

When you pray long and hard for something, what is your gut reaction: to wonder whether God actually heard you, that His timing is perfect, that He must have another plan, that you’re doing something wrong, or something else? Explain.

If you could ask God any question about prayer, what would it be?

Hannah was an Israelite who lived during the time of the judges. She was married to a devout man who loved her and provided for her. Yet, she struggled with a sense of incompleteness in her life because of infertility. In 1 Samuel 1, we find this woman whose humility and sense of desperation led her to a life-changing encounter with the Lord in prayer.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

- ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 1:1-19.

Hannah found herself in a desperate situation: she was childless (1:2). In those days, a woman’s primary role in life was bearing children for her husband. Infertility equaled



failure in other people's eyes. As if infertility weren't bad enough, Hannah was also taunted by her husband's other wife Peninnah (vv. 4-7). (It's important to note that polygamy was never God's plan for marriage but had become culturally acceptable in Old Testament times.) Hannah's despair over the entire situation led her soul to become bitter, or "deeply hurt" (v. 10).

How does the list of Elkanah's ancestry (v. 1) underscore Hannah's plight? Why is a child so dear to her?

What responses did Hannah's childlessness evoke in her? In Elkanah? In Peninnah?

How do you tend to respond to God when He seems to say no to your prayers?

Instead of camping in her bitterness and blaming God, Hannah voiced an honest, vulnerable prayer to Him (v. 11). She pleaded with God to give her a son and, in return, she would give him back to God for His service. Without even the promise of becoming pregnant, Hannah dedicated her life and her child's life to God. Her prayers acknowledged that if she were to have a child, it would be in God's control. Hannah wanted a child not for her needs, but for God's glory. Hannah recognized that God was the giver of life, and despite her apparent lack of ability to conceive, He could give her a child if He so willed it. Hannah's prayer illustrates how her hopelessness brought her to acknowledge the power and control of God.

Read verse 11 again. What stands out to you about the details of Hannah's prayer?

What do we learn about her character in this verse?

Hannah's prayer in verse 11 reveals the depth of her character. As she prayed, she captured some of God's attributes, including His greatness and sovereignty. Then she asked God to look upon her sorrow. Finally, she told God that she wasn't asking for a child to benefit her, but for ministry in the temple as a Nazarite (lay priest). She offered her not-yet-conceived child to God for His purposes in the world. Hannah asked for a child not for the benefits it would bring her, but for God's kingdom. As we'll see in the next set of verses, God chose to answer her prayer, and she became the mother of Samuel, the last judge and first prophet in Israel. Samuel bore the responsibility of anointing David as king, and he is listed among the greats of the faith in Hebrews 11:32.

Hannah asked God to look upon her sorrow, and He did. What does it mean to you that the Creator of the universe cares about you enough to answer your prayers?



What avenues do we sometimes take instead of taking our heartbreak and desperation to the Lord? Why turn to God first?

As a result of Hannah's honest prayer (v. 11), the encouragement of Eli (v. 17), and her total surrender to God (v. 18), her sorrow and hopelessness became joy and contentment. She didn't have the guarantee that God would answer her prayer, but she hoped in Him anyway. Through our desperate situations, God is teaching us to be utterly dependent on Him, to have hope in the fulfillment of His promises, and to build testimonies of His mercy and love to encourage others who go through similar situations.

- ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 1:20-28.

God blessed Hannah with a son "after some time." Hannah specifically asked God for a son, and she even dedicated him to God before the prayer was answered. This displayed the confidence Hannah had in God's ability to work a miracle in her life, which is what gave her hope. But as Hannah shows us, confidence in God doesn't mean we're free from the emotions involved in struggle. It does mean, however, that we can live in hope and anticipation of how God will work in us. After Samuel was weaned, Hannah brought him back to Eli the priest to fulfill her promise to God. He was probably around 3 years old at that time. Faithfulness and obedience to God meant Hannah had to give back to Him what she wanted most—her child.

What can you learn from Hannah's example in these verses?

How did Hannah view the things God gave her? Is this the same view you have? Why or why not?

Why do you think so many of us "forget" about God once He answers our prayers? What does this tendency reveal about us?

Hannah's confidence in God not only gave her hope in her desperate situation, but also created in her a desire to sacrifice to God. Her prayer was answered, and she gave the answer to her prayer back to God.

What things or people in your life are most indispensable to you? Can you give them back to God as Hannah did? What would that require of you?



APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What is the most reassuring part of this story for you? What encouragement can you find in this text for your present circumstances?

In what situation do you need to boldly ask the Lord for your heart's desire, then wait for Him to respond according to His perfect will and timing?

What do you find most difficult about letting go and relying on God through prayer?

Why do difficult times make us aware of our need for God? Share about a time when you've seen this awareness in your life.

PRAYER

Thank God for the ways He blesses you even when your circumstances are not what you want them to be. Confess your tendency to fail to trust Him fully. Ask Him to increase your faith, so that you might entrust your whole life to His will.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group members to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we conclude our study of Philemon:

May 15, 2022 --- Philemon 1:17-25

