

1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 1:1-28  
Hanna and the Birth of Samuel

Introduction

1. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel were originally one book
2. The author is unknown; Jewish tradition ascribes authorship to Samuel, but that is doubtful since his death is recorded in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 25 and all of the events in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel occur after his death
3. The date of writing is also unknown; however, since Judah and Israel are referred to as two distinct entities on multiple occasions the books would have been written during the Divided Kingdom or sometime during the Babylonian captivity
4. The two books fit between Judges and 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, and covers the transformation from Israel being a group of 12 distinct tribes ruled by judges into a united nation ruled by a monarchy
5. The events of the books took place over a 135 year period from the birth of Samuel, through King Saul's reign, and through most of David's kingship (it closed shortly before David's death and the beginning of Solomon's reign)—so, 1105 B.C. to 971 B.C.
6. 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel covers the first half of that—the time from Samuel's birth through Saul's reign
7. It was a difficult time in Israel:
  - a. We saw in the book of Judges how Israel had been in a downward spiral of idolatry and wickedness
  - b. The book of Judges ends with this (Judges 21:25): **"In those days there was no king in Israel; everything did what was right in his own eyes."**
  - c. The judges that had ruled Israel prior to Samuel had become more and more pathetic, and then even Samuel's own sons, whom he appointed as judges, took bribes and perverted justice (1 Samuel 8:2-3)
  - d. The priesthood was also corrupt (2 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-26)
  - e. And to top it all off, they were at war with the Philistines, an army much larger and more powerful than they
8. It was into this that God once again reaches out to Israel with mercy and compassion and sends them another judge, Samuel—one who would turn out to probably be their greatest and most faithful judge, but also their last before Israel would reject God as their king and demand an earthly one

A. Hannah's Plight (READ 1:1-8)

1. We are introduced to three individuals: a Godly and devote man named Elkanah, and his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah
2. Hannah is the focus of the first chapter and a half and she has two problems:
  - a. The first problem is that she's barren (2):
    - 1) In the ancient near east, women who could not have children were often scorned or looked down upon
    - 2) It was considered a wife's number one responsibility to produce offspring for her husband and if she couldn't it brought shame and humiliation

- 3) Monogamy was actually the norm in the ANE, but in many cultures a man was legally permitted to take a second wife if the first was unable to have children (stipulations found in ancient marriage licenses indicate this right)
- 4) That appears to be the case here—Hannah is listed first in the text likely indicating she was Elkanah’s first wife—he likely married his second wife, Peninnah, to have children
- 5) We see in our passage today the pain and anguish Hannah felt as a result:
  - a) In v. 10 we are told that she was “greatly distressed” which is the word for bitterness
  - b) It says that she “**wept bitterly**” (10)
  - c) In vs. 11 she refers her plight as an “**affliction**” which can also be understood as poverty
  - d) Probably most striking, however, is that we learn in v. 5 that her barrenness wasn’t simply some biological problem; it was the Lord who had closed her womb
- b. The second problem is that her rival is constantly mocking and provoking her:
  - 1) Elkanah married a second woman, Peninnah—probably to provide children
  - 2) Now Peninnah was quite the Fertile Myrtle because she had multiple children: “**all her sons and daughters**” (4)
  - 3) She was also an antagonist and constantly provoked Hannah, specifically because she couldn’t have children (6): “**Her rival, however, would provoke her bitterly to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb.**” (the SCB renders this “would taunt her severely”)
  - 4) And Peninnah was relentless in her taunting because v. 7 tells us that this happened “**year after year, as often as [Hannah] went up to the house of the LORD, [Peninnah] would provoke her...**”
3. The Lesson for us:
  - a. Life is hard; like Hannah, sometimes we don’t get what we want
  - b. We may even have rivals
  - c. But, also like Hannah, there is often a divine purpose and value behind our suffering
  - d. James reminds us in the first chapter of his letter that the trials we face ultimately produces endurance and maturity in our faith, making us perfect and complete, lacking in nothing

B. Hannah’s Petition (READ 1:9-11)
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1. All of this drives Hannah to do two things
  - a. She prays (10): “**she, greatly distressed, prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly.**”
    - 1) This is no simple prayer—it is about as earnest and desperate as one can get
    - 2) She is distressed, in anguish, weeping uncontrollably
  - b. She makes a vow (11):
    - 1) She asks for the Lord’s divine favor in giving her a son: “**She made a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son,**”
    - a) “**look on**”—each one of these three phrases indicates that Hannah understood that having a child, specifically a son, would require an act of divine mercy and favor
    - b) “**remember me**”

- c) **“do not forget”**
- 2) She promises to give him back to the Lord (11b): **“then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head.”**
  - a) The promise here is pretty remarkable because of what Hannah is willing to do
  - b) Her statement of no razor touching his head indicates that her intent is for him to serve as a Nazarite, which was normally someone who volunteered to serve the Lord for a set period of time (Numbers 6:21)
  - c) However, here she dedicates the child to serve the Lord **“all the days of his life”**
  - d) As we’ll see in a moment, she is literally promising to give up her child!
- 2. The lesson for us:
  - a. When Elkanah discovered Hannah couldn’t have children, he found a human solution—marrying a second wife who could
  - b. Hannah only had one option—to turn to the Lord for help
  - c. Like Hannah, our difficulties, struggles, suffering should drive us to our knees

**C. Hannah’s Piety (READ 1:12-18)**

- 1. In James 4:8 he wrote: **“Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.”**—I believe that’s what we see here in Hannah when she enters the temple to pray:
  - a. We find her praying silently **“in her heart”**, with lips moving but no sound (12-13)
  - b. She is **“oppressed in spirit”** and **“pouring out [her] soul before the LORD”** (15)
  - c. She is praying out of **“great concern and provocation”** (16)
  - d. She even asks for the Lord’s blessing through God’s priest (18): **“Let your maidservant find favor in your sight.”**
- 2. What really stands out here, however, is what happens when Hannah finishes praying (18): **“So, the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.”**
- 3. The lesson for us: What we see here is a perfect example of what Paul in Philippians 4:6-7: **“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”**

**D. Hannah’s Provision (READ 1:19-20)**

- 1. Like Sarah and Rachel before her, Hannah is blessed with a son
- 2. The emphasis of the passage is on God:
  - a. **“...and the LORD remembered her”** (just as she prayed)
  - b. She named the boy Samuel, which means “name of God” but actually sounds like “heard of God” when spoken
- 4. The lesson for us:
  - a. Hannah not only experienced God’s mercy and grace in the gift of a son, but also recognized (e.g. understood) that it was exactly what it was, God’s mercy and grace
  - b. She gave credit where credit was due—now in all fairness, it was a pretty miraculous event

- c. However, are the little things in our lives—the day to day provisions we receive—any less the work of God?
- d. Should we be any less inclined to recognize those things as God’s grace and mercy in our lives?

E. Hannah’s Promise (READ 1:21-23)

- 1. Back at the temple, Hannah made a promise to God, and a pretty heavy one at that because it came with a pretty significant cost—giving up her son to be raised in the temple
- 2. Here we learn that Hannah is a woman of her word as she announces her intention to keep her promise as soon as her son is weaned (probably age three)
- 3. This would involve taking Samuel to the temple and leaving him there “forever” to be raised by Eli, the priest—she would only see him on her yearly visits (2 Samuel 2:19)
- 4. The lesson for us:
  - a. We see in Hannah someone who took her vow to the Lord seriously, even though it would cost her dearly—her commitment to the LORD is an example to all of God’s people
  - b. In Luke 14, Jesus warned his followers that there is a cost to discipleship, and that they should weigh that cost when deciding to become his disciples
  - c. When we accept the Gospel, God’s gift of salvation, in essence we are promising to live our lives in accordance with that gift of grace, but all too often we accept the gift and forget about our promise
  - d. In Ephesians chapters 1-2 Paul describes the amazing thing God has done in calling us for salvation, and then implores us to fulfill our part which is to live in a manner worthy of that calling (Ephesians 4:1)
  - e. Hannah serves as a great example of this

F. Hannah’s Presentation (READ 1:24-28)

- 1. Hannah’s presentation of Samuel to the LORD was an act of worship—and it was above and beyond!
  - a. There is some disagreement regarding the offering (24-25)
  - b. The Law indicates that the proper offering when fulfilling a vow was one bull, 3/10 of an ephah of flour and ½ hin of wine.
  - c. Some ancient texts (LXX, Qumran) say Hannah brought a three year old bull which would require 3/10 ephah of flour and ½ hin of wine—but she brought a full ephah of flour and full hin of wine—two to three times more than required
  - d. Other ancient texts (MT) say she brought three bulls, which would match the amount of flour and wine she brought, but even if this is the case the offering is significantly more than spelled out in the Law
- 2. It was an act of thankfulness (26-27)
- 3. It was an act of dedication (28)
- 4. The lesson for us:
  - a. Hannah didn’t present Samuel to the LORD begrudgingly, but willingly as an act of worship, thankfulness and dedication to the LORD—even though the cost to her was significant

- b. The offering wasn't the bulls, flour and wine—it was Samuel (the bulls, flour and wine simply met the requirements of the law)
- c. In the same way, true worship for us goes beyond Sunday morning services, singing, praying, etc.—true worship is when we give something more valuable, our very lives (Romans 12:1-2)