

Bible Study October 4, 2023

1 SAUMUEL 1 (AMPLIFIED VERSION)

Elkanah and His Wives

¹ There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, of the hill country of Ephraim, named Elkanah the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite.

The book of 1 Samuel begins in the days when the judges still ruled Israel, possibly during the closing years of Samson's life. Samuel was Israel's last judge and the first priest and prophet to serve during the time of a king. He was the best example of what a good judge should be, governing the people by God's Word and not by his own impulses. Samuel was the man who anointed Saul as Israel's first king. Although this chapter begins with "There was a man," Hannah and her faith are the real focus of this story.

² He had two wives, one named Hannah and the other named Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

Although many great Old Testament leaders (such as Abraham, Jacob, and David) had more than one wife, this was not God's original intention for marriage, nor is it his intention today. Genesis 2:24 states that in marriage two people become one. Why, then, did polygamy exist among God's people? (1) It allowed families to produce more offspring to help provide labor and to assure the continuation of the family line. Numerous children were a symbol of status and wealth. (2) In societies where many young men were killed in battle, polygamy became an accepted way of supporting women who otherwise would have remained unmarried and, very likely, destitute. Nevertheless, polygamy is never endorsed in the Bible; on the contrary, it usually caused serious family problems, as we see in this story of Hannah and Peninnah.

³ This man went up from his city each year to worship and sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh. Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests to the LORD there.

The Tabernacle was located at Shiloh, the religious center of the nation (see Joshua 18:1). Three times a year all Israelite men were required to attend a religious festival held at the Tabernacle: the Passover with the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Harvest, and the Festival of Shelters (Deuteronomy 16:16). Elkanah made this pilgrimage regularly to fulfill God's commands. (See Exodus 23:14-17 for the regulations concerning the pilgrimage, and see the note on Exodus 40:34 for more on the Tabernacle.)

⁴ When the day came that Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions [of the sacrificial meat] to Peninnah his wife and all her sons and daughters. ⁵ But to Hannah he would give a double portion, because he loved Hannah, but the LORD had given her no children. ⁶ Hannah's rival provoked her bitterly, to irritate and embarrass her, because the LORD had left her childless.

Hannah had been unable to conceive children, and in Old Testament times, childless women were seen as flawed and inferior to women who could bear children. Their barrenness was a social embarrassment for their husbands. Children were a very important part of the society's economic structure. They were a source of labor for their families, and they had the duty of caring for their parents in their old age. If a wife could not bear children, she was often obligated by ancient Middle Eastern custom to give one of her servant girls to her husband to bear children for her. Although Elkanah could have left Hannah (a husband was permitted to divorce a barren wife), he remained lovingly devoted to her despite social pressure and his rights under civil law.

7 So it happened year after year, whenever she went up to the house of the LORD, Peninnah provoked her; so she wept and would not eat.

Part of God's plan for Hannah involved postponing her years of childbearing. While Peninnah looked at Hannah's outward circumstances, God was moving ahead with his plan. Think of those in your world who are struggling with God's timing in answering their prayers and who need your love and help. By supporting them, you may help them remain steadfast in their faith and confident in God's timing to bring fulfillment to their lives.

8 Then Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why do you cry and why do you not eat? Why are you so sad and discontent? Am I not better to you than ten sons?"

Hannah knew her husband loved her, but even his encouragement could not comfort her. She could not keep from hearing Peninnah's jeers and letting her hurtful words erode her self-confidence. Although we cannot keep others from unjustly criticizing us, we can choose how we will react to their words. Rather than dwelling upon our problems, we can enjoy the loving relationships God has given us. By so doing, we can exchange self-pity and despair for hope and optimism.

9 So Hannah got up after eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his seat beside the doorpost of the temple (tabernacle) of the LORD. 10 Hannah was greatly distressed, and she prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish.

Hannah had good reason to feel discouraged and bitter. She was unable to bear children; she shared her husband with a woman who ridiculed her (1:7); her loving husband could not solve her problem (1:8); and even the high priest misunderstood her motives (1:14). But instead of reacting with anger or giving up hope, Hannah prayed. She brought her problem honestly before God.

We may face times of barrenness when nothing "comes to birth" in our work, service, or relationships. Praying in faith is difficult when we feel so ineffective and alone. But as Hannah discovered, prayer opens the way for God to work (1:19-20).

11 She made a vow, saying, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction (suffering) of Your maidservant and remember, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life; a razor shall never touch his head."

In return for being able to conceive a son, Hannah vowed to dedicate him to God for lifetime service. Hannah may have been making a Nazirite vow, which parents could take for their unborn children. The Nazirite vow promised that a person would be set apart for special service to God

(see the notes on Numbers 6:1-4 and Judges 13:5). As long as the vow was in effect, the person's hair could not be cut. Although some vows were temporary, Hannah's vow for Samuel was for life.

Be careful what you promise in prayer, because God may hold you to it. Hannah so desperately wanted a child that she was willing to strike a bargain with God. God took her up on her promise, and to Hannah's credit, she kept her word, even though it must have been painful (1:27-28).

Although we are not in a position to barter with God, he may still choose to answer a prayer that has an attached promise. When you pray, ask yourself, Will I follow through on any promises I make to God if he gives me what I ask? To ignore a promise, especially to God, is dishonest and potentially disastrous. God keeps his promises, and he expects you to keep yours. Hannah fulfilled her promise to God, and he blessed her with five more children (2:21).

12 Now it happened as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli was watching her mouth. 13 Hannah was speaking in her heart (mind); only her lips were moving, and her voice was not heard, so Eli thought she was drunk. 14 Eli said to her, "How long will you make yourself drunk? Get rid of your wine."

When you notice that something seems wrong with another person, what is your first reaction? Eli made a snap judgment about Hannah before he knew all the facts. It is easy to misunderstand motives and actions, and doing so can cause us to make assumptions about others that are not true. Be sensitive to the fact that, like Hannah, anyone you encounter may be carrying a tremendous burden.

15 But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman with a despairing spirit. I have not been drinking wine or any intoxicating drink, but I have poured out my soul before the LORD. 16 Do not regard your maidservant as a wicked and worthless woman, for I have spoken until now out of my great concern and [bitter] provocation." 17 Then Eli answered and said, "Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him." 18 Hannah said, "Let your maidservant find grace and favor in your sight." So the woman went on her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

Earlier, Hannah had been discouraged to the point of being physically sick and unable to eat. At this point, she returned home well and happy. The change in her attitude may be attributed to three factors: (1) She had prayed honestly to God, not holding anything back from him (1:11); (2) she had received encouragement from Eli (1:17); and (3) she had resolved to leave the problem with God (1:18). This is the antidote for discouragement: Tell God how you really feel and leave your problems with him. Then rely upon the support of good friends and counselors.

Samuel Is Born to Hannah

19 The family got up early the next morning, worshiped before the LORD, and returned to their home in Ramah. Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her [prayer]. 20 It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; she named him Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked for him from the LORD."

21 Then the man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow. 22 But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "I will not go up until the child is weaned; and then I will bring him, so that he may appear before the LORD and remain there as long as he lives." 23 Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you. Wait until you have weaned him; only may the LORD establish and confirm His word." So the woman remained [behind] and nursed her son until she weaned him. 24 Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a leather bottle of wine [to pour over the burnt offering for a sweet fragrance], and she brought Samuel to the LORD's house in Shiloh, although the child was young. 25 Then they slaughtered the bull, and brought the child to Eli. 26 Hannah said, "Oh, my lord! As [surely as] your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood beside you here, praying to the LORD. 27 For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my request which I asked of Him. 28 Therefore I have also dedicated him to the LORD; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the LORD." And they worshiped the LORD there.

To do what she promised (1:11), Hannah gave up what she wanted most—her son—and presented him to Eli to serve in the house of the Lord. In dedicating her only son to God, Hannah was dedicating her entire life and future to him. Because Samuel's life was from God, Hannah was not really giving him up. Rather, she was returning him to God, who had been the one who gave him to Hannah in the first place. These verses illustrate the kind of gifts we should give to God. Do your gifts cost you little (Sunday mornings, a comfortable tithe), or are they gifts of sacrifice? Are you presenting God with tokens, or are you presenting him with your entire life?

Samuel was at least three years old (the customary age for weaning was three to five years or even older) when his mother left him at the Tabernacle. By saying, "I am giving him to the LORD," Hannah meant that she was dedicating Samuel to God for lifetime service. She did not, of course, forget her much-wanted son. She visited him regularly, and each year she brought him a new robe to wear (2:19). In later years, Samuel lived in Ramah (7:17),