

## Bible Study

### 1 Samuel 1:1 - 2:36

#### **The Text: READ 1 Samuel 1:1 - 2:36**

The events of 1 Samuel are taking place within the same context as the book of Judges. Judges 1:1-3:6 describes for us the overall pattern and way of life prevalent in Israel during this time. Judges 6:1-6 is representative of the type of foreign oppression Israel faced. Added to the external pressures from foreign oppression were significant internal difficulties that are recounted for us in Judges 19:1-20:48. When the nation of Israel was oppressed by the surrounding nations, God would appoint a judge to save and lead His people. Their freedom, however, generally lasted only as long as the judge was alive. On top of that, many of the judges, like Samson, had some fatal flaws. Their spiritual decay was linked to their lack of trust and obedience to God as their king. The situation is bleak, but this is the world that Elkanah and Hannah live in. The nation of Israel is torn apart by a lack of leadership and an incessant perversity. According to Judges 21:25, “In those days Israel had no king; **everyone did as they saw fit.**”

Our opening passage tells us that Elkanah made a yearly visit to Shiloh with his family to worship the Lord (1:3). When his whole culture was headed away from God, doing whatever they saw fit, Elkanah swam against the current and took his family to worship. Even the sons of the priest at Shiloh were evil to the bone (2:12). But nothing kept Elkanah from going to worship. He could have said, “No one else is going. It’s too far to travel. The service is too early, and I don’t like the ministers anyway. They’re corrupt and evil...” He didn’t. Even if no one else would keep the covenant, he would.

It is in this context that a “deeply troubled” woman “poured out [her] soul to the Lord” (v. 15). Hannah is childless, and deeply yearns to become a mother. God hears her prayers (*note in v. 12 that she “kept on praying”*) and answers them by giving her a son, whom she names Samuel. Hannah joins a fairly long line of women of faith who were childless. Yet among them she is the most prayerful. You’ll remember that Sarah, mother of Isaac, laughed when she learned a child would be born to her in her old age (*Genesis 18:12*) as did Abraham (*Genesis 17:17*). Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau, bore her grief with seeming indifference, as it was Isaac who prayed on her behalf (*Genesis 25:21*). Rachel, mother of Joseph and Benjamin, was so beside herself that she exclaimed to Jacob, “Give me children, or else I die” (*Genesis 30:1*).

Hannah sought her call to be a mother in the power of God and prayed, “O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life...” (v. 11). I’m certain that this was not an easy promise to make, let alone keep. But this great woman of prayer and faith does both. Her faithfulness to God is even blessed beyond what she had even hoped for, as she would go on to have three more sons and two daughters (2:21). Her faithfulness to God is why she is a model for all of us, but especially for mothers.

When Robert Ingersoll, the notorious atheist and skeptic, was in his heyday, two college students went to hear him lecture. As they walked down the street after the lecture, one said to the other, “Well, I guess he knocked the props out from under Christianity, didn’t he?” The other said, “No, I don’t think he did. Ingersoll did not explain my mother’s life, and until he can explain my mother’s life I will stand by my mother’s God.” I imagine that Samuel could have said the same of his mother.

### **Some Closing Thoughts For All of Us**

- 1.** Women, you are of great worth in God’s sight whether or not you have a child. Lift up your head and realize that God loves you for who you are, not for what you do. He understands your sorrow and your pain and He’ll meet you right where you are.
- 2.** Mothers and grandmothers, make it your mission to give your children and grandchildren to the Lord for a lifetime of service. There’s no greater purpose, and no higher honor, than to have your children give their lives to the Lord of Hosts. If you continue reading through the book of 1 Samuel, you will discover that Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were very evil and did some perversely detestable things (2:12-17, 22-26). It should be noted that their mother is never mentioned anywhere. We don’t know if she had died or if she was just not engaged as a parent. She is simply not mentioned at all. Hannah, on the other hand, greatly impacted her son, and he went on to become one of the most significant individuals in God’s redemptive history. Mothers and grandmothers, you matter greatly to your children, grandchildren, and to the very future of our nation!
- 3.** For each of us, man or woman, parent or grandparent, we need to be growing in our own relationship with God. If we want our children and grandchildren (and any who look up to us for guidance) to know God, and to love Him with all they’ve got, it’s got to be as real in our lives as it most certainly must have been in Hannah’s. **May you pray to and serve our Lord as faithfully as Hannah.**

## **1 Samuel 1 and 2**

### **Questions for Further Reflection**

#### **1 Samuel 1:1-20**

How does the list of Elkanah's ancestry (v. 1) highlight Hannah's plight? Why is a son so dear to her? What responses does her situation evoke in Peninnah (v. 6); Elkanah (v. 8); in Eli (v. 14, *but also* v. 17)? How would you have responded to each of these? What attitude does Hannah show toward her situation and toward the Lord (vv. 9-11, 15-16)? What does Hannah intend for her son by her vow (v. 11; *see Numbers 6:1-8, Judges 13:7*)? Why does Hannah's sadness disappear so quickly (v. 18)? Are you in the midst of a time of disappointment now? What encouragement can you find in this passage? Can you remember a time when the Lord "remembered" you in a time of great need (v. 1:19)? Has there been a time of need when you suddenly "remembered" the Lord? Write a prayer that will help you recall how God has been with you.

#### **1 Samuel 1:21-28**

How do you think Hannah felt leaving Samuel at the "house of the Lord at Shiloh" (v. 24)? What is your opinion of Elkanah given that both he and Hannah give Samuel back to the Lord (v. 25)? Have you or your parents made similar vows? If so, how have those vows affected your life? What things or people in your life are most precious to you? Can you "give them back to God" as Hannah did?

#### **1 Samuel 2:1-11**

Compare 1 Samuel 2:1-10 with Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55. Are there similarities in the causes and contents of each song? How might Hannah's song have influenced Mary's? What does Hannah's prayer teach us about our God? Do you notice any progressions in the role reversals described in verses 4-8? What or who is it that determines the nature of one's reversal?

#### **1 Samuel 2:12-36**

How did Eli's sons corrupt their priestly office (*see Leviticus 7:22-36*)? How did Eli respond to this (vv. 22-25, *see also* 3:13)? Why does Hannah continue to make clothes for Samuel? What can the cases of Hannah's and Eli's sons teach us about a parent's responsibility for the spiritual nurture of children (vv. 12 & 25 *in contrast to* vv. 18 & 26)? What does it mean to be "firmly established" (v. 35)? Is the inheritance that you are passing on to your descendants one that is "firmly established"?