

## Hannah

### I. Introduction: (Overview)

1 and 2 Samuel are named after the person God used to establish monarchy in Israel. Samuel not only anointed both Saul and David, Israel's first two kings, but he also gave definition to the new order of God's rule over Israel. Samuel's role as God's representative in this period of Israel's history is close to that of Moses (see Ps 99:6 "*Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel was among those who called on his name; they called on the Lord and he answered them*".; Jer 15:1 "*Then the Lord said to me: 'Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!'*") since he, more than any other person, provided for covenant continuity in the transition from the rule of the judges to that of the monarchy. Samuel would be both judge and prophet as well as the authority of God to appoint the first and second king of Israel.

1. The birth, youth and call of Samuel (chs. 1–3). In a book dealing for the most part with the reigns of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David, it is significant that the author chose not to include a birth narrative of either of these men, but to describe the birth of their forerunner and anointer, the prophet Samuel. This in itself accentuates the importance the author attached to Samuel's role in the events that follow. He seems to be saying in a subtle way that flesh and blood are to be subordinated to word and Spirit in the process of the establishment of kingship.
2. The "ark narratives" (chs. 4–6). This section describes how the ark of God was captured by the Philistines and then, after God wreaked havoc on several Philistine cities, how it was returned to Israel. These narratives reveal the folly of Israel's notion that possession of the ark automatically guaranteed victory over her enemies. They also display the awesome power of the Lord (Yahweh, the God of Israel) and his superiority over the Philistine god Dagon. The Philistines were forced to confess openly their helplessness against God's power by their return of the ark to Israel. The entire ark episode performs a vital function in placing Israel's subsequent sinful desire for a human king in proper perspective.
3. Samuel as a judge and deliverer (ch. 7). When Samuel called Israel to repentance and renewed dedication to the Lord, the Lord intervened mightily in Israel's behalf and gave victory over the Philistines. This narrative reaffirms the authority of Samuel as a divinely ordained leader; at the same time it provides evidence of divine protection and blessing for God's people when they place their confidence in the Lord and live in obedience to their covenant obligations.

All the material in chs. 1–7 serves as a necessary preface for the narratives of chs. 8–12, which describe the rise and establishment of kingship in Israel.

The author has masterfully arranged the stories in chs. 8–12 in order to accentuate the serious theological conflict surrounding the historical events. In the study of these chapters, scholars have often noted the presence of a tension or ambivalence in the attitude toward the monarchy: On the one hand, Samuel is commanded by the Lord to give the people a king (8:7,9,22; 9:16–17; 10:24; 12:13); on the other hand, their request for a king is considered a sinful rejection of the Lord (8:7; 10:19; 12:12,17,19–20). These conflicting attitudes toward the monarchy must be understood in the context of Israel’s covenant relationship with the Lord.

Moses had anticipated Israel’s desire for a human king (Dt 17:14–20), but Israelite kingship was to be compatible with the continued rule of the Lord over his people as their Great King. Instead, when the elders asked Samuel to give them a king (8:5,19–20), they rejected the Lord’s kingship over them. Their desire was for a king such as the nations around them had—to lead them in battle and give them a sense of national security and unity. The request for a king constituted a denial of their covenant relationship to the Lord, who was their King. The Lord not only had promised to be their protector but had also repeatedly demonstrated his power in their behalf, most recently in the ark narratives (chs. 4–6), as well as in the great victory won over the Philistines under the leadership of Samuel (ch. 7).

Nevertheless the Lord instructed Samuel to give the people a king. By divine appointment Saul was brought into contact with Samuel, and Samuel was directed to anoint him privately as king (9:1–10:16). Subsequently, Samuel gathered the people at Mizpah, where, after again admonishing them concerning their sin in desiring a king (10:18–19), he presided over the selection of a king by lot. The lot fell on Saul and publicly designated him as the one whom God had chosen (10:24). Saul did not immediately assume his royal office, but returned home to work his fields (11:5,7). When the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead were threatened by Nahash the Ammonite, Saul rose to the challenge, gathered an army and led Israel to victory in battle. His success placed a final seal of divine approval on Saul’s selection to be king (cf. 10:24; 11:12–13) and occasioned the inauguration of his reign at Gilgal (11:14–12:25).

The question that still needed resolution, then, was not so much whether Israel should have a king (it was clearly the Lord’s will to give them a king), but rather how they could maintain their covenant with God (i.e., preserve the theocracy) now that they had a human king. The problem was resolved when Samuel called the people to repentance and renewal of their allegiance to the Lord on the very occasion of the inauguration of Saul as king. By establishing kingship in the context of covenant renewal, Samuel placed the

monarchy in Israel on a radically different footing from that in surrounding nations. The king in Israel was not to be autonomous in his authority and power; rather, he was to be subject to the law of the Lord and the word of the prophet (10:25; 12:23). This was to be true not only for Saul but also for all the kings who would occupy the throne in Israel in the future. The king was to be an instrument of the Lord's rule over his people, and the people as well as the king were to continue to recognize the Lord as their ultimate Sovereign (12:14–15).

Saul soon demonstrated that he was unwilling to submit to the requirements of his theocratic office (chs. 13–15). When he disobeyed the instructions of the prophet Samuel in preparation for battle against the Philistines (13:13), and when he refused to totally destroy the Amalekites as he had been commanded to do by the word of the Lord through Samuel (ch. 15), he ceased to be an instrument of the Lord's rule over his people. These abrogations of the requirements of his theocratic office led to his rejection as king (15:23).

The remainder of 1 Samuel (chs. 16–31) depicts the Lord's choice of David to be Saul's successor, and then describes the long road by which David is prepared for accession to the throne. Although Saul's rule became increasingly antitheocratic in nature, David refused to usurp the throne by forceful means but left his accession to office in the Lord's hands. Eventually Saul was wounded in a battle with the Philistines and, fearing capture, took his own life. Three of Saul's sons, including David's loyal friend Jonathan, were killed in the same battle (ch. 31).

## **II. Hannah: A Desperate Woman**

Back to the beginning...And moving on we come to Samuel who was the first of Israel's great prophets, and the last of the judges. Samuel's mother Hannah (who was barren) had prayed for a son. Samuel's conception will begin with a mother's desperate yet, faithful prayer and a surrendered heart.

### **A Desperate Situation:**

1. The other woman, Peninnah, Elkanah's wife. Although many great OT leaders (such as Abraham, Jacob, and David) had more than one wife, this was not God's original intention for marriage. (Gen. 2:24) And in every case, there are problems. Hannah's husband Elkanah clearly loved Hannah very much, and showed her favoritism by giving her twice as much as his other wife. This of course promoted rivalry between the two women.
2. Hannah was barren. In OT times, a childless woman was considered a failure. Her barrenness was a social

## embarrassment for her husband. Verses 1-8: The Problem of Barrenness

Hannah was barren. This was a huge problem for a woman in ancient Israel's society. Family and having children was extremely important in ancient Israel. In order to flourish in this time period, you needed workers, you needed extra hands, you needed sons. Sons were able to do the hard work; they were able to learn the family trade and ensure the survival of the family. Children would not only care for the land, work the crops, and someday take over the family land and farm, but they would also take care of the parents in their old age, and eventually inherit the land and carry on the family name and ensure their survival through many generations. Having children was necessary for economic and physical survival.

Families depended on women, in this time, to be this source of life. And Hannah was barren. A woman who was unable to bear children was seen as an embarrassment, she would be a source of humiliation, and she would represent economic loss and potentially even death for the family. In that day, the sole purpose of women was to bear children, so for Hannah to not be able to bear would be a huge problem for this family. The narrator wants us to know that her barrenness is through no fault of hers though, but that the Lord had closed her womb (verses 5, 6). We'll begin to see in this story why her womb was closed and how God uses her for his own purposes. Although Elkanah could have left Hannah (a husband was permitted to divorce a barren wife), he remained lovingly devoted to her despite social criticism and his rights under civil law. The pressure she felt was even greater because her husband's other wife had borne him children, and she was quick to ridicule the childless Hannah.

3. Hannah was ridiculed in her own home. 1:4-8 Even in trying to worship God, Hannah was provoked "till she wept and could not eat." And this went on year after year. Peninnah criticized her and probably taught her children to do the same. Her husband loved Hannah, but he didn't understand the depths of her feelings. Her self confidence must have been very low.
4. Hannah was rebuked by the priest. He thought she was drunk (v13).

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; her loving husband could not solve her problem; and even the high priest misunderstood her motives. But instead of retaliating or giving up hope Hannah prayed. She brought her problem honestly before God.

1 Sam 1:10-11 *And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish. Then 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 male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life. . ."*

**I. A Devoted Woman**

- A.** V10 "In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord." Hannah prayed from the depths of her heart. She was willing to go before the Lord and express her pain and emotion. She was clearly pouring everything out to the only one who could understand her pain, feel her pain and give her peace and an answer. Are we going there in our prayers before God? Do we pray til we get down to the hurt and then pray through it?
- B.** V11 Some have taken Hannah's vow as bargaining with God. The form of her vow is similar to that of a person seeking to bargain. If you do X, I will do Y. But Hannah was not making a bargain, but a vow. Four times in the OT a vow made to the Lord is identified with a freewill or voluntary offering (Lev. 7:16 ; 22:21; Num. 15:3; Deut. 12:17) In verse 11, when Hannah says "no razor will touch his head," she's not just making some weird promise that he will have long hair or a long beard. Instead, she's vowing that her son will grow up in the Nazirite tradition. A Nazirite was a person who dedicated themselves to the Lord for a period of separation. During that time, they were not to eat or drink anything produced by the grapevine, not wine, not even fresh or dried grapes. They could not allow a razor to pass over their head, and they could not come into contact with a dead body. At the end of the time of separation, the hair would be cut off and offered up to the Lord as a sign of fulfillment of the vow. Other famous Nazirites in the Bible were Samson, with his long mane of hair, and John the Baptist. These men, as well as the future son of Hannah, were dedicated by their parents from birth to be Nazirites, rather than taking on the vow themselves. By Hannah making this promise, her son would be forever in God's service rather than in the service of the family. Hannah would not have a child to care for her in her old age, the family would not have an extra set of hands. This boy would not be able to follow Hannah around, so that others could see that she was a true woman with a son of her own. No, Hannah's prayer and vow were about much more than just satisfying her longing for a son and to feel fulfilled in life...

Verses 17-20: Peace with God

What was the purpose of Hannah's prayer then? What was she doing and saying, if not the obvious, begging for God to give her her heart's desire? Let's look what happens after her prayer. Picking back up in verse 17, Eli

sends her on her way in peace, granting that the Lord will answer her prayer. It reminds us of in the NT where Jesus sends people on their way, saying "Go in peace, your faith has saved you" (Luke 7:50). Hannah's prayer evidences her deep faith in the Lord, not just to work a miracle in her situation, and it would have been a miracle, but we see in verse 18, that after his blessing, she went away and ate. "Her face was no longer downcast." Her depression and inability to eat has gone away. She has a new outlook on life. Hannah has gone to the Lord in the midst of her trouble, she has gone to him, she has asked him to use her, to give her a son, not for herself, but for God: for His service. She's not asking to have this son to satisfy her desire, but as an offering to the Lord. She has asked that the Lord remember her and use her. She has asked to be a part of God's greater purposes. She has turned her life and her desires over to the Lord. She leaves the sanctuary and she has peace with God. She can eat again. Her face is no longer downcast. And God has not even answered her prayer. She finds fulfillment in the Lord alone, not in the answer to her prayer. She is fulfilled before she is given a son. I want you to notice that she has faith and peace even if God does not answer her prayer.

But we see that after she finds this peace in knowing she has turned to the Lord, then the Lord begins to work in her life. The family returns home. Elkanah lays with Hannah and the Lord remembers her. This doesn't mean he had forgotten her, only that he now changes the circumstances, opens her womb, and takes action. God works a miracle in her life. Just like he had opened the barren wombs of Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, and Samson's mother, before her, God in this case too opens the barren womb of a woman to carry out his greater purposes. God uses her prayer to now carry out his own purposes. Her child, the one "heard of God," the one "asked for," Samuel, will bring about new life, not just for Hannah and her story, but for God and for Israel and for their story. The nation of Israel will get their last judge and a faithful leader in Samuel. God will continue the salvation story through Samuel and he will play an important part in setting up the monarchy that the book of Samuel is so concerned to lay out.

She praised God when He answered her prayer and gave her a child. Hannah gave Samuel to the priest, Eli, so he could be taught to serve the Lord. As a child, Samuel, heard from God that he was going to be a prophet and judge in Israel. Before Samuel's time, a prophet was called a "seer." But Samuel was not just a forecaster of the future but became a "mouthpiece" for God. He was used by God to inform Eli that his house would be punished for the abuses and the perversions of his sons who were the priests of the people. The priest was a mediator for God to the people and for the people to God.

But they were completely corrupt. Samuel also rebuked the nation about their evil ways.

The Philistines and other enemies oppressed Israel so severely that they became disheartened. They complained that the nation had no hope of survival as long as it remained a collection of tribes. They were tired of being a theocracy under God. They wanted something more tangible. They wanted a monarchy. They cried for a king. They longed for a strong nation headed by a warrior king. The more Samuel tried to wed them closer to Jehovah and His direct rule over them, the more discontent they became. They wanted what the other nations had, an earthly king. At last, a broken-hearted Samuel let them have their way. (1 Sam 1-8). Samuel's life was not going to be an easy one.

- C.** What had happened in Hannah's heart was that she had come to the place where she was willing to give up to God the one thing that had become most important to her in life: a son. Hannah's prayer was not an act of bargaining, but an act of surrender. In giving up to God the thing that was most precious to her, Hannah found inner peace. This is so different from anything we experience in the world. *We can understand bargaining, surrender though is foreign to us and we fight the concept.* This is why submission is still a big issue with us, even though we know it is biblical. And not just to husbands, the verse before that one in Ephesians is about submitting to each other. It is a lack of spirituality and devotion to God that creates this attitude in us. We can't submit to one another without submitting to God. Faith is all about submission. It is about trust, not "I'll do what I want to do." Issues like dating, parenting, etc. reveal our hearts of surrender. Are we wanting advice and counsel? Without surrender, we get rebellious, angry and unhappy.
- D.** When Samuel was born, Hannah was truly delighted and thankful. We can imagine her, bending over her son, watching him take nourishment from her breast. We can imagine her delight when he took his first steps and uttered his first words. What perhaps surprises us, however, is the sense of joy that Hannah expressed when the day came for her to keep her vow and lend Samuel to Eli and the Lord. In Numbers 30:2, 6-8, we see that Elkanah could have nullified Hannah's vow. But Hannah didn't back down when it got hard. She did not manipulate her husband to change her vow. Even though it would have been biblical to do so. She had completely surrendered and was happy before God for her vow. She trusted God with her son, even though Eli's sons were not men of integrity. She trusted Samuel to God, not to men.

- E.** V24-2:1 Far from being heartbroken at Samuel's surrender, Hannah was filled with joy. In surrendering her heart's desire to God Hannah found her heart filled, not emptied! In surrendering our heart's desire to God, we discover joy; in truth only God can satisfy our deepest needs.
- F.** God continued to be gracious to Hannah. The text tells us that each year Hannah visited Samuel at the tabernacle and that she "used to make him a little robe, and bring it to him year by year when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice" (1 Sam. 2:19). Undoubtedly, Hannah missed Samuel, but she was busy and fulfilled, for "the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters" (2:21). And Hannah knew that the son she had loaned to the Lord would become great, for while Samuel was still a child he began to prophesy, "and all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord" (1 Sam. 3:20).

## **II. Hannah: A Woman Surrendered to God**

Hannah was a woman who for a long time could not enjoy her blessings. Her heart was so focused on having a son that nothing else seemed to matter. But life changed for Hannah when she surrendered the thing she wanted most to the Lord in a vow.

God had something else in mind. Verse 6 hints at what the fullness of this Messiah will be. We know based on the whole story of the Bible who this Messiah is: Jesus. Verse 6 has more meaning for us when it says, "The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up."

As we read more and more of the Bible, we begin to see the picture of the Messiah, and know that it was different than what they expected. Hannah's story just anticipates that greater divine story of Jesus Christ. By the time we get to the NT, we begin to read in Luke about an angel coming to another woman, this time a virgin, and promising that she will be remembered among her people and that she will bear a son who will be named Jesus. Mary, too, is going to give birth divinely, but in the form of a virgin birth. When she hears this, she breaks out in song and praise, in what's called the Magnificat recorded in Luke 1:46-55. Her song is patterned after Hannah's own song and has many of the same themes. She too is glad to be remembered among the nation of Israel and to be a part of God's greater plan.

We see that God used her and worked through her to bring about another miracle, the birth of this son, of God's own son. The birth of the true anointed one. It was the birth of the Messiah, of the true king, of the one



who is greater than David or even their expectations of him. So Mary's, like Hannah's, spirit rejoices in God, for he has been mindful of her. He has included her in his greater story. Hannah's closed womb and Mary's virgin womb became opportunities for God to divinely intervene and bring about life.

### III. Our Connection to this story

But then how does this all relate to us? God's mercy extends beyond Hannah and beyond Mary, though, to us too as we have this Messiah and Savior as well. We too get to be a part of God's greater purposes as we become Christians. We are already a part of his story because we have moved from death to life through our conversion.

We must learn to find that peace with God that Hannah found before God answered her prayers. Hannah asked to be a part of God's plan, but you are already a part of it. We must live into it then. We have to see our lives as bigger than just our current struggles. We too must learn to lay aside our personal dreams and desires that don't fit with God's purposes, to lay them at God's feet in prayer, saying "here Lord, take this... Take me and use me for your glory."

We need to see how our lives connect to God's story. God wants you to be a part of his purposes in the world, of bringing his kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. The Lord's Prayer, where this vision comes from and how Jesus teaches us to pray, tells what is God's vision and plan for this earth and for you. You can learn about it more the more you learn about God, the more you study his Bible, the more you see how important even an obscure OT book, like 1 Samuel, can be.

I leave you with this: Pray that God will use you and your life for his greater purposes. Learn how to pray that God will use you and your life for his greater purposes.

In surrendering to God the son she so desperately wanted, Hannah gained a fresh appreciation for the Lord, a deep sense of joy, and a truly satisfying life. And she gained the sure knowledge that in surrendering Samuel to the Lord, she had set him on course to become one of the Old Testament's great men of faith.