

## **AND THE LORD REMEMBERED HER**

**1 Samuel 1:1-2:10; 2:19-21**

**Focal Text 1 Samuel 1:8-11; 27-28**

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### Introduction

“Now there was a certain man....”

This is an invitation into the story of Samuel and Saul, David and Solomon. Jewish tradition names Samuel as the author of these books, and we certainly feel the power of his pen in these early chapters – the pen of one who tells the story of the cry for a king.

When it all begins in 1 Samuel 1, Israel is troubled. Israel is waiting. Israel is portrayed as a marginal community. That marginalization is made manifest by the pressure of the Philistines, ancient Israel’s number one enemy. Politically, Israel is weak. Economically, Israel is behind.

But the problems are bigger than economics or politics. There is a deep moral, theological dimension to Israel’s trouble. By the end of the book of Judges, Israel is shown to be a community in moral chaos, engaged in brutality.

To solve her problems, Israel is waiting, waiting for a king – a king who will protect, defend, gather, liberate, and legitimize the community.

Quite frankly, as I told you in our introduction last Sunday, Israel is waiting for a particular king: for David! And when David finally appears, Israel has the assurance that, at last, “this is he” (1 Samuel 16:12).

But, wait a minute. The story does not rush to David. Samuel will not be hurried. There is a waiting period, a long waiting period. At first, we’re not even sure for whom Israel is waiting. This story weaves a tale that leads us, just like it led ancient Israel, through a long season of bitter, confused, uncertain waiting. Oh, I think the storyteller knows well ahead of the telling – he knows what the outcome will be. But as in every good story, we are not told too much too soon.

In an interesting beginning, we have the spotlight on a barren woman. The whole origin of Israel’s future, and the great leaders to be discovered therein, is dependent upon the story of a bereft, barren woman named Hannah. This narrative featuring Elkanah and Hannah and Samuel is the threshold, the doorway that points to Israel’s astonished waiting.

**I. First of all, I want us to talk about the problem.**

The problem for Hannah is barrenness – no child, no son, no heir, no future, no historical possibility (1 Samuel 1:1-8).

Now there was a certain man from the Ramathaim-zophim from the hill country of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. And he had two wives: the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other was Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none (1:1-2).

Right out of the bag, at the very beginning, we see a problem – some clear stress in the story. “Now there was a certain man....And he had two wives.” It’s quite okay to have two sons or two daughters, two brothers or two sisters. But when you have two wives, trouble is in the making. Lest we not catch on, the narrator is clear (look at verse 2): Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. The man with the impressive genealogy in verse 1 is married to a barren woman in verse 2. From his fathers, Elkanah is proud of his past, but with this wife, Hannah, he has no future.

The outcome, of course, is a humiliated Hannah, a woman abused by her rival. Hannah is horrified by Yahweh’s foreclosure of her future with a barren womb. Her response? Depression, grief, and loss of appetite (v. 7).

In verse 3, the story unfolds that this “certain man” by the name of Elkanah made annual trips to sacrifice to the God that he loved and worshiped, carrying along his two wives and the children, all of whom belonged to Peninnah. Let’s call her “Penny,” for short. Elkanah took his family every year the 15 miles to Shiloh, a pilgrimage for worship and sacrifice. Notice that the object of the family’s worship was Yahweh of hosts (v. 3), the Lord of the heavenly army. There at Shiloh, the priest named Eli and his two wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas (v. 3) were officiating as priests.

The highlight of the pilgrimage was a family feast which followed the sacrifice. While no offerer ate the meat of his own guilt offering, he was given back a large portion of a peace offering, and this meat was enjoyed at the meal in celebration of restored fellowship with God. Penny, apparently, had used this time to score points over Hannah. The merry chatter of Penny’s children enjoying their portion was, in itself, reminder enough that Hannah’s womb was barren.

And Penny – Penny is puffed up. Look at verse 4. “When the day came that Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all – look at the word “all” – to all her sons and her daughters.” All the children belonged to Penny. They were all her sons. They were all her daughters.

The great blessing of an ancient woman was to have a fruitful womb. Somehow, Penny thought she herself had earned these children, she had received a great blessing from God. Maybe Penny’s puffing up went something like this: “Hannah must be wicked. If she were only good like I, God would bless her with children.” It was bad theology then. It is bad theology now to think God withholds children from a woman in order to punish her.

Like we, she took God's blessing as a sign of her own goodness. And, like we, she took the misfortune of others as a sign that, somehow, they were not as good as she.

"Hannah, come help with the chores. After all, Hannah, I'm the mother of all of Elkanah's children."

"Hannah, I'm so tired. Oh, I'm sorry – not having children, I'm sure you would not understand what I am talking about. Being pregnant just keeps me exhausted. Oh, Hannah, I do wonder if my next child will be a male child or a woman child."

Maybe Penny was puffed up because deep in her heart she knew (v. 5) that Elkanah loved Hannah more. Look at verse 5. "But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, but the Lord had closed her womb." The twinkle in Elkanah's eyes when Hannah walked by was not lost on Penny. She resented it. And who could miss the fact that Elkanah gave her a double portion of the sacrificed meat.

But (vs. 5-6), it was more than Hannah could bear. She got up and ran off weeping. Elkanah, like most men, was inept at comforting her. Of course, nothing he could say would fill her barren womb.

It's easy to see how Hannah must have dreaded everything associated with getting ready for the annual trip to Shiloh. While everyone else was eating and drinking and enjoying the time of fellowship, she was having her sense of failure heightened. Penny provoked her (v. 6).

Elkanah tried to comfort her (v. 8). "Hannah, why do you weep and why do you not eat and why is your heart sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?" Elkanah loved her, but their culture made it clear that with a barren womb, she was – in the eyes of the narrative – a failure with no future.

## **II. There is another movement in the story. The first was the problem, and the second is the priest (v. 9-18).**

There seemed to be no relief from what poor Hannah was facing. Look at verse 7. "It happened year after year." Penny provoked her year after year. These verses tell the story of a day in the temple that changed her life completely.

There is a sense of mystery in the way a cycle of failure can be broken in a moment. The woman who spoke with Jesus at the well of Sychar considered her situation hopeless, but something happened to her as she talked with Jesus that changed everything. Many people can look back on their lives to see what started as an ordinary day with no promise of relief became for them "the day" that they will never forget. This was the kind of day ahead for our Hannah.

She leaves the party and goes to the priest, to the place of worship where Eli was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She is distressed, greatly distressed (v. 10) and prays to the Lord and weeps bitterly. Look what Hannah says in verse 11: "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, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head.”

To ask for a male child reflected the normal desire of a woman of her time. Hannah, if God would give her the gift of a child, was willing to forego the pleasure of rearing the child. It was an ultimate sacrifice, but it’s what Hannah was willing to do: “God, if You’ll give me a son, I’ll give him back to You.” Besides giving him to the Lord, she also seemed to commit that he would be a Nazirite (like Samson), with a promise that no razor would come upon his head (although there is no other mention in the Bible of Samuel’s not cutting his hair).

The text suggests that Hannah was not speaking words that could be heard but, rather, that her lips were moving as she spoke within her heart. Maybe that’s the key to her prayer. The book of Exodus tells us of the Israelites crying out to God in their slavery, and “He heard their groaning” (Exodus 2:23-24). It is quite a breakthrough in our relationship with the Almighty when we realize that God can handle our frustration.

Eli the priest walks in on this mumbling, groaning prayer of Hannah. With her lips moving, but her voice only being heard by God (v. 13), Eli thought she was drunk. Hannah declares she is not drunk but, rather (v. 15), she is a woman oppressed in spirit. “I have poured out my soul before the Lord” (v. 15).

Eli gives her a blessing. “Go in peace. And whatever you’re groaning about, whatever vexes your spirit, may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him.”

Verse 18

And she said, “Let your maidservant find favor in your sight.” So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

There is a real sense in which nothing had changed and, yet, everything had changed. Her past misery had robbed her of her appetite, but now she went and ate. The woman who only moments before had described herself to Eli as a woman of “a sorrowful spirit” (v. 15) is now described with the phrase “her face was no longer sad” (v. 18). The word of Eli had created in her a hope that affected how she felt and looked. She experienced at a deep level what the author of the Book of Hebrews called “evidence of things not seen.”

Yes, Hannah realized that if God gave her a child, she had to give the child back to God.

Don’t think for a moment that the child born into your family is a thing to be clutched and kept. No, a baby is a gift to be returned to God. From the moment that the child is in your arms, all that you do is focused on training the child to be able to survive on his or her own. We teach the baby to feed himself. We teach the toddler to walk. We try to give values to our children in order that they might know right from wrong. All of our energies are focused on the devastating day when that child will no longer lay his or her head on a pillow in our home.

Our children are not property to possess. Our children belong to God – seeds which we are to plant and cultivate and return to Him, the fruits of our labor.

Now, perhaps only a mother can know, but the fact that God will give Hannah more children will not cover the fact that she is giving God her firstborn.

In Bluefield, West Virginia, when the minister was absent, a fill-in preacher had the funeral for a seven-year-old boy who was killed in a car wreck. As it turned out, he was one of eleven children. The other ten surrounded their mother, who was a widow. She screamed out several times at the church, and then twice again at the graveyard, “If I’d known this was going to happen, I’d never have had any children.” And there are ten children looking at her. “It hurts,” said the preacher. “It hurt me.” The fill-in preacher got the children together and said, “Now, your mother is distraught. She didn’t really mean that.” One of the kids was smart enough to correct the preacher, “Yes, she does. If I was the one who was killed, she would have said that too.” (Fred Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, p. 52)

### **III. The third movement in this story is promise, fulfilled promise (1:9-2:10). Hannah gives Samuel back to God.**

#### **V. 19-27**

We learn that Hannah, in due time, conceived and gave birth to a son (v. 20), and she named him Samuel, saying, “Because I have asked him of the Lord.” Samuel means “God has heard.” (By the way, Hannahs and Samuels go together really well. On our own church staff, we have two families with moms named Hannah and sons named Samuel. Their faithfulness in naming their children keeps this story alive.)

Look at verses 21-22.

Then the man Elkanah went up with all his household to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, “I will not go up until the child is weaned; then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord and stay there forever.”

And Elkanah told her, “You just do whatever seems best to you.”

Elkanah keeps going to Shiloh on the annual basis with the rest of the family, and Hannah stays home to nurse her son until the time of his weaning, which is possibly as long as three years. And when she finally did go up to the temple, Hannah took with her all the offerings appropriate to her worship and her sacrifices: a bullock, meal, wine, and her son. While the bullock was a very expensive offering, it cost nothing compared to her willingness to leave her only child at the temple to serve God for the rest of his life.

Someone who doesn’t understand the story might say, “What’s different about all this? Hannah is back where she started. She’s where she was when she started. She’s without a child. But that misses the point, doesn’t it? Before Samuel’s birth, she was as “nothing” in the eyes of her rival and in her own eyes as well. Now she had self-respect because she had borne a male child. She had the blessing of God.

In verses 25-28, Hannah brings the boy to Eli. And Hannah calls out to the priest, “Oh, my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the Lord. For this boy I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition which I asked of Him. So I have also dedicated him to the Lord; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the Lord.”

Quickly, look at chapter 2, verses 1-10, where Hannah sings her song. Let’s read a bit of it.

Then Hannah prayed and said,  
“My heart exults in the Lord;  
My horn is exalted in the Lord,  
My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies,  
Because I rejoice in Your salvation.  
There is no one holy like the Lord,  
Indeed, there is no one besides You,  
Nor is there any rock like our God.

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The bows of the mighty are shattered,  
But the feeble gird on strength.  
Even the barren gives birth

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The Lord makes poor and rich;  
He brings low, He also exalts.  
He raises the poor from the dust,  
He lifts the needy from the ash heap  
To make them sit with nobles,  
And inherit a seat of honor;

This song sounds like another song sung a thousand years later. Mary, a virgin, shall conceive, and she shall sing this same song. She will personalize it to sing of her joyful witness to the child in her womb who would bring salvation to the world. Mary’s song is called the Magnificat. You see, Hannah’s song rejoicing in her son, foreshadows Mary’s son.

And in Luke 1, Mary sings (she sounds like our Hannah):

My soul exalts the Lord,  
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.  
For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant;  
For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.

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He has brought down rulers from their thrones,  
And has exalted those who were humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things;  
And sent away the rich empty-handed.

This song – oh, it’s about the Savior, but it finds its roots in Samuel’s song.

1 Samuel 2:19-21

And his mother (that is Hannah) would make him a little robe and bring it to him from year to year when she would come up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, “May the Lord give you children from this woman in place of the one she dedicated to the Lord.” And they went to their home. And then Lord visited Hannah; and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters.

I can imagine Hannah going through the village before she made her annual trip and finding a little boy the age of Samuel and saying, “Let me hold it up; how big do I need to make his little robe?” There was love in every stitch and hope in Hannah’s hands as she made a garment for a son given by God, the son she gave back.

The first year I pastored First Baptist Church of Amarillo, my Mom and Dad came out to visit, and my mom wrote this letter that year on my Father’s Day card – about 30 years ago. She told me a tale I did not know, a tale I had never heard.

“Dear Howie, sorry the card is late, but the thoughts are not. I am very proud of you and your role as a father, as well as your other roles. I can remember holding you and feeding you your bottle while I prayed that you would be used by God in a special way. I gave you to Him, and He has blessed me richly. It was so humbling to attend your church in Amarillo the first time and see you do the children’s sermon. It’s hard to believe that my son, the son of a simple mill village girl, is the pastor of that great church. God has been so good to me. Always know that I love you more than life itself. I know that you can understand that kind of love since you are a father now. You, Lisa, and your girls are just something precious and rare. Always treasure them and put them first after God. Love, Mama. Happy Father’s Day”

I did not know she had given me back to God until I was 33.

My Mom was Hannah, too. How about you – we all must give our children back to God.

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Sources used heavily:

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