

SAMUEL'S BIRTH

1 Samuel 1:1 - 2:11

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Elkanah, Hannah, and Eli

Key-locations: Israel: Shiloh and Ramah

Key-repetitions:

- Problems faced by Hannah: her husband, Elkanah, had two wives (1 Sam 1:2); Hannah had no children (1 Sam 3:2); Peninnah provoked Hannah (1 Sam 1:6); Hannah became depressed (1 Sam 1:7); Elkanah didn't understand Hannah's depression (1 Sam 1:8); Priest Eli thought Hannah was drunk (1 Sam 1:13-14).
- Hannah cried: provoked by Peninnah, cried and wouldn't eat (1 Sam 1:6-7); Elkanah asked Hannah why she was crying (1 Sam 1:8); cried in the Lord's tabernacle (1 Sam 1:10).
- Hannah prayed: went to the tabernacle and prayed (1 Sam 1:9); cried as she prayed (1 Sam 1:10); prayed silently (1 Sam 1:12-13); told Eli that she wasn't drunk, she was praying (1 Sam 1:16); after her son was weaned, she returned to Shiloh and told Eli she was the woman who stood in the tabernacle praying for a child (1 Sam 1:26-29).

Key-attitudes:

- Rivalry between Hannah and Peninnah.
- Hannah's agony because she had no children.
- Eli's judgmental attitude.
- Hannah's joy when Samuel was born.

Initial-situation:

Under Joshua's leadership, the people of Israel conquered Canaan. Israel served the Lord during the lifetime of the leaders who had experienced the Lord helping them conquer Canaan. Another generation grew up that served the god Baal and goddess Ashtoreth. Then the Israelites experienced cycles of: The Lord raised up enemies who oppressed them; they cried for help; the Lord raised up a judge who delivered them; the judge died and the people returned to their old ways and became worse than their fathers. During the time when judges ruled, Israel had no king. Everyone did what he thought was right, and each generation became worse than the previous one.

Initial-problem:

A man named Elkanah had two wives; one named Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

Final-situation:

Samuel's parents, Elkanah and Hannah, returned home. The boy Samuel stayed in Shiloh and served the Lord under Priest Eli.

BIBLE STORY

Elkanah lived in Ramah with his two wives; one named Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

Every year Elkanah left his home in Ramah and went to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty. Shiloh was where Eli and his two sons served as priests.

Each year, Elkanah sacrificed an animal to the Lord, cooked the meat, and the family ate it. Elkanah gave portions of the sacrificial meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her children. But Elkanah gave Hannah a double portion because he loved her and because the Lord had made Hannah unable to have children. Peninnah kept provoking Hannah, never letting her forget that she had no children. This went on year after year. Every time Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her until she cried and wouldn't eat.

Her husband Elkanah asked her, "Hannah, why are you crying? Why don't you eat? Why are you depressed? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" (1 Sam 1:1-8).

Once after they had eaten their meal in Shiloh, Hannah slipped away and entered the tabernacle. Priest Eli was sitting on a chair by the entrance to the Lord's tabernacle. Hannah cried and cried in bitterness of soul. Hannah prayed to the Lord. Hannah made a promise, "Oh, Lord Almighty, if you'll only look at my misery and remember me by giving me a son, I'll give him back to you all the days of his life. No one will ever use a razor to cut his hair."

Hannah kept praying to the Lord; Priest Eli watched her mouth. Hannah prayed in her heart silently; her lips moved, but no words were heard. (*Israelites usually prayed aloud; feast days often became occasions for heavy drinking. See Isaiah 22:13 and Amos 2:8.*) Eli thought, "She's drunk," and said to Hannah, "You're drunk! How long will you keep on getting drunk? Throw away your wine!"

Hannah replied, "Oh, no sir. I'm a woman who is deeply troubled. I haven't been drinking wine nor beer; I poured out my soul to the Lord. Don't think that I'm a wicked woman. I've been praying because of my desperate torment and sorrow."

Eli answered, "Go in peace. And may the God of Israel give you what you've asked of him."

Hannah said, "Please think well of me." Then Hannah ate something, and her face was radiant. She was dejected no longer (1 Sam 1:9-18).

Elkanah's family returned home to Ramah. Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "I asked the Lord for him" (1 Sam 1:19-20).

Hannah stayed at home and nursed her son until she weaned him. Shortly after weaning Samuel, Elkanah and Hannah took him to the tabernacle of the Lord at Shiloh. Hannah presented the little child to Eli, and told him, "Sir, I'm the woman who stood at this

very spot praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord gave me what I asked for. Now I give him back to the Lord. He's dedicated to God for all his life" (1 Sam 1:21-28). Hannah sang a song praising the Lord (1 Sam 2:1-10).

Elkanah and Hannah went home to Ramah. The boy stayed in Shiloh and served the Lord under Priest Eli (1 Sam 2:11).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story? | 5. How did the characters face their problems? |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems? |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story? | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face? | 8. What does the story tell about God? |

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What problems did Elkanah have in his home?
2. Why was Hannah depressed?
3. How did Hannah deal with her depression?
4. Describe Hannah's prayer.
5. Why did Eli reach a false conclusion about Hannah?
6. What causes us to be quick to judge and reach false conclusions about someone?
7. How did God answer Hannah's prayer?
8. What can we learn from Hannah that can help us deal with agonizing situations?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Parents need to recognize that their children come from God and they should consecrate their children to him.** Hannah understood that baby Samuel was God's answer to her prayer, and she dedicated him to the Lord for all the days of his life (1 Sam 1:11, 28).
2. **People raised in humble homes considered insignificant may become great servants of God.** Priest Eli didn't know Hannah, thought she was a wicked drunk woman (1 Sam 1:13-14). Eli thought Hannah was the kind of woman who slept with his sons in the tabernacle (1 Sam 2:22). Samuel was born into a dysfunctional home. His father had two wives who didn't get along with each other (1 Sam 1:1-7). Samuel grew up in a dysfunctional home. Eli's sons were violent, immoral men (1 Sam 2:12-17; 22). Still Samuel became a spiritual leader of Israel.
3. **People who face desperate situations can discover that prayer opens the way for God to work.** Hannah's situation was desperate. She could not get pregnant (1 Sam 1:7); she shared her husband with a woman who ridiculed her (1 Sam 1:7); her husband didn't understand her sorrow and couldn't solve her problem (1 Sam 1:8);

her priest misunderstood and thought she was a wicked woman (1 Sam 1:14). Hannah's prayer opened the way for God to work (1 Sam 1:19-20).

4. **The antidote for discouragement is to tell God how you feel in prayer and choose to leave the problem with God.** Hannah was so discouraged that she became physically sick and unable to eat. She changed her attitude after she honestly confessed her misery to God (1 Sam 1:10-11); made her request to God for a son (1 Sam 1:11); resolved to leave the problem with God (1 Sam 1:18).
5. **People should praise God for answered prayer.** Hannah praised God for his answer to her prayer for a son. The theme of her poetic prayers is her confidence in God's sovereignty and her thankfulness for everything God had done (1 Sam 2:1-10).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Monologue Drama:

Pick volunteers to tell the story from the viewpoint of different participants in the story:

- Elkanah, husband of two wives, can't understand why Hannah is depressed.
- Peninnah, blessed with children, knows her husband loves Hannah the most.
- Eli the priest, misjudged Hannah, thinking she is an immoral woman.