

The Account of Samuel's Parents

1 Samuel 1:1-18

1 Samuel 1:1-18 – *“Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim Zophim, of the mountains 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. ² And he had two wives: the name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. ³ This man went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. Also the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there. ⁴ And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵ But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, although the LORD had closed her womb. ⁶ And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the LORD had closed her womb.*

⁷ So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, that she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat. ⁸ Then Elkanah her husband said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?” ⁹ So Hannah arose after they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the LORD. ¹⁰ And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish. ¹¹ 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, and no razor shall come upon his head.” ¹² And it happened, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli watched her mouth. ¹³ Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. ¹⁴ So Eli said to her, “How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!”

¹⁵ But Hannah answered and said, “No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. ¹⁶ Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken until now.” ¹⁷ Then Eli answered and said, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him.” 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.”

Background Notes

The time span of the book of 1 Samuel goes from the time of the Judges in Israel right on to the time of the Kings of Israel. Samuel is sometimes considered the last judge and the first prophet in Israel. As you know, the days of the Judges were not the greatest days in Israel's history. Israel did not fully drive the Canaanites out of the Land during (or following) the conquest under Joshua, and this failure led to the “dark days” of the Judges. Samuel was born against this background, near the end of the period of the Judges. The course of the nation of Israel changed as a result of his birth, because Samuel turned the heart of the nation back to the Lord.

Samuel's father, Elkanah, was a polygamist; his wives were named Peninnah and Hannah. Polygamy was practiced in Old Testament times, all the way back to the time of the patriarchs, but this does **not** mean that God approved of polygamy. No way! From the beginning, God's design and direction for marriage was one man and one woman, in marriage, for life. However, polygamy was practiced and permitted in the Old Testament.

The Tabernacle was located in Shiloh in Samuel's time. Remember, the Temple was not built in Jerusalem until the time of King Solomon. Every year, in accordance with God's Law, godly Jews came to the Tabernacle at Shiloh. Hannah, Samuel's mother, was childless for a number of years, and not having children was quite a stigma for a woman in those days. In fact, a childless woman was thought to be out of favor with God. On one of the annual family visits to the Tabernacle, Hannah prayed for a son -- and God answered her prayer.

Doctrinal Points

1. God works through all kinds of situations.

As we read through this chapter, there's no doubt that God was at work to accomplish His purposes. God was going to raise up a unique leader in Israel, Samuel the prophet, to lead God's people out of the dark days of the Judges and into the time of the United Kingdom of Israel. God worked through an unlikely set of circumstances to accomplish His purposes. First, Hannah was barren, and she did not have much hope of bearing a child. In fact, verses 5-6 state that God had closed her womb. In addition, Elkanah was a polygamist – far from an ideal situation!

Would God work through a situation like this? Answer: Yes! God can work through all kinds of situations! The fact that Samuel was born to a father who was a polygamist doesn't mean that God condones polygamy, and it doesn't mean that Samuel couldn't be fully qualified to be a man of God. We need to remember that God can work through all kinds of situations. In fact, He does!

Here's an illustration of God working through a far-from-ideal situation. One of the reasons why I'm in full time service for the Lord today is that I was in a very unpleasant situation many years ago. As most of you know, I was a research scientist before I began to teach at Emmaus Bible College. I loved my job in research, but a colleague at that research facility would often take my ideas. Worse, he didn't give me credit for these ideas -- he took all the credit for himself! Well, God used this unpleasant situation to open my mind and heart to the possibility of entering full-time Christian work.

Maybe you're in a very difficult situation right now, or maybe you're facing a very complicated set of circumstances. Listen – read 1 Samuel 1, and trust the Lord! God works through all kinds of situations.

2. God works through all kinds of people.

Peninnah, Elkanah's other wife, made Hannah's life miserable. *“And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the LORD had closed her womb.”* ⁷ So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the

LORD, that she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat” (v6-7). Peninnah’s actions were wrong, but in spite of this, God used Peninnah to accomplish His purposes. Most likely, Hannah would never have vowed to give up her child to the Lord as a Nazirite had it not been for Peninnah’s the constant harassing. *“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, and no razor shall come upon his head” (v11).* The vow Hannah made is the Nazirite vow. God works through all kinds of people.

Eli, the high priest, was an unusual priest. He misread Hannah’s character, assuming she was drunk when she actually was praying fervently to the Lord! And even though he was the high priest, Eli didn’t discipline his own sons, and he allowed sexual misconduct to occur at the Tabernacle! (See 1 Samuel 2.) And yet Eli was open to letting little Samuel come to live and serve at the Tabernacle. The average priest would probably have told Hannah to take her child home, saying something like, “Listen, lady -- this Tabernacle is the House of God! We have important work to do here. This isn’t a day care center or a preschool. We don’t need any little kids running around here tripping over the holy objects!” But Eli was different. Eli was open to letting little Samuel live at the Tabernacle. God works through all kinds of people.

God will bring all kinds of different people across your path in life. There will likely be rivals, like Peninnah, who harass you and provoke you, and there will be “different from the norm” people like Eli. There will be people who will strengthen you and people who will step on you -- but God is in control! A great lesson from 1 Samuel 1 is that God works through all kinds of people.

Practical Applications

1. Husbands, try to be sensitive to your wives’ feelings!

Although Elkanah had two wives, he was basically a good husband, and he faithfully took his family up to the house of the Lord every year, in accordance with the Law. *“This man went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh” (v3).* But Elkanah was not a very sensitive husband. *“Then Elkanah her husband said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?” (v8).* For Elkanah to say, “Hey, look at me! Am I not better than ten sons?” – well, this wasn’t exactly the right comment to make when Hannah was feeling miserable because she had no children! I’m surprised the text doesn’t say that Hannah took up a clay jar and threw it at him! (*Laughter*) Well, of course the Bible doesn’t say that, because Hannah was a godly woman! I’m sure no husband in this audience would ever make an insensitive comment to his wife like the comment Elkanah made to Hannah! (Right?) Well, unfortunately we husbands do occasionally make insensitive statements. My wife could give you many examples, and I’m glad she’s not here to tell you.

In spite of his shortcomings in the area of sensitivity, Elkanah did the right thing when Samuel was born. He encouraged Hannah to carry out her vow to dedicate their son to the Lord. But we husbands need to improve in the area of sensitivity to our wives. So, husbands -- try to be sensitive to your wives’ feelings!

2. Don't be surprised if people misread your actions.

Eli thought that Hannah was drunk, but Hannah was not drunk. She was praying fervently, but Eli misread her actions. Have people ever misread your actions?

Because I teach and preach, I spend a lot of time at my desk preparing lectures and sermons. I don't know how many times people have said to me, "Hey, what do you do all day?" They seem to think that sitting at a desk preparing sermons and lectures isn't "real work"! They think I must be daydreaming or snoozing or something. To them, I'm only "working" when I'm up front at church or school actually preaching and teaching! They don't understand the need for many hours of preparation, and they misread my actions.

What do you do if people misread your actions? First: if you get a chance, you explain your actions, as Hannah did. Hannah explained her actions to Eli – "I'm not drunk, I'm praying fervently for a child!" And second: expect to be misunderstood! Don't be surprised if this happens. Expect it; it goes with the territory. Don't be surprised if people misread your actions.