Our text today is

[1 Samuel 1-2:11](/references/bible%2Bnasb95.9.1-9.2.11)

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**‌**

**Introduction**

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1 and 2 Samuel, named after one of the principle figures in the book, were originally one single book. A long book, at 1,500 verses it was likely too long for a single scroll to comfortably contain it, hence the split. There’s barely a pause for breath between them.

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We open with the birth of Samuel and he is central until his death in ch25, although he still has a cameo after that...

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The book seems to be a compilation of writing by Samuel, Nathan and Gad:

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1 Chronicles 29:29–30

 NASB 2020

Now the acts of King David, from the first to the last, are written in the chronicles of Samuel the seer, in the chronicles of Nathan the prophet, and in the chronicles of Gad the seer, with all of his reign, his power, and the circumstances which came upon him, Israel, and all the kingdoms of the lands.

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So Samuel wrote records, as did other prophets, and these were likely assembled to make 1 and 2 Samuel.

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These are named 1 and 2 Kingdoms in the LXX: it has 1, 2, 3 and 4 Kingdoms.

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**Historical Setting**

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Our setting is a turning point in history.

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Paul, preaching in Antioch, puts it like this:

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Acts 13:16–23

 NASB 2020

Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance—all of which took about 450 years. After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, ‘I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.’ From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus,

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That gives us a nice context for our narrative.

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The Torah, the first 5 books is all about how God created. All humans descend from Adam and Eve, then through Noah’s 3 sons, from whom ALL nations in the world descend. It covers how sin entered the world, through willing obedience to Satan rather than God. But God will provide a Deliverer. That’s the overtone of the whole Old Testament.

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God chose one couple, Abraham and Sarah, through whom this promise would be fulfilled, but first they needed to start a family, then a nation. Abraham -> Isaac -> Jacob -> 12 sons.

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The family was only 70 or so when they went down to Egypt to escape famine, and after sojourning 400 years or so, they came out a nation of over a million people; 12 tribes from 12 sons [made the people great, as Paul puts it]. God led them out through Moses, showing great power over them that set the whole *world* in fear of God and Israel. Which echoes in the narrative of 1 Samuel.

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Under Joshua, the people of Israel in their 12 tribes took the land of Canaan in God’s power. When they were acting in obedience, they triumphed; when they acted unrighteously, they suffered defeat. Some areas of the land God allocated for them weren’t taken.

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After Joshua we had the time of the Judges. In this time we see a cycle of sin, oppression by enemies, then God would raise up a Judge to deliver them. These judges were men and women who had God’s enabling power to save, but they also had an ongoing office of arbitration and guidance.

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We studied through Judges and saw there was a continual decline in the spiritual and moral health. The last judge, Samson, was a beast, to be frank. And the book concludes with these two episodes of such depravity and wickedness that it is hard to believe this is the people whom God chose.

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So Paul says that they had judges until Samuel the prophet. Now actually, according to [1 Sam 7](/references/bible%2Bnasb95.9.7), Samuel did judge Israel all his life, going on a bit of a circuit of ministry.

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The last of the judges, and also the first of the prophets.

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In [Acts 3:24](/references/bible%2Bnasb95.65.3.24) Peter’s Second Sermon, he says:

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Acts 3:24

 NASB 2020

And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken from Samuel and his successors onward, have also announced these days.

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The prophets are in fact the successors of Samuel.

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So the Book of Samuel bridges the gap between judges and prophets.

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It also introduces to us the monarchy of Israel.

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**The Monarchy**

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The last verse in Judges is something of a refrain for the book:

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Judges 21:25

 NASB 2020

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

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And *that*’s where we come in. That’s the problem as we open the book of Samuel. Originally, in the Hebrew Bible puts Ruth later on in the canon, and so Samuel followed right after Judges. There’s no king, everyone’s just doing what they like.

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Samuel answers that.

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This is a major theme for the book: the creation and installation of the monarchy in Israel.

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As we read Samuel, we could infer that the creation of a monarchy was a concession on God’s part. We see in chapter 8 God speak of their demand for a king as an aspect of their rejection of Him.

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But, no, God always intended Israel to be governed by a king.

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God said to Abraham and to Sarah “kings shall come from you” in [Gen 17:6](/references/bible%2Bnasb95.1.17.6), [16](/references/bible%2Bnasb95.1.17.16)

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But the key passage to show this is [Deut 17:14-15](/references/bible%2Bnasb95.5.17.14-5.17.15)

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Deuteronomy 17:14–15

 NASB 2020

“When you enter the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and you take possession of it and live in it, and you say, ‘I will appoint a king over me like all the nations who are around me,’ you shall in fact appoint a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses. One from among your countrymen you shall appoint as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves, anyone who is not your countryman.

‌

And Moses goes on to deliver commandments concerning how the king should reign. The principle point being: he should read the Bible every day - actually, he shall *write it out for himself* - and live by it. Can you imagine if we had a society in which our leadership did that...

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No, the appointment of a king over Israel was always God’s plan. Because God’s ultimate plan is for the Son of David to reign as the True King of Israel.

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**The Turning Point**

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Thus, the Book of Samuel marks a turning point in Israel’s history.

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God is unchanging. [James 1:17](/references/bible%2Bnasb95.80.1.17) very poetically says that with God there is no variation, or “shadow of turning.”

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The technical word is “immutable.” God is immutable. *Unable* to be changed.

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God Himself never changes. As He was, so He is and so He will be forever. And He is kind, and good, and gracious, and loving, and just.

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And we do well to meditate on how awesome it is.

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But, *what* He is doing, *how* He is working does change. Throughout Scripture we see how God works. The different covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and so on. Different epochs or, dispensations...

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Now God *always* loves, always shows grace, always desires to save from sin. And we know that, in whatever time in history one lives, salvation is by grace and through faith, not works.

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[Habakkuk 2:4](/books/LLS%3ANASB2020/references/bible%2Bnasb95.35.2.4)b (NASB 2020)

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But the righteous one will live by his faith.

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How does that faith work out? What does it mean to live by faith?

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That is what varies. For Jews, it was the faithful adherence to law, completion of the feasts and sacrifices as the Scriptures command. For the Church, it is faithfulness to Christ and dependence upon His grace and Holy Spirit, which teaches us the right way to live in accordance with the Scriptures. The works did not save, nor did they produce faith; but faith lived out produced action that corresponds to the time in which you live.

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What is God doing in your life? It changes, doesn’t it? In the seasons of life, thing changes, priorities changes, issues and challenges change. The things we are praying about change. The sins we struggle with change.

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Sometimes, things are relatively peaceful. Other times, things are hard, and life feels heavy.

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The hymn says:

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*When peace like a river attendeth my way*

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*When sorrows, like sea billows, roll*

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*Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say*

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*it is well, it is well with my soul.*

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In the changing challenges of life, we do well to remember that God does *not* change. And in the changing circumstances of life, I think God continually asks each of us:

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“Do you trust Me?” “Do you love Me?” “Am I your top priority?”

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In the good times, God expects us to continually offer thanksgiving to Him, understanding that all good things come from Him. And to be generous.

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In the hard times, God expects us to continually offer faith-filled prayers that confess He is God over every challenge, and His promises are not in any doubt. Something I think we see modelled incredibly well by David.

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So, Samuel is a turning point. We move from judges to prophets, and a prophet who would install the monarchy.

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**Reading**

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1 Samuel 1:1–2

 NASB 2020

Now there was a man from 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 Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

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**Elkanah and His Family**

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Elkanah is introduced, with 5 of his forefathers named. This allows us to check the records in 1 Chronicles, where we discover Elkanah is in fact a Levite, descended from the sons of Korah. [1 Chr 6](/references/bible%2Bnasb95.13.6) if you want to check that out. It’s interesting to me that the narrator here seems to conceal that detail.

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The text calls Elkanah an Ephraimite, but this means he lived in the territory assigned to Ephraim. We know the Levites had no tribal allotment; they dwelt among the other tribes and depended on their tithes for their sustenance.

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This place, Ramathaim-zophim, I am delighted that it’s only called that here. It’s shortened form is just Ramah, which is what we read going forwards. Nice.

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Elkanah had two wives. Hannah and Peninnah. The Bible is clear that God intended marriage to be monogamous, and it’s entirely possible Elkanah has taken two wives in sin. Hannah is childless, and it’s possible that Elkanah felt justified in taking another wife, just as Abraham did with Hagar.

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However, it’s also possible this was a Levirite marriage, where a brother would marry the wife of a widowed sister-in-law to raise up a child for his deceased brother.

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We don’t know which is the case, we only know the fact that he had two wives.

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The name Channah means “grace”

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Peninnah appears to derive from corner, or cornerstone.

**‌**

**Hannah Childless**

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And we learn that Elkanah and Peninnah have had no problems having children, while Hannah has remained barren.

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There can be no doubt as to who is infertile.

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Passages like [Deut 28](/references/bible%2Bnasb95.5.28) led to a prevailing wisdom that children are a blessing and the evidence of being righteous, while barrenness was evidence of God’s curse and rejection.

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Of course, that is not what the text says, and the many saints already who have dealt with barrenness: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Rachel, and so on.

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But culturally this was a hard thing for Hannah to bear. Being unable to have children when you desire to is very difficult, even today. In Hannah’s day, it was even worse because of the stigma around it - it must be your fault, you must be cursed of God.

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We will read many, many adjectives describing how Hannah feels.

**‌**

**Reading**

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1 Samuel 1:3–8

 NASB 2020

Now this man would go up from his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of armies in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests to the Lord there. When the day came that Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; but to Hannah he would give a double portion, because he loved Hannah, but the Lord had closed her womb. Her rival, moreover, would provoke her bitterly to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. And it happened year after year, as often as she went up to the house of the Lord, that she would provoke her; so she wept and would not eat. Then Elkanah her husband would say to her, “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?”

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**Shiloh**

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Shiloh became a key site in Israel under Joshua. About 25 miles north of Jerusalem, and in Ephraim so fairly local for Elkanah.

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The Tabernacle was set up there in [Joshua 18](/references/bible%2Bnasb95.6.18), and here in 1 Samuel it remains there, with Eli the priest presiding over it.

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And Elkanah goes up regularly.

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As you probably know, God decreed in the Torah that when people wanted to worship, when they wanted to sacrifice, they were required to go up to the Tabernacle where the presence of God was localised, between the cherubim on the Mercy Seat, and to where the priests of God ministered.

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[Deut 12](/references/bible%2Bnasb95.5.12) gives the detail on that.

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So Elkanah is right to attend the Tabernacle.

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However, there were actually three Pilgrimage Festivals each year that required attendance: Passover, Shavuot - the feast of Weeks, and Sukkot (or Booths).

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So what we seem to have here is partial obedience.

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**Family Dynamics**

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We see here how the rhythm of Hannah’s life was extremely hard. Although she had Elkanah’s love, which he expressed in the double portion of meat, there was the double hardship of barrenness and being provoked by Peninnah. “Provoked bitterly to irritate.”

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Provoked with provocation - Peninnah is trying to make Hannah angry.

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And then we have Elkanah’s response: why so sad, when you have me? Aren’t I awesome? Look at me!

‌

Hannah is experiencing great grief and sadness. Magnified by her rival wife’s deliberate attempts to provoke her to more sadness, or perhaps trying to get her to lash out and reduce Elkanah’s love for her.

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And magnified still further by Elkanah’s lack of emotional intelligence. It’s not clear whether he is ignorant of Hannah’s feelings, or whether he’s simply not equipped to support her.

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**APPLICATION**

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Husbands, love your wives!

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1 Peter 3:7

 NASB 2020

You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

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Dwell with them in understanding. Study them.

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We husbands have a command of the LORD to seek to understand our wives. How does she feel? What’s concerning her? What are her hopes? How can I bless and encourage her?

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The Greek of that verse is “live together according to knowledge” which I think has a great sense of mutuality. We who are married should seek to really know one another in the fullest sense of the word.

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Marriage is intended to be the number one most intimate relationship between humans. It’s the one relationship where thoughts, emotions, hopes, worries, prayers, should be shared together.

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This is something I wish I had learned 10, 15 years ago.

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So, husbands and wives:

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How are you making time to know and understand your spouse?

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What space and time are you setting aside to really talk and share with him or her?

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Are there things you struggle to honestly discuss? If so, you should pray and ask yourself why. I am certain your marriage will be enriched if you share it.

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Elkanah is a useless support to Hannah. Guys, let’s not be like that.

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I think Hannah is a model for enduring hard times. We’ll read on about how she responds, but we must first consider a very important aspect of this trial.

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**The LORD closed her womb**

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v5: “the LORD had closed her womb.”

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v6: “the LORD had closed her womb.”

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Just in case we miss it in our reading, it is stated twice.

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Hannah’s barrenness is an active and deliberate act of God.

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This was not said of Sarah. Of her, it’s just she “had not borne [Abram] a child.”

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Nor of Rebekah “Isaac prayed to the LORD of behalf of his wife, because she was unable to have children.” - isn’t that a more godly response for a husband than Elkanah’s?

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But here: the LORD has done it. It’s not merely an aspect of living in a broken and fallen world.

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Why? Why has God done this? Why has the LORD withheld a good thing from her?

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Well, we will see. We will see the story unfold, and importantly we will see Hannah’s understanding.

**‌**

**Reading**

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1 Samuel 1:9–11

 NASB 2020

Then Hannah got up after eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She, greatly distressed, prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. And she made a vow and said, “Lord of armies, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your bond-servant and remember me, and not forget Your bond-servant, but will give Your bond-servant 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.”

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**Eli the Priest**

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We’re introduced now to Eli. I find it odd that we were already introduced to his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, before him. But we will talk about them next week.

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Where is Eli?

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Sat on a seat by the doorpost of the Temple of the LORD.

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This is the first time the Temple of the LORD is mentioned. We’re talking about the Tabernacle, of course, which is the forerunner to the Temple Solomon will build in 1 Kings.

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In ch3 we’ll read that Samuel and Eli are actually sleeping “in the temple of the LORD” which implies that sleeping quarters and perhaps other structures have been erected. Likely still tents.

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The word for seat is the same as for *seat of honour* or *throne.* It’s reasonable to picture this as something grandiose, certainly not something God prescribed in the Tabernacle design.

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I get the sense that the priesthood has started to take on an overinflated sense of self-importance. Of course, the priesthood was *critically important* to the Law of God. But not because of the priests *per se*! Because of the God whom they represent. The God who gave laws and rules, to which faith-filled obedience led to blessing and salvation.

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Certainly, Eli’s sons are corrupt. And, at best, Eli is portrayed as naive and foolish. His sitting upon a seat of honour is very inappropriate.

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**Hannah’s Prayer**

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She is greatly distressed. A soul filled with grief. Weeping much.

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I don’t think the writer is overstating dear Hannah’s sorrow. A heartache that has lasted her adult life, made even harder to bear by the sinful provocation of Peninnah.

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Where does she go, in her sorrow?

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To the LORD.

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Yahweh of Hosts, or of Armies. In v3 we saw that title used by the author, here we see Hannah use it. It’s the first time we see it. It’s a title that magnifies God’s sovereignty. He is Lord of all Creation. All human armies, all angel armies, all created things.

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She goes to the One who has closed her womb.

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And she makes a vow.

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*If* You will give me a son, *THEN* I will surrender him right back to you.

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I don’t want a son only for me; I want one for You.

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If you give me this great gift, then I will give it right back to you.

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A razor shall never come on his head, so this is what we call the Nazirite vow. [Numbers 6](/references/bible%2Bnasb95.4.6) has the details for the one who may choose to live a separate, sanctified life. A life dedicated to God, and visually distinguished by never taking alcohol and never cutting the hair.

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So Hannah is making a vow for this child she prays for. Lord, I will set him apart for you, forever.

**‌**

**APPLICATION: pray humbly, honestly and sacrificially**

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The LORD had closed her womb, and I think this is why: He wanted to bring Hannah to the point of total surrender. Samuel was to be a Nazirite from birth. A man set apart as a dedicated man to God forever.

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It’s very similar to John the Baptist, a son born to another childless, Levite couple. In their case, they didn’t get the message and an angel had to intervene and say “look, this is how it’s going to be.”

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Hannah, in her sadness and grief, came to the point of total surrender, saying Lord, if you do give me a son, he is yours, 100% dedicated to you. This is not for me, this is for you.

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The son I wanted, the thing I sought and prayed for until now, LORD, it is Yours. If you *do* give one to me, I give it right back to you, for your purposes.

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Hannah repeatedly refers to herself as a bond-servant. Maidservant in the 1995 edition. That is, she regards her life as not her own but from God and for God.

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A true servant doesn’t really have desires. A true servant doesn’t have self-interests, personal goals, etc.

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Everything is about service.

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For you and me, we are to consider ourselves as bond-servants to God. We are not our own, we were bought at a price.

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And when there are things we strongly desire, Hannah’s example to us is to surrender it to God, confessing that this is not for me, it is for You.

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This is *not* easy. And making this resolve in our hearts doesn’t dispel the desire and emotion, does it. Hannah has arrived here and made this decision. And yet she is still a “woman despairing in spirit” as we’ll read.

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But our truest and deepest fulfilment in this life is found in realising that God is God, and we are His workmanship created for good works. That is, we are created to worship and serve Him, and He will give us everything necessary to do that, *and much more besides* because He is generous.

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May God help us to align our wills and desires to His.

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