

1 Samuel 1:1-2:11

INTRODUCTION:

Hallmark estimates that 150 million Mothers' Day cards will be sent this year, as opposed to only 95 million that will be sent on Fathers' Day, making Mothers' Day the third largest greeting card holiday of the year.

- As I prepared for this morning's lesson, I also found that Americans will spend an average of \$105 on Mothers' Day gifts, as opposed to only \$90 on Fathers' Day gifts.
- I also found that the busiest day at car washes in the United States is the Saturday before Mothers' Day—And so we understand that what mom thinks really matters!

I am hoping that all of us here this morning either have or have had a mother!

- With that in mind, and as we think about motherhood, I'd like for us to think back to a rather famous mother from the Old Testament—a godly woman by the name of Hannah.

We read about Hannah in **1 Samuel 1**.

- Before we get to **1 Samuel 1**, however, we need to understand that Hannah comes onto the scene at time that was quite bleak in the nation of Israel.
- In fact, in the Hebrew Bible, the book of **1 Samuel** is immediately preceded, not by **Ruth**, as it is in our English Bibles, but by the book of **Judges**.
- If you are familiar with the book of **Judges**, then you know that it records one of the darkest periods in the history of God's people.
- The book is filled with stories of rape, and genocide, and dismemberment, and murder, and all kinds of horrible things.
- During this time, the religion of the Jews had been mixed in with the pagan religions of Canaan, and the situation was grim to say the least.
- We find in **1 Samuel 3:1** that a *"...word from the Lord was rare in those days, [and] visions were infrequent."*
- In other words, the people were so stubborn and the situation was so bad, that God did not waste His time by communicating with such an obstinate people.

If we turn back to the very last verse of **Judges**, we find a good summary of the way things were. In **Judges 21:25**, the Bible says, *"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*

- There were no prophets faithfully preaching, there were no moral absolutes, if it felt good the people did it, and tolerance was certainly a key word in that society.
- And now that we think about it, the situation sounds a little familiar, doesn't it?
- Into this situation, God sent a very special mother who would play a key role in turning the nation back to God.
- That brings us up to **1 Samuel 1**.

1 Now there was a certain 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.

2 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.

3 Now this man would go up from his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests to the LORD there.

4 When the day came that Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters;

5 but to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, but the LORD had closed her womb.

6 Her rival, however, would provoke her bitterly to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb.

7 It happened year after year, as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she would provoke her; so she wept and would not eat.

8 Then Elkanah her husband said 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?"

9 Then Hannah rose after eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the temple of the LORD.

10 She, greatly distressed, prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly.

11 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 son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head."

12 Now it came about, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli was watching her mouth.

13 As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. So Eli thought she was drunk.

14 Then Eli said to her, "How long will you make yourself drunk? Put away your wine from you."

15 But Hannah replied, "No, my lord, I am a woman oppressed in spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the LORD.

16 "Do not consider your maidservant as a worthless woman, for I have spoken until now out of my great concern and provocation."

17 Then Eli answered and said, "Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him."

18 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.

19 Then they arose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD, and returned again to their house in Ramah. And Elkanah had relations with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her.

20 It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked him of the LORD."

21 Then the man Elkanah went up with all his household to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow.

22 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."

23 Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you. Remain until you have weaned him; only may the LORD confirm His word." So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him.

24 Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull and one ephah of flour and a jug of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh, although the child was young.

25 Then they slaughtered the bull, and brought the boy to Eli.

26 She said, "Oh, my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the LORD.

27 "For this boy I prayed, and the LORD has given me my petition which I asked of Him.

28 "So I have also dedicated him to the LORD; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

As we look back over this chapter, I would like for us to focus on Hannah and several lessons from her life that might offer just a little bit of encouragement to the mothers who are with us this morning.

I. First of all, as we look back at the opening verses of **1 Samuel 1, WE FIND THAT HANNAH, LIKE MANY MOTHERS TODAY, HAD A VERY DIFFICULT LIFE.**

Only a mother can truly understand what Hannah was going through.

- Only a mother can know what it is like to experience a child growing inside of her.
- Only a mother can know how uncomfortable it is to lug around the added weight of that child night and day without relief.

As I was preparing this morning's lesson, I got a little curious about what women have to go through, so I went online and looked up the average amount of weight gain during a normal pregnancy.

- The figures varied, but the average seemed to be somewhere around 30 pounds.
- Yesterday, my family and I went to Wal-Mart; and as I picked up a bag of Tidy Cats kitty litter it occurred to me that this was a 30 lb bag.
- And if you've picked up a 30 lb bag of anything recently you realize the amount of extra weight that a mother typically gains when she becomes pregnant.
- Keep in mind, she has to carry that around 24 hours a day with no relief whatsoever.
- And so, I just want to express to all of our mothers here this morning that we appreciate you bearing that extra weight for all of us.

Only a mother can truly understand what this must be like.

- Only a mother can truly understand the pain of childbirth.
- I have a theory on teenagers that I may need to test out in a few years, but I think most teenagers would benefit from going into one of the hospitals in the area maybe between 1 and 2 AM.
- And I think it might be helpful for them to just sit in the waiting room outside the birthing center for about an hour...listening to the screams of pain coming out of those rooms up and down that hallway.
- It seems to me that that might help all of us to have a greater appreciation of what our mothers have gone through.

And yet in addition to this regular difficulty, Hannah certainly faced some very unique challenges of her own.

- Sometimes it is tempting to think of the great heroes of the Bible as not having the same troubles that we might have, and yet as we read we find that the great heroes of faith in fact did face the same troubles that we are facing today.

In **1 Samuel 1**, we find that Hannah had trouble conceiving.

- I know from talking with a number of Christian couples that this is still a heavy emotional burden even today.
- In many cases, there is a sense of loss...even a sense of guilt.
- Many times, they will start projecting into the future and think about all they will miss by not having children.
- I would say, though, that in some ways it would have been even worse in ancient times.
- The inability to conceive was often considered a curse, and Hannah would have been looked down upon.

When we think about it, though, we realize that Hannah joined a long line of godly women who faced the same struggle: Sarah (the wife of Abraham), Rebekah (the wife of Isaac), Rachel (the wife of Jacob), Ruth (the wife of Boaz), and Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist).

- In fact, as far as I can tell, most of the childless women in the Bible were righteous women, and many of those who easily conceived children were often quite wicked in their behavior.
- I don't know what the lesson here is, but we do know that Hannah faced a tremendous struggle.

As hard as it might be today, I wonder if we could put ourselves in her position—being one of two wives who were married to the same man.

- At least today, that burden is shared between a husband and wife, but in Hannah’s case, it was obvious to the world that she was the one who could not have children.
- The other woman kept on having babies, but Hannah was left behind.
- In **verse 6**, the other woman “*...would provoke her bitterly to irritate her....*”
- How painful that must have been!

We find in **verses 5 and 6**, though, that “*the Lord had closed her womb.*”

- In these cases, we want to think that there is some random reason, or some unknown health difficulty...but we find that the Lord was responsible for her not having any children.
- The Lord had a plan, and we’ll get to that in just a moment.

But for now, we see that Hannah was facing a very difficult situation.

- Like many mothers today, Hannah was also married to a man who probably meant well...but really didn’t help the situation.
- As Hannah is so stressed out and sad that she cannot even eat, her husband says, “*Am I not better to you than ten sons?*”
- Not exactly the most comforting thing that could be said!
- Instead of listening to her pain, this man basically says, “**Hey, you’ve got me...what else could you possibly want?**”
- As guys, we might be thinking, “**Yeah. That sounds like a pretty good answer.**”
- But we find that Hannah was miserable.
- So first of all, then, we find that mothers can go through tremendous difficulty, and as we think about our mothers today, we need to be especially thankful.

II. As we continue in **1 Samuel 1**, we also find that **GOD LISTENS TO THE PRAYERS OF MOTHERS WHO FEAR THE LORD.**

We notice in **verse 11** that she did not pray for God to kill the other woman or to make her leave the family.

- She did not pray that she herself would be removed from the family.
- In fact, she did not even pray for a child for anything remotely like a selfish reason—not to get back at the other woman, not so she would look good in the community, not just to make her happy or to make her husband happy.
- But she prayed specifically for a son so that she could give him to the Lord.
- In other words, her motives were incredibly pure.

We also notice that Hannah prayed fervently.

- This was not a spur-of-the-moment prayer.
- This was not a prayer that was prayed to impress anyone who might have been listening.
- But **verse 10** tells us that she was “*greatly distressed*” and that she “*wept bitterly*” as she prayed to the Lord.
- **Verse 12** tells us that she “*continued praying before the Lord.*”
- And so again, this was not something done quickly, but she kept on praying.

The Bible tells us that she was so intense in her prayer that Eli the priest thought she was drunk.

- He saw her lips moving but did not hear a voice, so Eli started condemning her for drinking, but then she explained (in **verse 15**) that she was “*...a woman oppressed in spirit...*” and that she had “*...poured out [her] soul before the Lord.*”

We are not told, but I am open to the possibility that God had allowed her to go so long without a child—just to bring her to this point.

- God needed a man who would be ready and willing to bring the nation back to God—and God did it through the prayer of this woman who feared the Lord.
- Hannah, then, put herself in the Lord’s plan and arranged her priorities in line with the Lord’s.
- And as a result of this prayer from a godly mother, the nation of Israel was going to be blessed for at least the next 100 years.

When the child was born, Hannah named him Samuel, which literally means, “**Heard by God.**”

- Every time someone said his name, they would have been reminded that Samuel was the result of a prayer by a godly woman.

I cannot speak for all parents, but I know that having kids of my own has absolutely revolutionized my own prayer life.

- Like Hannah, we can also pray for our children even before they are conceived.
- We can pray for them when they are small children and we pray for them throughout their teens.
- And we can continue praying for them as adults.
- We learn, then, that God listens to the prayers of godly women who fear the Lord.

III. There is a third lesson from the life of Hannah in this chapter and we see it as **HANNAH REALIZES THAT CHILDREN ARE A BLESSING FROM THE LORD.**

After she prays, she and her husband get up early in the morning to worship the Lord, and then they go home to do their part.

- As a result of their active faith, **verse 19** tells us that “*...the Lord remembered her.*”
- She then conceived and gave birth to a son.

I should point out that just because God answered her prayer in this way does not mean that every prayer for a child will be answered in the same way.

- I have read that 1 out of 6 women who want to have a baby cannot conceive (or at least have some difficulty).
- But it seems the point here is that when children come, they are indeed a blessing from the Lord.

It seems like our society has moved away from this view that children are a gift of God.

- It seems to me that some couples tend to look at children as glorified pets.
- But they are not. Children are a blessing from the Lord.
- We remember the words of Solomon in **Psalm 127:3-5**, “*Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate.*”

Solomon says that children are like a quiver full of arrows.

- It is a little hard for us to understand this today, first of all because we no longer hunt and defend ourselves with arrows.
- But secondly, even when we do use arrows, they are mass produced in giant factories.
- We buy them by the case at Wal-Mart.
- Each arrow is perfectly straight and round, with a smooth finish and little threads on the end for swapping out various tips.
- But in the ancient world, we would have made our own.
- If we wanted them to fly straight, it would have been our responsibility to shape them properly.

- Their ability to fly would have been due to our craftsmanship and aim.
- I think we can say the same thing about our children.
- Children are a blessing from the Lord and are a huge responsibility at the same time.

IV. There is something else we can learn from the life of Hannah, and that is, IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S GIFT, HANNAH GAVE HER CHILD BACK TO THE LORD.

Some of you may be thinking, **“I wish we could give our children back to the Lord...”**

- But that is not exactly what Hannah had in mind.
- Hannah realized that Samuel was a gift from God, and so she dedicated his life to the Lord's service.

The Bible says that Hannah waited until Samuel was weaned—maybe 2, or 3, or 4 years old—and when that day came, she brought a sacrifice to the Lord.

- She brought a bull, and some flour, and a jug of wine...and she also brought her only son as a gift to the Lord.
- Can we imagine leaving one of our children at that age to be raised by some religious leader that we only see maybe once a year?
- We think it's hard leaving a child at kindergarten for the first time, but here Hannah was leaving him for **“as long as he lives”** (according to **verse 28**)—This must have been so hard.
- There is a little statement in the next chapter that tells us that Hannah and Samuel stayed in touch.
- **1 Samuel 2:19** says, **“And his mother 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.”**
- Just imagine how difficult this must have been!

I hope we all noticed a very interesting statement at the very end of **1 Samuel 1**.

- Right at the end of **verse 28**, the Bible speaks of Samuel being left at the temple, and it says, **“And he worshiped the Lord there.”**
- Remember, Samuel was probably only about 4 years old...but he worshiped the Lord.

I wonder what impact it would have today if all of us as parents had the attitude of Hannah.

- What about all of us as a congregation?
- How would it change us if we saw the children of this congregation as Eli must have seen Samuel?
- As parents, would it change the amount of time we spend with our children?
- If we put ourselves in Hannah's position, knowing that we would give our child away at 4 years old, would we change the amount of time we would spend with our children?
- Would we spend less time in front of the television?
- Would we spend more time teaching the Bible to our children and more time praying with them at home?

SUMMARY:

It seems that all of us can learn from Hannah as we give our own children to the Lord.

- She went through tremendous difficulty.
- She took her concerns to God in prayer.
- She realized that children are a blessing from the Lord.
- And she gave her son back to God.

CONCLUSION:

As we close this morning, I should point out that Hannah was rewarded for her sacrifice.

- In **verse 21** of the next chapter, the Bible says that *“The Lord visited Hannah; and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters.”*
- Beyond this, she also saw her son Samuel become a leading figure in the history of God’s people.
- When Eli died, Samuel became the 14th and the last judge of Israel.
- In his lifetime, Samuel established a school for the prophets.
- He drove the Philistines back into their territory.
- He reestablished the worship of Jehovah.
- He took a leading role in training the next generation, and he personally anointed the first two kings of Israel—King Saul and King David.
- In many ways, Samuel literally turned the nation around.
- He took Israel from the very dark period of the judges and began turning the nation back toward God.
- All of this started when a woman named Hannah took her concerns to God in prayer.

INVITATION:

Every time we come together, we try to make a public invitation.

- The Bible teaches that we must turn away from our sins and make an appeal to God for a clean conscience through baptism.
- When we are buried with the Lord, our sins are covered by His blood.
- God sacrificed His only Son so that our sins could be washed away.
- We accept that sacrifice by being immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins.
- If you have any questions, we hope you will talk with us right away, but if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song.
- Let’s stand and sing...