

1 Samuel 1:1-28

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Samuel 1 There was a certain man of Ramathayim Zathim of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tahu, son of Zath, and Ephrathite.

He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah, and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to the worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas were priests of the Lord.

On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah, his wife, and to all her sons and daughters, but to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb.

And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her because the Lord had closed her womb. So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her.

Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. And 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 more to you than ten sons?

[1 : 1 7] After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli, the priest, was sitting in the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly, and she vowed a vow and said, O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.

As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart. Only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman.

And Eli said to her, How long will you go on being drunk? Put away your wine from you. But Hannah answered, No, my Lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.

Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation. Then Eli answered, Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him.

And she said, Let your servant find favor in your eyes. Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad. They rose early in the morning and worshipped before the Lord.

[2 : 4 2] Then they went back to their house in Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah, his wife, and the Lord remembered her. And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. And she called his name Samuel, for she said, I have asked for him from the Lord.

The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the Lord and dwell there forever.

Elkanah, her husband, said to her, Do what seems best to you. Wait until you have weaned him. Only may the Lord establish his word. So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him.

And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. And she brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh, and the child was young.

Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, O my Lord, as you live, my Lord, I and the woman who is standing here in your presence praying to the Lord, for this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made him.

[3 : 55] Therefore I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord. And he worshiped the Lord there. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Please be seated. Well, good afternoon.

A special welcome to all the children who are with us over these summer months. We have chosen to be in 1 Samuel, where we have this wonderful story of how God raises up a leader that would lead to the ultimate leader, Jesus.

And this early leader's name is Samuel. In fact, I was looking at the sheets for the children that Donna Dotzbach prepared, and I'm thinking even if I'm an adult, I might want to pick one of these up and use them over the summer months.

They have things in it, even like where the certain words in the text are hidden, and you have to find them. It might help some of you to find your way along during the summer crossword puzzles.

[5 : 11] Donna, thank you so much for serving our kids in that way. Well, a summer in the first seven chapters of 1 Samuel.

In the Hebrew Bible, the books that go by the names of 1 and 2 Samuel actually follow, in sequence, the book of Judges.

In our English Bible, it, of course, is separated by Judges via the book of Ruth. But both of these books are taking place in the time of the Judges.

So you have to work your way back to the great deliverance of Moses, the passing on to the generation of Joshua, the entrance into the land, and then those repetitive cycles of the people of God, and their failure, and their disobedience, and his raising up of deliverers.

So here it is, 1 Samuel. It almost functions as a bridge book. You know what I mean? It takes you from one biblical era to another.

[6 : 34] It takes you from the time of the judges to the moment where the great kings have arrived. And so this book really gives you three leaders.

1 Samuel, you see the first seven chapters, and that's what we'll deal with this summer. Samuel himself. But Samuel was a king maker. He is the one who anoints Saul.

And then David. And the first book of Samuel closes with Saul's death. And the second book of Samuel closes with the last words of David.

And so here we are in this book that is a bridge to the kings. And if you know your Bible well, how those kings lead to God's great preeminent king.

I suppose this idea of kings explains why the Vulgate actually calls this book 1 Kings. 1 and 2 Samuel are in the Vulgate called 1 and 2 Kings.

[7 : 51] And therefore, 1 and 2 Kings are called 3 and 4 Kings. The Septuagint, of course, calls these books the 1 and 2 Kingdoms.

And so we arrive, not knowing who wrote the work that we're reading this summer, but knowing nonetheless that Samuel is a king maker.

He reminds me a bit of John the Baptist, who was this forerunner of a later time who anointed God's forever king.

Samuel and the Baptist standing on either end of Israel's kings. The allure of the book is not so much its placement in the canon, but as I think we will all see this summer with great enjoyment, the strength of the narrative.

The allure is in the power of the story. You're going to be reading a story all summer long. And in that way, it will be very refreshing, won't it, from our six months through the great logic of Romans.

[9 : 18] Well, what's the story about? What's the takeaway on week one? One, simply this. God accomplishes His plan to put a king in the world through very ordinary people.

To put it a little differently, God's ways with those ordinary people will be that His work is accomplished in and through their great difficulties.

That's not the way we think of God working in the world. We think of Him working in this great, powerful way that He is immediately present in the most important of places.

But here, the Bible tells us differently. Nowhere does it make it more clear than the very opening verse. Take a look, because you will see there, in verse 1, that you are introduced to places and people who are of no great importance.

It's an interesting way to start the story. There was a certain man of Ramathim Tzothim, of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah, the son of Yehoram, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Tzuth, an Ephrathite.

[11 : 04] Notice the places. A long-sounding name that looks like it might come out of a contemporary children's movie.

Where are you from? I'm from Ramathim Tzothim. That goes through the hall. Well, in actual fact, this is the only time this city is ever mentioned in all the Bible.

In fact, the following clause humorously reveals its lack of significance. It's almost as if the reader would say, well, where is Ramathim Tzothim?

Well, following clause of the hill country of Ephraim, it's a place, well, to let you know where it is, hmm, well, it's in the hill country of Ephraim.

my father grew up in Tuscola, Illinois. Oh, really? Where's Tuscola? Well, it's in the vicinity of Champaign.

[12 : 23] Hmm, Champaign. And where might that be? Well, it's a bit a long drive, really, from Peoria or, hmm, and if you went north, you'd find your way to Chicago and suddenly Tuscola has its place.

Well, here we have a man that lives in a location of no great significance that is actually defined by being in the hill country of Ephraim and this man's name was Elkanah.

Now, notice there's a genealogy and normally when you think of genealogies, you think that in the Bible they trace great personages, you know, that you're looking for names that are well known that are, again, significant.

But the only striking feature of the genealogy of 1 Samuel is that all of these people are of absolutely no significance at all. And so the story begins of how God brings his king into the world.

He goes nowhere, actually a little west of nowhere, where there is a man of no lineage of any significance at any rate.

[14 : 02] In fact, the only moment of recollection to the reader in the name is the last one, the son of Suf, and here we have his location, in Ephrathite, which if you know your biblical history, could be the place surrounding Bethlehem or Bethlehem itself, but at this time, absolutely a meaningless place because the great significance of Bethlehem is still to come.

it's a man in the middle of nowhere from no one through whom God's great story of a king will come.

God's ways are rooted in the soil of an unknown and ordinary citizenry, not from the halls of power, not within a quote, priestly line.

Jesus, years later, hammers this very important point home, lest we forget it, when he says, no one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment and a worse tear is made.

Neither is new wine put on old wine skins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put in fresh wine skins and so both are preserved.

[15 : 49] And so, too, here, new wine is being readied to flow with new wine skins. So let me ask you, should it surprise you then that if God brings his own king into the world through this means, that he would not also bring kingdom followers along the same way, that their usefulness to him would spring ordinarily from very ordinary circumstances?

are you wondering today, does God really, is he really capable of doing something from where I'm from?

Is God capable of doing something with me? Let me put it differently. You're in transition. does God really work his plans out from that place?

Which is so far from any place through people that are unknown and will remain so?

can God raise up leaders, followers in his kingdom from your life and mine?

[17 : 26] The answer is yes. I've been thinking this week on 1 Corinthians 1, 26 and following, you know, not many of you were wise according to the wisdom of the world.

Not many of you were rich. Not many of you were of noble birth. Why? Because God chooses the foolish things to shame the wise.

He chooses the impoverished things to shame the rich. He chooses those things that are weak or even are not to say something to the world.

Praise God. God. This is his way. Well, when we see that he does something through places and persons of no great importance, he rolls into verses 2 to 8 where we see that this Elkanah and his family, he actually does something through marriages that are marked by patterns of great devotion but also great difficulty.

Take a look at verse 2. He had two wives. The name of the one, Hannah, the name of the other, Peninnah, and Peninnah had children but Hannah had no children.

[18 : 58] There's the first indicator of difficulty. A marriage marked by difficulty. Hannah was without children.

Infertility. That's a hard thing in that day as it is in this day and I'm not here today to compare that day to this day but I will say that in that day the provisions for such a woman and the social disdain in such a state would even have been magnified over the great magnification with which it is actually held today.

And so the sorrow that is felt by many here and in our city and in our churches is one that penetrates to the very bone and marrow of a woman's soul.

This is a woman who knew what it was to enter into nearly from her perspective every conversation where the rest of the discussion was on the lives of their children and she had none.

This is a woman who knew what it was to notice the aging of the children in her village fully cognizant of what age hers may have been had he given them to her.

[20 : 37] This is a woman with great loss having never lost for having never been given.

And those instances as you see in the text are actually magnified in particular times of the year and often in contexts where her life has to meet her religion.

You'll see that in just a moment. not only was she without children but notice she had to dwell day in and day out in the presence of one that the narrator calls a rival.

Did you see that in verse 6? It's quite a striking term. Her husband's other wife is termed her rival. A woman that knew what it was to be in a home that was shared with another woman.

Now in biblical terms we don't know why he had two wives at this point. We don't really know. We're not told whether Hannah was incapable of having children and therefore he took another wife in order to have an heir.

[21 : 59] All complete speculation. But what we do know is that day by day, drip by drip, moment by moment she dwelt in the house or the home where her husband had another.

There are women here that know this in a different way of course. But any time a husband brings a rival woman into his life, the devastating effects on a woman are overwhelming.

Whether it's a real woman or a perceived woman, whether it's an internet woman or a traveling woman, whether it's the office wife versus the home wife, it's just absolutely devastating.

I want you to know who Hannah was. She was a woman who had no children. She was a woman who knew what it was to dwell in the presence of a rival. And she was a woman who at certain times of the year found them worse than other times of the year.

And that was these religious ceremonies that called for her husband to go to Shiloh once a year. Verse 3, Now the man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh.

[23 : 24] If you're not familiar with Shiloh, a couple hundred years before this, when Joshua enters the land, Shiloh is the place where they first set up the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant rests at Shiloh.

So it was the center really of the cultic worship of the people. And so that's where he would go. It wasn't Jerusalem. That comes later with David. So Shiloh was the great, it was going to church, you know, it was in here making the annual pilgrimages.

And this man in the day of the judges is a commendable man. He would go year by year to offer sacrifices at the place where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the Lord.

More on them in the coming weeks. On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah, his wife, and to all her sons and daughters, but to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her that the Lord had closed her womb.

And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her because the Lord had closed her womb. So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her.

[24 : 45] Therefore, Hannah wept and would not eat. Very much, you can see the language of provocation. This is a difficult marriage.

church, this other woman actually on an annual basis took the sacrifice and the peace offerings, this religious moment, as an opportunity to rub salt in the wounds.

It's not a good woman here. And Hannah knew what that was. And look at the way the narrator speaks of it. Did you catch the phrases? Verse 7, year by year.

Verse 3, year by year. Verse 7, as often as she went up, a long suffering woman.

So what are we seeing? God works through ordinary people of no great importance. further, even people who are in marriages that are marked by great difficulty.

[25 : 58] God can still be at work. And notice, it's difficulty that's mixed. There's devotion. I mean, Elkanah is, in some sense, even though he has his second wife, a rather commendable fellow, I guess we could say.

He loves her. His devotion to her is listed there in the words of verse 8, and Elkanah, her husband, said to her, Hannah, why do you weep?

Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons? I mean, he is doing all he can to say, I love you.

He's devoted to her, even though it's a very difficult marriage. marriage. And notice the portions, isn't that fascinating? He would give portions at the offering to the one wife, but a double portion or literally two noses, almost like two animals that are sacrificed, double portion to Hannah because it says he loved her.

God works through persons of no great importance who are living in places in the middle of nowhere and in marriages that are marked by difficulty and this pattern of despair.

[27 : 29] So what happens? Look at verse 9. I mean, what a story. Hannah finally can't take it anymore. and I love the contrast here.

Notice, Hannah rises and the priest is seated. I mean, she's going to do something. He's sitting by the door but she's going in to talk to God.

And what you find in verses 9 to 11 is simply this. Hannah prays and Hannah makes a promise. It's Hannah's prayer and Hannah's promise.

You'll notice that later the whole text is the unfolding of that prayer is honored and her promise is kept.

But here, this far in the story, she prays. Notice the irony of her opening phrase. I mean, this is a prayer that is desperate. This is not convention week in, week out, I paid attention half the time.

[28 : 34] No, she is all in. And look at her opening line almost as if to throw her situation before God almost in a take this what she called you O Lord of hosts.

I mean, earlier in this chapter we saw the first mention of that title of God in all the Bible. people. It's the word host that is Genesis 2 1 where God creates all the hosts.

It's the word in Isaiah 40 26 that speaks of all the stars in the sky when you get out of the city in the summer and you look up or if you can't get out of the city in the summer and you take your iPad and you get the constellations and hold that up, you see that all, here's the woman with nothing, saying, Lord of everything.

I love this woman. What a beautiful portrait. She goes into his presence to claim a few things and she does so based on his very character.

Look at the language. She's deeply distressed, verse 10. She wept bitterly. Tears may last for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

[30 : 07] Didn't you love the song we sang over the Offertory? Pray in the morning, pray at noontime, pray when the day is through, pray when you're happy, pray when you're worried, pray when you don't know what to do, pray without ceasing, just pray without ceasing.

And I love that last little phrase, praise him, punch, adore him, boom, fall down before him, pray, pray, just pray.

That's what she does. And that's what some of you need to do this week, given your situation. Pray. bring it to him.

Lay it before him, whatever it is. Now, the second thing I'm not quite so confident I should tell you to do, but she did, in that she made a promise.

Look what it says in verse 11, and she vowed a vow and said, O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life and no razor shall touch his head.

[31 : 32] I mean, what a promise. It's one of those, the closest I can come to understanding her promise is the connection it might have to Numbers chapter 6.

And it's due to this little phrase here about a vow, first of all, that the connection to a razor shall not touch his head. And in Numbers chapter 6, there is something called a Nazarite vow, that an adult who is willing and able might actually make a vow before God's name alone for a particular time of their life or a length of period.

They would make an oath for a phase, a season. About something. They would make a promise. Paul does this, I think, in regard to somewhere in the book of Acts, about not cutting his hair, you know, because he had taken a vow.

But look what she does. She doesn't take a vow for herself. She goes and in the name of the living God says, I'm taking a vow on behalf of my son that I do not have. Now, I love this because this is another indication, like there's so many indications in the Bible, where the parent takes on the responsible promise on behalf of their children in faith, and they obligate the child to it of no free will of their own.

I love that. Parents doing for children according to the promise of God. He had no say in the matter. prayer. But that was the vow.

[33 : 13] That was the promise. And the qualification for you, if you're going into prayer this week on something, is simply, you need to balance this kind of thing with the book of James that says, you know, be careful, don't make a lot of promises, because you know you don't keep them very well.

You know? I mean, let your yes be yes, your no be no, nothing more. Don't get yourself in trouble by making all these promises before God. And that's wisdom. But this is what she did.

She made a promise. Give me a son, and I will give him to you. Man, it's a woman on a mission.

Her prayer, her promise, met, of course, by the priest's impertinence and eventual words of blessing and peace.

Eli comes onto the scene, doesn't he? Don't you love these stories? I mean, these are great. They just kind of roll along. Very different to preach from this than to preach from Romans, I must confess. I hope I'll be okay for the summer.

[34 : 24] But at any rate, here it is. As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart, only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard.

Therefore, Eli took her to be a drunken woman, and Eli said to her, how long will you go on being drunk? Put away your wine from you. The priest, I mean, this is typical.

All right, for those of you who are Anglophiles, this is Jane Austen Wordbeam. This is a priest that is nothing more than the bumbling idiot, which is why I don't like to go to any movies where religious priests or pastors are on display, because normally they play one role.

You're a bumbling idiot, and you are of no consequence in the real world of ideas and thought and motion. And then I have to tell people I'm a pastor. Well, here he is, sitting at the temple rather than working, and then misreading the seeker who walks in the door and what she's really doing.

I don't know if you've ever done this. This is a great trick, is to just kind of speak without speaking, just kind of moving your lips with a sense of irritation. It happens in Hyde Park quite a bit, and I never know whether I'm crossing somebody who's homeless and doing that, and they're in a drunken stupor and they're just walking, muttering to themselves, or I'm crossing the path of someone who is a Nobel Prize winner who's doing that, and they're lost in some kind of thing.

[35 : 51] But either way, those people do set you off a bit, don't they? But if you're ever worried and you're on the street at night and you're crossing somebody, all you need to do is to do that yourself, and they will leave you alone.

Well, Eli, he was impertinent. He intrudes, he presumes, he's rude, he throws himself into the situation, he makes a judgment on her character, he's got no tact, he's not in accordance with knowledge.

Everything he does here is wrong, and if you think it's bad, keep reading. Over the summer, it gets worse. Oh, that he would have been just a bumbling idiot.

Fortunately, though, he does bail himself out here in the first chapter, because those words of impertinence are followed by words of blessing and peace. He does what a priest should do.

He actually blesses her, doesn't he? When he gets it all straight, Eli answered verse 17, go in peace, and the God of Israel, grant your petition that you have made to him.

[37 : 01] And she said, let your servant find favor in your eyes. Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad. I mean, she got what she wanted out of church on that day.

She got the blessing of God through the lips of the priest. peace. She prayed a prayer. She made a promise. She received words of peace.

And I'm telling you, she got out of there fast. Got to get home to Elkanah. You know what I mean.

No longer sad. And I've been thinking about how do you handle this blessing? It's interesting that you go back this week and take a look. Number six, where you have that whole Nazarite vow section, it's the same chapter that inserts the Aaronic blessing.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face shine upon you. Lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. So you have this Nazarite vow, followed by the Aaronic words of peace, followed by God will put his name on his people.

[38 : 16] Now that's significant because her prayer is answered and she calls her son the name of the Lord.

Look at verses 19 and 20. Prayers answered. They rose early in the morning. They worshiped before the Lord. They went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew Hannah, his wife, and the Lord remembered her.

And in due time, Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, I have asked for him from the Lord. Samuel, of course, the name of the Lord.

What a story. prayer is answered. You know, this is the moment where this book really reminds me of Ruth because, you know, you have these women in these times of the judges that God did amazing things through.

Naomi, of course, wanted to be called Mara, bitter. God had abandoned her, taking her husband, taking her sons. No lineage, no line. Ruth comes in, and Ruth gives birth to a son, and then the genealogy traces that son, at the time of the judges, to the king.

[39 : 32] And in this story, Samuel, we have the same kind of thing in play, where she now gives birth to a son, and it's not the king, but this is the forerunner to the king.

This is the one who stands before the king and anoints him as God's own. A beautiful answer to prayer. Don't think God can't do great things through you and where you are, marked by difficulty, despair, and habitual annual patterns of disappointment.

And so it ends. Her promises are kept. 21 to the end. Elkanah, he goes up to the yearly sacrifice to pay his vows.

I love this, verse 22. But Hannah did not go up. I mean, all those years she went up, having to bear the brunt of the ridicule of the other woman, and now she has her own child.

Not going up. Not because I'm trying to avoid that woman. No, not going up. Because I'm raising my boy, and when he's weaned, I bring him to the Lord.

[40 : 52] Now, weaning could have taken anywhere between the ages of two or three. So you can now envision when she finally does come, this little one is toddling around, much the size and age of some of you who are in here.

And she brings him into the house of the Lord, and she presents him to Eli, and she says this. You remember that day? You remember that day? When I was a nobody?

From nowhere? Knew only disappointment? I came in here to church. I made a prayer. I made a promise.

And God did something. Changed my life. And the fruit of my womb is a gift to the Lord. Hey, can you imagine that going on in Hyde Park?

Can you imagine the sensitivity with which we must live our lives? Understanding that week in and week out, people come here needing the blessing, benediction from the Lord.

[41 : 59] and to know that he can make roots come up on a dry ground.

She kept her promise. That to me is the most stunning thing of all. She gave him to the Lord. And lest you think that she was old and never had any children, you'll be glad to know.

Read the next chapter. She has at least five, either five more or Samuel plus five. So don't think of Hannah the way you think of Elizabeth as if she was way too old to have kids.

No, she was still in her childbearing years. Raised a big family. So what did we learn today? Well, the takeaways.

God's ways of bringing his king into the world are very unlike the halls of power and the normal lines of priestly service.

[43 : 04] He takes people of no great importance whose marriages are marked by difficulty and disappointment and through their prayer and their promises brings his blessing and a new day emerges.

Well, we've got the table behind us. That's the divine pattern. This humble laying down of a life that gives life to all who come to him.

What a beautiful beginning to our summer. Our Heavenly Father, as we come now to the table, help us to remember this costly sacrifice and this son of yours that came from such obscure beginnings that we might have life.

In his name we pray. Amen.