

A Small Reversal

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[0 : 00] Folks, let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts this evening so that we might hear your word.

In Christ's name. Amen. Grab a seat, team. Folks, 1 Samuel.

Woo! We're here. Awesome. I've been in 1 Samuel for one week studying it. Love it. Absolutely love it. Could be my new favourite book of the Bible.

So I'm really, really excited about the next, goodness, I don't know, 12 to 13 years that we all spend in Samuel. Now, before jumping in right in here, it's a narrative, it's a story, it has a place in history. And so I figured it would probably be really helpful if I just brought you up to speed to whereabouts this occurred in the narrative of the Bible, in the whole story of the Bible.

[1 : 05] So let me go right from the start here. God created everything. Okay? He said it was good. His people rebelled. We wanted to be owners, not tenants.

And of course, everything went sideways after that because God judged us. People started knocking each other off. There was Noah. There was the flood. And one of the main points of that is that, you know, even when you restart the world with the best guy around, with the best family around, well, things quickly went sideways after they landed, right?

It just doesn't work.

Judges, Ruth, Samuel. Okay? Forget about Ruth for a moment. Pretty much goes Judges, Samuel in terms of the history of it here, in terms of what you need to know, places and history.

Okay, Judges, let me slow down a bit here. Judges, a very precarious time for Israel. Israel was a troubled community. They were militarily weak, politically weak, kind of fairly dodgy, fairly dodgy folks.

[2 : 37] They were a young nation. Not even really a nation. More of a sort of a confederation probably is a better way of describing it. A real low point for the Hebrew people. They had this cycle where they would fall into adultery and sin.

God would punish them. And the way he'd do that often was by allowing some outside enemy to come in and just slam them. And then the Hebrew people would repent. They'd come back to God. God would appoint them a judge. And don't think of Judges like a court judge, like a ruler, like a leader. The leader would put them right for a while. And then they'd fall into sin again. So, fairly chronic problem here.

There's some big names in Judges, the book of Judges. You know these guys. Gideon. You know Fleece. You know the story. Samson. Guys from that 80s rock band with the big hair, big muscles. Love the ladies. He was a bit of trouble though. And you read the book. Interesting book. You should read the book. It'll help you put Samuel in context.

[3 : 40] It's a funny book, eh Judges? Because you read it and you go, Oh, Hebrew people. It's so stupid. Why are you so thick headed?

Why did you keep doing what you were doing? Why couldn't you pull it together? How could you experience the kindness of God and then turn away from him? Why would you do that?

You read it and then you look in the mirror. So, it's a good book. You should probably get acquainted with it, right? The last line of Judges is a fairly sobering one. It says this.

And they did whatever was right in their own eyes. So, it's pretty much, it's sorry on a Friday night, team. So, not a great situation.

I make no apologies for that comment. Sorry on a Friday night. So, it's looking pretty rough for the Israelites at this point.

[4 : 41] And it's at this point that Samuel starts. And I just want to say, you're going to love Samuel. It's so great.

Great characters. It's got Samuel, obviously, the namesake of the book, the judge, prophet guy. It's got Saul, the guy that the people chose and he was incompetent. It's got David, who was the anointed king.

Fairly sketchy guy. It's got Eli, who was the doofus priest and his really evil sons. We'll talk about them next week. It's got a beheading of Goliath. It's got murder.

It's got intrigue. It's got lust. It's got everything. It is such a great book. But the best thing about Samuel, the very best thing about Samuel, is it's got Jesus.

It's got Jesus. And I will say this, and I'll stand by this. In terms of the Old Testament, the book of Samuel is the best book for understanding who Jesus is.

[5 : 40] And not even in a kind of like, hey, there's this character in Samuel. He's kind of like Jesus if you squint your eyes and, you know, kind of like Jesus and Jesus is nice and you should follow him.

You know, it's not like that. He is foundational. Jesus is foundational to the story of Samuel. So Samuel's got big things to say to us, huge things to say to us.

And really interestingly, the book doesn't start, though, by talking about a great king. It doesn't start in palaces. It doesn't start with a mountaintop experience.

It starts with the story of a very sad woman who can't have kids. Her name is Hannah. So we'll walk through this story. I'll make some observations and then we'll wrap up.

Folks, you should probably open up your Bibles because I'll be sticking pretty close to the text. What's the page number there, mate? 225. All right.

[6 : 44] I'll walk through the story. See, it's, I think there's kind of like five scenes here. Five scenes. Scene one. Sort of verses one to eight, I think. Verses one to eight.

So there's this guy, a certain man. Elkanah. He had two wives. Two wives. That wasn't, the Bible's not saying that's right.

It was just a fact. This man had two wives. It wasn't unusual that he had two wives. It wasn't super common, but it wasn't unusual that he had two wives back in the days. Possibly he had two wives because Hannah couldn't have kids.

And so he took a second wife so they'd have an heir. That's conjecture. I just made that up. But maybe, right? So he had two wives. Hannah, which means grace.

And Panaina, which means total jerk lady. I may be taking some liberties with my Hebrew. No, no, her name actually means really nice hair.

[7 : 48] I think it means luscious hair. Just because you have nice hair doesn't mean you're a nice person. Okay? There's your take home for the night. So Panaina was this baby machine.

Hannah was barren. Terrible situation, all right? All right. So the family would yearly go up to Shiloh to worship God in the temple there.

It's a great idea. They had this regular sort of family cycle. The priest there, Eli, tough guy to like. You'll find out about him later. Two sons, both horrible, horrible people. Again, that's next week's sermon.

Now, people did sacrifices. So they brought animals to sacrifice. And what would happen is they'd sacrifice the animal on the altar like a massive barbecue. And actually, you know, they'd actually get a lot of the animal back in terms of food.

So it was kind of a treat for people as well because they didn't get to eat a lot of meat. And it says here that Elkanah was a good man, a kind man, a lovely husband. And he gave Hannah double portions because he loved her dearly.

[8 : 52] Panaina would taunt her for a barrenness. This would send Hannah off into an understandable depression, horrible situation. She wouldn't eat. Elkanah was a good guy, though.

He'd try and sort of calm her down and tell her that he really loved her, etc. Okay, scene two, verses 19, verses 9 to 18. This particular year in Shiloh, Hannah once again taunted by Octomum.

And so miserable, miserable as always, having a rough time. But here she does something different. She cries out to God. She makes a vow. If you give me a son, paraphrase, if you give me a son, I'll give him back to you.

It talks about she'll never cut his hair. That's probably like a Nazarene vow, Nazarite vow. Now, little kids or adults that were given to the service of God, there would be this obvious physical thing to show that they're in the service of God.

They wouldn't drink alcohol and they'd never get their hair cut, right? So Eli the priest was watching. He thinks that she is drunk because she's praying to God. She's moving her lips when she's praying, but no words are coming out. He thinks she's drunk, which is a little bit of a clue as to the kind of things that were perhaps happening in this temple.

[10:06] Again, we'll find out about that later. He realizes his mistake and blesses her. And Hannah goes away changed, person peaceful, happy, eating, fairly positive.

Scene 3, verses 19 to 20. It talks about the end of their worship session, their time at Shiloh. Off they go back home.

When they get there, Elkanah cracks open a bottle of red wine, puts on some Michael Bublé. And it's in the text. And nine months later, they have this miraculous child, which they call Samuel.

We'll be spending a lot of time talking about this little boy Samuel over the next few months. Scene 4, 21 to 28. Hannah remembers her vows that she would give back this young man.

She would give back this boy into the service of God. And so, first of all, she's got to wean the child. And back in the days, it took quite a few years to do that, maybe three years to wean a baby.

[11:10] And so she brings the child back with a thanks offering to the temple and drops him off.

Thanks, God, for him. And then she prays in Scene 5, Chapter 2, 1 to 11, this beautiful prayer, acknowledging what God has done for them, their helplessness in God's grace.

Okay, that's the story. Folks, here's the big question. What is God trying to tell us through the story? What does God have to say to us tonight through the story?

And I wonder what has, as you heard it read and paraphrased, I wonder what moved your heart.

Was it Elkanah, a kind husband, wonderful man, a good example for us to follow?

Absolutely. Was it that? Was it Hannah, a woman who trusted God? Did you think to yourself, well, perhaps the lesson here is that if we are husbands, we should be kind to our wives if they're distressed.

Perhaps you thought maybe the lesson is this, is that if we pray and we make a vow, maybe you thought the secret to answered prayer is to promise God to give back what he gives us.

[12:32] I don't know. I don't think so. I don't think that's what it's about. I don't think that's what it's about because there are probably many wonderful women in the ancient Near East who couldn't have kids.

And they prayed to God earnestly, maybe made vows just like Hannah did. But their prayers didn't get the result they wanted. The reason we're told this story about Hannah is not because this is a secret way of praying.

It's not a secret way of getting a child if you want one. The reason we're told this is because it's so unusual. Because it's not normal. I don't think the heart of this passage is that these folks are great examples to follow.

However, if you find yourself moved by them and challenged by their actions, please, follow their examples. But that is not the heart of this story.

Now, before talking about what this story is about, I want to spend just about two minutes here talking about how we will be interpreting Old Testament narrative in this service. The common approach is to take leading characters and say, this is how we should live.

[13:52] Or, this is not how we should live. I.e., we should be like Hannah. She was faithful. We should be like Alcanna. He was a good husband. Don't be like the sons of Eli. They were bad. Be like David, except for the murder and adultery part.

But otherwise, totally, he's awesome apart from murder and adultery. Be like Saul. He had some great moments, apart from his crippling insecurity.

So, be like him, but apart from... You know, you can see that when we turn the Bible into morality tales, we can get into...

It's dangerous, because how far do you go? You know, if we take the story of Hannah, for example, you could say, well, there you go. We should be like Hannah.

We should be faithful people. And if we're faithful people, and there's something wrong with our womb, God will give us children. Now, we instinctively know that that's not the case always. See, you're on dangerous ground when you make these morality tales.

[14:53] So, in order to answer the question, what is God trying to tell us, we need to take another step back. And ask ourselves the question, what is the Bible about? And why do we preach it?

The answer is this. The purpose of preaching is to make Christ known. And I say that because that is the purpose of the text. In Luke 24, 44 onwards, for a few verses.

Let me read it to you. Jesus is on the road, speaking to some fellas. Then he said to them, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. And he said to them, Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

Folks, the whole Bible is about Jesus. Therefore, Samuel exists to help us understand Jesus. In fact, Jesus is foundationally found in Samuel. And that's what we're going to be preaching about over the next little while.

[16:07] Okay, so what does this story about a barren woman who conceives, an awful rival wife, a kind husband and a young boy, what has this got to do with Jesus?

How does this open our hearts to Jesus? How does this explain who Jesus is? Let me throw out a number of ideas here. One, Jesus is the promised king who's going to make everything okay.

And that sticks out like a sore thumb in Samuel. Let me explain that some more. Okay, so you've got tons of miraculous births in the Bible, right?

Tons of women who can't have kids end up having children. Isaac, John the Baptist, lots more examples. And the miraculous births, like this one, Samuel's birth, tend to have a couple of functions.

One, they point to the fact that the baby is going to do something amazing for God. That God has a specific purpose for them. And two, that this person is wholly a gift from God.

[17:17] It's not just a really great miracle and everyone feels great about it. That this person is a gift from God. So why is this three-year-old boy, Samuel would have been about three when he got dropped off at the temple, why is he such a gift to humanity?

Why is he so important? He's important, folks, and this is key. He is important because he is the kingmaker. What do I mean by this? He is the guy who identifies David as God's anointed king. And it's David who ushers in this whole new era for God's people of great governance, unity, prosperity. It's David who would reverse the fortunes of Israel and help them become a great nation.

It's God fulfilling his promise to Abraham in part. And why is this so important? Why is this a big deal? Because this king, King David, that Samuel is born to point to, that Samuel picks out amongst some shepherd boys, because this king is the forerunner to Christ, the real king.

David is a type of Christ who is there, who exists to help us understand who Christ is. And the reason I know that, the reason I'm backing myself on this, is because what happened in 1 Samuel with Hannah and Elkanah happened again.

[18:38] And Luke, with Zacharias and Elizabeth. They're both godly people, had the same problem. Elizabeth couldn't conceive. And they were past the age of normal conception.

And Luke 1 tells us the story of how they miraculously had a child. And that child was John the Baptist. A really, really similar birth narrative. And it was John the Baptist's job to introduce Jesus to the world.

To call out who Jesus is. The forever king. The king that David's reign points to. Samuel, this little boy, is to David. As John the Baptist is to Christ.

There's more. Two. Two. How else is this helping us understand Jesus? It tells us that Jesus came to save not just us. Sorry, he came to save, but that Jesus came to save.

He came to save. Not just show us how to live a good life. Samuel didn't grow up and pick David out because he's a super insightful kind of guy.

[19:48] He wasn't hanging out one day and saw David and thought, you know what? I've got a crazy idea. It just might work. He might be a really great king. He wasn't like this naturally super gifted person that kind of just kind of worked it out.

No, God provided him. At a watershed moment, at a crisis in Israel's history when they were super sketchy, had no leader, were not really a nation. God saved his people by providing a prophet who pointed to a king.

And that king would change everything. Folks, I know you know this, but I'll say it again. The solution to all the world's problems, the solution to all the crises in the world is not in here. It's not in

here.

It's outside of us. It's Jesus. Folks, salvation is rescue.

It's rescue. It's somebody saving you because you can't save yourself. Jesus came to rescue us, not just to show us a way out of our own mess.

[20 : 59] And that's exactly the story here. Miraculous birth. A gift from God. Here's more. Last point here. Salvation is not just making you into a better person.

It's not about saving you. It's about saving the whole world. And the biggest clue that we have to help us see this in the story, the biggest clue that helps us see that this is not just the story of a woman who is barren that God helps have kids.

The biggest clue is that that's not how Hannah views the situation. In chapter 2, verses 1 to 11, her song is not just like, yeah, you gave me a baby.

That's great. Got a little baby in your face. You know. No, she takes this situation and says, you know what, it's not just about me and this baby.

This is huge. She takes us through her song beyond her situation and shows us that it's about the salvation of a people group. She recognizes that this is way bigger than her problem.

[22 : 09] That her deliverance points to a much greater deliverance that God will bring. And one of the ways she does that is she talks about reversals.

A small reversal has taken place. It's the title of the sermon, a small reversal. A small reversal has taken place. She had a baby. Her enemy, Panina, was silent. You notice after she has the baby, we never hear from Panina again.

When she talks about God's deliverance, she talks about it in terms of huge reversals. Huge reversals, not just like I was barren, I had a baby. This is 4 to 8. I just picked out a few here.

The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who are full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who are hungry have ceased to hunger.

The barren have gone seven, but she has many children, but he who has many children is forlorn.

The Lord kills and brings to life. He brings down to Sheol and raises up.

[23 : 05] The Lord makes poor and makes rich. He brings low. He exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust. He lifts up the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor.

Cast your minds back to Luke. Do you remember in Luke, one of the pictures of salvation was reversal, reversal of fortunes. An external source causing a huge reversal.

Folks, salvation is reversal. And it's going to come from a king. And this king is going to be the king that God chooses.

And there's a clear link here to Jesus. And I'm not even getting into the fact that this song here is very similar to the Magnificent in Luke.

You can look that up yourself. But this last line in verse 10, he will give strength to his king. First mention of a king. And exalt the power of his anointed.

[24 : 05] A king is coming. He will change everything. That was Hannah's hope. That's our hope. The king is coming. He will change everything. The last word in Hannah's song, the anointed one. What's the Hebrew word for anointed one?

Anyone know that? Messiah. What's the Greek word for anointed one? Christ. A final couple of sentences here to finish.

There is a clear analogy between the situation in Israel and us here. They were suffering under inept leadership. We are suffering under inept leadership.

I'm not talking about David Short. I'm talking about us. The world. We run the world ourselves. And Christ is rightfully king. And he should be. They were threatened by sources they couldn't deal with.

They were surrounded by enemies. We have a couple of really big enemies we can do nothing about. Sin and death. They longed for strong, predictable leadership. And God provided them with the leader they needed in David.

[25 : 10] And Samuel pointed to him. God has given us a leader. King Jesus and John the Baptist pointed to him. What an awesome picture of salvation here team.

What an incredible picture of salvation. Salvation as rescue. As life from death. As hope for a better future.

As hope for a king. That's our great hope team. Folks. It's praying. Thank you. Thank you.