

1 SAMUEL - LOOKING FOR A LEADER

Study 1

THE LARGER STORY

The books of Samuel concern themselves with God's coming king, a theme with a long history in the Bible.

Israel's king was to be quite different from the kings of the nations around them; he was to be humble and righteous, one "whom the LORD your God will choose" (Deut. 17:15). A king for Israel was always in God's plan; the question was whether Israel would wait on God's timing and seek God's kind of king.

In spite of having no King, Israel being in Chaos, we are quickly introduced to a faithful woman who desires to have a baby boy.

READ 1 Samuel 1

DOES GOD CARE?

Does God care? First Samuel begins with the story of a woman, Hannah, whose heart is very heavy. In a culture in which a woman's significance is measured by her ability to have children, she is barren. Furthermore, her husband has taken a second wife, who not only has provided him with children, but also taunts Hannah for her childlessness. Hannah, in her distress, cries out to the Lord. He hears her cry and delivers her by blessing her with a son.

Hannah's story is like that of the nation of Israel, which is living in barrenness and being oppressed by enemies. Yet God has determined to rescue his people from oppression and to bless them with a deliverer. Hannah's son, Samuel, does not merely deliver her; he becomes the prophet who will anoint Israel's great king and deliverer. Hannah's story is also our story, because we too can cry out to God in our distress and receive deliverance through Christ.

GOD BRINGS DELIVERANCE TO HIS DISTRESSED PEOPLE

We are introduced to an ordinary yet extraordinary family in Israel. Elkanah faithfully leads his family on an annual pilgrimage to worship the Lord through sacrifice (1:1-4). Because the temple has not yet been built in Jerusalem (v. 9 uses the word "temple" to refer to the meeting place in Shiloh, but the true temple of God was not built until generations later, under Solomon—1 Kings 6, 8), the place of worship is at Shiloh, where Eli and his sons serve as priests. This joyous occasion is marred, however, by the grief of one of Elkanah's two wives, Hannah, who is childless. Her misery is compounded by the cruelty of her rival wife. Elkanah, who dearly loves Hannah, is unable to comfort her (vv. 5-8). It is significant that our author reminds us that it is the Lord who has, to this point, closed Hannah's womb (v. 5b)

Hannah, in her distress, cries out to God for a son and vows to dedicate him to the Lord (vv. 9–11). Eli the priest, seeing Hannah’s mouth moving as she prays, wrongly assumes that she is drunk, and rebukes her (vv. 12–15). When Hannah explains what she was doing, Eli blesses her by praying that God will grant her petition (vv. 16–18).

After Hannah returns home with her family, the Lord remembers her and gives her the son for whom she yearns (vv. 19–20). After Samuel is weaned she fulfills her vow and dedicates him to the Lord, taking him to Shiloh to serve with Eli in the house of the Lord (vv. 21–28; 2:11). Hannah’s story ends happily as she sees Samuel every year when her family goes to Shiloh for sacrifice, and the Lord blesses her with more children (see 2:18–21).

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is there any difference between how women felt about having children in biblical times and how women should feel about having children today?
2. Should we formally dedicate our children to the Lord (Luke 2:23)?
3. Why does God allow distress and persecution in the life of a believer?
4. How can God use ordinary people for his extraordinary purposes today?
5. How is Hannah’s dedication of Samuel to God unique? Is there any way in which we can emulate her as we think of our own children?
6. In what ways does this passage point to God’s plan of redemption in Christ?

7. What are other ways this passage may apply to us or other areas that it causes us to reflect on?

WHERE DO WE SEE JESUS IN THIS PASSAGE?

The early chapters of 1 Samuel aren't primarily about Hannah; rather they are about the Lord, whose care for Hannah reflects his care for his people.

The deliverance of Hannah and Israel points to God's deliverance of his people through Christ. Just as Hannah was distressed because of her barrenness, so humanity is in great distress because of sin's devastating effects. Just as Hannah was oppressed by her rival, so we are oppressed by the world and the devil. Just as God provided a deliverer for Hannah and later for Israel, so God has sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to deliver us from our spiritual barrenness and oppression. Through his work on the cross, Jesus has defeated Satan and set us free from sin. As a result, we enjoy the rich blessings of spiritual fruitfulness. First Samuel records events that were a significant part of the process by which God brought redemption to his people.

The birth of Samuel, like the other miraculous births in the Bible (Gen. 21; Rom. 4:19–21), reminds us of Jesus's miraculous virgin birth (Isa. 7:14; 9:6–7). Samuel's birth also reminds us of the birth of John the Baptist, who, like Samuel, was a forerunner who acknowledged God's chosen king (Luke 1:5–25, 57–66).