

First Samuel / 1 Samuel 1:1–20

Introduction

Today we begin a new series in First Samuel. The books of 1 and 2 Samuel stand at a pivotal moment in the history of salvation. They record the transition from the time of the judges to the time of kings. They record the destruction of the Tabernacle and the beginnings of the construction of the Temple. They record the death of one priesthood in Eli and the rise of a prophet like Moses in Samuel.

At the beginning of 1 and 2 Samuel, the Philistines oppress Israel. At the end of 1 and 2 Samuel, Israel rests from oppression under king David.

In Samuel's day, God's people were oppressed. In Samuel's day, there was no king and everyone did what was right in their own eyes. In Samuel's day, the lamp of the Lord in the Tabernacle was burning low.

It was the end of one world and the beginning of a new world. 1 and 2 Samuel remind God's people of God's faithfulness in the midst of a seemingly hopeless situation.

In 1 and 2 Samuel God acts. God acts even though the Philistines were ascendant, the priests were negligent, and the judges was impotent. Despite all this, God would raise up a prophet who would anoint a king who would revive God's House and priesthood.

What's more, God would do all of this from the very humble beginnings of a barren woman. Like so many stories in the Bible, God's mighty works begin in the lowliest of places.

As we come to this first passage from 1 Samuel this morning, I would like to walk through it by focusing on three things:

1. The Barren Woman (vv. 1-8)
2. The Blind Priest (vv. 9-18)
3. The Gracious God (vv. 19-20)

The Barren Woman (vv. 1-8)

1 Samuel begins with the man Elkanah and his two wives Peninnah and Hannah. Elkanah is presented as a righteous man fulfilling his responsibilities to come to the Tabernacle at least once a year to offer sacrifice to God. ([Deut 12:5-7](#))

Verse 2 presents the drama of the section by noting that “**Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.**”

Verses 4 and 5 show that when Elkanah would take his family to the Tabernacle in Shiloh each year to sacrifice, “**he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave only one portion, for although he loved her, the LORD had closed her womb.**”

Many translations say that Elkanah gave a “double portion” to Hannah. But this is likely mistaken. The passage emphasizes the fact that Peninnah and her children got many portions due to her fertility. However, because the LORD had closed Hannah’s womb, she only received one portion.

So much of what is going on here echoes other stories that are found in the Bible. It is likely that Hannah was Elkanah’s first wife. But due to her barrenness, he took a second wife, Peninnah. This echoes the story of Abraham who, perceiving Sarah’s continued barrenness, took Hagar.

Moreover, just as Hagar mocked Sarah when she bore Ishmael, verse 7 explains that Peninnah **provoked Hannah**. In her sorrow, Hannah would not even be able to eat the sacrificial portion she was given.

Echoing the Jacob story where Leah had ten children before Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Elkanah asks Hannah, “**why do you weep? And do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?**”

The name Hannah means “Favored one” but she is not favored. As verse five makes it strikingly clear, “**the LORD had closed her womb.**”

Hannah, represents all of Israel at this point in salvation history. Like Hannah, Israel was Yahweh’s “favored one”, but now Israel is fruitless and barren. (Leithart)

The fact that the text is so explicit that the LORD closed Hannah’s womb can be shocking for many. This is why Holy Scripture is so important for the Church. In it

we are given example after example of God transforming circumstances of sorrow into joy. These stories teach us to place all our sorrows into the hands of the “**LORD of hosts**”. Not every tragic circumstance receives resolution in this life, but the Bible teaches God’s people to be assured that “Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!” ([Psalm 126:5](#))

What we find in Hannah is a theme of grace that can be found throughout the Scriptures. Very often, God is pleased to use those who are of low estate to accomplish his purposes. As Paul puts it in [1 Corinthians 1:28](#) “God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,”

By highlighting the lowliness of Hannah you should be reminded again that your hope rests in God.

The Blind Priest (vv. 9-18)

The barren but faithful Hannah contrasts with Eli the Priest. 1 Samuel does not place Eli in a good light.

Eli is at the gate of the Tabernacle and in verse 10 Hannah prays to God.

Hannah vows, “***If you will 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.***”

Hannah promises that if God gives her a child, she will offer the child to God’s service as a nazirite.

But in verses 13-14, Eli cannot tell that Hannah is praying and he supposes her to be drunk from the feast. Eli thinks he is guarding the Tabernacle, but what he is really doing is showing his own blindness. Eli looks at the lips but he cannot perceive the heart.

This is the beginning of the end for Eli and his house. The final five chapters of Judges present the decline of the levites in Israel during the time of the judges. The beginning of 1 Samuel overlaps considerably with Judges. Samson, the last judge in Judges, lives during the time of Philistine oppression which begins in 1 Samuel.

This theme of levitical failure continues in 1 Samuel. Israel has no leaders, especially not the priests and levites. In raising up his prophet Samuel, God is going to remake Israel. The Israel of the judges will die. But God is always telling a story of Resurrection. From that death, God is going to resurrect Israel into a new life with king David.

To Eli's credit, when Hannah explains that she was "**troubled in spirit**" and that she was "**pouring our my soul before the LORD**" he sends her out with in peace and a blessing that God would "**grant her petition**".

Hannah continues as an exemplar in these passages. In her distress she goes to God's House and pours out her soul before the LORD. This is the way of the godly. In our powerlessness we turn to the LORD and giver of all life and, knowing that if we are to be revived, God must be gracious to us (Bergen).

When Hannah departs from the sanctuary she is not longer sad. Like Asaph in [Psalm 73](#), Hannah goes into the sanctuary of God sorrowful but goes out transformed.

The Gracious God(vv. 19-20)

Hannah's prayer is answered in the final two verses of our passage when God shows up in his grace. Elkanah and his family returned to their home in Ramah and verse 19 states that "**the LORD remembered Hannah.**"

When the Bible says that God remembers, you can be assured that he is about to act in grace toward his people.

[Genesis 8:1](#) says that "God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark."

[Exodus 2:24](#) states that "God heard the groaning [of the Hebrews], and God remembered his covenant."

[Genesis 30:22](#) says that "God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb."

None of this means that God forgets things. Rather, God desires us to call upon him to remember **and act** according to his great mercy.

In verse 20, Hannah conceives and bears a son and calls him Samuel because, “***I have asked for him from the LORD.***”

These final lines set up the coming sections of 1 Samuel. The name Samuel is close to sounding like the Hebrew word for “asked” but not *that* close. The Hebrew word for is “asked” is *sha’ul* or **Saul**. That name, Saul, should ring a bell.

As we will come to find, in [1 Sam 9](#) the people **ask** for a king. But we find here that already had a *sha’ul*, one “asked for”, namely Samuel. Israel should have been content with Samuel and waited for God to introduce their king. But they weren’t. (Leithart)

Too often we don’t take impatience as seriously as the Bible does. We know that patience is a fruit of the Spirit but we don’t necessarily believe that impatience is all that wicked.

God calls us to *wait* for his salvation. This waiting requires patience. While we wait we are to pour out our hearts before the LORD, calling him to remember his covenant promises.

Indeed this is what we are doing when we come to the table each Lord’s day. We are learning to be patient as we wait for God to establish his salvation. We come to the table confessing that we are waiting one more week for God fulfill all his promises for us.

As we do that this morning, do not lose heart or become impatient. Take heart as we wait for God’s his salvation. He will be faithful to us even as he was faithful to Hannah.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!