



# Community Group Discussion Guide

August 18, 2024

1 Samuel 1:1-28 | The Faithfulness of Hannah

## MOTIVATE

Starter Question:

⇒ *What is a request of God that you have made repeatedly? How does waiting for His response affect your faith?*

## DISCUSS

The concluding chapters of the Old Testament book of Judges describe the period in which the prophet Samuel was born as one of great rebellion against God (Judges 17:6; 21:25). The Israelite nation was adrift, the leadership was perverse, and the people were wicked. The devotion of Samuel's parents, Hannah and Elkanah, in 1 Samuel 1:1-28 provide a stark contrast to the wayward nation of Israel. Separating the period of the judges from that of the kings, Samuel's birth was a momentous event in salvation history and came during one of the most critical moments of Israel's history.<sup>1</sup> (See [1 Samuel Overview](#) for more information.)

**1 Samuel 1:1-3** *There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite. 2 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. 3 Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to 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*

It's noteworthy in biblical translations when LORD is in all capital letters as it is throughout this chapter. This is the sacred name, Yahweh or Jehovah, that God revealed to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:13-15).

⇒ *What version of the Bible do you use? Does this translation tend to capitalize LORD in the Old Testament? Discuss the significance of this capitalization.*

It might seem odd to describe Elkanah's marital status so soon after introducing him. These matrimonial details are important for the rest of the book, as well as God's future dealings with His people.<sup>2</sup> The major characters of 1 Samuel 1 are:

1. **Eli**: Priest at the sanctuary at Shiloh who became responsible for the spiritual training of the child Samuel. Since the days of Joshua, Shiloh was Israel's central worship site that housed the ark of the covenant, Israel's most sacred object.

2. **Elkanah**: A Levite who was a member of Kohathite clan of Levitical priests of the tribe of Levi (1 Chronicles 6:21-22). Since Levites were not given tribal territory of their own, they lived in cities scattered throughout the rest of the Promised Land. Elkanah lived with his family in rural regions of Ephraim—one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Elkanah was an upstanding Israelite who cared deeply for his family and carefully attended to his religious commitments.

3. **Hannah**: Since Hannah is named first, she was probably the first wife of Elkanah. He loved Hannah deeply, despite her unenviable position as a barren wife. In the ancient social setting, the most important role for a wife was to bear children. The inability to do so was a serious and embarrassing issue. An heir not only maintained the family line but also provided for the preservation of the father's

<sup>1</sup> Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 54). Zondervan.

<sup>2</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 11). Holman Reference.

estate within the clan and the tribe. In addition, the heir would provide for his mother after the death of the father.<sup>3</sup>

4. Peninnah: Most likely Elkanah's second wife who had given him several children. Following social customs, Elkanah's bigamy was probably motivated by Hannah's inability to conceive an heir. Peninnah proved to be a constant source of pain and agony to Hannah.

⇒ **Discuss this quote: The practice of multiple wives was less than God's ideal for Israel (Genesis 2:18, 24), and if we read this text in light of others in the Old Testament, it is clear that, wherever practiced, polygamy resulted in problems (Genesis 16:4; 30:1).**<sup>4</sup>

5. Samuel: First son of Elkanah and Hannah, Samuel's significance goes far beyond their circumstances. Samuel's arrival begins a new stage in God's overarching plan of salvation as it unfolds in the Old Testament. The account of his birth reveals the way God uses individuals and the circumstances of their lives to accomplish His purposes.<sup>5</sup>

⇒ **Do you have any additional insight into this list of major characters?**

**1 Samuel 1:4-8** On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. **5** But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. **6** And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. **7** 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. **8** 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?"

Year after year Elkanah faithfully led his family to the proper worship of God at great personal sacrifice. Old Testament law required every Israelite to appear before the LORD three times a year (Exodus 23:14–19; Deuteronomy 16:16–17). Elkanah was a devout Israelite, concerned to fulfill his commitment to Yahweh. Elkanah purposely distributed meat to his family, likely a common practice during the festivals in which sacrifices were offered. Each wife was given a portion of meat corresponding to the number of children to which she had given birth.

When he served his family the sacrificial meal, Elkanah gave sufficient portions to Peninnah and her children. But to Hannah, he gave what most translations call a "double portion." Elkanah gave this extra to Hannah because he loved her, even though the LORD had closed her womb.

⇒ **In discussing this passage, why must we be sensitive to those who are unable to bear children? How have our societal norms on this circumstance changed since biblical times?**

Surely Peninnah saw how Elkanah loved Hannah, and this angered her. Peninnah's abuse during these times was such an emotional burden that Hannah couldn't even eat. Her plight became increasingly heavy as she was constantly reminded that the LORD had closed her womb. This went on year after year until Hannah's pain was more than she could bear.

⇒ **What indication is there in verse 8 that Elkanah may not have understood Hannah's feelings?**

Elkanah's reference to "ten sons" may be an allusion to sons born to Jacob during the period of Rachel's barrenness (Genesis 29:31–30:22). In saying this, Elkanah may have been trying to tell Hannah that he loved her like Jacob loved Rachel. If this is true, then we can also perceive how the statement foreshadows a happy ending because Rachel eventually had two sons.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 6, pp. 11–12). Holman Reference.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold, B. T. (2003). *1 & 2 Samuel* (p. 59). Zondervan.

<sup>5</sup> Arnold, B. T. (2003). *1 & 2 Samuel* (p. 59). Zondervan.

<sup>6</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 6, p. 13). Holman Reference.

⇒ **How does the circumstance of having a beloved wife who was incapable of bearing children link Elkanah with the Genesis patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 16, 25, and 30) and the New Testament's Elizabeth (Luke 1)?**

**1 Samuel 1:9-12** After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. **10** She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. **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." **12** As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth.

Verse 9 indicates that one year Hannah left the family celebration to weep and pray alone in the temple of the LORD. The use of the word *temple* is interesting as the building of the first temple by Solomon has not yet occurred. As well, throughout 1 Samuel until the time of Solomon there are numerous references to the tabernacle. While this may be unclear, we can be certain that this was a holy place for the worship of God.

At the doorpost of this place of worship sat Eli the priest. The seat on which he sat was probably a place from which he advised the people. Under Eli's observation, Hannah prayed silently and earnestly to the LORD for a son. In her prayer, Hannah humbly referred to herself as "Your servant," a term normally used to describe a female household slave.

⇒ **Discuss this quote: Hannah could have cursed God, challenged His motives, or rejected Him for a miserable life of bitterness. Yet she came to Him with proper respect and humility believing He would help her in her distress.**

In her despair, Hannah also uttered a serious and solemn vow. No other example of a woman making a vow is found elsewhere in the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup> Her years of barrenness had convinced her that any child born to her would be nothing short of a miraculous gift from God. Hannah promised two things. If God would give her a son, she would give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor would touch his head. In the second promise, it appears Hannah was giving her son as a Nazirite, a special servant to the LORD.

Normally, a Nazirite vow was temporary. However, Hannah was so committed to the LORD that she made it permanent. According to Numbers 6:1–21, three conditions were attached to this vow. First, the individual must abstain from wine and fermented drinks. Second, no razor was to be used on the head of a Nazirite. Finally, the individual must not go near a dead body. Throughout the days of this vow, the Nazirite was considered to be holy unto the Lord.<sup>8</sup>

⇒ **How is Hannah's prayer and vow a role model for all believers?**

⇒ **How does Hannah exemplify the persistent and tenacious kind of faith that is borne out of pain and suffering?**

**1 Samuel 1:13-18** 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. **14** And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you." **15** 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. **16** Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation." **17** Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him." **18** 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.

Hannah's tearful, silent prayer caught the attention of Eli, who mistakenly accused her of being drunk. Hannah humbly explained that she was actually pleading with God for a child. When Eli recognized her

<sup>7</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 14). Holman Reference.

<sup>8</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 25). Holman Reference.

faith, he validated Hannah's prayer and asked God to grant her request. Though her circumstances had not yet changed, Hannah found a peace with God that left her capable of returning and eating with her family.

⇒ **Discuss the contrast between the Hannah who was too despondent to eat and the Hannah who emerged from God's presence full of hope and confidence.**

**1 Samuel 1:19-20** *They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. 20 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."*

After their return trip home, Elkanah had relations with Hannah. The LORD remembered her, and she conceived a child—a boy she named Samuel. God's remembering someone in the Old Testament does not mean He had actually forgotten them, only that His memory is consistent with His promises and that He will take action. When used with the LORD as the subject, the verb "to remember" points to the beginning of a major new work initiated by God on behalf of His people (Genesis 8:1; Exodus 2:24).

While the exact meaning of Samuel's name is still debated among scholars, it was a name expressing the fact that Hannah had asked the LORD for him. Hannah gave Samuel a name that would help her and everyone else remember her bold prayer and the LORD's gracious response.<sup>9</sup>

⇒ **How did Samuel's name emphasize Hannah's confidence in God's faithfulness to answer prayer?**

⇒ **Discuss this quote: Israel is barren like Hannah; each has a desperate need that only God can satisfy. The chapter opens with the account of God's intervening on behalf of both Hannah and Israel. He delivers Hannah from her barrenness and intervenes in the history of Israel.<sup>10</sup>**

**1 Samuel 1:21-23** *The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. 22 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." 23 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.*

About a year later, after Samuel's birth, Elkanah again prepared his family to make the pilgrimage to Shiloh to offer the annual sacrifice. Contrary to their previous custom, Hannah stayed home with the baby Samuel, but she promised Elkanah that she would pay her vow after Samuel was weaned. Weaning a child in biblical times often took up to three years or longer. Hannah was determined to give back to the LORD what he had given to her. Elkanah encouraged Hannah to do what seemed best to her but also reminded her of her vow.

⇒ **What are some ways you can give God's gifts back to Him?**

⇒ **What do Hannah's actions teach believers about our children no matter their age?**

**1 Samuel 1:24-28** *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. 25 Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. 26 And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. 27 For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him. 28 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.*

<sup>9</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, pp. 15–16). Holman Reference.

<sup>10</sup> Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 60). Zondervan.

Until Samuel was weaned, Hannah devoted herself to nurturing him at home. After that time, Hannah and Elkanah brought Samuel to Shiloh, where he would grow up assisting Eli in maintaining the worship site. The parents' presentation was accompanied by a lavish sacrifice of animals and agricultural products and concluded with a time to worship God for His gracious gift.

True to her word, Hannah brought her son to Eli. She reminded the priest that she was the woman who prayed so earnestly for a child. She publicly confessed that the LORD answered her prayer and declared that she was prepared to fulfill her vow. In remarkable faithfulness and in one of the most touching scenes of devotion in the Bible, Hannah returned to the LORD what He so compassionately had given to her.

⇒ *How does Hannah's story illustrate the way God works out His purposes through the everyday affairs of regular people?*

## TRANSFORM

---

**1. Make personal application:** Hannah's humiliating hardship drove her to God and forced her to look to Him for her hope and help. In the end her faith was mightily rewarded. The birth of Samuel not only ended her disgrace but also brought onto the stage of history Israel's greatest judge and first kingmaker. Building on Hannah's devotion, God illustrated that HE takes the weakness and barrenness of His people to demonstrate His might.

- ⇒ *How can profound pain push you to greater faith and earnest prayer?*
- ⇒ *When have you received a surprising gift of grace from God?*
- ⇒ *Is there a vow you made to God that you still need to fulfill?*

**2. Pray:** Ask God to teach you to throw your cares upon Him. Praise Him that regardless of our circumstances, He can remove worry and fear from our lives. Pray He will help us to dedicate all things totally to Him.

## STUDY

---

**Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:**

- *Holman New Testament Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel, pages 7-27.*
- *The NIV Application Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel pages 51-64.*
- *Shepherd's Notes, 1 and 2 Samuel, pages 5-7.*