

Hannah's Story

INTRO: How do people determine whether God exists, and - if he does - what he is like?

- As a child, you learn from your parents, but as you age life experience throws this question into flux, and you revisit it many times
 - "If there is a God, is he good?" you might wonder
 - "If there is God, is he powerful? Why doesn't he stop my suffering?"
 - "What is he like?"
- If you ask people, "What is God like?" they will often begin with, "I think he is like XYZ." If you listen carefully to their words, they are giving you answers from a buffet of life, story, myth, rumor, memes, Scripture, philosophy, and many other things
- Maybe you are here today and YOU are wrestling with these things.
 - Does God care? Is he there? What's he like?
 - As you look at the experiences of your life, you are hesitant, even scared at what they might teach you about God
- In this story we meet such a family.
 - We see a family who is trying to do the right thing, trying to love well, but life isn't always giving them what they might think they deserve. This runs the risk of shaping their worldview, their theology, their view on God
- But as readers of this story, we also get to see another angle, an unseen omniscient angle. We get to see a force at work that transcends time, current events, and so much more. We see from the WORD, which is more reliable than experience, the TRUTH
 - That despite God's transcendence, he isn't some impersonal force
- He is the King behind the scenes, and he is a king who cares deeply for YOU

<i>1 SAMUEL 1, 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. 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.</i>	- a certain man... (Judges 13) - Elkanah from the hills (5 miles N of Jerusalem) - Wife #1: Hannah, no children - Wife #2: Peninnah, many children
<i>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. 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,</i>	- A faithful man, a faithful family, but faithful doesn't always mean happy - A man who loves his wife. He sees her plight. He sees the shame she carries. - The LORD has closed her womb (2x) - 1st time seeing Lord of Hosts in Bible → King who commands angelic armies - This isn't his fault. This isn't Hannah's fault. This is in the LORD's sovereign hands. (But why, LORD?) - It caused tension in the home

<i>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?"</i>	- The love that Elkanah had for his barren wife burned as hatred within Peninnah. When would she be the favored one and not the back up? - This went on for years... - Every time they went for the celebration, Peninnah would rub it in Hannah's face, "What do YOU have to celebrate?" - Elkanah means well, but his love falls short (Perhaps better, "You mean more to me than ten sons.")
<i>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. 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."</i> <i>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 your wine away 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.</i>	- Everyone else is celebrating, but not Hannah. She is mourning. - Although Hannah's struggle has been year after year, this year is different: whether because the LORD chooses to act or b/c Hannah tries a different approach, she prays - From a place of deep distress... deep sadness... she prays and weeps - BAP: We have to applaud Hannah for her faith and her prayers. She goes to the only one who CAN open her womb, the LORD of hosts - the King Behind the Scenes - She makes a vow, "This is your son if you would only let me carry him. Take away my shame!" - Eli has seen plenty of revelers. He assumes she's drunk - Not drunk; she is moved! Her response puts Eli in his place, and Eli responds kindly, hoping that the Lord would grant her request - Hannah's response is interesting, "Let your servant find favor..." Hannah's name is similar to favor. It actually means grace. Hannah is the name, grace is the common noun - The Lord loves to rid people of their shame. He does it with sacrifice. He does it with redemption. He does it with ransoming. He does it with covering. He does it on the cross. He does it here by providing for Hannah. - Hannah, Grace, "The Favored One," who feels nothing but shame and dishonor will finally find the grace and favor she craves. - BAP: She prays, she believes, she leaves it there... she goes and eats IN FAITH, believing grace and favor is on the horizon

<i>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. 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."</i>	- They rose to worship again and we can presume Hannah's worship was different, more alive - unburdened and free - She had brought her burden to the Lord, and left it by faith in his hands (come to me..) - In due time (God's time, the King's time), she conceives... - Samuel sounds like "Asked for"
<i>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, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was 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 to him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD."</i> <i>And he worshiped the LORD there. (ESV)</i>	- Samuel, the asked for one, came at a vow - Hannah, Grace, the one who received what she didn't deserve, vows to give God what he does deserve: her son - Hannah had named the boy Samuel because in Hebrew "Samuel" sounds a little like "Asked for." Now she used the Hebrew word for "ask" four times over. - We cannot see this in our English translations, but it is striking in Hebrew: "The LORD has granted me my petition that I made of him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD." - Interesting is that while Samuel sounds a little like "Asked for," a little later in 1 Samuel we will come across a name that really does mean "Asked for." - That name is identical in Hebrew to the last occurrence of this verb in verse 28. The name is Saul. From the very beginning, long before these things actually took place, Samuel's name was linked to that of Saul. - The books point is this: As Hannah asked for Samuel and received him only to give him back to the LORD, the Israelites will break faith with God and ask for a King and he will give them what they asked for: Saul

So what are we to make of this story? What does the Lord want us to see about his great character? What did the author intend for us to see?

- REMEMBER: 1 Samuel is a story that explains the beginning of the monarchy. It is a turning point, a transition point in Israelite history
- In some ways, everything in this book is pointing towards that end goal
- Why does the author include these specific details over decades? Why leave out other stories and include these? They reinforce his purpose, his goal
- We will see, over time, that the people will get what they ask for in Saul. David, a man after God's own heart, will get what he asks for → a deep relationship with his Creator.

- God will get what he asks for, a King, a king of Kings, a descendant of David - King Jesus.
- But Hannah helps us out b/c in Chapter 2 she tells us exactly what we are meant to learn about this great God and King of Armies, the Lord of Hosts.
- **He is the King behind the scenes!**

<i>1 SAM 2: 1 Samuel 2:1–11</i> <i>And Hannah prayed and said,</i> <i>“My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.</i> <i>“There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.</i>	- God is holy, set apart as the uncreated one - No other being can manipulate time, space, people, everything to accommodate his purposes - No other being is a rock to the ashamed, a sanctuary to the humble, or a place for the weak - While the world prizes manipulation, survival of the fittest, and strength, God is unique - The proper response to this age and this world is not to blend in w/ the crowd, but to fear the Lord and live in response to a knowledge of God - He sees the intention of the heart - To truly know this God you need his Word and his Spirit b/c he is unlike any other
<i>The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind [put on] on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world.</i>	- Psalm 115:3 Our God is in heaven; He does as He pleases. - He brings the strong low; turns a paradise into a desert. He flips everything upside down, exalting the meek, bringing low the proud - This reminds us of Mary and Jesus - He did this for Hannah, but he has and continues to do this throughout history - He does it with us in the gospel - Where does he get the right to do whatever he pleases? He set the world in order. He is the king behind the scenes - His timing is perfect. What we see as delays, is God setting up the dominoes. - Beyond that, he has the power to enforce his reign - He isn't a weak king, but one who is strong!
<i>“He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;</i>	- In the midst of the pain, the suffering, God has a plan - He WILL right the wrongs, cut off the wicked, and bind wounded - How will he do it? Through his future king - In 1 Samuel, this is David, but ultimately, it is his descendant, Jesus, the King of kings!

<i>he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."</i>	
<i>Then Elkanah went home to Ramah. And the boy was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest.</i>	To be continued... Next week: Eli's Worthless Sons

CONCLUSION:

- 1 Samuel is about the nation's transition to a monarchy, but we see here that they already have a king and he is a much greater king than any human ruler
- Men and women might think that they have the wisdom to rule, the power, and the control, but it is an illusion. God alone has that kind of ability
- He closes Hannah's womb. Why? Because it pleased him to do so.
- Why did it please him to do so? Because the time wasn't yet right.
- The time wasn't right for Samuel to be born.
- God had a plan - a birth of a prophet (Samuel), the birth of a future king (Saul), and the birth of God's king (David).
- The Lord, in his sovereignty, knew what needed to happen and when it needed to happen. The King Behind the Scenes setting up dominoes
- He knew all along how this would unfold. Orchestrated it, planned it, collaborated in it
- And he invites us into his story (not ours, his)
- He gives us a thread to weave in the tapestry, and although we have choice to do what we desire, he - ultimately - knows how to turn everything around and use it for his plan
 - Only God can take Joseph being sold into slavery and use it to save a nation
 - Only God can take a barren womb and bring forth a deliverer
 - Only God can take the cross and use it for the greatest good
- Doesn't it make sense to throw ourselves before this God in prayer and trust HIM with the results, even if they don't match our expectations? Doesn't seem like his plans are better, his ideas more profound, his timing more perfect?
- Israel will reject the King Behind the Scenes in 1 Samuel, as many still do today, but Psalm 2 reminds us of this truth:

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,
"Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."

He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.
Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying,
"As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." (ESV)
- He IS the King behind the scenes. His timing and his answers to prayer are perfect. He does whatever he pleases, and every decision he makes is right and good. Let us TRUST him. Come to him all who are weary and heavy laden, give him your burden and leave it there for him to carry! You can't carry it anyway.