



Hannah Promises Samuel to God

Promises Made, Promises Broken

About the Story

Since last week's lesson, Moses has died and God has called Joshua to lead the people into Canaan and claim that land. The Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings that follow are grouped together as Historical Books. This is not to say these books recount history as we understand it today. Instead, they give an account of events that occur once the Israelites are in the Promised Land with a goal of teaching the pattern of sin, consequences, repentance, and forgiveness that characterizes much of Israel's experience as God's people.

The Point:

God hears the prayers of everyone. There is a saying that every time we try to draw a line in the sand, Jesus is standing on the other side. We so often think we are right or righteous, but God loves all people unconditionally—even those we find unworthy. The world would be so much kinder if we could see each other as God sees us. At the same time, know that whatever your struggle, God is there to comfort you, heal you, and provide for you. This may not always be seen in physical terms here and now, but we know God continually keeps God's promises.

Life in the Promised Land is not easy. The Israelites have yet to create a formal government for themselves. Instead they have relied on a loose order under the judges. The judges of Israel are not deciders of guilt or innocence under the law as we think of judges today, but they are leaders called by God to remind the people of their dependence on God. The judges also help protect the 12 tribes from external threats. As the Israelites become more chaotic and vulnerable, they long for a king to rule them.

1 Samuel opens before Samuel is born. Samuel's parents, Elkanah and Hannah, have been childless for many years. Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah, has given him several children and she holds that over Hannah. Hannah is distraught because at that time a woman's worth was largely tied to producing a male heir for her husband. Elkanah loves Hannah. Hannah promises God that if she is blessed with a male child, she will commit his entire life to God's service.

After receiving a blessing from Eli the priest, Hannah and Elkanah finally conceive a son. Samuel is born and Hannah keeps her promise in committing him to God's service. Chapter 2 is Hannah's song of gratitude for a God who hears the people's prayers, lifts up the lowly, provides for the poor, and protects the faithful. Samuel will be the last of the great judges of Israel before he anoints their first kings: Saul and David.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, we learned how the Israelites strayed from God, but God forgave them as they were on the verge of entering the Promised Land. Since that time, Moses died and God appointed Joshua as the one who would lead the people into Canaan. Judges will loosely govern in the Promised Land until the Israelites demand a king. This week we learn of Hannah's son, Samuel, who will be the last of the great judges and will anoint Israel's first kings: Saul and David. Next week we will learn about God's promise to David.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time together with this, or another, prayer:

God of promises, you continue to hear the cries of your people. Help us to trust in you when things seem hopeless. Give us strength when we feel we have none. Empower us to bring your mercy and grace to others who suffer. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Into the Story

Hannah promises God that if God gives her the son she has longed for, she will commit that child to God's service. God gives her Samuel and she keeps her word. Share a time when you have "negotiated" with God. Did it work?

Learning the Story**Read 1 Samuel 1:9-11 – Hannah Pleads**

- ❓ In whose presence does Hannah make her plea before God?
- ❓ Do you find additional comfort in praying in the presence of a faith leader? Why or why not?
- ❓ Do you think Hannah wants a son for her husband, for herself, or for God? Why?

Read 1 Samuel 1:19-20 – Hannah's Prayer Answered

- ❓ Why do you think the couple worship before conceiving their child—to earn God's favor or to keep their focus on God's faithfulness?
- ❓ Do you find it helpful to worship and pray in times of difficulty? What about in times of ease and joy?

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-10 – Hannah's Song

- ❓ Which other Old Testament story have we already read about a mother pleading to God for a son?
- ❓ Read Luke 1:46-55 (Mary's Song, traditionally called the Magnificat). How is Hannah's song similar? How is it different?
- ❓ Where else in Scripture do we hear of God doing the opposite of what the world expects?

- ❓ Do you know any worship songs or hymns that contain the themes of Hannah's prayer in chapter 2?
- ❓ Which line of Hannah's song brings you the greatest hope or comfort?

Bible Connections

- ✚ A child is dedicated to God's service, including the law that "no razor shall ever touch his head" (Numbers 6:1).
- ✚ Samson is another child who was dedicated to God in the same way as Samuel (Judges 13:5, 16:17).
- ✚ Hannah's song echoes many psalms. (Psalm 2, 18, 113, 75, 98, and 89)

Living the Story: Worship

Take a few moments to write your own verses to Hannah's prayer, reflecting on what God continues to do in the world and for humankind. You can use a specific example such as not allowing bullies to have the final word, or a more general theme like comforting those who grieve. Take turns reading them as an act of worship together. Brainstorm if there are any other verses you could add to Hannah's prayer about what God does for humanity and for individuals. As an added challenge, try writing them in a poetic rhythm like hers. Reflect together on which newly created verses were especially powerful for you.

Closing Prayer

As your closing prayer, take turns reading chapter 2 verse-by-verse. After each verse everyone shouts, "Alleluia!" in praise to God's faithfulness. At the end of verse 10 all say together, "Amen."

At Home

- ✚ Type or write out Hannah's song (1 Samuel 2:1-10) and post it in your kitchen. Each morning as you prepare breakfast, read it aloud as a devotion.
- ✚ Pray for a different person or group of people each day this week. Perhaps someone you hear about who is suffering on the other side of the world, a neighbor who has fallen on tough times, or a friend or family member struggling with something. Keep that person or group in mind all day and ask God to help them.
- ✚ Find one person this week that you can share God's love with by supporting them. Take soup to someone who is sick or offer to shop or babysit for a single parent. Call or visit someone who is homebound so she knows she is not forgotten.

Bible Nuts and Bolts: Ancient History

1 Samuel is situated in the section of the Bible called the "History Books," which includes the books from Joshua to Esther in the typical order of our Bibles. The people writing and reading these books did not think of history as "just the facts" as we often do. The stories found in the Histories were chosen to teach the people about Israel's life as a nation and to witness to God's continued presence with the people through this difficult history. These stories were meant to teach the people about how they got to where they are now, and to show them the deeper meaning in their past, present and future.

Daily Readings

Sunday—Read 1 Samuel 1:9-11, 19-20; 2:1-10

God continues to care for the Israelites long after they have arrived in the Promised Land. Say a prayer of thanks to God for staying with you when things are easy—and difficult!

Monday—Read 1 Samuel 3:1-18

Samuel heard a voice call him three times before it was revealed to him as God's. Take five minutes of quiet time with God starting with "Here I am" and the rest of the time listening for God. (It's not as easy as it sounds, but it is a good discipline.)

Tuesday—Read 1 Samuel 8:1-22

The people of Israel demand that Samuel appoint a king for them. Pray for other countries and governments of the world and for your own, as imperfect people govern them all.

Wednesday—Read 1 Samuel 9:27; 10:1-9

Samuel anoints Saul as Israel's first king. Think of practices or rites in your own Christian tradition (or others you know of) that are similar to the ones described in this passage and then consider why they are still practiced.

Thursday—Read 1 Samuel 13:2-14

Saul offers an unlawful sacrifice in the midst of Israel's battle with the Philistines. Think of past lessons about other people who had grown impatient with God and took matters into their own hands.

Friday—Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Samuel anoints David as Israel's new king. Reflect on the fact that God passed up all the elder brothers and chose the youngest. Note the language we will hear again at Christmas—that Jesus comes from the lineage of David, out of the shoot of Jesse, as a baby in Bethlehem.

Saturday—Read 1 Samuel 24:4-12, 16-20

David has the opportunity to kill Saul, but spares his life. Think of someone who is hard to forgive or does not "deserve" your forgiveness and offer it to them because of God's grace to you.