

SESSION 3

HANNAH: FAITH THAT PRAYS

▶ **The Point**

Pray with confidence; God hears.

▶ **The Passage**

1 Samuel 1:1-2,9-11,17-18,26-28; 2:1-3

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

A guest evangelist encouraged our congregation to share prayer needs. One by one, people poured their hearts out to the Lord, including my friend Hester. Hester struggled with infertility, and I heard her plead with God to provide a much-desired child. Women gathered around her, asking God to intervene. We had confidence God heard our prayer, and we anxiously waited for His response.

But as the years passed, Hester and her husband experienced a failed adoption and financial struggles. Nevertheless, she kept praying.

Then, at the age of 42, Hester got sick. The doctor suspected a mass on her ovaries, but she needed tests. During an ultrasound, the doctor exclaimed, “There it is!” Dazed and concerned, Hester began crying, fearing the worst. But it wasn’t a mass—it was a miracle baby! Eli was born prematurely a few months later, but he is thriving today as a healthy young man. God heard the cries of my friend, just as He heard Hannah pray centuries earlier. Hester did what Hannah had modeled: both women prayed persistently and faithfully.

▶ **The Setting**

The Book of 1 Samuel presents the historical bridge from the judges until the death of Israel’s first king, Saul. Samuel’s father was Elkanah; his mother was Hannah who was childless at that time. Hannah prayed confidently; God heard her prayer and gave her a son, Samuel. As soon as he was weaned, Hannah gave him to the Lord by delivering him to live and serve with Eli the priest.

What does the Bible say?

Shiloh (1:9)—About thirty miles north of Jerusalem, and the location of the ark of the covenant from near the end of Joshua’s life until the Philistines captured it.

My horn (2:1)—The Hebrew term represents strength and power. The Lord is frequently identified as the horn of His people in the Old Testament.

1 Samuel 1:1-2,9-11,17-18,26-28; 2:1-3

^{1:1} 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. 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.

⁹ 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.”

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.

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.

^{2:1} And Hannah prayed and said, “My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation. ² “There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. ³ 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.”

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 2**, the “Living by Faith Map,” to give context for some of the places that were important in the story of Hannah.

DISCUSS: **Question #1** on page 29 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “**When have you actually enjoyed waiting for something?**” Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “**The Bible Meets Life**” on page 30 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of prayer by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “**The Point**” on page 30 of the PSG: “**Pray with confidence; God hears.**”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, on a poster or white board, write headings for three columns: Situation, Worry, and Faith. Ask members to give examples of situations where some people exhibit worry and others respond with faith. Write the answers beneath the appropriate heading. Lead a discussion around this question: “Since the results of faith are far better than those of worry, why do some people choose to worry rather than pray in confidence?”

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 3**, the “Judges” poster to give context for where Samuel is in the line of Israel’s judges.

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to open our eyes to ways we can influence others for Him.



JUDGES	
▶ Othniel	Judges 3:7-11
▶ Ehud	Judges 3:12-30
▶ Shamgar	Judges 3:31
▶ Deborah and Barak	Judges 4:1-5:31
▶ Gideon and Abimelech	Judges 6:1-9:57
▶ Tola and Jai	Judges 10:1-5
▶ Jephthah	Judges 10:6-12:7
▶ Ibtzan, Elan, and Abdon	Judges 12:8-15
▶ Samson	Judges 13:1-16:31
▶ Samuel	1 Samuel 7:35

1 Samuel 1:1-2,9-11 Commentary

[Verses 1-2] Samuel's ancestry and birth are presented in the opening verses. Elkanah was Samuel's father; his ancestors lived in the territory of **Ramathaim-zophim** in **the hill country of Ephraim**. Scholars today are unsure of the exact location of this rural town. Elkanah's wives were **Hannah** ("charming" or "gracious") and **Peninnah** ("pearl" or "prolific"). Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless. Verses 3-8 reveal Elkanah's habit of worshiping at Shiloh every year and including his family. These verses also reveal the family problems caused by Peninnah's taunting of Hannah because of her childlessness and Hannah's responses.

[Verses 9-10] Hannah's faith caused her to pray and bring her needs to the Lord. Although Hannah accompanied Elkanah to the Lord's temple year after year (v. 7), the story focuses on one occasion. The phrase temple of the Lord coupled with the word **doorpost** may mean the tabernacle which housed the ark of the covenant had been replaced with a building. Israelites believed the ark represented the earthly presence of God. The ark was the central focus of Israel's worship until Solomon dedicated the temple. Part of Hannah's worship experience was eating a fellowship meal that indicated their participation in bringing an offering to God. The words deeply distressed reveal Hannah's worship was an emotional experience. That she did not have a son weighed heavily on her. She didn't try to fix her problems on her own. She didn't give up. She didn't blame someone else. She didn't even enlist the assistance of others. Hannah brought her deepest needs to God. Not only did Hannah pray, she **wept** bitterly. Her outward appearance and actions (praying and weeping) revealed the struggle in her soul that her childlessness had brought to her heart. Although we may not completely understand all these feelings, most of us have matters that weigh heavily on us. Hannah's response—bringing her concerns to God in prayer—is appropriate for us also.

[Verse 11] Hannah did not stop with prayer, she also made a promise, **a vow** to God. The words she pleaded reveal the depth of her response to God and imply an ongoing activity rather than a one-time request. The title Hannah used, **LORD** of hosts, is sometimes translated "Lord Almighty." Although this phrase is used many times in the Old Testament, Hannah was the first person recorded to do so. This title points to God's power and authority to accomplish whatever He has planned to do. The depth of Hannah's prayer is revealed in the repetition of verbs in her vow: vowed a vow . . . look on . . . remember . . . not forget . . . give. While some of these verbs elaborate on previous ones, they crescendo to the final verb, give. Hannah promised that if God would give her a son, she would (1) **give him to the LORD all the days of his life**, and (2) never cut his hair. This second promise points toward a nazirite vow, indicating dedication to the Lord. Indeed, Hannah had brought her needs to God—and as we will see, God answered her prayer. When we pray with confidence in God, He hears our prayers and provides the right answer for us in His perfect time.

1 Samuel 1:17-18,26-28 Commentary

[Verse 17] In 1 Samuel 1:15-16, Hannah told Eli she was not drunk but had been pouring out her heart before the Lord. Eli accepted Hannah's explanation and told her, **"Go in peace."** This common Hebrew benediction indicated much more than an absence of (military) conflict. *Shalom* (translated "peace") refers to right relationships between God and others, thus giving the person who experiences it a sense of wholeness, serenity, and life as it was meant to be lived. In addition to wishing Hannah peace, Eli also responded by saying **"the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him."** In English this phrase appears to be more of a wish. However, some Hebrew scholars view it as an imperative for God to fulfill Hannah's request.

[Verse 18] Hannah humbly referred to herself as **your servant**. She expressed the desire to find favor with Eli. When Hannah took her needs to God, she trusted God to answer. Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad. Her trust in God is evident by these actions she took. Verses 19-23 describe Samuel's conception, birth, and early life until he was approximately three years old. During these years Hannah did not go back to Shiloh but waited until she could fulfill her vow to give Samuel back to God. Bible scholars debate the meaning of Samuel's name. Some suggest "God hears" or "God has heard." Others suggest "asked of God" and "asked from *Yahweh*." Whatever may be the exact origin, his birth was in response to God's remembering Hannah's request.

[Verses 26-28] Hannah recounted for Eli their last encounter. She remained very respectful of Eli, calling him my lord twice. Perhaps this explanation was necessary because Eli was getting old or perhaps it was because Eli had seen a number of women at Shiloh over the past several years. In either case, Hannah wanted to remind Eli of the circumstances of their last meeting. Hannah told Eli exactly what she had prayed for: **this child**. Hannah also told Eli **"the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him."** Before God had answered her prayer, she had faith He would do so (v. 18). Once God had answered, she was ready to keep her vow—she lent him **to the LORD**. The Bible reveals no hesitancy on Hannah's part. Since God did for her exactly what she asked, Hannah did for God exactly what she had promised. She fulfilled her vow. Hannah explained the details of her action: **"As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord."** Hannah was generous in fulfilling her promise. She did not cheat God or try to wiggle out of her commitment. Finally, the Bible tells us **he worshiped the LORD there**. Although some manuscripts have she or they, most scholars believe the correct reading is he. However, a disagreement centers around knowing who he is. Some believe it refers back to Eli; others believe it refers to Samuel. In either case, worship is the appropriate response when God keeps His promises.

1 Samuel 2:1-3 Commentary

[Verse 1] Hannah responded in thanksgiving to God for His answer to her request for a son. She thanked God for answering her prayer and described some of God's attributes. The opening words indicate that although this prayer is written in poetic format, it is first and foremost an act of worship. Hannah had previously responded by fulfilling her vow to give Samuel to the Lord (1:9-11). Here, Hannah responded by voicing thankfulness to Him. The first element of thankfulness Hannah expressed was praise. In saying **"my heart exults in the LORD,"** Hannah revealed the depth of her feelings. Hannah's inner being was focused on the joy she felt, particularly joy over God's answering her prayer. The grammatical form of the Hebrew verb translated **exults** reveals this action was not a one-time experience but rather an ongoing practice. Although this prayer contains Hannah's last recorded words in the Old Testament, the verb reveals her rejoicing continued. Hannah's rejoicing was not in Samuel; her rejoicing was **in the LORD**, the One who gave the answer.

My horn refers to a visible sign of strength or power. For Hannah, this sign was Samuel. **Exalted** refers to a visible sign by the Lord of His answer to her prayer for a son. God abundantly answered that prayer by giving her not only Samuel, but other children as well. **"My mouth derides my enemies"** most likely referred to Peninnah (1:2) who is described as Hannah's "rival" (v. 6). Hannah specified the reason for her boasting: **"because I rejoice in your salvation."** In the Old Testament, the word salvation has the basic idea of rescue from an enemy or deliverance from a problem. Likely Hannah had in mind a combination of these.

[Verse 2] The three lines of verse 2 focus on God's attributes (qualities). The first declares, **"there is none holy like the LORD."** The word **holy** represents a distinctiveness, a separateness of one who has a specific purpose. The second line proclaims, **"there is none besides you,"** a description of the Lord Himself, a repetition of the first line with added details implied in the first line. The third line testifies, **"there is no rock like our God."** This affirmation adds to the parallelism by providing an additional description of God. Rock refers to the stability of bedrock rather than to a small movable stone. **Like our God** reflects God's incomparable nature.

[Verse 3] This verse focuses on commands concerning the response of those who heard this prayer. The first command is **"talk no more so very proudly."** The second command, **"let not arrogance come from your mouth,"** parallels the first by adding detail. Together, these two lines warn against those who would speak without having knowledge. The reason Hannah gave these commands is described in the third and fourth lines. For can also be translated "because." **"For the LORD is a God of knowledge"** lays the foundation for the final line, **"by him actions are weighed."** These two lines provide the rationale for Hannah's commands earlier in this verse. They give further reasons for thanking God for His answer to prayer.

Read the article "The Nazirite Vow" in the Summer 2019 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: Bible Studies for Life.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 36 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week.



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Pray.** If you're not in the habit of praying, begin. Do more than just offer casual prayers; set aside time each day for an uninterrupted conversation with God with no distractions.
- ▶ **Pray with others.** Share your needs with others. "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt. 18:19-20).
- ▶ **Pray with a journal.** Begin a prayer journal or write down your prayer requests. Record Scriptures that speak of God's character and His plans for your life. Journal about the ways you see God working in the midst of your need.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 36 of the PSG:

Sometimes an affirmative answer to prayer may seem unlikely. But God has given us plenty of examples in the past, and many in the present, that remind us to continue to pray with confidence.

PRAY: Conclude by asking God to give us the confidence we need to pray boldly. Thank Him for the ways He has been faithful to answer our prayers before.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

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