

March 26

1 Samuel 1 and 2

This morning you read 1 Samuel, chapters 1 and 2. There are five main characters in this Book whose lives dominate the nation of Israel from about the year 1105 BC to the death of King Saul, which occurred in about 1010 BC. These five characters are first **Eli**, the aged priest, who is functioning as a spiritual leader of the nation as we begin the Book; second, **Hannah**, the mother of Samuel, important not because she played any prominent role in the life of the nation -- in fact during her life quite probably very few people even knew who she was -- but because of her faith and her example, she is known to us. **Samuel** himself is the third major player in the Book. This man, who is the last of the judges of Israel and the first of the prophets, Samuel was one of the great transitional figures in the Bible. Although there were individuals exercising prophetic gifts before him, like the man who God sent to warn Eli about the judgment that he was about to bring upon his disobedient sons, Samuel was the first recognized prophet in the nation of Israel.

The fourth and fifth people that play important roles in this book are, of course, the first King of Israel, **Saul**, and the shepherd boy upon whom the favor of God falls, **David**, the son of Jesse, who God chose to become the second king. The topic of leadership is one that will occupy our attention as we move through the pages of this Book and its companion volume. We will be reminded over and over again that God chooses His own leaders, and that the qualifications for spiritual leadership are not often the things that men and women look for.

The hero of the first two chapters, of course, is Hannah, the barren "other wife" of Elkanah. In that society, you know, barrenness was perceived as a curse. If you had no children, then you must have somehow greatly offended God. That is the way people thought, and in a society where everything depended on the strength and productivity of your offspring, to not have children was a great burden. In fact, it was precisely because of the great fear of not being able to produce a large and powerful family that polygamy got a foothold among the ways of our ancient forefathers to begin with. The more wives you took, the greater your chances of having many strong sons. Take the heartache of a childless couple today, who really want children but cannot have them. Multiply it by a hundred, or maybe a thousand, and then you will begin to understand the burden of Hannah.

Did you carefully read Hannah's prayers? For now, let me just note that the essence of her first prayer can be summed up in just two words, "remember me". Perhaps there is a specific request heavy on your heart, one that you have been praying for a long time and you need to simply say to God, "remember me".

The second prayer of Hannah is not what we would expect it to be. It is not a prayer that focuses on joy because of the birth of her son. Instead, it speaks of the joy that Hannah has because of who God is. She takes joy from His providential government of the earth, and His loving treatment of His people, and in the mighty plan that He has for the future. It is not that she is not thankful for the birth of her

son; it is just that she cannot be content only to celebrate her bounty. She looks beyond that and rejoices in the nature and plan of the One who has so blessed her. Hannah is a very good model for us.

I do not believe that we can thoughtfully read this account without pondering again the mysterious activity that we call prayer. Hannah prayed and God answered her prayer. How long she had to pray for a son before that prayer was answered, we do not know. Presumably she had been praying for many years, though it was just possible that her prayer in the Tabernacle represents the first time she earnestly took her plight to the Lord. The great lesson of this passage, of course, is that God does hear His people when they pray. That is why she named her son "Heard by God."

While God always hears our prayers, He gives us three different answers, based upon His wise and perfect plan for our lives. Sometimes He says "yes" - that is the answer I like best. Sometimes He says "no" because, like the wise Father that He is, He only gives gifts that are good for us. Sometimes He says, "wait," knowing that the request is right but the timing is wrong. The really important thing to remember here is that God always hears our prayer, and that we have the liberty, and even the responsibility, to keep on praying until we are sure that He has given us His answer.

I know you will have noted the sad story of a godly father with unruly sons. Eli was not the first parent to have his heart broken by wild and licentious children, and he certainly wasn't the last. It is not always possible for a godly parent to control the actions of their ungodly children. The Bible is clear that the children are ultimately responsible for their own actions and will be judged by God for what they have done. It is, however, also clear from this account that Eli failed to do all that he could have done to restrain the evil of his children, and for that he was also guilty before God. The word of the unnamed prophet was 'that he honored his sons more than he honored the Lord.' Eli stands as a warning to those of us who are parents today. I cannot be sure of this, but from the account of Scripture, it would seem to me like Eli's warnings to his sons were too little and too late.

Our greatest influence over our children is when they are young. That is the prime time to shape their values and their habits. If your children are still young, seize that opportunity; too quickly it will pass.

My prayer for you today is that you, like Hannah, will know the presence of the LORD and unlike Eli, will raise your kids to know the LORD.