

## September 8 Lesson 2 (NIV)

### FAITHFUL DURING GRIEF

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 99

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 1:1–2:10

#### 1 SAMUEL 1:9–20

<sup>9</sup> Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the LORD's house. <sup>10</sup> In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. <sup>11</sup> And she made a vow, saying, "LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

<sup>12</sup> As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. <sup>13</sup> Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk <sup>14</sup> and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."

<sup>15</sup> "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. <sup>16</sup> Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

<sup>17</sup> Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

<sup>18</sup> She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

<sup>19</sup> Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. <sup>20</sup> So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him."

#### KEY VERSE

*Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."*—1 Samuel 1:17

### RESPONDING TO GOD'S GRACE

#### Unit 1: God Is Faithful

## LESSONS 1–5

### LESSON OUTLINE

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- I. Hannah's Sorrow (1 SAMUEL 1:9–11)
  - A. Annual Visit (v. 9)
  - B. Desperate Prayer (vv. 10, 11)  
*Baby Dedication?*
- II. Eli's Suspicion (1 SAMUEL 1:12–16)
  - A. His Doubts (vv. 12–14)
  - B. Her Denial (vv. 15, 16)
- III. Eli's Pronouncement (1 SAMUEL 1:17, 18)
  - A. Declaring a Blessing (v. 17)
  - B. Departing in Peace (v. 18)
- IV. The Lord's Provision (1 SAMUEL 1:19, 20)
  - A. Remembering Hannah (v. 19)
  - B. Responding to Her Prayer (v. 20)  
*The Name Game*

#### Conclusion

- A. Grace for the Grieving
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

### HOW TO SAY IT

Belial*Bee*-li-ul.

Eli*Ee*-lye.

Elkanah*El*-kuh-nuh or *El-kay*-nuh.

Ephraim*Ee*-fray-im.

Hophni*Hoff*-nye.

Nazirite*Naz*-uh-rite.

Peninnah*Peh-nin*-uh.

Phinehas*Fin*-ee-us.

Ramah*Ray*-muh.

Shiloh*Shy*-low.

## **Introduction**

### **A. A Hymn Written Through Tears**

Many well-known and well-loved hymns celebrate God's faithfulness and provide a sense of comfort and peace to the grieving. In many cases, the hymns themselves were produced in the aftermath of great sorrow on the part of the writer. One of these is "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

Joseph Scriven (1819–1886) wrote the words that were later set to music. He was living a very contented life in his native Ireland. Then, on the night before his wedding was to take place, his fiancée drowned. Not long after this, Scriven moved to Port Hope, Canada, determined to devote his life to helping others in need. When his mother became ill in Ireland, he wrote a letter to comfort her and included in it the words to "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Sometime later, when Scriven himself fell ill, a friend who came to visit him happened to see a copy of the words scribbled on a piece of paper near his bed. The friend asked who wrote them. Scriven replied, "The Lord and I did it between us."

Through the years, the Lord has provided comfort to the disheartened and the grieving. He has done so sometimes through words of hymns or poems, sometimes through the words of Scripture, sometimes through the simple caring presence of concerned Christian friends, and through other means at other times. And while we often associate grieving with death, in a world broken by the curse of sin there are many other circumstances in which genuine grief can occur. One of these is seen in our Scripture text for today. A childless woman became so distraught over her condition that she determined she would "take it to the Lord in prayer."

### **B. Lesson Context**

The events in the early chapters of 1 Samuel occur toward the end of the period when the judges provided leadership for the nation of Israel. The book of Judges is filled with turmoil and chaos due to Israel's pattern of disobedience and rebellion against God. This trend continues into 1 Samuel with a misbehaving priestly family (see commentary on 1 Samuel 1:14).

Hannah's turmoil is of a different kind: the strife that exists within a family and the heartbreak of a barren woman in that family. Hers was the grief of a hope unfulfilled, a desire for the joys of motherhood that she could see other women experiencing but which had been denied her. Hannah felt cruelly separated from those women and in some cases was likely ostracized by them. In a society in which a woman's primary vocation was to be a mother, infertility was often taken as a sign of God's displeasure and resulted in a loss of status. Hannah experienced the disdain of society and likely wondered whether the Lord saw her in a similar light.

Aside from the societal stigma attached to barrenness in biblical times, the surroundings in Hannah's home made her condition even more excruciating. Elkanah, Hannah's husband, had another wife besides Hannah, named Peninnah. Not only did Peninnah have children, but she taunted Hannah mercilessly for her inability to bear children (1 Samuel 1:6, 7). Peninnah was downright cruel in reminding Hannah of her barren condition. It is hard to imagine how deeply Hannah was hurt by such malicious words from a woman she could not simply cut out of her life.

Elkanah was a well-intentioned man and sympathetic toward Hannah, but he did not grasp fully the extent of her anguish. When Hannah would become so upset during their annual sacrifice

that she refused to eat (1 Samuel 1:3, 7), Elkanah would say to her, “Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don’t you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?” (1:8). In truth, being a mother of just one son would have satisfied Hannah, so great was her grief at being childless.

## **I. Hannah’s Sorrow**

(1 SAMUEL 1:9–11)

### **A. Annual Visit (v. 9)**

#### **9a. Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up.**

*Shiloh* is where the tabernacle was set up once Joshua and the Israelites had taken control of the promised land (Joshua 18:1). Shiloh is situated within the tribal territory of Ephraim and centrally located in relation to the rest of the land. Thus it is a fitting location for the tabernacle (see also Joshua 18:8–10; 19:51; Judges 21:19).

Each year Elkanah takes his family to worship and perform a sacrifice at the tabernacle at Shiloh. This may be at a national festival such as Passover, but the text does not specify. It appears that families can plan special gatherings of worship together, perhaps along the line of family reunions (1 Samuel 20:6, 28, 29).

Apparently a fellowship meal shared by Elkanah’s family follows the time of sacrifice. This is meant to be a joyous time. But it was certainly not joyful for Hannah since her “rival” Peninnah constantly ridicules her barrenness (1 Samuel 1:6). On this occasion, the fact that Hannah is said to rise *when they had finished eating* the fellowship meal may mean that she herself has not eaten anything because she is so upset (see the Lesson Context).

#### **9b. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the LORD’s house.**

The Hebrew word translated *house* is used in the Old Testament to describe a number of structures. These include the house of the Lord, or tabernacle (here and in 1 Samuel 3:3), a king’s palace (1 Kings 21:1; 2 Kings 20:18), Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem (18:16), and the Lord’s heavenly temple (Micah 1:2). Virtually nothing is said about the tabernacle in the book of Judges, probably because the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel is so poor at the time. Thus, the tabernacle is not a priority because God is not often prioritized by the people.

But the tabernacle is still revered as a sacred place to those who seek to maintain a true relationship with the Lord. To his credit, Hannah’s husband, Elkanah, is one of those individuals who desires to raise his family to honor the Lord.

Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are mentioned as priests of the Lord in 1 Samuel 1:3, but nothing is said about Eli’s service until the present verse. It is generally assumed that Eli is serving as high priest in Shiloh at this time. Perhaps this is why he is stationed *on his chair by the doorpost* of the tabernacle. People can come and bring their concerns to Eli or seek his counsel.

### **B. Desperate Prayer (vv. 10 11)**

**10, 11a. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying,**

Hannah’s prayer likely includes more than the words recorded in the lines that follow. But this segment contains the most significant part of her prayer: the *vow* that she makes before the Lord.

**11b. “LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son,**

Two times Hannah refers to herself as the Lord's *servant*, a polite way of speaking of herself and emphasizing her lowly status in presenting her request. Hannah uses the words *remember* and *not forget*, which, as noted in the previous lesson, imply God's action to fulfill his word—in this case, to act in answer to a prayer.

Her repetition emphasizes how desperately she hopes the *Lord Almighty* will hear her and honor her prayer.

**11c. then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.”**

The latter declaration sets her son's dedication apart from that of all firstborn sons to the Lord (see Exodus 13:2; Leviticus 27:26). These words reflect Hannah's awareness of the Nazirite vow, the regulations of which are explained in Numbers 6. Either a man or a woman can make such a vow. It includes not only abstaining from cutting one's hair but also from both fruit and drink from the vine and from going near any corpse (Numbers 6:1–8).

Normally the Nazirite vow is voluntary and is taken for a limited period of time (see Numbers 6:13–20). Hannah, however, is placing her son under this vow for life, even before he is conceived. The Lord placed Samson under a similar vow, also before he was conceived (see Judges 13:2–5).

## **II. Eli's Suspicion**

**(1 SAMUEL 1:12–16)**

### **A. His Doubts (vv. 12–14)**

**12, 13. As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk**

Hannah continues *praying in her heart*, or silently. Eli observes the movements of *her mouth*. Had Eli heard her speaking, he may have prepared a response to Hannah's vow, possibly to question the validity of it. Regulations for vows state that if a wife makes a vow and her husband hears it, he can forbid her from keeping the vow and nullify it (Numbers 30:6–8, 10–15). Nothing is said about what happens if a priest should hear the vow.

Then Eli notices that her lips are moving, but she is not speaking aloud. He assumes, mistakenly, that Hannah is drunk. This suggests she also made her vow silently.

**14. and said to her, “How long are going to stay drunk? Put away your wine.”**

Eli's accusation of drunkenness on Hannah's part and his inability to recognize her genuinely deep sorrow may say something about his spiritual sensitivity or lack of such (compare Eli's ignorance in 1 Samuel 3). It may also reflect the sad state of spiritual life at the tabernacle, something that unfortunately Eli has seen demonstrated all too often in the conduct of his own sons, Hophni and Phinehas.

These two men, priests though they are, have become widely known for their scandalous behavior within the sacred space of the tabernacle (1 Samuel 2:12–17, 22–25). While Eli rebukes Hannah for what he views as shameful behavior, it is Eli who will receive the Lord's rebuke and

judgment from Hannah's son Samuel for his own shameful behavior regarding the conduct of his sons (1 Samuel 3:10–18; compare 2:27–36; 4:4, 11–18).

### **B. Her Denial (vv. 15, 16)**

**15. “Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD.**

*Hannah* is quick to counter Eli's accusation of drunkenness. Her agitated state is not the result of hard liquor but of a hard life. She has not poured wine or beer into her body; instead she has been *pouring out* her distressed *soul to the Lord*.

**16. “Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.”**

The term *wicked* can take a range of meaning from “worthless” to “evil.” Ironically (and sadly) this word is later translated “scoundrels” and is attached to the sons of Eli (1 Samuel 2:12). Paul transliterates this Hebrew word *Belial* to speak of Satan in 2 Corinthians 6:15. Hannah is no such person. *Out of her soul* comes the anguished, earnest prayer she has just prayed and the vow she has made.

## **III. Eli's Pronouncement**

(1 SAMUEL 1:17, 18)

### **A. Declaring a Blessing (v. 17)**

**17. Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”**

*Eli* is satisfied with Hannah's explanation. To send her away *in peace* suggests that Eli hopes Hannah will find wholeness and healing from her distress. He declares a blessing on Hannah: *the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him*. Whether Eli's words constitute a promise or merely a hope is difficult to say. The latter seems preferable given his spiritual weakness. This blessing may also be the standard way for a priest to respond to a request offered by any worshipper in prayer.

### **B. Departing in Peace (v. 18)**

**18a. She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.”**

Hannah concludes her exchange with Eli by asking that she *find favor in his eyes*—a reversal of the scornful attitude that he had previously displayed toward her. The presence of both *peace* (see commentary on 1 Samuel 1:17) and *favor* in this verse form a strong contrast to the “deep anguish” with which Hannah had approached the tabernacle (1:10).

**18b. Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.**

With her spirit at peace, Hannah is now in a better frame of mind to eat. No longer is she “downhearted” (1 Samuel 1:8). *Her face* also reflects her state of contentment and her trust that her barren condition will be reversed through the Lord's intervention.

## **IV. The Lord's Provision**

## (1 SAMUEL 1:19, 20)

### A. Remembering Hannah (v. 19)

**19a. Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah.**

Because *Ramah* could be one of several different locations, the trip from Shiloh could be anywhere from 3 to 13 miles. Samuel continued to live in Ramah after he became a recognized leader and judge among the Israelites (1 Samuel 7:15–17).

One can only imagine how different Hannah's worship is following the events of the previous day and whether Elkanah or Peninnah notice anything different about her. Her prayer on her next visit to Shiloh might be some indication of her change of heart (see 1 Samuel 2:1–10).

**19b. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her.**

At some point after the return home, *Elkanah* and *Hannah* become intimate. The Lord remembers Hannah, thus answering her earlier request (see commentary on 1 Samuel 1:11).

### B. Responding to Her Prayer (v. 20)

**20. So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him."**

The result of the Lord's remembrance of *Hannah* is the birth of *a son*, whom Hannah names *Samuel*. She states her reason for doing so: *because I asked the Lord for him*. The name Samuel has been understood to mean "asked of God" or "name of God." Either meaning emphasizes the Lord's provision in answering Hannah's prayer.

## Conclusion

### A. Grace for the Grieving

Women today have different means available for dealing with matters of infertility, means not known in Hannah's time. Still, infertility treatments are not always within the financial means of the would-be mother or even within the possibilities of medicine. The sorrow of infertility remains a particularly burdensome form of grief. A woman's heart is broken; her despair is immeasurable. She can relate to the words in today's Scripture such as "deep anguish," "misery," "deeply troubled," and "great anguish and grief." She feels she has been denied one of life's most precious experiences. *Why?* she asks repeatedly. *Why me?*

Hannah's barrenness became so excruciating for her that she finally vowed to the Lord that if he gave her a son, she would then give him right back to the Lord. The making of vows is something more in keeping with Old Testament law and practice than with New Testament practice (contrast Matthew 5:37). Prayer, however, continues to provide a means for anyone with a bitter soul or a sorrowful spirit to lay bare their grievance before the Lord as Hannah did.

The God to whom Hannah poured out her soul in her anguish is the God who hears our prayers today. He remains our rock, our fortress, our deliverer (Psalm 18:2), our strength and shield (28:7), our hiding place (32:7), our shepherd (23:1; John 10:11). He is the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3), and the God who will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). What Paul advises in Philippians 4:6 still applies, and he was under arrest when he wrote it: "In every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Hannah demonstrated her faithfulness long before Paul wrote. She did so by taking her deepest hurt to the Lord. He, in turn, demonstrated his faithfulness by taking away her pain by providing the blessing she desired.

We keep in mind, however, that we are not guaranteed to receive what we ask of God. And his answer of yes, no, or wait always is in line with his bigger plans. In Hannah's case, her son became a pivotal figure in being the last of the judges and the first of the prophets (Acts 3:24; 13:20). We don't know the future and neither did Hannah. But with her we can say, "My heart rejoices in the Lord ... There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God" (1 Samuel 2:1, 2).

### **B. Prayer**

Father, we see that "deep anguish" abounds every night on the news. It abounds everywhere. Empower each of us to bring your grace, peace, and hope to people around us who need comfort from Heaven amidst their brokenness. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

God listens to our prayers  
because he loves us.<sup>1</sup>