

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 1 – The Birth of Samuel
1Samuel 1:1-2:11

“GOD WITH US” is more than just a title for our thru-the-Bible series. It is a lens through which we may experience the personal presence of “Immanuel” (God with us) through every section of the divine story. As you engage with this series, by reading the Bible, studying the notes, and listening to the messages, ask God to apply these sacred Scriptures to your personal story and your daily walk with Him. He *IS WITH YOU*, and wants you to experience Him more and more intimately, even as you read of His passions and actions with people in biblical times.

Review of Parts 1 and 2 of GOD WITH US:

In Part 1, the **Pentateuch** (Genesis – Deuteronomy) we saw how God chose Abraham and promised to make of his descendants a great nation that would bring blessings to the whole world (Genesis 12:1-3). Some 400 years later, the people of Israel were called forth from the womb of Egypt to be a “kingdom of priests” that would learn to walk in relationship with their God, Yahweh, and represent Him to the world (Exodus 19:5,6). Laws were given to Israel, through Moses, to set apart their behavior so as to provide a true witness to the character of Yahweh. As the Pentateuch concluded, Israel was poised to enter the land of Canaan, the very land promised by God to Abraham.

In Part 2, **Joshua, Judges** and **Ruth**, Israel took possession of the land granted to them by God. The land was divided among the 12 tribes of Israel and the nation began representing God to the world. Sadly, Israel conformed to the ways of the surrounding nations instead of faithfully representing Yahweh. Repeated cycles of sin, oppression, repentance and rest followed, with God raising up new “judges” or “deliverers” to rescue Israel from the sequence of foreign oppressors. The book of Judges ended with the phrase: “*Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*” The nation was reeling in anarchy and lawlessness. They were trying to navigate

their way without a true compass. The solution *should have been* a complete submission to Yahweh their KING; but that was not the path that Israel chose. Yet, there was a faithful remnant. The story of Ruth showed us people who *did* walk with God: Boaz, Naomi, and Ruth the Moabite woman. And we saw God's faithfulness to His promises: the son of Boaz and Ruth was in the line of Christ.

Introduction to Part 3, 1 and 2 Samuel:

Samuel is a key transitional character. The last of the judges of Israel, he was used by God to transition the nation into the period of the monarchy. God intended for Israel to be a "theocracy" (rule of God), with Yahweh serving as the one and only KING for the nation. Yet, the people clamored for a human king so that they could be "*like the other nations.*" The books of 1 and 2 Samuel record how Samuel anointed the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. The narrative follows the careers of both kings, with the major focus being on David, the "man after God's own heart."

Hannah's Struggle to have a Child: 1:1-8

The story opens with the struggle of a woman named Hannah, who was childless. Her struggle was intensified by the fact that her husband, Elkanah (a Levite priest) had taken a second wife in order to raise up offspring, and this other wife, Peninnah, was successful in bearing many children.

He had two wives: the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children (1:2).

Yearly, Elkanah would take his entire family to one of the annual religious festivals in Shiloh. He tried to soothe Hannah's pain by giving her double portions of food at the sacrificial meal.

"When the day came that Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters; but to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, but the Lord had closed her womb" (1:4,5).

The situation was made much worse by Peninnah's hostile disposition toward Hannah.

"Her rival, however, would provoke her bitterly to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. It happened year after year, as often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she would provoke her; so she wept and would not eat" (1:6,7).

For Hannah, the annual religious ‘celebration’ was a nightmare, as Peninnah took the opportunity to rub in the (false) implication of childlessness: *The Lord must be against you*. This caused Hannah great grief because she was not aware of any specific sin in her life that might be resulting in such divine discipline.

So often we make a false connection between suffering and the displeasure of God. Job’s three friends made this mistake, in the midst of his great suffering: accusing him of hidden sins. Yet, Job was chosen by God to go through his ordeal precisely because he was the most righteous person on earth, not the most sinful! Yes, there are times when our suffering is connected to the discipline of God in our lives; but there are other, more mysterious times, when our trials are part of a beautiful plan that God is weaving, not just for our own benefit, but also for the good of others. The barren woman Hannah would, in the end, bring forth one of the greatest leaders in all of Scripture, and God would bless her with many more children. Be careful not to jump to the conclusion that you (or someone else) are suffering because of God’s displeasure.

Elkanah acted in somewhat typical and misguided male fashion: he tried to ‘fix’ the problem instead of ‘entering into’ his wife’s hurting heart with attentiveness and empathy. In doing so, he uttered one of the most insensitive statements a man could make to a hurting, childless wife:

Then 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 better to you than ten sons?” (1:8).

In our course, *Listening Well*, we learn how to listen with empathy and respect, instead of offering quick answers to those who are speaking with us. Elkanah broke nearly every rule of *Listening Well*: He questioned Hannah’s tears instead of affirming them; he showed that he did not empathize with her sorrow; he scolded her for not eating; he gave her pat answers and reasons she should be happy. Men . . . we need to learn to LISTEN and ENTER INTO our women’s hearts, instead of offering quick fixes and judgmental responses. If you want to learn how to better do that, sign up next time our *Listening Well* course is offered. It will revolutionize the way you have conversations, AND it will change the way people feel about opening up to you. If you’re not sure you need help in this area, try asking the females in your life if you are prone to be like Elkanah (and welcome constructive criticism).

Hannah's Prayer: 1:9-11

Hannah was mocked by her rival, and misunderstood by her husband; but she knew that GOD would SEE and HEAR her heart.

Then Hannah rose after eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She, greatly distressed, prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. She made a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head" (1:9-11).

Pouring out her heart to God, she made a vow: IF God would give her a son, then she would place him under a lifetime Nazirite vow to be a special servant of the Lord. (On the Nazirite vow, see p.241 of notes, and also Numbers 6). The fact that Hannah specifically prayed for a SON seems to indicate that she may have had a sense that this son would be used in some very special way during this particularly turbulent period of Israel's history.

There are many times in life when God is our only refuge. People may misunderstand us, or fail to adequately empathize with us; but God is our sympathetic High Priest who really 'gets us' (Hebrews 4:15,16). Hannah could have sought some form of temporary 'relief' for her pain. She could have become bitter and hardened toward God (and people). She could easily have become an angry, defeated woman. Instead, she fully surrendered her life and her pain to the GOD who was WITH HER . . . and she became part of His greater story for the world. When no one else listens or understands, pour out your heart to Him. He will hear your cries and answer according to His perfect will. "Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us" (Psalm 62:8).

Hannah defends herself to Eli the High Priest: 1:12-18

It was enough to be chided by her rival, and misunderstood by her husband; yet, the praying Hannah was also accused and rebuked by her spiritual leader for being a drunken woman!

Now it came about, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli was watching her mouth. As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice

was not heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. Then Eli said to her, “How long will you make yourself drunk? Put away your wine from you” (1:12-14).

Eli failed to pause and “check his assumptions” (a lesson in our Living Well course). He jumped to false conclusions, probably based on his regular experience of watching other women carousing with his wild sons at the Tabernacle (see 2:22,23). It was a minor miracle that Hannah did not respond with anger or hostility; rather, she spoke with humility and respect:

But Hannah replied, “No, my lord, I am a woman discouraged in spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord. Do not consider your maidservant as a worthless woman, for I have spoken until now out of my great anguish and sorrow.” Then Eli answered and said, “Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him.” She said, “Let your maidservant find favor in your sight.” So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad (1:15-18).

Eli did not apologize; but he did use his priestly office to bless her request and to ask God to grant her petition. Her hope in God restored, Hannah took food again and wiped away her tears.

The Birth and Early Life of Samuel: 1:19-28

God soon answered Hannah’s prayer, giving her a son. The name “Samuel” means “God hears,” or “asked of God.” How fitting a name for this child, given Hannah’s intense prayers to God.

It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, “Because I have asked him of the Lord” (1:20).

While Elkanah and the rest of the family continued to go to the yearly feast in Shiloh, Hannah remained at home nursing little Samuel for several years. In that day, children were typically weaned by age 3. Thus, it was at this very young age that Hannah took her little boy back to Shiloh, to present him back to the Lord (about 4 years after her previous, prayerful visit).

Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull and one ephah of flour and a jug of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord in Shiloh, although the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and brought

the boy to Eli. She said, “Oh, my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the Lord. For this boy I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition which I asked of Him. So I have also dedicated him to the Lord; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the Lord.” And he worshiped the Lord there” (1:24-28).

Hannah “dedicated” her child to the Lord. In a similar way, here at Oak Pointe Church we regularly conduct infant “dedication” ceremonies. This is a special occasion where parents do three things: 1) Acknowledge that the child is a gift from the Lord (Psalm 127:3-5). 2) Commit to raise the child in the ways of God (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). 3) Dedicate the child to the Lord, to be used for His purposes in the child’s lifetime (Acts 13:36). While Hannah’s use of a Nazirite vow was unique, her example of offering her child back to God is something to be emulated. If you would like to dedicate your child to the Lord, in this fashion, get in touch with your Community Pastor to make arrangements. We believe it is important to include this kind of ceremony in the spiritual life of your family.

It is important to note the *faith* of both Elkanah and Hannah in presenting their son to Eli at the Tabernacle (where he would stay and serve for the rest of his life). As we will see, the spiritual and moral environment within Eli’s own family was disastrous. Yet, these parents were able to place their hope *in God* for the protection and wellbeing of their precious son. They fulfilled their vow in spite of circumstances that might have caused them to back down. They offered sacrifices prescribed for those who were fulfilling special vows to the Lord (see Numbers 15:9,10).

Hannah’s Song of Praise to God: 2:1-11

Hannah’s song to God is a model of praise and thanksgiving. Many of her themes are reflected in later personal songs of praise, such as the one Mary the mother of Jesus uttered upon hearing that she would bear a special child from God (Luke 1:46-55). Hannah’s song is quoted in full here, from the New Living Translation, with brief comments inserted between the stanzas:

“My heart rejoices in the Lord! The Lord has made me strong. Now I have an answer for my enemies; I rejoice because you rescued me.

GOD was the strength of her heart. She had been rescued not just from barrenness; but also from the bitter taunts of Peninnah, her rival.

No one is holy like the Lord! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.

She ascribed worth to God for being uniquely HOLY and SOLID. All around Hannah there was un-holiness and uncertainty; but God was her firm refuge.

“Stop acting so proud and haughty! Don’t speak with such arrogance! For the Lord is a God who knows what you have done; he will judge your actions.

She saw the futility in people’s boasting and posing. Her God knew all the secrets and carefully judged the hearts and actions of each one.

The bow of the mighty is now broken, and those who stumbled are now strong. Those who were well fed are now starving, and those who were starving are now full. The childless woman now has seven children, and the woman with many children wastes away. The Lord gives both death and life; he brings some down to the grave but raises others up. The Lord makes some poor and others rich; he brings some down and lifts others up. He lifts the poor from the dust and the needy from the garbage dump. He sets them among princes, placing them in seats of honor.

Hannah praised the Lord for being a God of surprising and sudden REVERSALS. She observed that not just in her own situation, but in all of life, it is the LORD who chooses when to bring one DOWN, and when to lift another UP. No one is ‘locked into’ a position of lowliness and futility. God has the power and sovereign authority to reverse the tables at any moment that He so chooses.

For all the earth is the Lord’s, and he has set the world in order. He will protect his faithful ones, but the wicked will disappear in darkness.

He is, after all, the Creator and Sustainer of the whole earth! It is not some monumental task for the LORD OF ALL to look after my one, solitary life! Perspective on the majesty of God changes how we see the mountains and valleys we are facing.

No one will succeed by strength alone. Those who fight against the Lord will be shattered. He thunders against them from heaven; the Lord judges throughout the earth. He gives power to his king; he increases the strength of his anointed one.”

Hannah knew how foolish it was to take pride in human strength or resources, and to resist or ignore the Lord. He gives power to the king who yields to Him . . . yet He thunders from heaven against all those who proudly resist Him.

Additional Thoughts on Hannah, the woman of God . . .

Hannah’s story started with little hope. She was barren, misunderstood, mocked and accused. She could have become a

bitter woman (recall how Naomi renamed herself ‘Mara’ – bitterness – Ruth 1:20). She could have tried to find some form of ‘relief’ – some way of escaping or numbing the pain of her life. Instead, Hannah turned to God as her true companion and her only source of comfort and hope. As a result of her deep and persevering dependence upon God, she ‘released’ the greater God-story that He had waiting for her life, and for the life of Israel as a nation. Hannah the hopeless became Hannah the heroine, as God heard her cries and gave her a son, Samuel – “Heard of God.” Samuel would rise to bring stability and hope to an entire nation reeling in chaos. He was the last judge, a faithful priest, and the founder of the school of prophets. He was a steady, righteous, praying leader at a time when Israel desperately needed one like him at the helm. To put it simply: God used a simple, suffering woman named Hannah to change the course of history.

God uses simple men and women of faith and dependence to bring His plan into our lives and our world. Hannah was a woman who maintained her faith in God in the midst of many obstacles and heartaches. It was her pain-filled prayer that was used by God to bring Samuel into the world. Then, Samuel became the man through whom God brought stability and change into the nation of Israel. He was a faithful, praying leader, who trusted and obeyed God, instead of bowing to the pressures of the culture. How about you? Are you allowing God to use YOU to advance His purposes in your own life, and the lives of those around you? How will the world be impacted because of your time here on earth? YOU can make a difference, IF you let God be the KING in your heart and your life. When HE is on the throne in a human heart, amazing reversals take place, and things happen that we never could have dreamed of. He does “above and beyond all that we could ask or think, according to His power that works within us” (Eph.3:20).