

## **Something New** **I Samuel 1:1-2:11**

### **Story Behind the Text**

I & II Samuel together form what was originally one book that dealt with the transition of Israel from a loosely connected tribal federation to a united kingdom. This movement is presented as much more than a political evolution, but as another step in God's fulfillment of his promises to Abraham to establish his descendants as a blessed and special people in the land of promise.

As with all of the story of Israel, the concept that most defines the life of the nation is covenant. When God had called Abraham, it was a call to a life of faith – following God to the land he would show him, with the promise that God would bless him, and make him a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. God established Abraham's family as the faithful seed for the blessing he was bringing into the world to reverse the impact of sin. In the Exodus, God brought his covenant forward for his people by giving them the law as the specific instructions for how they were to live in his blessing. In this covenant, God established Israel as a nation, a peculiar people who were his own possession. In I & II Samuel, God brings the covenant forward by making of this special nation an eternal kingdom, a picture of God's own reign in all the earth, as the people lived in submission to him.

The major focus in the overall story is that the king who is worthy to reign is the one who recognizes that he is not the ultimate ruler of Israel. That the true king is God himself, and that the earthly king can only keep the throne as long as he honors the covenant that God has established with his people. The only reign that matters is the reign of God. The Davidic covenant that promises an eternal reign of a descendant of David on his throne points to Jesus, the only human who would ever live perfectly according to God's purpose and will, and who would inaugurate the Kingdom of Heaven as the final answer to the brokenness of humanity and of creation since the Garden.

### **The Story Around the Text**

I Samuel begins where Judges leaves off. "Judges ends with stories of spiritual ineptitude among the Levites (cf. Judg 17:1-18:31), sexual misconduct in Shiloh (Judg 21:15-24), and Levitical involvement in tragic military encounters (Judg 19:29-20:48); 1 Samuel opens with all three: spiritually dull Eli and his corrupt sons operate the Shiloh sanctuary contrary to the Torah guidelines (2:12-17); Hophni and Phinehas abuse the women serving at the Tent of Meeting (2:22); and ultimately, Eli's sons die in a catastrophic battle with the Philistines (4:10-11). The Book of Judges concludes with a collection of stories that portray Levites guiding the tribes of Israel into sin—idolatry and fratricide. Samuel opens with sinful Levitical activity—forcing Israelite worshipers to offer unacceptable sacrificial portions to the Lord and playing a role in Israel's disastrous loss to the Philistines." (NAC). The setting is Shiloh, where the Tabernacle of the Lord has been set up, maintained by the Eli and his sons.

In Chapter 1, the book opens with the struggle of Hannah, a barren woman who is dealing with her own personal agony in the midst of the spiritual corruption of Shiloh. It reads like the opening of a very well-written novel, telling a story within the story which will prove to be

essential and foundational to the narrative that follows. The fruit of Hannah's struggle will be one of the most important transitional figures in the history of Israel, the judge/priest/prophet Samuel who will first act as a judge to put things right in the nation, and then anoint the first two kings, ushering in the kingdom that has been alluded to (Deut. 17), but not yet established. Ultimately, in the flow of I & II Samuel, the nation will stumble into the kingdom first with the king that the people want, and then with the king that God wants. It all begins, however, with a desperate woman weeping before the Lord at Shiloh.

## Story Within the Text

### Structure:

- **Exposition:** Elkanah's family trips to Shiloh (1:1-5)
- **Crisis:** Hannah's distress (6-10)
- **Rising Tension** (1:11-23)
  - Hannah's vow (11)
  - Eli's rebuke/misunderstanding (12-16)
  - Eli's blessing (17)
  - Hannah's Return and birth of Samuel (18-20)
  - Infancy of Samuel in Ramah
- **Resolution:** Presentation of Samuel at Shiloh (24-28)
- **Conclusion:** Hannah's Song (2:1-11)

### Commentaries:

Hannah, therefore, shares in a fellowship of barrenness. And it is frequently in this fellowship that new chapters in Yahweh's history with his people begin—begin with nothing. God's tendency is to make our total inability his starting point. Our hopelessness and our helplessness are no barrier to his work. Indeed our utter incapacity is often the prop he delights to use for his next act. (Davis)

Hannah was a woman of faith. In fact, Hannah is portrayed as the most pious woman in the Old Testament. Here she is shown going up to the Lord's house; no other woman in the Old Testament is mentioned doing this. In addition, Hannah is the only woman shown making and fulfilling a vow to the Lord; she is also the only woman who is specifically said to pray (Hb. *pll*; 1:10, 12, 26-27; 2:1); her prayer is also among the longest recorded in the Old Testament. Furthermore, her prayer includes the most recorded utterances of Yahweh's name by a woman (eighteen). She is shown avoiding the faults of the first infertile covenant woman by seeking help from Yahweh rather than pursuing crafty schemes (cf. Gen 16:2). She also avoided the fault of Jephthah, who likewise made a vow that separated him from his child; whereas Jephthah gave his daughter as a burnt offering, Hannah gave her child as a living sacrifice (cf. Rom 12:1). (NAC)

She addresses Yahweh of hosts, cosmic ruler, sovereign of every and all power, and assumes that the broken heart of a relatively obscure woman in the hill country of Ephraim matters to him. (Believers use some of their best logic in prayer.) (Davis)

Perhaps the most prominent catchphrase in the story of Samuel is “before the Lord.” Samuel was to live “before the Lord” always (cf. also 2:11, 18, 21), and this he actually did (cf. 7:6; 10:19; 11:15; 12:3, 7; 15:33). (NAC)

Interwoven into her confession in vv. 27–28 is an artful wordplay involving four different forms of the Hebrew root *š’l*. Samuel’s name is an extension of the wordplay, combining the concept of “asking from” (*šā’altī mē’im*) God and being “given over” (*šā’ûl*). More than that, it is an expression of Hannah’s faith. As Payne notes: “God had given him; Hannah gave him back; and Samuel’s very name was a reminder of these things. We should not overlook the sacrifice made by Hannah; but her loss was to be Israel’s gain, and she felt amply compensated.” (NAC)

We should pay special attention to Hannah’s words in verses 27–28 as she presents little Samuel to Eli. Four times she uses a form of the Hebrew root *š’l* (to ask), a fact which English translations obscure because it is difficult to anglicize fluently. If we tolerate a rougher rendering we could read it like this:

For this child I prayed, and Yahweh gave me my asking which I asked from him; and I also have given back what was asked to Yahweh; all the days he lives he is one that is asked for Yahweh. (Davis)

## **2:1-11**

This section, which contains Hannah’s last recorded words and her longest quotation (112 words), provides a triumphant climax to the narrator’s portrayal of the humble woman’s faith. It is often considered to be a deliberate literary complement to 2 Samuel 22. Hannah’s monologue is described as a prayer; it is cast as a poetic hymn or Psalm of Thanksgiving<sup>32</sup> and is considered by many scholars to be among the earliest extant examples of Israelite poetry.

Hannah’s prayerful song eloquently affirms core concepts of Israelite faith: the Lord is the great judge and overseer of human destinies and a rewarder of those who earnestly seek him (cf. Heb 11:6). He is the source of empowerment and victory for those who fear him, but for all others he is the overpowering authority who dispenses fearful judgment.

The prayer’s emphasis on the Lord’s exaltation of those devalued by others serves not only as a testimony of God’s action in Hannah’s own life. It also foreshadows the Lord’s ways in the lives of Samuel, David, and the nation of Israel. Negatively, it also presages what the Lord would do in judgment against the house of Eli. (NAC)

## **Word Studies:**

### **Barrenness –**

The image of the barren wife is one of the Bible’s strongest images of desolation and rejection. We find this first in Genesis, where the examples include Sarah (11:30), Rebekah (25:21) and Rachel (29:31). The classic case of barrenness is Hannah (1 Sam 1). A NT example is Elizabeth. In

wisdom literature one of four things that are never satisfied is “the barren womb” (Prov 30:16 NIV). (Dictionary of Biblical Imagery)

To be a wife without bearing children has always been regarded in the East, not only as a matter of regret, but as a reproach which could lead to divorce. This is the cause of Sarah’s despairing laughter (Gn. 18:12), Hannah’s silent prayer (1 Sa. 1:10ff.), Rachel’s passionate alternative of children or death (Gn. 30:1) and Elizabeth’s cry that God had taken away her reproach (Lk. 1:25). (New Bible Dictionary)

Barren women seem to be God’s instruments in raising up key figures in the history of redemption, whether the promised seed (Isaac), the father of Israel (Jacob), saviors or preservers of Israel (Joseph, Samson, Samuel), or the forerunner of the great King (John the Baptist). (Davis)

**“Remember”** – When God “remembers” someone, it always ends in a significant action that moves his salvation forward ...

“Remembered” is a soteriological verb when used with the Lord as the subject and suggests the initiation of a major new activity by the covenant-making God (cf. Gen 8:1; Exod 2:24; cf. also Gen 19:29; 30:22). (NAC)

### **Exegetical Conclusions**

- **CIT:** From Barrenness to Joy
- **SST:** Hannah became a key player in God’s plan when she came to the Lord in her despair and gave his blessing back to him for his purpose.
- **ME’s:**
  - Hannah reached the end of herself and cried out in despair.
  - Hannah responded to God’s blessing by sacrificially returning it to him.
  - Hannah gained insight into who God is and what he is doing in the world.

### **Theological Reflection**

- **Story Question: Where does it fit in God’s story?**
  - **Chronologically** – The period of promise. God has been faithful to his covenant, making the family of Abraham into a great nation, delivering them from slavery, giving them the promised land. Now he is about to establish them as a kingdom, the precursor and seed of the eternal kingdom of the new creation. The moment is one of great need, as God’s people await the new thing that God will do.
  - **Theologically** – God demonstrates once again that his redemptive work does not begin with the strengths of those he intends to bless, but with their weakness. He chooses the weak, the broken, the despairing, the barren to be his instruments of redemption.

- **Experientially** – God does his greatest work in our lives when we come to him in our brokenness and out of that weakness surrender ourselves completely to him. We learn who he is and what he is doing as we walk through our most difficult days with him in faith.
- **Brokenness Question – What area of human brokenness does it address?**
  - Our reflex is always to apply human solutions to every problem, to explore our own toolbox for possible solutions before we inquire of the Lord. Our tendency towards self-reliance is a reflection of our fallen inclination to try to be our own savior, our own god.
- **Redemption Question – How does it anticipate Jesus as the solution?**
  - Hannah stands directly in the story of the redemption God is bringing about. Her son will anoint the king to whom God will promise an eternal kingdom and a descendant who will reign forever. The insight she gains into God’s plan echo’s down through history to Mary, who mirrors her song in the Magnificat. Clearly, the new thing God is doing through her desperation is a move towards ultimate redemption and new creation in Christ.
- **Application Question – How does it invite us into God’s story?**
  - We are invited to join each new thing God is doing in the world by coming to the end of ourselves, putting our preferred future on the altar before him, and having the imagination (faith) to envision a future that we could not have imagined, but which is God’s purpose for our lives. We are invited to allow our stories to be swallowed up in his.

#### Homiletical Conclusions:

- **Title:** *Something New*
- **Big Idea:** We are not truly ready to experience the new thing God is doing in our day until we are ready to allow our stories to be swallowed up in his story, for his glory.
- **Supporting Ideas:** To experience the new thing that God is doing among us, we must come to him with ...
  - **Desperation** – Coming to the end of ourselves.
  - **Sacrifice** – of our preferred future (since something new is always a new trajectory).
  - **Imagination** – to see a future we could never have dreamed.
- **Objective:** I want my hearers to open their hearts to a God-purposed future that might be something different from what they had dreamed or planned.
- **Tension:**
  - Human Agenda: We want something new that supports our plans.
  - Divine Agenda: God wants something new that moves towards his purpose in the world.
  - Question: When God is doing something new, what is our part?
- **Exegetical Clue:** Hannah’s place in God’s grand story.

## Act I:

- **Question of the week: What have we learned in this age of Covid?**
  - What is God doing? Certainly, he must be doing something!
    - The last time all the peoples of the earth were this directly and immediately affected by a single event, it was raining and Noah was putting the last coat of tar on his boat! Of course God is doing something! My concern in the very beginning ... **Let's not waste this!**
  - We've gone through **several stages** of receptivity to this ...
    - For introverted germaphobes ... YES!
    - Fascination stage ... "unprecedented" ... emails from Dr., Bank, grocery store, mechanic, favorite restaurant ... all began with "*in these unprecedented times ...*"
    - Sabbatical stage ... more time w/family ... time to reflect ... New podcasts (John Krasinski, "Some Good News") – making the best of it!
    - "Really?" stage ... It's Easter and we're still not back to church?
    - "I'm getting sick of this" stage ... Getting claustrophobic ... have we over-reacted? When is enough, enough? Caution to the wind ...
    - "New Normal" stage ... resignation ... get on with life the best we can.
  - But the question, "What is God doing?" is just as important now as it was on the first day ... I worry that we are still in danger of missing it ... *wasting it*.
- **Dr. Blackaby's invitation/theme** ... My mind immediately went back to a moment in the middle of all of this when I heard God speaking most clearly to me ... Faculty Retreat ... responsible for devotional on second day ... ended day 1 with possibility of "hyperflex" ... 2 AM in the lobby ... Reflection together over I Samuel 1 ... It was a profound moment for me/all of us ... Never been far from my mind since ... With apologies to my colleagues who were there, I want to share this experience with the entire community today ...
- **I Samuel** ... God doing something new ...
  - Abraham ... called to faith ... covenant of blessing ... Isaac ... Jacob ...
  - Moses ... call to nationhood/God's peculiar people ... covenant enhanced (law) ...
    - Joshua ... possessing the land ...
  - Samuel ... call to kingdom ... covenant of an eternal throne ...
  - Picks up where Judges leaves off ...
- **When God wants to do something new, what is our part?**
- This story begins ...
  - Not with a promising leader standing up and announcing a fresh vision ...
  - Not with a message written across the sky ...
  - Not with a some dramatic and spectacular victory ...
  - But with a barren woman crying her eyes out in the presence of the Lord ...
- **READ: I Samuel 1:1-11** -

## ACT II

## 1. Desperation ...

- Have you noticed how often, when God is about to do something new, he begins with a barren woman? Sarah ... Rebekah ... Elizabeth ...
  - As if to say, God will use our devoted strengths on a day to day basis, but when He wants to do something truly extraordinary, something earth-shaking, history-shaping ... **He doesn't start with our strengths ... he starts with our weaknesses.**
- Hannah had no children ... not only that, she was tormented by a rival wife ...-
  - Ralph Davis' description of Penninah: "Overly fertile, mouthy, thorn in the flesh." Imagines the scene at Shiloh that might have put Hannah over the top ...

*"Now do all you children have your food? Dear me, there are so many of you, it's hard to keep track."*

*"Mommy, Miss Hannah doesn't have any children."*

*"What did you say, dear?"*

*"I said, Miss Hannah doesn't have any children."*

*"Miss Hannah? Oh, yes, that's right—she doesn't have any children."*

*"Doesn't she want children?"*

*"Oh, yes, she wants children very, very much! Wouldn't you say so, Hannah? [In a low aside] Don't you wish you had children too?"*

*"Doesn't Daddy want Miss Hannah to have kids?"*

*"Oh, certainly he does—but Miss Hannah keeps disappointing him; she just can't have kids."*

*"Why not?"*

*"Why, because God won't let her."*

*"Does God not like Miss Hannah?"*

*"Well, I don't know—what do you think? Oh, by the way, Hannah, did I tell you that I'm pregnant again?! You think you'll ever be pregnant, Hannah?"<sup>1</sup>*
- **Maybe that's the way it was, maybe not exactly, but not too far off ...**
  - At any rate, the story of God's inaugurating a kingdom begins with this despairing, distressed, desperate woman pouring out her heart at the altar of the Lord ...
- **So when God wants to do something new, what's our part? It would seem from this story that our part begins with *desperation* - we have to come utterly to the end of ourselves.**
  - If it's true that when God wants to do something new, he's not going to do it out of our strengths, but out of our weaknesses, then the first place we need to find ourselves is in a place of acute awareness of our complete incapacity to move anything forward ... **Desperation...**

## 2. Sacrifice ...

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<sup>1</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, [1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 17.

- Story goes on ... Eli thinks she's drunk ... when he realizes the truth, blesses her ... sends her home ... she does conceive ... gives birth to a little boy and names him Samuel ... maybe three years later, after he's weened, **she shows up at Shiloh again with a toddler, a bushel of flour and a skin of wine ... 1:25-28**
  - *When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, and she said to him, "Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.*
- **It's hard to imagine what this act meant ...** This child she had prayed for, longed for, waited for was finally in her arms ... And this was no infant adoption ... she had nurtured him, fed him, loved him, cuddled with him, bonded with him – probably for two or three years – and now she was leaving him at the Tabernacle, currently overseen by Eli the priest and his two scoundrel sons ... An act of faith ... and act of **Sacrifice ...**
- **And here's the second thing that this story seems to teach us is our part when God is doing something new ... Sacrifice.**
  - And it's not just sacrificing some object or person that is precious to us ... it is sacrificing a future that we might have imagined ... our *preferred* future.
  - Makes sense, because if God is going to do something new, it will always mean that there is a trajectory that we had not foreseen ... an alternate future that we could not have imagined ... but we can't get there until we let our old vision go ...
  - **ILL: Portuguese expression ... "abrir mão"** – Especially hard in a culture of scarcity ... When God blesses us we want to hold onto it, cling to it, secure it, make sure it doesn't get away ...
  - **But real freedom only happens when we hold God's blessing lightly, open our hand ...** because that's when God can use the blessings he's given us to do something more than we could ever imagine.

### 3. Imagination

- **Hannah's prayer ...** Important ... with David's prayer at the end of II Samuel, brackets the entire story of God's inauguration of his kingdom among his people ...
  - **Testimony (2:1-6)**

*"My heart rejoices in the LORD;  
in the LORD my horn is lifted high.  
My mouth boasts over my enemies,  
for I delight in your deliverance.*

<sup>2</sup>*"There is no one holy like the LORD;  
there is no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.*

<sup>3</sup>*"Do not keep talking so proudly  
or let your mouth speak such arrogance,  
for the LORD is a God who knows,*

*and by him deeds are weighed.*

<sup>4</sup> *“The bows of the warriors are broken,  
but those who stumbled are armed with strength.*

<sup>5</sup> *Those who were full hire themselves out for food,  
but those who were hungry are hungry no more.  
She who was barren has borne seven children,  
but she who has had many sons pines away.*

**o Then Hannah gets theological ... from her experience to God’s character ... (6-8)**

<sup>6</sup> *“The LORD brings death and makes alive;  
he brings down to the grave and raises up.*

<sup>7</sup> *The LORD sends poverty and wealth;  
he humbles and he exalts.*

<sup>8</sup> *He raises the poor from the dust  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;  
he seats them with princes  
and has them inherit a throne of honor.*

*“For the foundations of the earth are the LORD’s;  
on them he has set the world.*

**o Finally, Hannah goes eschatological ... (9-10)**

<sup>9</sup> *He will guard the feet of his faithful servants,  
but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.*

*“It is not by strength that one prevails;  
<sup>10</sup>those who oppose the LORD will be broken.  
The Most High will thunder from heaven;  
the LORD will judge the ends of the earth.*

*“He will give strength to his king  
and exalt the horn of his anointed.”*

- o** It’s this last part that I find so astounding ... There had never yet been a king in Israel ... But this humble, broken, yielded woman from the hill country of Ephraim was imagining a future that she had no way of having seen ...
- She had been broken in desperation ...
  - Out of her desperation she had experienced blessing, and then put that blessing on the altar as a sacrifice ...
  - Having opened her hand to sacrifice her preferred future to the Lord, she was now free to imagine a future that she could never have seen ... To see a kingdom that as yet did not exist except in the heart of God.

**• Act II Climax:**

- o So Hannah found the path to experiencing the new thing God was doing in the midst of her suffering ... a path of desperation, sacrifice, and imagination.
- o But how does that translate into our situation?

### Act III

- **Clue:** You know the rest of the story ...
  - o This child became one of the most important transitional figures in God's story ... Ultimately anointed a king after God's own heart ...
  - o And with that king, God established a new expression of his covenant, the promise of a kingdom that would never end ... of a descendent who would reign forever.
  - o And one day, a descendent of that king, a young girl would find that she was unexpectedly, miraculously with child ...
  - o And she would sing a song that is so close to Hannah's prayer that most scholars can only assume she had it in mind ...
  - o And her child would establish the promised kingdom – a kingdom like no other ... and he would bring about the redemption for which creation had longed since the Garden ... a redemption that will be ultimately fulfilled when we returns to complete once and for all a perfect, eternal, new creation ...
- **It's a grand story ... *the* story ...** but in the middle of it is this ordinary, broken, despairing woman who out of her desperation poured her heart out to the Lord, placed her most precious gift on the altar of sacrifice, and so was able not only to imagine but to participate a future that she could never have foreseen ... And that's how God does something new!
- **Big Idea: We are not truly ready to experience the new thing God is doing in our day until we are ready to allow our stories to be swallowed up in his story, for his glory.**
- **Resolution: Does this have anything to do with us?**
  - Desperation ... money ... students ... virus ... finances ... health ... family ... stress ... personal struggle ...
  - Sacrifice ... the future we may have imagined ... the things we most enjoy about teaching ... dreams for ministry ... goals ... picture you have in your mind of what life looks like beyond seminary ...
  - Imagination ... Not of a hill full of students, and buildings, but of every tribe and nation around the throne ... Delight not that we are establishing a legacy, but that our story, the story of our years, our lives, our best efforts in this place is swallowed up in the grand story of what God is doing in this world.
  - ***The cool thing*** ... Hannah ended up with a house full of kids. God gave her dream back to her, but the reason we still tell her story today is not because of all those children, but because out of the desperation of her childlessness, she made the sacrifice and had the imagination to allow God to do something new ...

- Could God be doing something new in our day? If he is, I'm pretty sure our part is this:
  - **Desperation** - Coming to the end of ourselves ...
  - **Sacrifice** - Opening our hand to all that we most treasure ... of hopes & dreams and the future we had in mind ...
  - **Imagination** - To see our story swallowed up in his story, for his glory ...