

Squall In The Family

1 Samuel 1:1-18 May 10, 2026

Who is in charge here!?!? That's usually a question that gets asked when things have gone wrong. In 1100 BC Israel,¹ things had gone very wrong.

It was the time of the Judges. A time defined by moral and political chaos. One of the *darkest* eras of Israel's history.² Some of those closing chapters of Judges are hard to stomach because of how ruined society had become, not only *outside* of Israel, but among God's people.

1100 BC was also a time of historic transition. The world was transforming. The Late Bronze age was ending and the Early Iron Age began. New iron technologies were influencing every phase of life. In Canaan, societies were changing from city-states to united monarchies. The "great" empires of Egypt or the Hittites no longer dominated. Instead, it was a time of many smaller kingdoms.³

These trends would ultimately drive God's people to demand a king of their own. They thought that would not only make them more respectable in the eyes of the peoples around them, but surely a king would bring some stability, some sanity to the chaos. Remember the closing verse of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him."⁴ There was no Moses or Joshua to lead the people. The judges had been sporadic and geographically limited. In the end, they failed to unite the people. *If only a king would save us!*

Into *that* setting comes the book of Samuel, which gives the history of how Israel went from Theocracy to Monarchy. But of course, the history books of the Bible aren't *only* meant to give us history. They are given to teach us *theology*. To show us the character and nature and faithfulness and grace of God. To *illustrate* truths that are explained more directly in other parts of the Bible.⁵

Now, I said the "book of Samuel" on purpose. What we call First and Second Samuel are one single book. The issue was, when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek in the 3rd century BC, they used these standard-sized scrolls and one scroll wasn't enough for the whole thing. And so they broke it up into two parts.⁶ So, I'll go with what we're used to and refer to the two books.

They introduce us to three main characters: Samuel, Saul, and David. But through their stories they teach us major spiritual principles about what happens to our institutions and societies when our leaders will not submit to God. About what happens to our own lives and families when we trust God or when we doubt Him. Through these three lives we learn the biggest point of the book: Who is king? Who is in charge? Who is really ruling and reigning over our lives?

¹ Dale Ralph Davis *1 Samuel: Looking On The Heart*

² David Toshio Tsumura *The New International Commentary On The Old Testament: The First Book of Samuel*

³ Tsumura

⁴ Judges 21:25

⁵ Bill Arnold *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel*

⁶ Robert Alter *The David Story*

Now who wrote Samuel? Samuel dies halfway through the book. The truth is, we don't know. The book is anonymous. It's not named Samuel because he's the author, but because of how prominent he was in this transition period. He is the *last* judge and is then used by God to be the kingmaker.

One theory of authorship is that Samuel wrote portions and the rest were finished by the prophets Nathan and Gad.⁷ Another theory is that the book was compiled later by King Josiah.⁸

Based off internal clues, it seems it must've been written before the exile to Babylon.⁹ Interesting bit of trivia: the oldest of the Dead Sea Scrolls found thus far contain portions of Samuel.¹⁰

So we've got upheaval and major political change. Imagine if America transitioned to a monarchy in the next few years! We've got a book full of intrigue and battles, giants and betrayal and the establishment of the greatest kingly dynasty in the *history* of mankind. It's a *big* story. So how does the book start? With a tender telling of a broken-hearted woman from the hill country of Ephraim.

1 Samuel 1:1-3 - ¹There was a man from Ramathaim-zophim in the hill country of Ephraim. His name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ²He had two wives, the first named Hannah and the second Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless. ³This man would go up from his town every year to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of Armies at Shiloh, where Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were the LORD's priests.

Some introductions are in order. In fact, the book presents us with seven people and, as it does, gives some important foreshadowing.

The first is Elkanah. Based off his lineage, his household, and his ability to travel every year, there's good reason to believe he was a wealthy member of the aristocracy.¹¹ But we also learn he was a faithful believer. In a time when people did what was right in their own eyes, he went year after year to Shiloh to worship God. Shiloh was about 20 miles north of Jerusalem and was the headquarters both politically and religiously since the time of Joshua.¹² That's where the Tabernacle was set up.

Next, we have his two wives. Hannah was the first and, we'll see, the love of Elkanah's life. But in that time and culture you *must* perpetuate the family line through male children. And so, Elkanah eventually took a second wife, named Peninnah. Not a very pleasant lady, we'll see.

We're also introduced to Eli and his two sons. They will figure very prominently in the coming passages. And already we get a clue that something is not quite right. Our author says, "this was

⁷ Ralph Klein *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 10: 1 Samuel*

⁸ Alter

⁹ 1 Samuel 27:6

¹⁰ Tsumura

¹¹ Arnold

¹² *Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament*

during the time when *these two guys* were priests.” And both of their names are *Egyptian* names.¹³ So we make a note that something is up. All is not well in the family of Eli.

The seventh Person we’re introduced to is God Himself. Notice the name: The LORD of Armies. Your version may have The LORD of Hosts. This is the very first use of this name for God in the Bible.¹⁴ Why? Because what is Samuel all about? Israel demanding a king. The establishment of the monarchy. And *right from the start* the Bible wants to remind us that *God* is King. He is not the King of a single city-state or the King of a single nation or even the King of an empire. He is the King of kings. He sits enthroned over Israel’s armies, over the hosts of heaven, over all heavenly creatures, over all creation, enthroned *forever* between the cherubim. Heaven is His throne and earth is His footstool. And our part is to bow to Him as King because He is *our* King, as well.

Now, seeing an Israelite family with two wives, one who is unable to have children, should *immediately* grab our interest. This is how many important, dramatic, glorious stories begin in the Old Testament. Abraham and Sarah. Isaac and Rebekah. Jacob and Rachel. Samson’s parents. As readers, anticipation should start building immediately.

It’s easy for us to *read* the story. It was much harder to *live* it. Hannah’s story begins with many years of intense heartache. Perhaps you’re facing heartache today. The Lord sees and He knows and He loves you. All of us can be encouraged by the fact that, as one commentator notes, “God’s tendency is to make our total inability His starting point.”¹⁵

1 Samuel 1:4-8 - ⁴ Whenever Elkanah offered a sacrifice, he always gave portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to each of her sons and daughters. ⁵ But he gave a double portion to Hannah, for he loved her even though the LORD had kept her from conceiving. ⁶ Her rival would taunt her severely just to provoke her, because the LORD had kept Hannah from conceiving. ⁷ Year after year, when she went up to the LORD’s house, her rival taunted her in this way. Hannah would weep and would not eat. ⁸ “Hannah, why are you crying?” her husband, Elkanah, would ask. “Why won’t you eat? Why are you troubled? Am I not better to you than ten sons?”

It’s hard for some of us to imagine such a bad family dynamic. For others, you know the hurt of having an enemy in your own home. These were long and difficult days for poor Hannah.

I’d like to make a quick aside here: Sometimes we wonder why it seems like God was ok with polygamy in the Old Testament. The truth is, He wasn’t. It was *never* what He wanted. He gave a clear pattern and boundary in Genesis. Polygamy is *never* shown in a positive light in the Bible. Far from it. It *always* brings problems and pain. God is merciful and forgiving, but He did not want it.

¹³ P. Kyle McCarter *1 Samuel: A New Translation With Introduction And Commentary*

¹⁴ Tsumura

¹⁵ Davis

Let's bring it up to date. We don't really deal with polygamy, though things like that *are* becoming more normalized in our godless culture. But listen - God's sexual ethic is not prudish or stifling. It is *good*. If you want fulfillment relationally and sexually, follow God's design.

But back to our text - Hannah is struggling. *Years* of struggle. Peninnah would go out of her way to actively hurt her feelings and taunt her and belittle her.

Obviously she was not a nice lady, but she was probably jealous herself. The words there indicate Hannah was the one true object of Elkanah's love.¹⁶ But that doesn't excuse Peninnah's behavior.

For his part, Elkanah *tried* to comfort his wife, but he really didn't do a good job. He acted like the stereotypical man. He gives Hannah a huge portion of food but she can't eat all of that. It only *highlights* that she has no kids to eat it with. He says, "Aren't I enough for you?" Actually, the words he said could be translated, "Don't I treat you as if you had 10 sons?"¹⁷ So, he *tried* to make her feel better, but clearly he did not understand his wife. And he seemed to allow this family dysfunction.

The big question is: Why did God do this to Hannah? Our author clearly assigns responsibility to the Lord *twice*.

We know why it happened to Hannah and how it's going to turn out so good. But we don't always know why God allows hard things in *our* lives. But remember the promise: God, Who loves us, will work all things together *for the good*. That doesn't always mean relief from barrenness or healing from sickness or removal of suffering. Sometimes God asks us to walk through *very* hard things. But He sees and knows. He has grace and mercy for you in any day of difficulty or *decade* of difficulty.

1 Samuel 1:9-11 - ⁹ On one occasion, Hannah got up after they ate and drank at Shiloh. The priest Eli was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple. ¹⁰ Deeply hurt, Hannah prayed to the LORD and wept with many tears. ¹¹ Making a vow, she pleaded, "LORD of Armies, if you will take notice of your servant's affliction, remember and not forget me, and give your servant a son, I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and his hair will never be cut."

In her pain, in her ongoing distress, where did Hannah go? She went to the Lord. She *knew* God had allowed this in her life, she's overwhelmed with sadness, but she did not curse God. She did not reject Him. She leaves the feast and *chooses* faith. She *chooses* relationship with God. Pleading, yes. Questions, yes. Sorrow, yes. But through the tears she says, "You are the Lord of Armies and I am Your servant." She did not know if He would grant her request, but she knew He would hear her.

And in her plea we see her dive *deeper* into the ways of God. "Give me a son and he will live as a Nazarite." Could it be that she found hope in the Samson story? After all, Samson's mother had been childless many years, too. But what happened? The Lord intervened. But here Hannah

¹⁶ Klein

¹⁷ McCarter

doesn't just ask to be like Samson's mom, she promises that her son would do what Samson would not. "His hair will *never* be cut." Her son would be faithful where Samson had been faithless.

If you are sorrowing today, you do not have to hide it from the Lord. He hears the sound of your weeping.¹⁸ He puts your tears in His bottle.¹⁹ He can be trusted to love you and comfort you.

1 Samuel 1:12-14 - ¹² **While she continued praying in the LORD's presence, Eli watched her mouth.** ¹³ **Hannah was praying silently, and though her lips were moving, her voice could not be heard. Eli thought she was drunk** ¹⁴ **and said to her, "How long are you going to be drunk? Get rid of your wine!"**

Poor Hannah! She is just so misunderstood by the people around her. Here's Eli - the spiritual leader of Israel - condemning her as a wicked and worthless woman.

Why in the world would Eli jump to this conclusion? Well, maybe the Tabernacle had a regular stream of drunkards coming in. That sort of corruption was certainly the norm for his own sons who were defiling the Lord's House every day. But this scene really reveals a lot about Eli.

Notice: Hannah didn't go to *him* for prayer or to get an oracle from God. She bypassed him altogether. As faithful believers, she and Elkanah would not have thought very highly of Eli. And his reaction here reveals that he couldn't recognize true piety when he saw it.²⁰

1 Samuel 1:15-18 - ¹⁵ **"No, my lord," Hannah replied. "I am a woman with a broken heart. I haven't had any wine or beer; I've been pouring out my heart before the LORD.** ¹⁶ **Don't think of me as a wicked woman; I've been praying from the depth of my anguish and resentment."** ¹⁷ **Eli responded, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant the request you've made of him."** ¹⁸ **"May your servant find favor with you," she replied. Then Hannah went on her way; she ate and no longer looked despondent.**

Hope is kindled! Hannah's deep sorrow has been replaced by a deep confidence in the Lord. Her situation is the same but now she has a promise. And she knows that God's grace changes things.

She says, "May your servant find favor." It's interesting: Her name *means* "Gracious woman,"²¹ or, "Favor with God."²² And her prayer is that God would work His grace in her life. That she would become who she was created to be. That her life would be defined and overflowing with grace.

And it wasn't an empty hope. It wasn't just a placebo. In verse 8, she was so upset she couldn't eat. Now in verse 18 she's eating. She's feasting with the family - yes, even Peninnah. God has done a work of grace in her heart *despite* the difficulties of her situation.

¹⁸ Psalm 6:8

¹⁹ Psalm 56:8

²⁰ James Smith *The Books Of History*

²¹ Robert Bergen *The New American Commentary, Volume 7: 1, 2 Samuel*

²² Tsumura

It's a beautiful start to a monumental book. But we have to ask, why start with Hannah and Samuel instead of David's mom? Or maybe pick up with Ruth and carry on the story?

Because Samuel is not *really* about David. Of course, he is the main character - one of the most significant in the whole Bible. I mean, he has *his own* covenant with God like Abraham did. I don't say this to diminish David.

But this book is really about something deeper. That no matter what's going on in your life, in the world around us, the wars, the changes in culture, *God is in charge*. Christ is the true King.

The book starts with Hannah because through her God gives us Samuel. And Samuel is the agent God uses to anoint the first kings of Israel. And we'll see that both Saul and David are beholden to Samuel and after him the prophets like Nathan. Because they are God's representatives. The kings of Israel are, in actuality, appointed to be *vice-kings*. *Allowed* to rule as long as they obey the *true* King. They are, in fact, merely stewards on temporary thrones. Even though the nation wanted to throw off Theocracy and was often fighting with themselves like this family, God was still in charge.

The other reason the book starts with Hannah is because of what comes in chapter 2. The song of Hannah is not just a nice thank you to the Lord for giving her a son. It contains the theological purpose of this book. It is the key to the interpretation of everything that follows.²³

In her song we will hear that God is the Savior. That He is holy. That He is the rock. That He changes the fortunes of people. In fact, we'll get seven examples of God changing things - flipping them on their heads. Why? Because *He* is the real King, the true King. And we will learn in her song and in these stories that if you oppose Him, you will be shattered. And most of all, we learn that God will send the messiah. That's the very last word of her song. Did you know David is called God's "messiah" in this book? He is - messiah, *small* m. Sent to deliver Israel. But as we follow his story, we'll find that a human messiah - a small m messiah - is not enough to save us. Because he, too, needs saving. But that's why God will promise that the *Son* of David will be the ultimate Messiah, capital M. The King of kings, capital K. The Leader Who will *never* fail, *never* be defeated, *never* make a mistake, *never* let us down.

In the darkest days of Israel's history, God sends the light of hope. And we can live today in the power of grace because the Light has come. The Light of the World, the Son of David. The King Who is coming back one day, but Who is in charge right now. A King we bow before, a King we honor, a King we serve and celebrate.

²³ John Martin *Studies In 1 And 2 Samuel, Part 1*