

Let's open our Bibles tonight to our favorite book. What is it? (Congregation responds) "1 Samuel." I'm glad you've joined us tonight as we continue our studies through the Old Testament. And we begin a very much in-depth look at 1 and 2 Samuel, which will basically give us detailed information - as God wants you to have it - for the lives of Samuel and Saul and David.

Our chapter tonight will pick up the chronology where we left off a long time ago - in Judges 16 with the death of Samuel. We told you then, and I think we told you in Ruth as well, that the last five chapters of the book of Judges, as well as the book of Ruth itself, are portraits of the times of the judges, but they're non-specific in terms of time. We don't know if they were early on or later on. The judges, chronologically, covered about 338 years; it took us from 1381 or so B.C. until 1043 or so - to the time of the first king in Israel, King Saul. Tonight we will begin with the last judge, who happens to be Samuel (and his birth), and we will go all the way through to the time of Saul and then to the time of David.

1 and 2 Samuel are narrative history. It is important that you understand that narrative history, like the book of Acts, you are taught through the examples that God paints for us or the situations that He presents. So the lessons are in the details and in the stories that God sets before us. As you go through this book, and I'll try to point it out as we go through, sometimes the LORD slows down and has us spend chapters just upon a couple of weeks of time; other times you'll skip 25 years without a comment. And I have no explanation for you except these are the things that the LORD wants us to learn. So we're going to try to put ourselves in the story and in the situations because they are written so that we might learn to trust the LORD better. For me there's no easier way to study than narrative. If we teach you the book of Hebrews, the book of Romans, it's a lot of theological work; you've got to put on your thinking cap, and you've got to think things through, and that's important, too. And we'll do those, as we have. But narrative tends to be just like comfort food. You know? You can kind of learn it as you sit.

According to the Jewish Talmud, Samuel is thought to have written the first twenty-four chapters of this book; and then Nathan and Gad had written the rest. Now they get that out of 1 Chronicles 29:29, where they are mentioned as each

having their own book: Gad the seer, Nathan the prophet, Samuel the seer. And that's kind of where that idea is gathered. It may be true. It's impossible to prove, but it works as good as anything, and you have a verse to go with anyway. Not that it really matters; we know that the Holy Spirit wrote it. But it's always kind of fun to try to understand as much as you can.

Since 1 Samuel begins with the birth of the last judge, Samuel, who will anoint Saul as king, the book starts about 1051 or so B.C. Our timeframe for 1 and 2 Samuel is roughly from 1100 or so to the end of David's life, 970. So there's only 130 years of history in these two books that we'll be taking next. If you add 1 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles as well, which we plan to do, they will take us all the way forward in our history to 606 B.C., which is an important date - and you'll learn it as we go - when the Babylonians came against Judah, and they began their onslaught against Jerusalem and began to take prisoners. And over a several-year period, actually three different attacks would take the Jews into captivity where they would stay for 70 years. After those 70 years, Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah would follow, and then we would pretty much be done with history. So it's these six books and then three books that cover just a little short period of time of the rebuilding of the Temple and then 400 years of silence, and then you're in the book of Matthew. So once we get to the end of the historical books, all of those prophetic books after Nehemiah, if you will, they all can be picked up and placed into this historical narrative that you and I are studying now. So everything beyond that just fits back into this history. You got that, right? So your Bible's not as big as you think. It covers a lot of years, but we'll be able to place all of these prophets at a proper time - both the major and the minor prophets - into the history. But for now, we'll focus on 1 and 2 Samuel for the next twenty weeks or so, thirty weeks, 130 years of Samuel and Saul and then David; so the last judge and two of the three kings that were over Israel during the united kingdom, and we'll cover them.

The book of 1 Samuel is really all about leadership. There are three types of leaders: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who have no idea what's happening. (Laughing) And that's pretty much what you'll find in the four main characters in these two books: Eli and Samuel, Saul and David - the life of a priest, the life of a prophet, the life of a politician and the life of a poet. And their influence is either good or bad.

From a historical standpoint, since you're here studying with me, at the time of Solomon, the world empires were almost all very weak and in transition: the

Hittites in Asia Minor were losing their power; the Assyrians also were very weak during this time; Egypt was struggling with internal conflicts. The only people group that was very strong during these two books was the Philistines. They were very developed. They were growing stronger, according to 1 Samuel 13. They had cornered the iron market and could work in iron so that their weapons were far advanced from most others. They could make axes and sickles and sharpen mattocks and swords and all. So, when they went to battle, they were pretty powerful. In fact, even during the time of Saul and Jonathan, there were only two swords in all of Israel. And they had them, not their army; they had them, only the two. So it was an interesting time. On the sea, the Phoenicians were the strongest. They were developing an alphabet that we actually use today to develop our English alphabet. They were traders in wool and traders in cloth.

From a religious standpoint, Israel was still stuck in the judges time. We've talked a lot about those in the last couple of weeks - the sin-drome, right? That constant revolving of rest and rebellion and retribution and repentance and restoration and redemption, back to rest; and this laid out seven different times over these 338 years in your Bible. So, Ruth was the exception. It was a notable exception, a godly family in the midst of a very ungodly time. Samuel will also be an exception as well. But understand, in Israel most of the priesthood was corrupt. The people refused to hear the Bible. In fact, you'll read (in chapter 8 of this book) that they refused to hear the counsel of Samuel. They wanted a king. Samuel said, "It's a bad idea. We're God's people. He should be our King." They said, "Go talk to yourself, man. We don't want to hear it anymore." And they kind of resisted him.

So Samuel's ministry, at the end of this judges period, was very difficult; it was very heartbreaking; it was very challenging. But by the time you finish these two books together, Israel will have progressed nationally from twelve loosely-affiliated tribes and judges to the most powerful nation on the planet, under God's leadership. They had very few rivals. When David, as a monarch, was leading - early on in his leadership, especially - there was no one as bad and tough and overcoming, if you will, as Israel. When you read these accounts (that we're going to start with chapter 1 tonight), God does not hide the weaknesses of His people. He's not ashamed of us, though He is honest about our sinfulness. The only place that you will read a different history than in these history books is if you turn to the book of Hebrews 11; and God cleans everything up for us, and He only picks those things that pleased Him by our actions of faith. You won't read failure, you won't read the wrong kind of motivation; you'll just read about the accomplishments

of men and women from the Old Testament history that walked with God and did these remarkable things by faith, and God marks them down - the kind of faith God accepts. But if you go back to the historic books, like we are tonight, you'll get the reports kind of warts and all. In fact, some of the most referenced stories and lessons, and I suspect that we could have a lot of you just stand up and tell the stories because you know them so well, are found especially in these two books. And so we want to be sure we don't just turn our mind off because we've heard them before and let the LORD just speak to us.

Well tonight we're just going to do twenty-eight verses. It'll take us forever. No. We'll be fine. (Laughing) We're going to look at the birth of Samuel, his dedication to the LORD at the tabernacle in Shiloh. Samuel was from the tribe of the Levites. He was a judge, he was also a prophet, he was also a priest. Interesting enough - a kind of a type of Christ. He was a man of tremendous faith. He has a powerful prayer life. But chapter 1 doesn't focus on him hardly at all; it focuses solely on his parents, and especially his mom, but really both mom and dad and their trusting in the LORD as they go forward.

So let's start in verse 1 of our favorite book. Verse 1, chapter 1, here we go, "Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim Zophim, of the mountains of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. And he had two wives: the name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children." Elkanah, the husband; Hannah and Peninnah, the two wives. Bigamy or polygamy, if you will, in the Bible is forbidden. If you get to Matthew 19:5, for example, Jesus will say to those questioning Him, "It is for this reason that a man would leave his mother and his father, and he would cling to his wife, and the two would become one flesh. They are no longer two; they're one. And what God has joined together, let not man separate." God's intention, biblically, has always been that relationship - one man, one woman, one life, joined together by God's hand. The first mention of bigamy or polygamy, in the Bible, is way back in Genesis 4:18. There's a fellow named Lamech. He was a wicked descendant of Cain. Old Testament culture has the commonality amongst the heathen that found its way amongst the saints so often; guys like Jacob and David and Elkanah and others who ended up having more than one wife. It seems to me, having been married many years, that one wife is plenty. (Laughing) I don't mean that in a bad way. I just mean that in a real way. To keep one wife happy is work enough for most men. I'm gettin' "amens" on the front row, anyway. (Laughing)

However, the revelation of God, in His will, to men is, in the Bible, progressive. What that means is He deals with one thing at a time, and over time He makes His will known as He does to you and me. He sharpens us, He nurtures us, He guides us from one thing to the other to help us overcome things in our lives. Well, it's the same way in the Scriptures. Society may color our outlooks and practices, but the Word of God - when you ignore it or disobey it - will always lead to suffering. So, when the LORD established marriage early on and you find even some heroes of faith caught up in what are practices that the LORD would not have approved of, understand that with those come consequences. In fact, there is not one case of polygamy in the Bible where there's a good result or everyone says, "This was the better way to go." There's no high-fiving, there's no the LORD promoting, no one's wearing "I've got three wives and I love it" tee-shirts. It's just not happening. Right? God had made His way clear. He is certainly tolerant, but it always leads - at least every example that you find in the Bible - to trials and hurts and favoritism and hatred and conflict. Here, Elkanah has two wives: one has the ability to have children; the other one is unable to have children. And, because of her barrenness, she suffers greatly in many different ways (as we're going to see).

Verse 3 tells us, "This man" (Elkanah) "went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. Also the two sons" (of the high priest at that time) "of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there." Though faulty in his marital practice, everything else about Elkanah would tell us he was a godly man whose family was interested in worshipping God in the manner that God prescribed. Remember, progressive revelation - this is what God had made known to His people. He came to God on God's terms. As a faithful husband and Jew, he made the trip three times a year for the yearly Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Weeks and Tabernacles (week-long Jewish feasts), and he made them to the place where the tabernacle of God, or God's presence, stood in Shiloh - forty miles or so northwest of Jerusalem. Today, Shiloh is called Nablus. It is as you head towards the Jordanian border. It is a place that, when we're in Israel, we don't take our folks; it isn't a secure place. But we know exactly where it is, if you will. And it was the place that God had ordered that they set up the tabernacle back in Joshua 18:1. It was the only place for the Jews to come worship God; they weren't allowed to just set up wherever they wanted. You wanted to worship God, you came where His presence was at the tabernacle at Shiloh. In fact, the tabernacle stood longer in Shiloh than anywhere else. That was where God wanted His name. It was on one of these family trips to worship God (then to Jerusalem, much later) that Jesus had been separated from His family - twelve-year-old

Jesus. And when they recognized that night, as they sat down to camp, that Jesus wasn't around, and they had to make that all-night trip back to Jerusalem, and they found Him, remember, in the Temple (there in Luke 2:46), that was one of these kinds of trips.

So notice, in verse 3, that the man, Elkanah, took his family to go worship and to offer sacrifice to the "LORD of hosts." This is the first time this word is used in the Scriptures. As far as Bible hermeneutics or the ability to interpret Bible, they will tell you that it is always important that you get the first use of a word in the Bible because it usually sets the standard for its use throughout the Scriptures from that point on. So this is the first time that the word *Jehovah Sabaoth* is used. In Hebrew, it literally means the LORD of the army or the LORD of the company or the gathered ones or the mighty or the One that leads into battle. It's a military term. It suggests that the LORD had, at His disposal, a mighty army of angels or, if you will, that Elkanah saw the God of the Jews, his God, as the One who ruled all, was powerful to deliver. That's how he viewed the LORD. And it's brought up, like I said, for the first time here. He acknowledged that Jehovah was God over every nation, and he did so during the time of the judges, when people were just not worshipping God at all. So he's a very unique kind of individual in his position.

We also read, here in verse 3, of the leadership that was taking place at the tabernacle. When Elkanah and his family arrived there three times a year, the priests on duty were the sons of Eli, the high priest. Now Eli was a good priest, and we're going to learn that as we go, but he was a horrible father. And he did not restrain his sons from the wickedness that they pursued, being there as servants, where people came to offer sacrifice to God. These guys would take more than what belonged to them for pay. They would steal or take from people by force. They slept with the women. These guys could not have been worse. And Eli, their father - a good, devoted priest who would lose all because of them - had just let this kind of thing fester; and he would for decades before it actually being dealt with by the LORD and by him. Needless to say, the only mention of it is here, and the reason it is mentioned - and I'll tell you ahead of time - is because the vow of Hannah is going to be to send her son as a young boy to this tabernacle to serve and to live there, to be at God's disposal from his youth. That was her promise, "if I could just have a child." And God just paints the picture: this is the kind of place he was being sent into; these rulers that were wicked and a father, though he was good, who didn't restrain his sons. Now we're getting ahead of the picture a little

bit, but.....well, let me read to you - since we're ahead of the picture anyway - verse 12 of chapter 2, where it says this, "Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD. And the priests' custom with the people was that when any man offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fleshhook in his hand while the meat was boiling. Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; and the priest would take for himself all that the fleshhook brought up. So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who sacrificed, 'Give meat for roasting to the priest, for he will not take boiled meat from you, but raw.' And if the man said to him, 'They should really burn the fat first; then you may take as much as your heart desires,' he would then answer him, 'No, but you must give it now; and if not, I will take it by force.' Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for men abhorred the offering of the LORD." Or, if you will, people showed up, and they started wanting to give to God in love, by the Law, and they ran into these clowns. And they were stealing from them and misusing what they were provided for, and people started hating coming to the LORD - not because of the LORD but because those who were representing Him were taking the people to the cleaners. For now, we're just told this is what the tabernacle looked like every time that they showed up.

Now, I want to follow that along for a minute because here're two guys: Hophni - his name means "boxer;" Phinehas means your "mouth of brass" or "mouth of judgment." God would deal with them in time; He would deal with Eli, their father, as well. But I want to bring this up to you that here comes Elkanah - godly man, two wives - undeterred by the ungodliness of others in terms of him coming to worship. He came every year - three times a year - to worship God despite the hypocrisy and the sinfulness that he found at the place of worship. So much so that we just read, in chapter 2, people hated coming at all because they ran into these rip-offs who were just serving themselves and taking from the people. Here's why I bring it up to you: I've heard people say before that they refuse to go to church because there're too many hypocrites. I usually say to people like that, "Well, then don't join 'em and make it any worse." But there is always this desire to blame others for your lack of devotion. "Oh, I would except so-and-so did this and so-and-so said that," and they point to the weakness of others rather than being devoted to the Lord who can handle all of those things. We're supposed to worship the Lord no matter how poor the examples of others might be. Now that doesn't mean you should be in a church where there're poor leadership examples; I hope

that's not the case. But it is a good thing to point out that you can't excuse your own commitment and responsibility by blaming your lack on the behavior of others. And Elkanah didn't do that. He came every year with his family, and whether there were poor or wicked leaders there or not, it didn't matter to him; he came to serve the LORD. So, I guess what I'm saying to you is be careful in your walk and your service to the Lord and your example to others. Don't let their poor example sideline you. Everybody's weak. Some people are way too weak. But still, keep your eyes on Jesus. And certainly Elkanah did that very well. Wasn't a pretty place to come and worship, apparently, in his days. Not a place you'd look forward to going. But yet, between him and the LORD, that's exactly what he wanted to do.

We read, in verse 4, "And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, although the LORD had closed her womb. And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the LORD had closed her womb." Although you were not allowed to eat the sin offering (that had to be offered and burned up on the altar when you came to cover for your sin), the peace offering, the thanksgiving offering, those offerings of relationship, in their law format, were often returned to you - that meat, a large portion of it - so that you could sit down in God's presence and eat with God. It was like a time of fellowship with God. You would eat with the LORD. You brought your offering. You brought it for thanksgiving or for peace, and a great portion of it was given back to you in fellowship. When that time came, Hannah was given by her husband a double portion - more than Peninnah - because Elkanah loved her; and you conclude, again, loved her more, loved her better, had a favorite. "I love you even if you bear no children." Here're the sad statistics of bigamy - favoritism and jealousy. Even the LORD, in commenting on this in verse 6, says that Peninnah, the other wife, was Hannah's "rival," who used her fertility to "severely provoke" (those are the words that are used here) Hannah, "to make her miserable," to take this joyous time of worship and the family vacation and the time of the weeklong worship trips to make them worse for her than ever before. Peninnah had children; she didn't have the love of her husband. Hannah had no children, but her husband loved her greatly. But this Peninnah woman is a wicked kind of woman in church, so to speak. She's mean-spirited, she's jealous, she's hateful, and she's vindictive; and this went on and on. Now we read here, twice, that the LORD had closed Hannah's womb. Society, in those days, saw this as nothing less than a judgment from God because if you were not able to bear children, you'd have no opportunity to bear the

promised Messiah. So you're out of luck, you're out of the game, you don't stand a chance. According to the accusations, I'm sure that Hannah wondered if God had really rejected her. We have no word at all here in this section that this was punishment, that it was God angry at them or her. There is no indication at all that this was punitive at all. In fact, I think if you read the whole story, what you come away with is saying the LORD had a perfect timing, and it wasn't time yet. But the assumption that people make, obviously, because God did sometimes use barrenness as a punishment, was that must always be the case, and it wasn't. If you read through your Bibles, you will see that the LORD opened the womb of Leah, the LORD opened the womb of Rachel. Later David will write in the Psalms about the LORD, "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward" (Psalm 127:3). God blesses with children. But sometimes He blesses not having children. So, to suspect that her barrenness is a result of God's judgment is foolish, not biblical, and it shouldn't be biblical in your life if that's something that you're feeling. It's a foolish conclusion to make. I think you would know if God was dealing with you, and He would tell you in ways other than that. So if you've been trying to have children, and you've been unable, either God is preparing you for what lies ahead (that's certainly Hannah's story), or there are children that need parents like you (who don't have them), or maybe you have a special ministry that requires you to not have kids at all to be available. I don't know. Can't speak for the Lord. But I would not jump to the conclusion that these folks did or that this hateful second wife liked to throw in the face of her rival. Know this: God knows how you feel. You can rest in His love. But for Hannah, because we've read ahead, God was forming her heart so that He could accomplish His will because this time of judges was about to come to an end, and what they needed was a godly leader who could turn them and bring them forward into a relationship with God, that God wanted to have with them. And Samuel would be that man.

We read, in verse 7, "So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, that she" (Peninnah) "provoked her" (Hannah); "therefore she wept and did not eat." I mean, this taunting torment year after year, as they went up to Shiloh, this waiting by Hannah, this suffering that continued, got worse on vacation weeks, on family trips. You never read, by the way, of Hannah responding in kind like, "Shut up, your kids are a bunch of buffoons" or anything. You don't get any of that. You know? Hannah's just a real godly woman, I think, in every way. She doesn't respond in kind. I think I might have had lots to say to this woman. But God is working it out, if you will.

We read, in verse 8, in fact, "Then Elkanah her husband said to her, 'Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?' " I think he's trying to comfort her, but I think her answer would have been, "Not at this point." You know? So here's this woman, Peninnah, year by year up at the place of worship with this attitude. I'm guessing that to go to church doesn't make you a believer. In fact, the worst gossip I've ever met in my life I met in church. I guess you can meet all kinds. So God allowed all of this to happen, like I said, to prepare Hannah's heart. But she didn't know that. And here's the bigger picture for the reasons for the delay that God will be revealing Himself. But, look, that waiting kills ya, right? Unless you're ready to rest in the Lord's purposes, the waiting can sometimes just wear you out. So this went on for years - year after year (we're at verse 7).

Well, Hannah is in tears most of the time. Her husband can't comfort her. "So Hannah," verse 9, "arose after they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the LORD. And she" (Hannah) "was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, 'O LORD of hosts,' " (same title again) " '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 male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.' " I guess, in this particular trip, she was grieved, and she couldn't eat, and she was kind enough to wait until everyone had eaten, and then she quickly got up and ran over to the tabernacle to unload her heart to the LORD. She was just a godly woman of prayer. Anguish drove her to her knees, to the One whose ears are always open to their cries. This time Eli, the high priest, was sitting nearby in attendance. We are told, in verse 10, that Hannah began to talk to the LORD from a broken heart; that she wept in distress, this was too much for her, she was in despair, and, "I can't do this anymore." She had come to the end of herself. But something happened in verse 11, and she prays a prayer that I assume, from all that we read, she had not prayed before. She said, out of much prayer, in one line that seemed to move the heart of God. She reminded the LORD of her difficulty. She asks Him to remember her as His maidservant; she uses the word three times. Maidservant. "Whether You are favorable to me or not, I will be Your female servant for the rest of my life. I belong to You." So, she saw herself in that vain. But this day she makes a vow to the LORD that if He would see fit to give her a son, she would commit him, once she had him, to the service of the LORD all the days of his life. Beginning with his birth, he would be given a Nazirite vow,

the one that we've read about before (as in Samson's parents' lives). Remember they were told to do the same thing - no shaving of the head, lots of rules to govern their walk with God. But needless to say, it's a dedication, a consecration. A lot of times it was just for a month. You might remember Paul having made those vows as well in the New Testament. But often after prayer we are faced with the dilemma of delay. So Hannah is brought to the end of herself this particular year, and seeking the LORD for years without success, and the divine delay had brought her to this position, and now she said to the LORD, "I just want a son so that I can be used to give him to You to serve You." I don't know if, in years past, she prayed, "Please give me a son so I can shut that woman up once and for all" because that's the prayer I might have prayed. Or, "In her face, LORD. Get me pregnant." What we don't read is that at all. But what we do read is that she now comes to the end of herself, and her only motivation is, "I want to be a vessel in God's hands as His maidservant." And it was the one prayer, I think, that God was waiting to hear. He'd been looking for a man to lead Israel out of their troubled times. The Word of the LORD was not around much. If you read chapter 3:1 of this book, you will read that no one was speaking for the LORD, no one was seeking the LORD. He wanted to get someone who would speak for Him. But to get a man to use in leadership, He got a woman's heart first - a heart of a mom; a mom who had been waiting for years to be a mother, who had cried for years on her own, unable to share her distress, whose husband couldn't comfort her, whose anger was not directed at her accusers. So, God hears this, "If You give me a son, I will give him back to You all the days of his life." And just like that - what He had been waiting for - this process of having a child begins. And things change. You know, oftentimes when we go pray, we start off with pretty selfish motives. We have kind of narrow outlooks, you know? We pray. "We lust, and we don't have; we covet, and we don't obtain; we fight and we war." James says (James 4:2-4), "That's why you're not getting what you're askin' for. You just want to consume it on your own lusts." A lot of time it starts out that way. We cover it in spiritual statements, "Oh, Lord, just deal with my neighbor. May they get saved and move away." (Laughing) We have all kinds of weird reasons to do stuff. And God flushes those out and, over time, prayer brings us to that place that we will begin to pray as God would want us to. So, maybe in years gone by, she prays that she could give her loving husband a child so he would be happy with her. But all of these delays were conforming her to God's will, and, in the process, God brought her to the recognition and to the resignation that all she wanted to do was be a servant. "I want to just be a maidservant." She says it, very clearly, three times. And so, at the end, in verse 18 (we'll get to in just a moment), you will read that she walked

away from this prayer time "no longer sad." Something happened within. She just felt like this was it. Right?

Verse 12, "And it happened, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli watched her mouth. Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, 'How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!' But Hannah answered and said, 'No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken until now.' Then Eli answered and said, 'Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him.' And 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." Eli, the priest, sitting nearby, misinterpreted her condition and presumed she was drunk, mumbling to herself; kind of threw a stinging rebuke her way. He's a well-meaning, spiritual man; don't hurt him too badly. But, at the same time, he was wrong. When my first wife died young, at 25, of leukemia, I had someone at the funeral say to me, "Brother, if you'd have just had more faith," and I went, "All right, I could hit him or I could just realize he's trying to be nice, but he's just an idiot." And I kind of just wrote it off and went, "Well, he don't know any better, just kind of a stupid thing to say." And I think that's kind of where Eli was. I think Eli just said a stupid thing. I don't think he meant to hurt her. If I put myself in his place, and especially since this is the time of the judges, I would presume that he had to deal with drunks far more often than he should at the tabernacle; that this wasn't the first time he thought someone was plowed, and this wasn't the first time someone had showed up just kind of mumbling to themselves. I think he's become a bouncer rather than a priest. I think this is not a good spiritual place to be during this time, so he finds himself having to do a lot of struggling in the house of the LORD. And so he was greatly mistaken, he was hurtful in his rebuke. Hannah was extremely gracious in her response. We never see her fighting back, like I told you. Again, I might have ministered to Eli in other ways. Hannah was graceful, and she was godly in her response. To his credit, notice in verse 17 and 18, Eli, the high priest, immediately recognized his error, and he blesses her; prays that her crying out to the LORD might be heard by God. By the way, your High Priest never misunderstands you. So that's good to know. But notice the effect, this time, of prayer. It was different than before. Compared to the other times - when she left with the same heart she came in with - this time she left with a smile on her face and her

appetite returned. And she had come from a place of surrendering her will to His. Her outward circumstances had not changed at all, but she'd changed. And the LORD had touched her life, and, as a result, she could just leave this here, and she'd made a vow, and now she's going to rest in that and off she goes. Another year of travel to and from Shiloh.

Verse 19, "Then they rose early in the morning and worshipped before the LORD, and returned and came to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, 'Because I have asked for him from the LORD.' " Notice, verse 19, the next morning her commitment was still a reality. It wasn't an emotional deal; it was a heartfelt, true step in the right direction. She left the tabernacle, offering worship. She goes home, she has normal physical relationships with her husband. It doesn't seem to say she got pregnant on day one; it just said over the period of time. How long, we don't know. She finally did get pregnant, and then she gave birth, over time, to this boy that she named Samuel. The word "Samuel" means "to be heard by God." And this boy was an answer to her prayers.

Now, put yourself in Hannah's shoes. You've been waitin' forever. This woman's been in your grill. You finally get the baby you're waitin' on. Don't you say to the LORD, "LORD, You know, when I meant he was going to serve You, I meant from home"? Right? "You know I was emotional, LORD. You know how a mom gets." She had a hundred reasons to rationalize away this vow that she had made back there before the LORD. And I don't know if anybody could have argued with her except the LORD because this was beautiful, and she'd promised to take him all the days of his life. She looks at this baby in her hands. She could have said, "No. Eli's got a horrible track record. His kids are buffoons. I can't entrust my kid to someone like that. I made the promise in great distress. I claim temporary insanity. You understand, don't You, LORD?" "No! You made a promise."

So what does she do? Verse 21, "Now the man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, 'Not until the child is weaned; then I will take him, that he may appear before the LORD and remain there forever.' So Elkanah her husband said to her, 'Do what seems best to you.' " Here's good advice for you husbands; your wife asks if she can do something, just say, "Do whatever you want." Happy wife, happy life. There's the verse, right there. (Laughing) Happy one wife, okay?

" 'Wait until you have weaned him. Only let the LORD establish His Word.' Then the woman stayed and nursed her son until she had weaned him." So Hannah does not make excuses. She had made a promise to the LORD. No wonder God worked in and through her life. According to Numbers, by the way, chapter 30, a woman in that culture could not make a promise to the LORD without her husband signing off. In fact, if her husband didn't sign off, it was null and void. So she says, "I don't want to take the baby until I can leave the baby, until he's old enough to stay without my daily care." And her husband says, "Fine. Do what you want, but let's make sure that we do what we promised the LORD." So he was in on this. Right? He signed off on this agreement as well. Eli was involved, and he wanted (notice verse 23) His blessings, too. "Let the LORD establish His Word. Let's do it the way He intended us to." So she stayed home to wean Samuel, determined that once he was weaned, she would deliver him to the tabernacle to serve the LORD. Now, weaning, Old-Testament style, usually took from three to four years. So these years seem to pass by in relative silence. Her husband made trips - she did not. I always think about young families in our church - and we have a lot of them that have kids - and usually the moms are real involved in the church until the baby's born, and then they disappear; and then eventually they end up back there behind the glass. It's hard bein' a new mom and learnin' all that stuff, and it's kind of the weaning time, you know? You're just as busy as you could be raisin' your kids, and then eventually the kids are older, and they're back involved - as they should be. But that was Hannah's heart. "I want to get him healthy and well and share with him my heart, and minister to him as a mom, and then I'm going to do what I promised the LORD."

Verse 24, "Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bulls, one ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh. And the child was young." Young - three or four years old. "Then they slaughtered a bull, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, 'O my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood by you here, praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD.' So they worshipped the LORD there." I can only imagine the joy of her testimony and the witness to Eli. She was an encouragement, and so would this little boy be in the days and weeks to come. We have certainly prayed for couples to have kids here, dedicated their children later. A lot of people take pregnancy for granted; these parents certainly did not. But anyway, here's Hannah and her husband; they come to give the child back. Now

imagine that. Put yourself in that position. She had promised him to the LORD. This is obviously a different culture than you can relate to today. In type, it's a little bit like a baby dedication. There isn't any biblical support, by the way, for infant baptisms. But there's lots of support for dedication of children, and it's all about the parents; you dedicate your children, you're saying, "Lord, use me." So, they brought him to be dedicated. They worshipped, and they left. What an amazing couple. And how they wanted this spiritual well-being for their son and how they wanted to please the LORD in all that they had done; and she becomes a vessel, a handmaiden, that God would certainly use. And I would say to you - Samuel becomes the guy in the next generation of godly men that they needed to follow.

Well let's end with this. Let's read the first eleven verses of chapter 2. We will look at it more in detail, along with the rest of the chapter, next week. But I wanted you to go home thinking about what Hannah said as she dropped off her son, what her prayer was that day that she delivered her son into, of all people, Eli's care. Verse 1, "And Hannah prayed and said: 'My heart rejoices in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation. No one is holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly; let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the LORD is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and those who stumbled are girded with strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, and the hungry have ceased to hunger. Even the barren has borne seven, and she who has many children has become feeble. The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and He has set the world upon them. He will guard the feet of His saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness. For by strength no man shall prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken in pieces; from heaven He will thunder against them. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed.' Then Elkanah went to his house at Ramah. But the child ministered to the LORD before Eli the priest." Pretty amazing! What a lesson to learn.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson