

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic.,
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DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 1

FIRST SAMUEL

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles mark an exciting, delightful and instructive record of how God relates to the people giving them meaning, purpose and hope.

The two books of Samuel focus on the lives of Samuel, king Saul and king David (circa 1100-950 B.C.).¹ The first book narrates the early periods of the monarchy and the division of the kingdom. The latter book relates to the decline and the destruction of the divided kingdoms.

Samuel describes the period of transition from theocracy (the rule of God) to monarchy (the rule of man). It began where the period of the Judges ended. Samuel is known as the last Judge as well as the first prophet. The last chapters of Judges repeatedly state that “there was no king in Israel” (18:1; 19:1; 21:25). This statement anticipates the development of Israel’s new leadership. The spiritual condition of Israel during that time (circa 1100

¹ Date of the division of the kingdom (1 Kings 11:42 cf. 1 Kings 6:1) c. 931 B.C. Solomon’s reign (970-931 B.C.); David’s reign (1010-970 B.C.); and Saul’s reign (1050-1010 B.C.). Samuel was born around 1100 B.C.

B.C.) was succinctly described in the last verse of Judges (21:25) – “every man did that which was right in his own eyes”. The moral, cultural and political lives of the people of Israel declined sharply. The religious disgrace of Eli, the chief priest, and his sons is a case in point (2:22). The people were oppressed by the Philistines (4:1, 17). God raised Samuel to arrest the spiritual decline of the nation of Israel.

One significant feature of the writing of the historical books of the Bible deserves mention. The writers focused on the acts and events rather than the dates and the time. It is the acts and events that are significant. The people namely princes, prophets, priests and nobles were all treated equally. There was no distortion or embellishment whether good or bad. The universal frailty and depravity of human nature was laid bare – the naked sinner in kingly clothes, and the sinister hidden intents behind the apparent visible kind acts.

The two books of Samuel may be divided into three main parts. These three parts relate to the lives and acts of Samuel, Saul and David respectively. The first part from 1 Samuel 1:1 to 8:22 features Samuel as the last judge and the first prophet.² We shall start with Samuel 1:1 to 2:11 which details his birth.

² Acts 3:24 Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

Acts 13:20 And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.

1 Samuel 7:15 And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

COMMENTARY

1 Samuel 1:1-8

Samuel was born to the family of Elkanah (*God is owner*). Elkanah was a devout Levite (1 Chronicles 6:33-34). He lived in a village called Ramathaim-zophim which was in the hill country of Ephraim, hence he was also called an Ephratite. Elkanah had two wives, Hannah (“grace”) and Peninnah (“pearl”). This gave rise to discord and strife within the family. It was the same problem with Jacob who had two wives, Leah and Rachel (Genesis 30:1). Hannah was barren but Peninnah had children.

The fact that Elkanah was a devout Levite was evidenced by his regular annual journeys to worship the LORD God at Shiloh. Shiloh was located 20 miles north of Jerusalem. It was the religious centre of Israel, and the Tabernacle was there (Joshua 18:1). At Shiloh, the sons of Eli namely, Hophni and Phinehas, served as priests in The Tabernacle.

When Elkanah brought his wives and family to Shiloh to worship the LORD, he gave to his wives and children a portion for their sacrifices to the LORD. This was the thanksgiving or peace offering where part of the offering was returned to the offerer (Leviticus 7:11-18). Elkanah gave Hannah a double portion because he loved her but this did not seem to make up for her despair at not being able to bear children. While they were partaking of the portion of meat given to them, Peninnah provoked Hannah. Her insults drove Hannah to tears and she left her meal uneaten.

In those days, barrenness was generally associated with women

who had been dishonoured or cursed by God. But the Word of God explains that God is sovereign. It was mentioned twice that God had shut Hannah's womb. Her barrenness was not due to unconfessed sins in her life. The reason for why the LORD had shut her womb was not explicitly stated. We can only guess that it was to cause her to pray and dedicate her first born son to the LORD as a Nazarite to serve the LORD full time. Elkanah sought to comfort Hannah by pointing out that his love and concern for her was a greater blessing than “ten sons”.

1 Samuel 1:9-18

While the other family members were enjoying their meals, Hannah went to pray to the LORD at The Tabernacle. Eli was sitting at one of the pillars of The Tabernacle.

Hannah was deeply distressed, disappointed and disturbed. She was weeping as she prayed. In her prayer, she made a vow to God. She pleaded with God to “remember” her, to look upon her suffering and affliction, and to have compassion on her. She asked God to look upon her with favour and mercy, and not to turn His face away from her. She petitioned specifically for “a man child”. She promised that she would give the child back to the LORD for “all the days of his life”. She told the LORD that “there shall no razor come upon his head”. This last promise was a Nazarite vow (Numbers 6:1-8, 13-21). The word “razor” means “to separate” or “to consecrate”. Hannah had by her own free will vowed that she would consecrate her son to a life-long service unto the LORD. The essence of Hannah's prayer was that she would return to the LORD the very

thing she asked from Him. Her petition and vow showed her desperation.

Hannah prayed long. Eli, the high priest, observed that Hannah's lips were moving silently. He thought that Hannah was drunk because not praying audibly was uncommon then. The truth was that Hannah prayed and spoke silently in her heart. Eli thought that she was drunk and rebuked her. He told her to "put away thy wine from thee", which means, "to go and sleep off the effects of her drunkenness". Eli made a wrong accusation.

Hannah responded to Eli's accusation immediately. She respectfully declared that she was not drunk. She explained that she was very sorrowful and had "poured out" her soul before the LORD, an apt description of fervent praying. The literal expression "a daughter of Belial" means a woman without value or a worthless woman or a wicked woman. Hannah explained to Eli that she was praying from great anguish and sorrow. Eli realised that he had made a mistake. He saw that Hannah's faith was sincere. He quickly pronounced a blessing upon her and prayed that God would grant her request. Hannah was comforted by the words of blessing and assurance that her prayer would be answered although she did not reveal the content of her prayer to Eli. Filled with peace and joy, she left the place and went to have her meal.

1 Samuel 1:19-28

Early the next morning, Elkanah and his family worshipped the LORD before they set off for home. This record showed how the Old Testament saints revered God and recognized that God is

sovereign, the Master of heaven and earth and all that are in it.

Elkanah "knew" his wife, Hannah. The word "knew" is used here as an expression of the marital act. The LORD remembered Hannah indicating that He was about to work out his purpose.³ When the time came, Hannah gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel which means "the name of God" as a testament that God answered her prayers.

It was time for Elkanah to make the yearly trip to Shiloh. But Hannah told him that she would not go up with him this time. She said that she wanted to wait until Samuel was weaned (literally, 'dealt fully with') before she bring him to the LORD. The weaning period could be about two to three years, or as some have surmised five to six years. It could also include spiritual upbringing. It is clear that Hannah had every intention of fulfilling her vow. The day when she brings Samuel to the presence of God, she would leave him there forever. Elkanah understood her reason and supported her. Elkanah prayed "may the LORD establish His word" (v.23) which in this context means "may the LORD fulfil the vow that Hannah had made and that little Samuel would grow strong and healthy".

³ Compare: Genesis 8:1 And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged;

Exodus 2:24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

When Samuel was weaned, Hannah kept her vow. She brought Samuel before the LORD at Shiloh. After making the burnt offering, the purification offering, and the peace offering, they brought Samuel to Eli, the priest. Hannah identified herself to Eli as the woman who had prayed and asked the LORD for a child. And the LORD had given her Samuel. Hannah's testimony could not have failed to impress Eli. He must have recalled the incident when Hannah had stood near him to pray and how he had mistaken her to be drunk. Then Hannah made it clear that she had brought Samuel to give him to the LORD. The word 'lent' (v.28) does not mean 'to loan'. It literally means 'to make over' or 'to return to'. It was a total giving to the LORD. This act demonstrated Hannah's total piety and spirituality which was so lacking in those days of the Judges and today as well.

PRACTICAL VALUE

In the midst of the spiritual degeneration when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25), it was encouraging to learn that there was a family who devoutly kept the commandments of the LORD by performing the yearly sacrifices unto the LORD. In contrast to the sons of Eli, Elkanah had set a good and positive example of faith and godly living (2:12-17).

Peninnah was blessed with children by the LORD but instead of recognizing that, she persisted in insulting and provoking Hannah. She was jealous of and unkind to Hannah when she should have joined Elkanah to comfort and build Hannah up spiritually. One can imagine the strife and strain in the

family. Peninnah did not set a good example for her children.

Hannah's turning to the LORD and her fervent prayer is a good example for us. In her dire state, there was no one else who could help her or grant her the deepest desire to have a male child except the LORD God. She recognised this and approached the LORD for mercy and grace (Hebrews 4:16). Her prayer was not done casually or perfunctorily. She poured out her soul. It was an earnest, fervent prayer of a woman in great need of help.

Eli's quick judgment of Hannah was a bad mistake. As the saying goes, "Don't judge a book by its cover." However, Eli was equally quick to correct himself after he realized that he had made a bad judgment. Accordingly, he blessed her and gave an assurance that the LORD would grant her the desire of her prayer. Everyone can learn from this incident, especially leaders of the church who have to care for the flock. Many times they have to make decisions based on their judgments. Sometimes they may make wrong judgments. They must be quick and be prepared to make amendments and change.

Hannah's fulfilment of her vow to God was exemplary. It was not easy considering that she had waited so long for a child. Moreover, Samuel would be left to Eli and the priests. The priests had been self-indulgent, especially Hophni and Phinehas. It was difficult for Hannah to leave Samuel with them. It was at great cost. Her devotion and loyalty to God come first before her own pleasure and gain. Her offering of Samuel to the LORD may be appropriately compared to Paul's call

to the Christians in Rome to “present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Romans 12:1).

These are precious lessons that we can apply in our daily walk with the Lord, to be a witness to our brethren and others.

AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: 1 Samuel 1:1-8; Psalm 37:1-15.

Tuesday: 1 Samuel 1:9-11; James 4:1-10.

Wednesday: 1 Samuel 1:12-18; Psalm 27:1-14.

Thursday: 1 Samuel 1:19-23; Luke 2:50-52; 1 Corinthians 3:8-10.

Friday: 1 Samuel 1:24-28; Psalm 116:1-19.

Analysis

Text	Practical Value
1 Samuel 1:1-8	
1 Samuel 1:9-18	
1 Samuel 1:19-23	
1 Samuel 1:24-28	

Discussion Questions

1. What lesson can we learn from Hannah's prayer?

2. Did Elkanah handle his family problem correctly?

3. Is it alright to pray like Hannah and make promises to God in return for answered prayers?

4. Why was praying in the precinct of The Tabernacle significant?

5. What can we learn from Eli's judgment of Hannah's behaviour?

6. Would you be willing to do what Hannah did?

7. Would you be willing to support or encourage your son or daughter to go into full time ministry?

8. Would you pray that God call your son or daughter into full time ministry? Have you dedicated your child to God?
