

God Answers Prayer

Bible Background • 1 SAMUEL 1:1–2:10

Printed Text • 1 SAMUEL 1:9–20 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 99

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: RECALL the story of Hannah’s desperate longing for a child, REFLECT on longings for God to intervene in our lives, and PRAY with confidence that God will provide what is best for us.

In Focus

One day, Kenny collapsed in a chair and just shook his head. He asked God, “Why haven’t I heard from the Young Leader’s Fellowship Program for grad school?” Since all of his friends were accepted, he began to wonder what was wrong with him? Every time he thought about the situation, it made him angry.

The next day, Kenny and his friends were playing a pick-up game of basketball. AJ kept blocking his shots. When AJ went to shoot, Kenny purposely tripped him. AJ jumped up, slammed the ball on the court, and told Kenny to stop acting like a big baby. Before Kenny could respond, Jamal jumped in between them to cool things down. Jamal told Kenny he needed to get it together. They asked what was wrong.

At first, Kenny sharply said, “Nothing.” His friends told him he was lying. Kenny finally told them he was upset because he hadn’t heard from the Fellowship Program. They assured him things were going to be okay. He just needed to relax and pray.

When Kenny got home, he saw a letter from the program in the mailbox. He hesitantly opened it, and then shouted, “Amen!” He had been accepted. Kenny quickly sent a group text to his friends.

How do you help your friends who are unable to move forward? As a believer how does your faith encourage you when you are struggling?

Keep in Mind

“‘In that case,’ Eli said, ‘go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him’” (1 Samuel 1:17, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Belial (v. 16) beliya‘al (Heb.) — Worthless; a demonic force

B. Handmaid (v. 16) ‘amah (Heb.) — Maidservant or female slave

Say It Correctly

Shiloh. SHY-lo.

Belial. be-LEE-al.

Ramah. raw-MAH.

Elkanah. el-kaw-NAW.

Peninnah. pen-in-NAW.

KJV

1 Samuel 1:9 So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD.

10 And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.

11 And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

12 And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth.

13 Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken.

14 And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.

15 And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.

16 Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

17 Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.

18 And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.

19 And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her.

20 Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD.

NLT

1 Samuel 1:9 Once after a sacrificial meal at Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to pray. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance of the Tabernacle.

10 Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the LORD.

11 And she made this vow: "O LORD of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the LORD, his hair will never be cut."

12 As she was praying to the LORD, Eli watched her.

13 Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking.

14 "Must you come here drunk?" he demanded. "Throw away your wine!"

15 "Oh no, sir!" she replied. "I haven't been drinking wine or anything stronger. But I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the LORD.

16 Don't think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow."

17 "In that case," Eli said, "go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him."

18 "Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad.

19 The entire family got up early the next morning and went to worship the LORD once more. Then they returned home to Ramah. When Elkanah slept with Hannah, the LORD remembered her plea,

20 and in due time she gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I asked the LORD for him."

The People, Places, and Times

Hannah. She was the devoted mother of Samuel and wife of Elkanah. Hannah sought the Lord before she conceived and gave birth to Samuel (1 Samuel 1:5–11). Every year, she and her husband Elkanah went to the sanctuary at Shiloh to offer sacrifices to the Lord. She devoted her son to the service of God and offered a “prayer of thanksgiving for God’s blessing” (1 Samuel 2:1–10). Hannah also gave birth to two other sons and two daughters.

Eli. He was the high priest of Israel with whom the prophet Samuel lived during his boyhood years. Eli, a devout but flawed priest, was the father of Phinehas and Hophni, who were killed by the Philistines (see 1 Samuel 2:12–25). Eli died upon learning of their deaths (1 Samuel 4:1–18).

Background

Samuel is noted as the last judge and a prophet. During his time, Israel underwent a shift in leadership from judges to kings. Samuel would anoint the first king, Saul, and would also anoint David as king. While there is much debate regarding who wrote the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and when they were written, we can be sure they were originally one book that told the story of the rising monarchy after the time of the judges. Together, these two books as one book are considered part of a collection of books called the Deuteronomic history. These books are Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings.

In this first chapter, we are given Samuel’s birth story. His father, Elkanah, was married to Hannah and to Peninnah, as polygamy was the common marital system of the time. Peninnah was able to bear children while Hannah was barren, like many other women in the biblical text (e.g., Sarah [Genesis 17:16–19], Rebekah [Genesis 25:21–26], Rachel [Genesis 29:31; 30:22–24], Samson’s mother [Judges 13:2–5], and Elizabeth [Luke 1:5–17]). This opening chapter shows the persistence of Hannah’s prayers for a child explicitly while God had shut her womb. Peninnah bullied and provoked Hannah to the point of tears, yet Hannah received a double portion of Elkanah’s sacrifice because he loved her.

Prayer is a practice in which we all need to engage. How does Hannah teach us that we must be persistent in our prayers?

At-A-Glance

1. Pressing to Pray (1 Samuel 1:9–11)
2. Persecution to Peace (vv. 12–20)

In Depth

1. Pressing to Pray (1 Samuel 1:9–11) At this point in the text, we know that Hannah is unable to conceive a child. After Hannah finishes eating, she goes to pray. Hannah’s prayer of deep anguish shows us that bearing a child is an experience that she desires. People tend to bring the Lord their deepest desires and are willing to weep before the Lord with full passion, as Hannah does in her heart. Hannah asks the Lord to look to her misery and remember her. Hannah continues to pull on God’s heartstrings and promises God that she will dedicate her son back to the Lord and will never put a razor to his head. Here, we see that Hannah is not only praying, but she is willing to commit to God well before she receives her blessing. Her promise to God is not an afterthought of receiving; rather, it is standing in the expectation that God will move.

Describe a time you prayed fervently to God. What did you pray for? How has God answered the prayer so far?

2. Persecution to Peace (1 Samuel 1:12–20) Hannah continues to pray. Eli, who was sitting at the doorpost, sees Hannah praying. He watches her mouth closely as he sees her lips moving with no audible words coming out. Hannah prays within her heart, and only God hears her words. This reminds us that people can see us praying but still have no idea what the circumstances are behind the prayer. Not all prayers need to be spoken out loud, as some things are between God and the individual. Eli assumes that Hannah is drunk, but she tells Eli that she is praying to God out of her anguish and grief. In her loss and pain, she continues to pray with hope that she will be able to conceive a child. Now knowing this, Eli blesses her with peace and adds his prayer to hers that God would grant her prayer request.

After this, Hannah is no longer downcast, eats something, and leaves the sanctuary. Already Eli's blessing of peace has calmed the anguish seen in her prayer. When they return home, Hannah and Elkanah are able to conceive, and she later births a son. She names him Samuel, meaning "God heard me." Sometimes it takes longer than our expected timelines to receive the things we pray for, but God hears every single prayer. God provided for Hannah, and Hannah never gave up on praying and worshiping.

Describe a time you made an inaccurate assumption about someone who was worshiping. How do we avoid making those assumptions?

Search the Scriptures

1. Eli makes a hasty assumption about Hannah when he sees her praying silently. What is Eli's reaction when Hannah corrects him (v. 17)?
2. How does Elkanah try to cheer Hannah up (1 Samuel 1:8)? What eventually makes her glad (v. 18)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. We see the provision of God as a significant theme within the text. Think back over your life. How has God provided for you after seasons of unanswered prayers?
2. We also see that Hannah's faith did not go unwitnessed. Is there anyone who can give an account for your faith or prayer life? What testimony of faith could they speak on your behalf?

Liberating Lesson

Infertility among the African American community is more common than spoken of. The rates of infertility and the shame around it are topics that need to be discussed more often. This text, along with other texts in the Bible, is an example of how families struggling with infertility are not alone and can rest in hope. Today, 10 percent of couples experience infertility. It is easy to think that God has forgotten the deep desires of our hearts after years of praying. But that is not so. Even in moments when things seem impossible, God reminds us that nothing is impossible for God. No matter the prayer—be it fertility, finances, education, or collective liberation—God will provide. It may take days, months, and even years; yet, we are to remain hopeful in the Lord, no matter when it comes. Our prayers ought not to be about the blessing as much they should be about the one who provides the blessing. Even in her sorrow, Hannah remained faithful. We ought to do the same.

Application for Activation

So often we become discouraged and believe in the things we see rather than believing in the one who will provide. Hannah teaches us about the faith that is required for prayer. Hannah's prayers remind us that there is truly nothing too hard for God when we believe and have faith. Faith is the key to this narrative as Hannah had faith to continue praying, and God eventually answered her prayer. A great way to keep track of how God provides on a promise is to journal our prayers. This will allow us to trace our prayers and to track God in the process.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

1 Samuel 1:9–20

9 So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk, Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD.

Although he lives in the land belonging to the tribe of Ephraim, Elkanah is a Levite, which meant he holds religious responsibilities (1 Chronicles 6:26, 34), and he is also Hannah’s husband. Hannah is very sad because the Lord has closed her womb, and she is unable to conceive. Elkanah and his other wife, Peninnah, have several children. Elkanah sees Hannah sadness but thinks his kindness should console her grief. He always gives her a double portion of meat because he loves her.

They eat in Shiloh, a prominent city in Ephraim and the religious center of Israel as the home of the tabernacle at the time. Israelite men go there three times a year: for Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14). This is where God promised to meet His people, which is the house of prayer. Hannah has not been able to eat or drink. So, she gets up. She does not know the answer to her husband’s question, if he is better to her than ten sons (v. 8). She knows Elkanah can only give what he has, more meat, but God has the power to give her the desires of her heart. She goes to God with a remorseful heart and prays.

10 And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.

Peninnah has been teasing Hannah for something she has no control over. This makes Hannah even more sorrowful and sad. She is heartbroken. It brings her to tears, but more importantly, it brings her to prayer. She knows God is able to change her situation. She knows all power is in His control. So, she brings her concerns and issues to Him. She pours out her heart and tells the one who closed her womb how much she desires Him to open it. She cries with deep passion from her heart as it was evident from the tears coming from her eyes.

This is the place we all should go when we feel hopeless and “bitterness of soul” (Heb. marah nefesh, MAW-rah NE-fesh). We should go toward God (Psalm 62:8; Philippians 4:6–7; 1 Peter 5:7) in our deepest sorrow. This poignant phrase is also used of another kind of a fiercely sad mother: a bear robbed of her cubs (2 Samuel 17:8). Four times Job describes his misery, inflicted by Satan himself, as the bitterness of soul (Job 3:20, 7:11, 10:1, 21:25). King Hezekiah uses the phrase to describe a wasting sickness that almost killed him before he received healing from God (Isaiah 38:15). Hannah is confident in whom to confide and leave her concerns with. Although her husband would help her if he could because he loves her, he cannot do what God has not done. God closed her womb. He is the one to open it. We should be as confident with our cares and concerns. God is the one to run to. No one else can change the situation, only God.

11 And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

Humbling herself as a submissive servant, calling herself “handmaid” (Heb. ‘amah, aw-MAW), a maidservant or female slave, Hannah makes a vow to the Lord. A vow is more intense than a promise; she pleads for Him to answer her prayer. She is very specific in her prayer asking for a child, a “man child.” She does not ask for many children; she asks for just one. She wants this one to be a boy, insisting if the Lord gives her this son, she will give him back to the Lord for the rest of his life.

God did not ask her to do this; Hannah volunteers this commitment unto the Lord. Hannah is not selfish to just want this baby for herself. She wants the Lord to use him in His service. She passionately promises the Lord no razor will come upon his head ever in his life, like the Nazirite vow. This was the requirement God set for Samson (Judges 13:5).

Hannah knows that if the Lord chooses to grant her request, He will give her the ability to keep her vow to Him. She is insistent and persistent. She desperately wants this child, and she is determined to keep her word, trusting the Lord will grant her request.

12 And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. 13 Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore, Eli thought she had been drunken. 14 And Eli said unto her, how long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee.

Eli is watching Hannah as she prays very closely. He marks (Heb. (shamar, shaw-MAR), meaning to keep watch or guard, generally to protect or attend to, her mouth. Eli is there to be a watchman or overseer. He answers questions, gives direction, and keeps order. They are in a public place, but Hannah prays to the Lord as if this is just between Him and her. She is passionate in her prayer, but she prays in her heart. Her lips move, but there is no sound coming from her mouth. Hannah is not confused about the way she needs to pray for God to hear her. She understands God hears her whether she speaks out loud to Him or petitions Him in her heart. There may be instances when we cry aloud to the Lord, but it is not necessary for Him to hear us. He hears the secrets of our hearts; we do not need to be loud to be heard as those who do not know God cry out (Isaiah 58:4). Hannah realizes it was not the volume of the prayer but the sincerity of her heart that is important. Eli thinks she is drunk. He watches her pray, her mouth moving and tears flowing, but silent. He just knows she must be drunk. He has been watching her the whole time she has been in the temple. He passes judgment and concludes she must have been drinking. He feels the need to address the situation and rhetorically asks how long she will be drunk. Authoritatively, he tells her to put the wine away.

15 And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink but have poured out my soul before the LORD. 16 Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

As politely and respectfully as she can (addressing him as “my lord”), Hannah explains to Eli, the high priest, she has not been drinking anything. She wants him to know she has been pouring out her heart to the Lord. She informs him that she is of a sorrowful (Heb. qasheh, kaw-SHEH) spirit. The word qasheh could also be translated austere, so the word either reiterates her grief or refers to an avoidance of alcohol. She had previously been reprimanded by her husband for not drinking or eating. Now, she is being accused of having too much to drink. This has to add to her grief. Hannah has been in prayer, calling out to the Lord, and someone watching her from a distance assumes she must be a lowly drunk. Hannah asks him not to categorize her as a woman who has been drinking. A daughter of Belial (Heb. beliya‘al, beh-lee-YAH-al), meaning one of disobedience and

wickedness, is not who she is. Children of Belial was a common way during the time to refer to wicked people, those who did not worship God (1 Samuel 2:12; 1 Kings 21:10). The term belial means worthless, but it came to be understood as a proper name for the devil (2 Corinthians 6:15). She wants to assure Eli his assumptions are incorrect and give validity to her demeanor.

17 Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.

Hannah persuades Eli that her explanation of her appearance is sincere. He doesn't give her a formal apology for jumping to the wrong conclusion, but he responds with kind words. He even cosigns her prayer. He does not know what she prayed, nor does he ask to hear what he now understands to be a private, fervent prayer. Being convinced of her innocence, he agrees with her in prayer. Whatever she prays to the God of Israel, may He give her what she asks of Him. He blesses her to go knowing her request has been heard, and the high priest responds with an amen. Sometimes just knowing someone else is agreeing with us in prayer is all we need. We may often call on our pastors or other elders of the church, asking for prayer after we have already prayed. It is not that we think God cannot hear our prayers alone, but it is to agree with one another in prayer. Therefore, Eli is the elder for Hannah, and he agrees with her, sending her on her way in peace. She leaves in confidence and faith, recognizing the God of the universe hears her prayer. She just waits patiently for Him to answer. She knows that He would. By faith, Eli confirms it.

18 And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So, the woman went her way and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.

Hannah's attitude changes. She has prayed to the Lord God Almighty, entrusting all her concerns to Him. She poured out her heart to Him, giving Him all her passion and energy, making her request known. Eli, the high priest also prayed for her. She goes away believing one way or another, God will answer her prayer. Resting in the assurance of answered prayer, Hannah is able to eat and be happy again. She does not have to be sad; she spoke to the all-powerful God. She made her requests known; by faith, she knows she has been heard. In addition, the high priest has spoken to Him also on her behalf. She is, with good cause, extremely happy.

Attitude adjustments in the Lord show in our demeanor. Joy should be all over us—the joy we have because we live in the confidence and assurance that God, the Righteous One, hears us and works on our behalf. God already knows what He wants for us; we just need to ask (Jeremiah 29:11; Matthew 7:9–11). God wants what is best for us. He also wants us to recognize who He is. He is the giver of good gifts. He is the one who can when others cannot.

19 And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her. and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her.

The family understands the importance of seeking the Lord first. God requires the first of our time as well as our fruits. It is expected we adhere to God's voice and direction first. We should awake with a grateful heart and a focused mind toward the Lord. God is faithful in His ways toward His people. His people should be faithful in their focus toward Him. Elkanah's household intentionally gets up early in the morning and worships the Lord. Keep in mind, prayer is a form of worship. It is always in order to pray.

After worshipping the Lord, they go back home, and Elkanah sleeps with his wife. Elkanah and Hannah have their part to play in working out the miracle of having a child.

“The LORD remembered” means that God acted on her behalf in answer to her prayer. It does not mean to imply that God had forgotten about Hannah until this point or that He should remember her just now. The word “remember” (Heb. *zakar*, *zaw-KAR*) in this context means to think on, be mindful of, or contemplate. God is actively thinking about Hannah now in a special way and is acting to answer her prayer for a child. Just as the

Bible tells of several instances when God intervenes in the lives of infertile women, allowing them to bear great heroes of the faith such as Sarah and Rachel, He also does not forget Hannah (Genesis 21:1, 30:22). He remembers what Hannah asks Him for. She wants a son. God hears and answers the prayers of His people. We may not know when, where, or how, but God answers the prayers of His people (Psalm 91:15; Mark 11:24).

20 Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD.

Hannah wholeheartedly cried out to the Lord for this son and now God answers her prayer and grants her request. Her answered prayer is reflected in her name for him. Samuel means “God hears.” God never forgets about His children. He is faithful; He hears and answers our prayers. What is our response to Him? Do we live in such a way that others can see our joy from a relationship with Him?

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Nazirite Vow
(Numbers 6:1–5, 13–15)

TUESDAY

“O LORD Our God, You Answered”
(Psalm 99)

WEDNESDAY

Hannah Is Childless and Suffering
(1 Samuel 1:1–8)

THURSDAY

Elkanah Attends the Yearly Sacrifice
(1 Samuel 1:21–23)

FRIDAY

Samuel Is Dedicated to the Lord
(1 Samuel 1:24–28)

SATURDAY

Hannah Rewarded for Her Faithfulness
(1 Samuel 2:18–21)

SUNDAY

God Answers Hannah’s Prayer
(1 Samuel 1:9–20)