

Hannah Weeps Before the LORD: 1 Samuel 1's Pain and Prayer

Scriptures for Today: 1 Samuel 1:1-8

""1 Samuel 1:1-8

Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite: 2 And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. 3 And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there. 4 And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: 5 But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb. 6 And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb. 7 And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat. 8 Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?""

Introduction to 1 Samuel 1: Pain and Prayer

Let's remember where we are in the Bible.

- **Genesis** laid the foundation: creation, the fall, God's covenant with Abraham.
- **Exodus** showed God redeeming His people from Egypt and dwelling with them in the Tabernacle.
- **Leviticus** explained how sinful man approaches a holy God through sacrifice.
- **Numbers** organized Israel for battle but also recorded their unbelief and wandering.
- **Deuteronomy** was Moses' farewell charge, calling Israel to obedience before entering the land.
- **Joshua** recorded conquest and division of the land.
- **Judges** showed Israel's repeated cycle of sin, bondage, crying out, and temporary deliverance. "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes."
- **Ruth** shined a ray of hope in those dark days, pointing us toward David's line and the Redeemer to come.

Now we arrive at **1 Samuel**, a transitional book. The period of the Judges is ending. Israel has no king, but they want one. Corruption exists even among the priests (Hophni and Phinehas). Yet God begins His work of renewal not with a king or a warrior, but with a barren woman who prays.

Just like **Sarah's barrenness led to Isaac**. God's covenant people began not with human strength but with a barren woman giving birth in old age (Genesis 21:1-2). Just like **Mary's**

lowliness led to Jesus Christ: The Savior entered the world not through a queen in a palace but through a humble virgin in Nazareth (Luke 1:26–31, 46–48). We see Hanna here. Notice the great women of the Bible and the attitude that they have.

This is God's way. He brings life out of barrenness, strength out of weakness, and hope out of tears. Hannah's story prepares the way for Samuel, the prophet who will anoint both Saul and David, and ultimately point us forward to Christ, the true King.

Outline of Ruth 4, 1 Samuel 1, and 1 Samuel 2

Ruth 4

1–12. Boaz redeems Ruth.

13–22. Ruth bears Obed, grandfather of David.

1 Samuel 1

1–8. The sorrow of Hannah.

9–18. Hannah's prayer and vow.

19–28. The birth of Samuel and his dedication to the LORD.

1 Samuel 2

1–11. Hannah's song of praise.

12–36. The corruption of Eli's sons and God's judgment.

Focus on 1 Samuel 1:1–8

1 Samuel 1:1–8 shows us the foundation of Hannah's pain and prayer. We see her barrenness, her rival's provocation, her husband's love, and her soul's sorrow. If this passage never happened, Samuel would never have been born — and Israel's history would have turned out differently.

This reminds us: God often begins His greatest works in the place of greatest weakness. Hannah's tears become the seedbed of Samuel's ministry, just as the cross becomes the seedbed of our salvation.

Exposition of 1 Samuel 1:1–8

Verse 1 — “Now there was a certain man ... an Ephrathite”

""1 Samuel 1:1

Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite.""

The genealogy is not filler. God anchors Samuel's origin in real history and covenant lineage. Elkanah is an **Ephrathite**, the same root tied to Bethlehem-Ephrath (Micah 5:2), the prophesied birthplace of Christ. God is showing us that Samuel's rise is not random — it is part of His providential plan to prepare for Israel's king, and ultimately for Christ, the Son of David.

Now let's look a little closer at the places and names mentioned here because there's several here in this verse.

Ramathaim-zophim. A town in the hill country of Ephraim, later shortened to **Ramah** (1 Sam 1:19; 2:11). Ramah becomes Samuel's home base and burial place (1 Sam 7:17; 25:1). The name suggests "heights" or "watchers," hinting at its elevated location. **Significance:** This is where God raises up a prophet who will "watch" over Israel and guide them from the corruption of Eli's priesthood toward kingship. Elkanah is Samuel's dad. He is from Ramah.

Mount Ephraim. Refers to the hill country belonging to the tribe of Ephraim (Judges 17:1). Many judges came from this region, including Joshua and Deborah. **Significance:** Though Samuel's family lived in Ephraim's land, they were Levites by tribe (1 Chr 6). This shows God often places His servants in surprising locations for His purposes.

Elkanah's genealogy. Elkanah means "God has created/possessed." His line is traced through Jeroham, Elihu, Tohu, and Zuph (1 Sam 1:1; 1 Chr 6:22–28, 33–38). **Significance:** This anchors Samuel's birth in real covenant lineage. The names themselves point to God's character: Creator, Compassionate, "My God is He." Samuel comes from a line marked by God's providence.

Ephrathite. At first glance this might mean "of Ephraim," but 1 Chronicles clarifies Elkanah was a Levite, descended from Kohath. Levites lived scattered in other tribes' territories. **Significance:** Elkanah was a Levite living in Ephraim's hill country. Samuel, therefore, is Levite by blood, Ephraimite by geography. God placed him in the right tribe (Levi) for priestly service and in the right location (Ephraim) to influence Israel at a turning point in history.

Verse 2 — "Hannah ... had no children"

""1 Samuel 1:2

And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.""

We see that Elkanah has two wives. This is not God's design. No man should want two wives. For example, in Revelation 8:1, the Bible says that there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. That alone tells us that men were in heaven before women. That was a joke and has nothing to do with the sermon. God's design is not for two wives. One wife. Why? You'll see one of these reasons in our text today.

Polygamy in Israel. It's tolerated in the Old Testament, but it always produced trouble. Abraham with Sarah and Hagar. There was strife. Jacob with Leah and Rachel. There was rivalry, envy,

and family division. David and Solomon had multiple wives that led to lust, rebellion, and idolatry. Every Biblical example of multiple wives shows us pain, jealousy, and consequences.

We don't know for sure, but maybe Elkanah took a second wife because Hannah was barren. Abraham and Sarah were similar. In that world, childlessness was seen as shameful. Offspring were crucial for inheritance and the family name. Peninnah likely entered the picture to solve that so-called problem. Man's solutions apart from God's plan always creates strife.

Hannah equals grace. Loved but barren. Peninnah equals pearl. Fruitful but spiteful. We see the tension in this Bible story. God will exalt the barren and humble the proud.

The text emphasizes Hannah's barrenness. In Israel, childbearing was tied to covenant blessing (Psalm 127:3). Barrenness, then, felt like a curse. And this did upset Hannah. But God often chooses barren women to display His power: Sarah (Gen 18:11), Rebekah (Gen 25:21), Rachel (Gen 30:1–2), and later Elizabeth (Luke 1:7). Hannah joins this line — her womb closed by God, her sorrow deep, yet her story destined to bring forth Samuel, the prophet who will anoint kings.

Samuel's birth shows that Israel's hope does not come through natural strength but through God's intervention. That's what happens here in 1 Samuel 1.

Verse 3 — “Yearly to worship ... in Shiloh”

""1 Samuel 1:3

And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there.""

Elkanah is faithful to worship — yearly worship. He goes to **Shiloh**, where the Tabernacle stood before the Temple. This is the **first mention of “LORD of hosts”** in Scripture — a title showing God as the commander of heaven's armies. God's army from heaven is "THE" greatest. You can't see all His angels but they're out there. Jesus is the LORD of hosts.

What's the significance there of Shiloh? Remember where we are in the Bible. We are in 1 Samuel. Samuel is a judge. Israel doesn't have their first king yet. He's coming soon.

The location is **Shiloh**, where the Tabernacle was set up after Israel conquered Canaan (Joshua 18:1). Shiloh became the central sanctuary until David established Jerusalem. According to **Joshua 18:1**, when Israel set up the Tabernacle in Shiloh, the land was already part of **Ephraim's tribal allotment**. Shiloh was located in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Bethel. That's why Elkanah (called an “Ephrathite” in 1 Samuel 1:1) is connected with that area — he lived within Ephraim's territory, though by blood he was a Levite (1 Chronicles 6:33–38).

Ephraim was the leading northern tribe, and housing the Tabernacle in Shiloh elevated their role in Israel's worship. But God's choice of Shiloh also foreshadows His freedom to move His dwelling place — eventually to Jerusalem in Judah's territory (Psalm 78:67–69). This shift

signaled that God's plan for kingship and Messiah would not remain with Ephraim but with Judah.

You see that Joshua was their leader that took them into the promised land – he was from the tribe of Ephraim. Jesus becomes the true leader that takes us all into the promised land. He is from Judah.

So Shiloh's future is not good – it will be destroyed. Jeremiah 7:12 records its destruction as a warning to Judah centuries later. Even though Shiloh was the holy place, God's presence was not bound there. This reminds us that outward religion without obedience will always collapse. There's a lot of people who want to worship God outwardly for show.

Now, the second part of that verse speaks of Eli and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas – priests of the Lord. These two sons of Eli and priests of the Lord are very corrupt. For example, a lady that got saved the other day told me she doesn't trust churches because the male leaders within the churches are having babies outside of marriage. This is similar corruption.

1 Samuel 2:12 calls Hophni and Phinehas sons of Belial or children of the devil. "They knew not the Lord." They are disguising themselves as priests of the Lord. This happens often.

They exploited the sacrifices and committed immorality at the Tabernacle. Their presence is a stark contrast: faithful Elkanah and barren Hannah, offering sincere worship, versus corrupt priests who profaned the sanctuary. Yet God was at work, raising up Samuel in the midst of this corruption. This teaches us that God is not hindered by the failures of religious leaders. His plan moves forward, and He raises faithful servants even when the priesthood is corrupt.

In one verse, then, we have faithfulness (Elkanah), sacrifice (blood), sovereignty (LORD of hosts), a holy place (Shiloh), corruption (Hophni and Phinehas), and hope (God's coming answer through Samuel). It is a reminder that even in the darkest days, God is preparing His deliverer.

God is about to raise Samuel to reform a corrupt priesthood.

Verses 4–5 — “He gave Hannah a worthy portion ... but the LORD had shut up her womb”

""1 Samuel 1:4–5

And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: 5 But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb.""

When Elkanah went to Shiloh to sacrifice, he distributed the sacrificial portions of food to his family. Peninnah, the fertile wife, received shares for herself *and* for her many sons and daughters. This public moment of distribution highlighted her fruitfulness — and therefore Hannah's barrenness. It was like a yearly reminder of Hannah's emptiness.

But Elkanah gave Hannah “a worthy portion.” The Hebrew phrase can mean “a double portion” or “a special portion,” showing both honor and affection. This was his way of compensating for her sorrow, showing that though she had no children, she still had his heart. Compare this to Jacob’s love for Rachel over Leah (Genesis 29:30–31). Rachel was barren, yet Jacob’s affection was for her. Similarly, Hannah is barren, but Elkanah loves her more deeply than Peninnah.

And yet, the verse doesn’t let us stay with mere human sympathy. Twice in this chapter the Spirit emphasizes, “the LORD had shut up her womb.” This was not an accident of biology or the result of chance. It was providential. God was sovereignly closing Hannah’s womb, not out of cruelty but because He was preparing to open it in His time — and not just for any child, but for **Samuel**, the prophet who would anoint David and alter Israel’s destiny.

Verse 6 — “Her adversary provoked her sore”

""1 Samuel 1:6

And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb.""

Peninnah, Hannah’s “adversary,” is the second wife of Elkanah. The word *adversary* here is the same Hebrew root often used for enemies in battle. This wasn’t friendly teasing — it was cruel, and calculated.

Peninnah’s goal was not simply to point out the obvious, but to “*make her fret*.” The phrase literally means to thunder at her, to make her tremble, to stir her into deep grief and agitation.

Notice carefully: Peninnah’s weapon is Hannah’s barrenness. And twice the text reminds us: “because the LORD had shut up her womb.” This was God’s doing, but Peninnah exploited it to mock Hannah. The devil often takes what God is doing and twists it into torment. What God meant for preparation, Peninnah used for provocation.

Verse 7 — “She wept, and did not eat”

""1 Samuel 1:7

And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat.""

This was not a one-time jab from Peninnah. It was *year by year* — repeated, relentless, cyclical torment. Every time the family went up to the house of the LORD at Shiloh for worship, Peninnah used it as an opportunity to mock Hannah. Imagine it: the very place that should have been a refuge became the stage of her reproach.

“When she went up to the house of the LORD” — that’s the setting. Instead of comfort in worship, Hannah faced cruelty. Satan often tries to turn sacred seasons into times of sorrow, robbing the afflicted of joy in God’s presence. Even today, some of the deepest wounds people carry are inflicted in religious settings.

“So she provoked her” — Peninnah’s cruelty was deliberate and persistent. The repetition shows the bitterness of envy and pride. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had Elkanah’s love. Peninnah’s attacks reveal the spirit of rivalry that often surfaces when flesh governs relationships instead of grace. Marrying two women or having two women will cause this. Fornication with multiple women will cause these things.

“Therefore she wept, and did not eat.” Hannah’s grief is now overwhelming. Worship festivals in Israel were joyous feasts (Deuteronomy 12:7), but Hannah can find no joy, no appetite. Her spirit is so broken that even food loses its appeal. This is more than sadness; it is soul-crushing despair.

Verse 8 — “Am not I better to thee than ten sons?”

""1 Samuel 1:8

Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?""

Elkanah loved Hannah. He really did. But here’s the problem: he thought his love was enough to fix her pain. It wasn’t. He sees the tears, he sees the grief, he sees her not eating — but he can’t do anything about the root of it. That shows you the limits of human love. A husband can love his wife with everything he’s got, but he still can’t heal the hurt that only God can touch.

“Am not I better to thee than ten sons?” That sounds sweet — but it misses the point. Hannah’s desire wasn’t some selfish craving. Wanting children was tied to God’s covenant promises. Her womb was shut by the LORD Himself (v. 5–6). Elkanah is basically saying, “You’ve got me, isn’t that enough?” But the truth is, no human love can ever be “better than ten sons.” Only the LORD can give what the heart really longs for.

Now here’s where the doctrine comes in. This verse screams out the truth that **people can’t satisfy you — only God can.** You’ll run into this again and again in life. Someone loses a child, loses a parent, loses a marriage — and others come along with Elkanah’s line: “But you still have this. But you still have me. Isn’t that enough?” No, it isn’t enough. Only the LORD is enough.

And don’t miss the picture here: Elkanah couldn’t be “better than ten sons,” but Jesus can. Christ is better than children, better than health, better than wealth, better than life itself. When everything else is stripped away, He alone is enough.

So what do we learn? Don’t expect people to carry the weight only God can carry. Love your spouse, love your family, but remember this: when the heart is grieved, when the soul is barren, there’s only one place to go. Not to Elkanah. To the LORD.

Doctrinal Truths in 1 Samuel 1:1–8

1. **God is Sovereign Over the Womb** (1 Sam 1:5–6; Ps 113:9). The LORD shut Hannah's womb. Life is always in His hands.
2. **Prayer Is the Answer to Pain** (Phil 4:6; Jas 5:13). Hannah's sorrow drove her to the LORD, not away.
3. **Human Love Has Limits** (1 Sam 1:8; Jer 17:5). Elkanah loved Hannah, but only God could meet her need.
4. **God Uses Weakness** (2 Cor 12:9; 1 Cor 1:27). A barren woman in distress became the vessel for Samuel.
5. **The LORD of Hosts Hears Prayer** (1 Sam 1:3). The God of heaven's armies listens to a weeping woman.
6. **Marriage Is One Man, One Woman** (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4–6). Elkanah had two wives, but polygamy always brought strife. God's design is one flesh.

Practical Applications from 1 Samuel 1:1–8

1. **Bring your grief to God.** Don't bottle it up. Don't lash out. Pray like Hannah.
2. **Stop expecting people to be your Savior.** Elkanah couldn't fix Hannah. Only God could.
3. **Don't run from weakness.** God works through barrenness, loss, and tears. Trust Him in yours.
4. **Stay faithful in worship.** Elkanah went yearly to Shiloh. Don't skip out when life gets hard.
5. **Hold to God's design.** Multiple wives brought sorrow. God's way — one man, one woman — is always best.

Warnings and Encouragements from 1 Samuel 1:1–8

Warnings:

- Don't fight God's design for marriage. Every time in Scripture, polygamy ends in jealousy and pain.
- Don't lean on people to carry what only God can carry. Human love fails when it tries to replace God.
- Don't waste your sorrow. Pain can make you bitter or it can drive you to prayer — but it will do one or the other.

Encouragements:

- God hears the brokenhearted. The LORD of hosts listens to tears on the altar.
- God is sovereign over life and over your circumstances. Nothing is random, not even barrenness.
- God turns weakness into strength. Out of Hannah's grief came Samuel, a prophet who would anoint kings.

The Gospel Connection in 1 Samuel 1:1–8

Hannah's barrenness reminds us that man cannot produce life on his own. Only God gives life. That's the whole picture of the Gospel — we are dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Just as Hannah could not open her own womb, we cannot save ourselves. Salvation must come from the LORD.

Her tears point us to Christ. Hannah wept because of her shame and loss. Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) and at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:35). But more than that — in Gethsemane He "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). Hannah's cries for a son echo forward to the Son who would come to save.

And don't miss the title "LORD of hosts" (1 Sam 1:3). This is the first time it shows up in the Bible. The One who commands heaven's armies would one day send His own Son, the Captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10). Jesus Christ fought our greatest battle at the cross — not with armies, but with His blood.

The Gospel truth is this: where we are barren, Christ brings life. Where we are broken, He brings hope. Where we have no strength, He is our strength.

Conclusion: The Power of 1 Samuel 1's Pain and Prayer

This passage shows us that God begins His work in weakness. A barren woman. A broken home. A rival provoking. Tears. That's where God steps in. Samuel's story doesn't start with kings and armies — it starts with a grieving woman who prays. And from her prayer, God raises up the prophet who will anoint kings and point Israel forward to Christ. Remember this as we continue in 1 Samuel.

One-Sentence Takeaway: When sorrow drives you to your knees, you are closer than ever to the power of God.

Let's pray.