

Title: Remembered  
Text: 1 Samuel 1:1-20  
Theme: The hidden providences of God  
Series: 1 Samuel  
Prop Stmtnt: God answers our prayers in ways way beyond us.

Childless. Pregnant. Miscarriage. Abortion. Adoption. I read that 10% of women struggle to conceive. I also read that 10-15% of women who do conceive, miscarry. It is estimated that 25% of women in this country have had an abortion by the age of 45. Therefore, these topics are very personal and prevalent. If you have struggled with getting pregnant, you don't forget the hope and multiple disappointments, the painful conversations, the frustrations and at times, despair. Pregnancy brings a new set of dynamics as a very private act brings a very public reality. You don't ever forget a miscarriage and will spend the rest of your life looking at the calendar and wondering what might have been. If you aborted a child you may want to forget, but you can't and if you gave up a child for adoption, or were given up for adoption, you have a lot of unanswered questions as well. But these are not geometry or calculus questions. These are questions that strike at the core of us. Who am I? Where did I come from? Who do I look like? Why was I wanted? Why was I not wanted?

The opening verses of 1 Samuel throw us right into the midst of some of this. The emotions are deep and raw. The grief is heavy and provoked. Just the reading of this text stirs up memories, most of which are sad because many of us have stories that are related and they are stories that we wish we didn't have to work through. This means that many of us have a very tender place in our hearts for Hannah. Hannah wanted a child. She desperately wanted a child. Her husband wanted her to have a child, but twice the text says that "*the LORD had closed her womb.*" How was Hannah to think about the LORD? How could she trust herself to the One whose providence so clearly and so deeply had frowned upon her?

There is a reason why so many of you know Hannah. There is a reason why girls and women in our church have the name Hannah and why no girl is named Peninnah. There is a reason why this story of rivalry, bitterness, barrenness and shame is front and center stage. All of this and so much more awaits the reader and student who travels through the 100 years of history in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. I do not know who wrote these books. It was clearly not Samuel. But whoever wrote it was a masterful story writer. The political intrigue, the character insights, the powerful dramas, the twists and surprises feel like a Super Hero movie where the action is so forceful and intense that the reader has to be reminded to breathe. This is narrative at its finest. The author does not preach nor does he explain and apply. He tells us a history, which as you know is His Story and this incredible story is part of THE Story that you and I are in. Welcome to the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. When tasked with such a masterful work, I feel my inadequacies to preach this as it should be, but then again recognize that no mortal could preach a sermon or series that could master it all. But I will try. I am comforted to know that my job is not to make God's Word come alive. It is alive and it is gloriously awesome. I will not be able to preach this book without tears. This book will rip out your heart, but it will give you a bigger one. I will seek to uncage this Lion text and let the Lion roar.

Read Text: 1 Samuel 1.1-20

Most of this text is tension. You do not have to read between the lines. It is done for us. 1) Not good enough. 2) Faith under fire. 3) More faith under more fire. 4) Remembered

1. **Not good enough** (1-2)

**A. The Days of the Judges**

This story begins where the book of Ruth leaves off and the book of Ruth occurred during the days of the judges which were exceedingly dark and morally repulsive. It has been 400 years since the death of Moses and the conquest of the land Canaan. Instead of living under God's law, the history of God's people is one of continual rebellion and its resulting chaos. It is stunning and disgusting to read of what occurred in the lives of the people of Israel in those days. But in those days, there was no king and everyone did that which was right in their own eyes. This was true of the people and it was true of the priests as we will see. How could anyone be expected to follow the Lord in the midst of this when the entire cultural landscape was tilted toward so much godlessness? And, even some of those who participated in the ceremonies of the OT law, so mixed and mingled this with other pagan practices and immorality that it was not recognizable as being from the Lord. On the whole, the people of God did not look anything like the people of God. The last judge in the book of Judges was Samson. His enemy and the enemy of Israel was the Philistines. That was still the case. Israel was threatened from without and corrupt from within.

How was this problem going to be fixed? The judges had tried, but most of them were flawed, some rather deeply and even the good ones died and didn't have a good transition plan. The judges were not good enough to rescue Israel. Israel had a problem that she could not solve. The tribes became even more tribalistic. Any unity was based on a mutual enemy of the moment and because Israel rejected the law of God, the tabernacle at Shiloh did not appear to hold them together. Israel rejected the God she could not see and wanted a leader she could see. When asked, who is your king? The answer should have been, God is. But Israel seemed embarrassed by that. Her God sat on a throne as a cloud in a little room in a little tent. What kind of a King was that? She wanted a king that she could see, talk to, follow into battle. How was that going to happen? And could Israel follow God and at the same time have a king that she could see, talk to, follow into battle and who would defend her from her enemies? We don't know, but the end of the book of Ruth appears to give us a clue, when the final verse says, "*Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.*" But God had a solution that was bigger than anyone could imagine. Even bigger than David. Therefore, the theme of 1 and 2 Samuel is: ***Who should be the King?*** But there is another theme. It is more subtle but related. It is this. ***The Lord looks on the heart.*** So, the answer to the question of who should be the king is somehow going to be answered by someone who has the kind of heart that completely follows God. And that question is not fully answered until the book of Matthew. For now, our eyes are focused on a homestead in the hill country of Ephraim. Here, we are introduced to 3 people.

## **B. The Characters (1-2a)**

### a. Elkanah

Elkanah comes from a good line, so to say. Though he lived in Ephraim, Elkanah was actually from the tribe Levi (1 Chron 6.26-27, 33-34). His ancestors were the ones who carried the Ark of the Covenant. And, for the most part, what we know of this guy is actually pretty good. In the days of the judges when godlessness abounded this man led his family year after year to the tabernacle in Shiloh to worship God by offering costly sacrifices. Nobody was keeping track or score in those days. This was his decision and it was in many ways contrary to the culture of the times. In fact, since the functioning priests were so corrupt and immoral, we could understand it if Elkanah did not go to the tabernacle yearly. But, he did, year by year (v.3).

### b. Hannah (named first)

Elkanah had a wife named Hannah and he loved her (v.5). In many ways, Hannah looks like Israel. Israel is waiting for a king. Hannah is waiting for a son. The waiting is long and confusing. But, the waiting won't last forever. What Israel does not know is that her history hinges upon this overlooked, undervalued, and childless woman of faith. Yes, of faith! Early in this story, our hearts are drawn to Hannah because of pity. But, soon, our pity turns into amazement as we see her deep waters of faith rise to the surface. These deep waters of faith fight to get to the surface and when they do, they burst forth into a spring a beautiful fountain as we will see. Because she is named first, I think we should assume that Hannah was Elkanah's first wife. Yes, Elkanah had a second wife. This was never ideal and it is never presented in Scripture as being a good thing. In the OT, with so many men dying in battles, polygamy may have been a temporary mercy for the protection and provision of women. At the same time, men of means needed heirs to pass on the name and the heritage and if a wife was unable to have children, it was common for him to marry again in order to be able to have children. Given the list of his ancestors and the apparent means that Elkanah possessed, my guess is that this was the reason behind Elkanah marrying Peninnah. The man with the impressive genealogy is married to a woman who cannot carry it on and that burden is a weight that she does not seem able to bear.

### c. Peninnah

Peninnah is quickly forgotten in history, as are her children, unlike Hannah and her firstborn son. Peninnah was able to have children and apparently several of them and Hannah was not. This dagger of reality, this bitterness is blazoned at the end of v.2. *"And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children."* We've seen this before. It sounds like Abraham, Sarah and Hagar. It did not work then. It was not working now.

## **C. The dagger of reality (2b)**

Hannah did not have to drive by a mom-to-mom store, to be reminded that she did not need to shop there. Every day she lived she faced and felt the grief of not being able to conceive. Not

good enough. Not good enough. Many of you know the burning dagger of that condemnation. You don't measure up. You are not like her. You are not like him. You disappoint me. This story sounds familiar. Rachel was loved, but Leah was able to have children. Abraham, Sara and Hagar explains much of the middle east to this day. The dynamic of Rachel and Leah explains so much of the early history of Israel. Here it is again. Two women in the same home. One loved, the other able to have children and it sets the stage for a lot of bitterness. Peninnah knew that Elkanah loved Hannah. Peninnah knew that no matter how many children she would bear that she wasn't Hannah and Hannah knew that she had no children and Peninnah was determined to never let her forget it. You are flawed. You are not a complete woman. You cannot be the wife your husband wants and needs. Something is wrong with you. The condemnation from Peninnah only reinforced what Hannah's own heart accused her of. Where could she go and what could she do to address this?

Where do you go and what do you when your heart and your world tell you the same thing? You are not good enough. You do not measure up. Something is deeply flawed with you. Some of you have children who do not want you around their children. Some of you have friends who have used social media to try to destroy you. Thursday, I read<sup>1</sup> the story of a college student who made a tasteless racial joke at the expense of a friend. Immediately she realized what she had done and asked her friend to forgive her, which her friend did. However, someone else overheard the conversation and reported her to the dean. The dean removed the girl from a student-leadership position and informed her that she would be expelled if this ever happened again. Then, the student who reported her to the dean got on social media and posted what the girl had said. The response was brutal and so overwhelming, the girl ended up in the Emergency Room with a panic attack.

Believers like us are often portrayed in the culture as harsh, condemning bigots. The truth is, believers like us know firsthand that we all are deeply flawed, sinful, and in need of redemption and we know that there is only remedy for that, and that is Christ. But because Jesus is a bigger Savior than we are sinners, we can be forgiven and we are forgiven and therefore we can and do forgive. Why would this girl seek to destroy another girl? Why would Peninnah seek to destroy Hannah and in both cases rub their noses in their shame? Is it not that the people who themselves struggle with not measuring up seek to compensate for that by tearing others down? And since none of us measure up, what will ever stop us from cannibalizing one another?

## 2. **Faith under fire** (3-8)

Hannah's situation is aggravated by the fact that what is supposed to be a comfort, encouragement and hope is used by her enemy to be an occasion for torment. It's like being childless and going to church on Mother's Day, only to have someone else ask you if you got any flowers from your kids for that day. You don't want to go to church on Mother's Day. Every year the family went to the Tabernacle at Shiloh in order to offer sacrifices. This could have been one of the festival days or it could have been their own personal event. But, Elkanah gave portions (lamb, bulls, grains?) to Peninnah and her children and he gave a portion to Hannah.

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<sup>1</sup> Cancel Culture's Mental-Health Toll, by Erica Komisar. Wall Street Journal, October 14, 2021

Even this was an opportunity for both women to be hurt. Hannah received a double portion in an effort on Elkanah's part to compensate her for the fact that she had no children. Peninnah used this occasion to "provoke her grievously to irritate her because the LORD had closed her womb. So it went on year by year."

Elkanah could have said, this is not worth it and stopped sacrificing to the Lord at the Tabernacle. Obviously, there were plenty of others in Israel who did not honor the Lord, what did it matter if he quit. Besides, this situation was intolerable and everytime they went to the Tabernacle, it happened. *"As often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her."* Hannah could have said, I quit. I am not going. I don't believe anymore. What has my faith in God gotten me? What evidence do I have that all of these promises of God work for me? And yet, Hannah knew that the God who had closed her womb was the God that she could trust and had to trust – and she did. The God who did not give her what she wanted (and she wanted a good thing) was still the God that she had to trust and she did. But, while she had faith, her faith was costly. She believed even though there was not the immediate benefit for it. Her time of sacrifice and offering and what was designed to be a time of holiday, feasting even celebration was a time of sorrow and fasting. "Hannah wept and would not eat."

This may have been the feast of the tabernacle. We can understand. We know that holidays are supposed to be times of reunion, festivities and eating. But, when the holiday is a reminder of loss and sorrow, then the pain seems intensified by the expectation of the holiday. Elkanah cared for her. Her tears meant something to him. He tried. But, he was her husband. He was not a son. She longed for children. "Am I not more to you than ten sons?" Actually, the answer is "no." Even Elkanah was not good enough either.

### 3. **More faith under more fire** (9-18)

Hannah was there, at Shiloh, at the tabernacle. She was with the family when they ate together and drank together. But she had something else to attend to. Near the entrance to the Tabernacle, Hannah, deeply distressed and weeping bitterly, poured out her heart to the Lord. She had likely done this many times before and made a vow. *"if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head."* (v.11) Even what we would call the natural or normal means of conception is the work of God since he created it in the first place. Therefore, when Ruth conceived in Ruth 4, the text says, "and the LORD gave her conception." Hannah's experience confirmed that. She knew that the only way that she would ever have a child was if God directly intervened. To that she prayed, and she prayed for a son, one who's life she would give completely to the Lord.

Hannah is strangely alone. Elkanah is not with her. It highlights the point that this is between Hannah and God. Eli, the priest, saw her lips moving, but did not hear any words, since she was not talking out loud. This is a powerfully personal and sacred moment. Hannah is offering a sacrifice greater than any offering she had ever given. She is offering her son, that she does not have. She is casting herself completely at the mercy of God. She is believing the God that she

cannot see for a son that she cannot see and promises to give him back. This is the moment at which the story turns but not without more sorrow. Her sacred sacrifice by faith is viewed as an act of drunkenness by a worthless woman. And this is coming from the high priest! Is that what she is? A worthless woman?

Again, Hannah had many human and circumstantial reasons to quit believing. I will have more to say about Eli in the coming weeks. To his credit, he acknowledges his mistake and then blesses her. His blessing (v.17) is a glimmer of hope. Look at verse 18. *“And she said, ‘Let your servant find favor in your eyes.’ Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.”* She knew that the Lord had heard her. And the trip back home was completely different than her trip there.

#### 4. **Remembered** (19-20)

The word translated “remember” (vs.11, 19) does not imply that God forgot. It is the idea of God acting on behalf of. And he did. We do not know how if Hannah and Elkanah went through more months of waiting or even years, or if she conceived right way. The text says, “in due time.” Hannah conceived. Hannah conceived! 19 verses of waiting; 1 verse of fulfillment. She bore a son and she named him. She named him. She had given her yet to be conceived son to the Lord. And you and I know that it is not difficult to give to God what we don’t have. “Oh God, if I win this lottery or sweepstakes, I’ll give you 25%.” Then you win. What would Hannah do? For the first time, she holds her own baby. For the first time, she is nursing a child and loving her own flesh and blood. For the first time she is a mother. She is a mom who is needed by her child. For the first time, the cries in the night are from her child, calling for her to come and for her to be the mom. The Lord remembered Hannah. Would Hannah remember the Lord?

If the name that she chose is a clue. We get our answer. She called him “Samuel.” She named him, a name that literally means, “the name of God” because she asked for him from the Lord. Therefore, his name would be a reminder to her and to everyone. The Lord remembered. His life is a testimony of the fact that the Lord remembers and Hannah did not forget.

- For those who struggle with not being good enough
  - o You can look in to compensate (control your body) – your inner P.A. will still accuse
  - o You can look out to compensate (control others) – you will still not measure up
  - o You can look up. There is One who is good enough.
- For those whose faith is under fire
  - o The Lord knows and in due time, he will act
- For those who came through the trial and experienced the Lord answering.
  - o Have you remembered what you promised?