

# Background on First Samuel

by Chuck Smith

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*The sermon explores the background of 1 Samuel, focusing on Hannah's prayer and vow, and the importance of prayer and seeking God's help in times of desperation and need.*

**Duration:** 25:04

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 1:10-11, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Samuel"

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## Description

In this sermon, Pastor Chuck Smith begins his study of the book of 1 Samuel. He provides valuable background information on the book, highlighting the moral degeneracy of the times. He focuses on the story of Hannah, a woman who pours out her heart to God in the temple. The priest initially mistakes her for being drunk, but her husband, Elkinah, offers her sympathetic understanding. Pastor Chuck emphasizes the importance of understanding and empathy in relationships, particularly when women are going through emotional struggles.

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## Transcript

Oh, let the Son of God enfold you With His Spirit and His love Let Him fill your heart and satisfy your soul  
Oh, let Him have the things that hold you And His Spirit like a dove Will descend upon your life and make you whole  
Welcome to The Word for Today, the broadcast ministry of Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, California. Pastor Chuck is currently leading us on a verse-by-verse venture through the entire Bible. And on today's edition of The Word for Today, Pastor Chuck begins his study of 1 Samuel with some valuable background on the book itself.

So, let's turn in our Bibles to 1 Samuel, chapter 1, verse 1, for today's lesson. The book of Samuel is a transition period in the history of Israel. The nation is moving from a theocracy to a monarchy.

However, they weren't really following God as king. So, you might say that they were moving from an anarchy because several times through the book of Judges it says, and every man did that which was right in his own sight, and that's anarchy, into a monarchy where they have an earthly king. But more than that, it is a transition from the period of judges into the period of kings, where the nation no longer will be ruled by judges, but we are introduced to the kings.

Now, this book is called elsewhere in the Septuagint the first book of the kings. And 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings in the Septuagint are called 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th kings. But it is divided as to the life of

Samuel and the life of Saul and the life of David in this book of 1 Samuel.

There was a certain man of Ramathaim Zophim of Mount Ephraim. His name was Elkanah, which means acquired of God, and he was the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zoph, and Ephrathite. Now, in 1 Chronicles 6, verses 26 and 27, as the genealogies are there given, we find that Samuel, or his father Elkanah, is of the Levitical tribe of Kohath.

Though they lived in Ephraim, they lived in one of the Levitical cities in Ephraim, so they were called an Ephraimite because that is the area that they came from. But they were of the tribe of Levi. He was of the family of Kohath.

And their genealogy is listed there in 1 Chronicles 6. Some people have a problem because Samuel was offering sacrifices, and if he was of the tribe of Ephraim, that would not be his lot or his position. But he was of the tribe of Levi, living in one of the Levitical cities in Ephraim, and thus called an Ephraimite, but in reality of the tribe of Levi, a Kohathite. In those days, polygamy was practiced, and this man Elkanah had two wives.

The name of the first one was Grace, or Hannah in Hebrew, but translated into English is Grace. The name of the second was Peninnah, which in English is Pearl, so he was married to Grace and Pearl. Now Pearl had children, but Grace had no children.

And this man went up out of his city every year to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of Hosts in Shiloh. This is the first time the name the Lord of Hosts, Jehovah Sabaoth, is used in the Bible. It is not used at all in the Pentateuch.

This is the first time the mention of Jehovah Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts. Jehovah Sabaoth is his name. It is used 281 times in the Bible, but this is the first use of the name the Lord of Hosts.

Shiloh was at that time the religious center. That's where the tabernacle was placed, and this is where the Ark of the Covenant was, and so the place of worship was Shiloh, and thus they're going to Shiloh each year to worship the Lord at the time of the feast. Now the priest at that time was Eli.

He had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. They were the priests of the Lord. And when the time was that Elkanah offered his sacrifice, he offered, he gave to Peninnah, his wife, and to all of her sons and daughters, portions.

But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion, for he loved Hannah, but the Lord had shut up her womb. So in those days, not being able to bear children was a cultural curse. The primary duty of the wife was to produce a son for her husband according to that culture.

If she was unable to do so, her husband could divorce her legally and take another wife. It would appear that Elkanah had married Hannah first. It was probably her inability to have children that caused him to take the second wife, Peninnah.

And Peninnah, in contrast to Hannah, was very fruitful. She had many children, many sons and daughters. And yet Hannah was still the apparent favorite of Elkanah in that when they offered, he gave unto Peninnah and to each of her sons and daughters portions, but unto Hannah a special portion, an extraordinary portion because he loved Hannah.

And Hannah, it says, her adversary, and that of course is a tragic word to be used in a family relationship, but Peninnah was the adversary of Hannah. There is no doubt jealousy involved because of the affections of Elkanah. And this jealousy caused Peninnah to constantly be chiding Hannah for her inability to bear children.

So her adversary provoked her grievously to make her fret because the Lord had shut up her womb. The thing to note is that it was the Lord that had shut up her womb. It was God that had caused her to become barren in order that God might work out his eternal purpose and plan in her life.

And as he did year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, Peninnah would provoke her. And therefore she wept and did not eat. Going up to the house of the Lord was going up for the feast, and it was a time of great feasting.

You would offer your sacrifice, your peace offering unto the Lord, and you would take and give the Lord his portion, but then you'd take your portion. And it was always a time of great feasting. As you worshipped God, you would worship him with feasting, like Thanksgiving when we gather and we worship the Lord and we thank God for his goodness and, you know, we have the big spread and we eat together giving thanks unto God for his blessings.

That's what the feast, the Jewish holidays were. They were feast days where they would come to Jerusalem to feast. But because of this vexation that she was experiencing because of Peninnah's constant taunting, Hannah found that she couldn't eat.

She was just weeping all the time. This had become now an obsession with her, the inability to have a child, and the fact that Peninnah was just really pressing in on that point. So Elkanah, her husband, said to her, Hannah, why are you weeping? And why don't you eat? Why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to thee than ten sons? He didn't understand.

That's what she was needing, sympathetic understanding. But we husbands are so clumsy in these areas. When your wife is going through an emotional problem, she doesn't need reasons.

She needs understanding. She doesn't need for you to tell her, well now, honey, there's nothing to it. There's nothing wrong here.

Why are you crying? There's no sense of crying, you know. Everything is fine. She doesn't need a rationale.

She needs understanding. Sympathetic understanding. Honey, I understand.

And that'll do more than all the reasons in the world. Just to know that you understand. Look, I'm better to you than ten sons are.

You've got me, baby. You don't need a lot of kids. How we men misunderstand the needs of our women, you know.

You've got me, isn't that enough, you know? So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh and after they had drunk. And now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by the post of the temple of the Lord, or the tabernacle, as it was. And she was in bitterness of soul and prayed unto the Lord and wept grievously or wept sorely or sobbed convulsively.

The bitterness of her soul, praying unto God, and she did the right thing. She brought her grief and her sorrows to the Lord. Poured out her heart to God.

And that's really where we're going to find our help. That's where we're going to find the sympathetic understanding that we need. And as she was praying, she vowed a vow and said, O Lord of hosts, if you will just look upon the affliction of your handmaid and remember me and not forget me, but you will give unto your handmaid a man-child, I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life and there shall no raiser come upon his head.

She is promising to give the child back to God. Lord, if you'll just give me a child, I'll give him back to you. This is the vow that she made.

And in this we discover the purpose for God delaying the answers to her prayers because she no doubt had been praying for years for a child. Now it's desperate. Now she can't eat.

She's crying all the time. And in the desperation of her need, she promises the Lord, if you'll just give me a child, I'll give him back to you. He'll be consecrated, Lord, to you all the days of his life.

Not a raiser will come to his head. She no doubt had heard the story of Samson's mother who lived contemporaneously with her, was probably 30 years older or so. But she heard the story of Samson's mother who was also barren, who was promised by the angel of the Lord that God was going to give to her a son that no raiser should come to his head.

He would be a Nazarite unto God from his birth. At this time, Samson was the judge in Israel. At this time, he was performing his heroics against the Philistines, but already had begun to be corrupted by the weakness of his flesh.

And hearing how that God gave to Samson's mother a son who was to be dedicated to God, she said, Lord, I'll dedicate my child to you. I'll not let a raiser come to his head. I'll give him back to you all the days of his life.

God needed a man to lead the children of Israel in a spiritual revival, and there was no man in Israel that God could use. It's a sad story, God's need for a man. At the time of Ezekiel the prophet, when God's judgment was coming upon the nation because of their sin, God was wanting still to forestall the judgment, and God said in Ezekiel, And I sought for a man among them who would stand in the gap and who would fill in the hedge, but I found none, and therefore my judgment had to come.

God could not find a man who would intercede and stand between the judgment of God and the people, and thus not finding a man, judgment came. I wonder how often that's repeated in history where God is seeking for a man who will fully dedicate his life to the purposes and the plan of God, and how many times God comes up short. Not finding a man, God found a woman.

And as we go into chapter 2, you'll see that she was indeed a very godly woman, and probably that because of all of the problems that she had. You know, there's nothing like problems to drive you to the Lord. You know, just being pressed day by day by this other wife and all, and living in such misery, it probably drove her to the Lord and brought her into a deep relationship with God.

There is a book called *Crowded to Christ* by B.M. Maxwell. I imagine it's out of print by now, but it is a book that speaks about how God so often uses adverse circumstances to just push us to Jesus Christ. How

we're crowded unto Christ through the trials and the problems that we face.

And here was Hannah crowded unto God by the problems that she had and was a deeply spiritual woman, and God used her to bring forth a man into the earth that he could use for his purposes. But first of all, he had to get Hannah in alignment with his purpose. And this happened as she was praying, and she said, God, if you'll just give me a son, I'll give him to you all the days of his life.

And so it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli, the priest that was sitting by, noticed her mouth. Now Hannah was speaking in her heart, but her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. Therefore, Eli presumed that she was drunk.

Lying there in the agony and the bitterness of her soul, the bitterness so deep, so great, that she can't even audibly express her prayer to God. But just in the agony of her heart, pouring out her soul to God, her lips moving, but no words coming forth. There, sobbing convulsively, so as she's lying there, her body is heaving with the sobs, and the mouth is moving, and Eli looks and thinks, man, this woman's had too much.

Now, here's an interesting thing. It gives you an insight into the moral degeneracy of the times. Here's the priest in the temple, seeing a woman really pouring out her heart to God.

It's such an unusual sight to him, that he doesn't think she's praying, but he figures she's drunk. Which means that the women were perhaps lying around drunk at the feast times. And that was his initial presumption, was she's drunk.

Rather than realizing that here's a woman in real agony and bitterness of soul pouring out her heart to God, he just presumed that she was drunk. And so he said to her, hey lady, how long are you going to be drunk? Put away your booze. And Hannah answered and said, no my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit.

I've drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I've poured out my soul before the Lord. It says that she was praying from her heart. Now she says she poured out her soul to the Lord.

This is probably prayer at its deepest. When we get to that place where we are just really desperate before God, those are the times when we really meet God. In the day God said that you seek me with all of your heart, I will be found of you.

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We'll return with more of our verse-by-verse study of 1 Samuel in our next lesson as we continue with Hannah's Prayer for a Son. And we do hope you'll make plans to join us. But right now, I'd like to remind you that if you missed any part of today's message or perhaps you'd like to order a copy for that special friend or loved one, you can do so by simply contacting one of our customer service representatives and they'd be more than happy to assist you with the ordering details.

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And be sure to join us again next time as Pastor Chuck Smith continues his verse-by-verse study through the book of 1 Samuel. That's right here on the next edition of The Word For Today. ■■■ And now, once again, here's Pastor Chuck Smith.

May the Lord be with you and give you a beautiful week. May you enjoy His presence and His fellowship as you walk with Him. May you come into a new, rich, love relationship with Jesus Christ, where your heart burns with passion for Him and for the things of the Spirit.

May you be enriched in His fullness. May the Lord watch over and keep you. In Jesus' name.

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