

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: Hannah's Prayer and the Birth of Samuel

1 Samuel 1:1-2:11

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson opens the entire study by establishing who God is before we ever meet a king. The doctrinal stakes are God's providence and His nearness to the suffering. Help the class see that the books of Samuel begin deliberately with a barren, grieving woman, not a throne, because the Lord builds His purposes through the prayers of the lowly. Guard against two errors: the prosperity notion that faith guarantees God will give us whatever we ask, and the despairing notion that God does not hear when answers are delayed. Hannah trusted God, surrendered her request to His will, and worshipped Him both before and after the answer came. Her song (2:1-10) is the theological heart of the lesson, anticipating a God who reverses human fortunes and pointing ahead to His Anointed, fulfilled in Christ who now reigns at God's right hand.

The lesson also aims at the student's spiritual formation. Press the class beyond information toward transformation. Hannah models the kind of honest, surrendered, worshipful prayer that Jesus Himself embodied in Gethsemane. Many in the room carry private griefs and long-unanswered prayers; this passage invites them to pour out their souls to God rather than numbing the pain or hiding it. Aim to leave each student with one concrete act of surrender and one renewed habit of honest prayer, so that the truth about God's character reshapes the way they actually walk with Him this week.

Question 1

Student Question:

What does this passage reveal about God's relationship to the brokenhearted and the overlooked, and how does it answer the lie that He is distant from our private pain?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The narrative opens with painstaking ordinariness: a man named Elkanah, his town, his lineage, his two wives. Then comes the line that breaks the symmetry, "but Hannah had no children." In the world of the Old Testament, barrenness was not merely private heartbreak; it carried social shame and the fear that one's name would die out. God allows us to see Hannah at her most vulnerable so that we will understand the kind of person He delights to lift up.

Notice that Hannah's pain is sharpened by another human being. Peninnah "provoked her sore, for to make her fret," year after year, especially at the house of the Lord. Suffering is hard enough; suffering with a tormentor nearby is harder still. Yet the text never says God was

absent. It says plainly “the Lord had shut up her womb,” which means even her closed circumstances were not outside His knowledge or His purpose.

Against this backdrop the great truth of the chapter shines. The God of all the earth is not detached from one woman’s tears in a crowded feast. He is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18). The whole story that follows, the rise of a prophet, a kingdom, and ultimately the line of the Messiah, springs from God’s tender attention to someone the world had written off.

For our class this corrects a false picture of God as distant or interested only in great affairs of state. The same God who governs nations counts the tears of the overlooked. That is the God we worship, and it is the God we point our neighbors to when their prayers seem to disappear.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s providence reaches even into private, hidden grief; nothing in our lives is beneath His notice.
- Barrenness and delayed answers are not proof that God has abandoned us; Scripture says plainly the Lord had shut her womb for His own purposes.
- God repeatedly chooses the overlooked and the lowly to accomplish His greatest works (1 Corinthians 1:26–29).
- Human cruelty can sharpen our suffering, but it cannot remove us from God’s care.

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think God chose to begin the books of Samuel with a grieving, barren woman rather than a king?
- How does it change your prayers to believe that God is genuinely near to the brokenhearted?
- Who in our congregation or community might be quietly carrying the kind of overlooked grief Hannah carried?

Question 2

Student Question:

Hannah carried her grief into the house of the Lord and poured it out before Him. Where do you tend to take your sorrow instead, and what would change if you brought it first to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hannah does something with her grief that we must not rush past. She rises from the table and goes into the house of the Lord, and there, “in bitterness of soul,” she prays and weeps sore. She does not stuff the pain down, and she does not let it harden into resentment. She carries it to the one place where it can do something more than fester.

Her prayer is so raw that no words come out; only her lips move. She later describes it herself: “I have poured out my soul before the Lord” (1:15). This is honest prayer at its rawest, the soul emptied before God with nothing held back and nothing dressed up. It is the same posture David models in the Psalms and that Jesus models in Gethsemane.

We are tempted to take our sorrow everywhere but to God. We take it to food, to distraction, to busyness, to complaint, to the cold comfort of pretending we are fine. Hannah teaches us to take it first to the Lord, before we take it anywhere else.

Ask the class to be honest about their own habits. The question is not whether we will carry our pain somewhere; we always do. The question is whether we will carry it to the only One who can actually bear it with us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God welcomes raw, honest prayer; we do not need to clean ourselves up before coming to Him.
- Pouring out the soul before God is an act of faith, not weakness.
- Where we instinctively take our pain reveals what we truly trust.
- Bottling up grief or numbing it tends to harden the heart, while bringing it to God softens it.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you tend to take your sorrow before you take it to God?
- What would it look like this week to bring one specific grief to the Lord as honestly as Hannah did?
- Why is honesty, even ‘bitterness of soul,’ welcome in prayer rather than offensive to God?

Question 3

Student Question:

Eli at first misjudged Hannah, yet she answered with humility and he then blessed her. What does this exchange teach about how God’s people should treat one another, especially those who are suffering?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Eli the priest watches Hannah’s lips move without sound and jumps to a harsh conclusion: he assumes she is drunk and tells her to put away her wine. It is a striking failure of discernment from a spiritual leader, and it adds insult to an already wounded woman.

Hannah’s response is a model of humble grace under unjust accusation. She does not lash out. She gently explains, “I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit,” and asks him not to count her a daughter of Belial. Her gentleness opens the door for Eli to bless her: “Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition.”

There is real instruction here about how God's people treat one another, especially the suffering. We are quick to misread, quick to judge what we do not understand. The hurting in our midst often look like something other than what they are. Eli's mistake warns leaders and members alike to look closer and speak slower.

It is also worth noting how Hannah received an imperfect leader. Eli will prove a weak father and a flawed priest in the chapters ahead, yet Hannah honored the office and received his blessing with faith. Grace runs in both directions in this exchange.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual leaders, and all of us, can misjudge the suffering; we should be slow to assume the worst (James 1:19).
- Gentleness in the face of unjust accusation reflects the heart God blesses (1 Peter 3:9).
- The hurting among us often do not look the way we expect; love looks closer before it judges.
- Honoring God-given roles is consistent with recognizing the human flaws of those who fill them.

Discussion Prompts

- When have you misjudged someone who was actually grieving? What did you learn?
- How can our class become a place where the hurting are seen rather than misread?
- What does Hannah's gentle answer teach us about responding to unfair criticism?

Question 4

Student Question:

Hannah's face changed and she was "no more sad" before her circumstances changed at all. What does it look like for you to find peace by surrendering a burden to God even while the situation stays the same?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

One of the most moving details in the chapter is easy to miss. After Hannah prays and Eli blesses her, the text says she "went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad." Her womb is still closed. Nothing in her circumstances has changed. Yet her face has changed.

What changed was not her situation but the location of her burden. She brought it to God and left it there. This is the fruit of genuine surrender: a peace that does not depend on the problem being solved first. Paul describes the same gift in Philippians 4:6-7, where prayer with thanksgiving yields a peace that guards the heart even before the answer comes.

We often think peace must wait until the crisis resolves. Hannah shows us another way. The weight lifted not because the future was secured but because she had truly handed it to the One who holds the future.

Help the class see that this is not denial or positive thinking. It is the settled rest of a soul that has actually let go. The test of whether we have surrendered a burden is often written on our faces and in our sleep.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- True surrender brings peace before circumstances change (Philippians 4:6-7).
- Peace that depends only on getting our way is not the peace God offers.
- Casting our care on God is a deliberate act of the will, not merely a feeling (1 Peter 5:7).
- A changed countenance can be the visible fruit of an inwardly surrendered heart.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between resignation and the peace Hannah experienced?
- Is there a burden you are still holding that you have not truly handed to God?
- How can we tell whether we have genuinely surrendered something to the Lord?

Question 5

Student Question:

Hannah made a costly vow, promising to give back the very son she begged to receive. What does her vow reveal about true faith, and about the difference between using God and trusting God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hannah's prayer contains a vow that stops us in our tracks. She asks God for a son, and in the same breath promises that if He gives her one, "I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life." The very thing she most longs to keep, she pledges to give back.

This reveals the heart of true faith. Hannah does not want a son merely to fill her own arms and silence Peninnah; she wants to honor God with the gift He gives. There is a world of difference between using God to get what we want and trusting God enough to surrender what we receive back into His hands.

The vow likely involved a Nazarite-like dedication, "there shall no razor come upon his head." Whatever its exact form, the point is that Hannah's request was never self-centered at its core. Her deepest desire was that God be glorified, even at the cost of the dearest thing she owned.

This searches us. We can pray fervently and still be praying selfishly, treating God as a means to our own ends. Hannah teaches us to pray, 'Lord, give me this, and I will give it back to You,' which is the very opposite of treating God as a vending machine.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- True faith trusts God enough to surrender His gifts back to Him.
- There is a deep difference between using God to get what we want and trusting God with what we receive.
- Vows made to God are serious and meant to be kept (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5).
- Our requests reveal our hearts; even good prayers can be selfish at the root.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between using God and trusting God?
- Have you ever asked God for something mainly to satisfy yourself rather than to honor Him?
- What might God be asking you to receive with open hands rather than clenched fists?

Question 6

Student Question:

Hannah kept her vow and brought young Samuel to Eli, letting him go. What is God asking you to hold loosely or surrender that you would naturally want to keep tightly for yourself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God answers Hannah's prayer. Samuel is born, his name a reminder that she "asked him of the Lord." But the heart of this section is what Hannah does with the answered prayer. When the boy is weaned, she takes him to Eli and leaves him there, saying, "As long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord."

Imagine the cost. After years of longing, after finally cradling the child she begged for, she gives him up while he is still small. This is not a careless letting-go; it is a deliberate, worshipful surrender of the most precious thing in her life. The vow was easy to make in the temple; it was costly to keep at the door.

Hannah models a truth every disciple must learn: the things we love most are safest in God's hands, not ours. She does not grip Samuel tightly. She holds him loosely, returning to God the gift God had given. And remarkably, she does it with worship rather than grief.

Press the class gently here. All of us have 'Samuels,' people or hopes or plans we would naturally clutch. Faith does not mean we stop loving them; it means we hold them open before the Lord, trusting Him to do with them what is best.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Keeping our commitments to God often costs more than making them.
- What we love most is safest when held loosely before God, not gripped tightly.
- Surrender can be an act of worship rather than mere loss.
- Hannah's faithfulness shaped a child who would shape a nation; obedience has ripple effects we cannot foresee.

Discussion Prompts

- What 'Samuel' in your life are you tempted to hold tightly rather than surrender to God?
- Why is it often harder to keep a commitment than to make one?
- How can surrender become worship rather than just painful loss?

Question 7

Student Question:

In her song Hannah declares that the Lord raises the poor from the dust and brings down the mighty. What does this reversal teach us about God's character and the way He runs His world?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hannah's song in chapter two lifts the whole story onto a higher plane. She sings of a God who turns the world's order upside down: "The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength." The hungry are filled, the full are emptied, the poor are lifted from the dust and seated with princes.

This is not wishful thinking; it is a window into God's character and the way He actually governs His world. He is not impressed by human strength, wealth, or status. He delights to raise the lowly and humble the proud. Hannah, once the object of scorn, has become a witness to this great reversal in her own life.

This theme runs through the whole of Scripture and reaches its fullest voice in the New Testament, where God "hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree" (Luke 1:52). The God of Hannah is the God who chose a manger over a palace and a cross over a crown.

For the proud, this is a warning; for the humble, it is hope. Where we stand in the world's ranking means nothing to God. He looks instead at the heart, and He lifts those who depend on Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God reverses the world's order, lifting the lowly and humbling the proud (Luke 1:51-53).
- Human strength, wealth, and status do not impress God or earn His favor.
- God's ways often run directly opposite to the values of the world around us.
- The same character that lifted Hannah is at work in the gospel that lifts the humble in Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you see God's 'great reversal' at work in your own life or in Scripture?
- How does this song confront the way our culture measures success and importance?
- What does it mean to live as someone who trusts a God who exalts the lowly?

Question 8

Student Question:

Hannah's song overflows with worship after a season of weeping. How does remembering what God has done turn your prayers from mere requests into genuine praise?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hannah's song is saturated with praise. The woman who once could only weep now overflows with worship: "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord." Remarkably, her praise is not focused on the gift of a son but on the Giver Himself, on His holiness, His knowledge, His power.

This is the natural movement of a heart that remembers what God has done. Hannah looks back at her own deliverance and it propels her forward into worship. Gratitude turns the rearview mirror into an act of praise. Prayer that began as desperate petition has matured into joyful adoration.

Our own prayers often stall at the level of requests. We tell God what we want and then move on. Hannah teaches us to circle back, to remember the answers, and to let remembrance kindle worship. A thankful memory is one of the great safeguards of a faithful heart.

Encourage the class to keep some record of answered prayer, a journal, a list, a habit of testimony, so that, like Hannah, they can return again and again to praise the God who hears.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Remembering God's past faithfulness fuels present worship (Psalm 103:2).
- Mature prayer moves beyond requests to adoration of God Himself.
- Praise centers on the Giver, not merely the gifts He gives.
- A grateful memory guards the heart against discouragement and unbelief.

Discussion Prompts

- How might keeping a record of answered prayer change your walk with God?
- Why is it so easy for our prayers to stay at the level of requests?
- What past faithfulness of God can you turn into praise this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Hannah's song ends by pointing to the Lord's "king" and "his anointed," reaching far beyond her own family. How does this passage point forward to God's larger plan that finds its fulfillment in Christ, the true Anointed One?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The final note of Hannah's song reaches far beyond her own household. "The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed." At the moment she sang, Israel had no king. The monarchy did not yet exist. Yet Hannah, moved by God's Spirit, sings of the Lord's king and the Lord's anointed.

This is one of the earliest pointers in Scripture to the coming Messiah, the true Anointed One. The word "anointed" is the very word that gives us Messiah and Christ. Hannah's personal deliverance becomes a prophetic window onto God's great plan to bring a King who would rule not over one nation only but to "the ends of the earth."

The books of Samuel will trace the rise of Saul and then David, but David himself was only a shadow of the King to come. The promise that began to take shape here finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who now reigns at the right hand of God (Acts 2:32–36; Colossians 1:13). His kingdom is not a future earthly throne but His present reign over His church.

Let the class marvel at the reach of this. A grieving woman's answered prayer becomes a thread woven into the tapestry of redemption. God was doing far more through Hannah than giving her a son; He was advancing the plan that would one day bring the world its Savior and King.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hannah's song points prophetically to the Lord's Anointed, fulfilled in Christ (Acts 2:32–36).
- The 'king' and 'anointed' language anticipates the Messiah, whose kingdom is His church (Colossians 1:13).
- Christ now reigns at God's right hand; His is a present spiritual reign, not a future earthly political kingdom.
- God works through ordinary, faithful lives to advance His eternal plan of redemption.

Discussion Prompts

- How does it deepen your reading to know Hannah was pointing forward to Christ?
- What does it mean that Jesus reigns now as the true Anointed King?
- How does seeing God's larger plan reframe your own small acts of faithfulness?

Question 10**Student Question:**

Looking back across Hannah's story, name one specific way the Lord is using this passage to form you to be more like Jesus, whether in honest prayer, costly surrender, or worship that lifts your eyes off yourself and onto God.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

As we close, gather up the whole story. Hannah brought her grief honestly to God, surrendered her deepest desire into His hands, kept her costly vow with worship, and sang of a God who lifts the lowly and will one day exalt His Anointed. Every part of her story presses us toward the character of Christ.

Jesus is the One who poured out His soul in Gethsemane, the One who surrendered the dearest thing of all in obedience to the Father, the One who is Himself the King Hannah sang about. To grow more like Him is to learn Hannah's honesty, Hannah's surrender, and Hannah's worship.

Invite each student to be specific. It is easy to admire Hannah and remain unchanged. Far better to name one concrete way the Lord is forming us through this passage: perhaps a grief we will finally bring to Him, a gift we will hold loosely, or a habit of praise we will begin.

End by lifting the class's eyes to the King. The same God who heard a weeping woman in Shiloh hears us now and is shaping us, prayer by prayer and surrender by surrender, into the image of His Son.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual growth requires moving from admiration to specific obedience.
- Hannah's honesty, surrender, and worship each point toward the character of Christ.
- The God who heard Hannah hears us and is actively forming us into Christ's likeness (Romans 8:29).
- Naming one concrete response helps truth take root in daily life.

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific way this passage is forming you to be more like Jesus?
- Which is hardest for you right now: honest prayer, costly surrender, or wholehearted worship?
- How will you put one of those into practice before our next lesson?