

the story of GOD

a narrative lectionary
bible study

october 16, 2016



The Tables Have Turned

Read I Samuel 1:4-20 and 2:1-10

How does God respond to suffering? How do you we share our concerns with God? How does God answer prayer?

1 samuel 1:11 **" Lord of heavenly forces, just look at your servant's pain and remember me! "**

IN-DEPTH: A deeper look at the story

BACKGROUND

In our last lesson, the Israelites were wandering in the desert to the Promised Land. Between that lesson and our current one, a number of things happened. The Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years, and then entered the promised land. Then for several years there were wars between the Israelites and the peoples who were living in the Canaan. Israel is set up and for some time there was no central government or leadership. From time to time, God would pick a person to serve as a judge to lead the people.

Our story opens today in a period just as the age of the judges was ending and the royal era was about to begin. We read here today of the birth of the final judge, Samuel who will ultimately pick the first king of Israel, Saul and later anoint his successor, David.

But Samuel is not the star of this story today. Instead, the person we will learn about today is Hannah, the mother of Samuel and what it took for her to give birth to this important figure in the history of Israel.

HANNAH AND HER SISTER (WIFE)

Chapter 1 of 1 Samuel opens with a man named Elkanah who has two wives: Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah has given Elkanah children and Hannah was not able to give her husband any children. Now, the story is already setting things up. We know this woman is barren and we know that something big is going to happen.

Hannah's barrenness said many things about the women in ancient times. If a woman was barren, it was usually considered the woman's fault. People around Hannah would wonder what she had done to earn this judgement from God. This is why her co-wife Peninnah would taunt her.

While Peninnah was terrible to her co-wife, Elkanah loved Hannah and when they went for the yearly sacrifice she was always given a double portion to sacrifice.

Children were also a statement about the future. They represented the future of the current generation, which was a very important thing in ancient Israel. Belief in the after-life and heaven was either cloudy or non-existent, so having a child was an insurance policy for the future.

Finally, Hannah's own life was in jeopardy. If Elkanah died, the inheritance would go to Peninnah's sons. She would have to rely on the kindness of those sons. Because she had no son, she could end up on the street.

Hannah does something very different compared to other stories of barren women. Sarah kicked Hagar out. Leah and Rachel competed to give Jacob children to the point that Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin.

But Hannah doesn't strike back at Peninnah (even though she deserved it). Instead she pours her heart out to God. "Lord of heavenly forces, just look at your servant's pain and remember me! Don't forget your servant! Give her a boy!" she says to God. She wanted for God to not

forget her and God remembered. Soon, she was pregnant with another son for Elkanah. She named him Samuel.

Later in chapter 1, she gives her son back to God as she had promised. She had set several events in notion, that would lead to the rise and fall of kings and kingdoms. But for all that to happen, it had to start with this woman named Hannah. This story of a simple woman in pain is where it all begins.

A SONG OF THANKS

Hannah is given a son, Samuel. A few years pass and she then gives the youngster to Eli the priest. It is then that she breaks into song.

Most people would expect that if Hannah were to sing a song, it would be about Samuel. But instead, she sings a song of thanks to God. She is joyous at the prospect of having a son, but as theologian Walter Brueggeman notes that she is singing of God's power. She acknowledges that God is powerful, so powerful that people should take heed.

Hannah's song is broken up in a few pieces. The first part is where she acknowledges that it is God and not her own power that make a difference in her life. She realizes that she was in need and is honest enough to admit that.

But the song is much more than that. Hannah sings about a turning of the tables where the outcasts are lifted up and the well connected are brought low. She believes in a God that intervenes and

changes things. Look at what she says in verses 4-5:

*The bows of mighty warriors are shattered,
but those who were stumbling now dress
themselves in power!*

*5 Those who were filled full now sell
themselves for bread, but the ones who
were starving are now fat from food!*

*The woman who was barren has birthed
seven children, but the mother with many
sons has lost them all!*

You wonder if she thought of her co-wife Penniah when she talked about the poor being lifted up and the rich being brought down. We don't know what happened to Penniah, but she believed that God was looking out for the poor and was looking out for her.

Similar words would be spoken again by a woman who might be considered on the margins. Mary, the mother of Jesus would speak out in Luke 1. Mary, like Hannah would give thanks that God was mindful of her "humble state," and gave thanks for a God that can turn the tables, raising up the lowly while casting down the powerful.

God's changing of places is not about punishment as much as it is giving God respect. Whatever gifts or advantages we have it is important to remember that they can be easily lost. It is a reminder that it is God that gives life and that God can intervene in ways that upset what might have been considered the natural order of things. Hannah, like Mary remind us that God will be God no matter what we plan.

WRAP-UP: Time to Review

IN MEDIA

Take a look at Dollar Store Sermons from John Stevens. Hannah praises God who is a rock in her hard times. What do you think of the image of a rock to describe God? To watch the video, please to go to: <https://dskidsermons.com/2016/10/03/october-16th-2016-twenty-second-sunday-after-pentecost/> .

Watch the a video from Bible Scholar Nikki Hardeman. What do you think of her view of today's story? View the video by going here: <https://faithement.net/7-47-hannahs-anchor-starter/> .

DIG DEEP

Read the following paragraph about infertility: *"Facing the fact that one will never conceive or bear children is not just an experience of profound disappointment. Rather, those who have gone through it describe it as a kind of "dying," a loss of both an envisioned future and a possible self, a potential role and a longed-for relationship. Infertility is rarely recognized as a personal crisis, however, and even when it is, it is treated largely as a medical or social crisis. It is seldom recognized as a spiritual crisis, a deep confrontation of meaning and belief. Yet, it is precisely when infertility is acknowledged as a question to one's very understanding of oneself and one's place in the universe that the pain and disappointment of infertility can become an opportunity for personal and spiritual growth."* 1

How should the church respond to those who face infertility? Read the full text by going to: <http://www.baylor.edu/ifl/christianreflection/CloningarticleRyan.pdf> .

THINK ABOUT IT

1. It was important in ancient Israel for a woman to be able to have children, especially male children? How have women's role changed when it comes to children? How has it not?
2. What is the role of the men in this story? Do women understand this story better than men?
3. When has your faith made you want to sing or give praise to God?

1. From the article "Faith and Infertility" by Maura Ryan for the Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2005.