



1 SAMUEL 1-3

God Speaks Mercy and Judgement and Truth

2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER – APRIL 23, 2017 (AM)

INTRODUCTION

Jud.21²⁵ ... *There was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* That was God's own caption written under the period of the Judges in ancient Israel (~1370-1050 BC), after they'd taken possession of the Land under Joshua, but before *Saul* was anointed as their chosen *king*, then *David* as a *man after (God's) own heart* (13:14). The days of the Judges were dark ones among God's covenant people. And few places is that more evident than in the opening chapters of 1Sa.

Eli, the priest, the shepherd and spiritual guide of God's people, was going blind (3:2). And he'd grown exceedingly fat (4:18), probably from the unlawful behavior of his sons. The Law stipulated what portion of the sacrificial animals the priests should receive as food (Deu.18:3). But Eli's sons, *Hophni and Phinehas*, 2¹² ... *did not know the LORD.* 13 *(Their) custom... with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, (their) servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, 14 and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. ... They would take the best parts of the meat, rather than the portion the Law said was theirs.* 15 *Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but only raw."* They wanted to prepare it to their own liking. 16 *And if the man said to him, "Let them burn the fat first," as the Law required (Lev.3:14-16), "... then take as much as you wish," which the Law didn't allow, he would still say, "No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force."* Eli's sons operated by brute force, through their servant (2:15)! Plus, *they would lay with the women who were serving at the... tent of meeting* (2:22)! 17 *Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for (they) treated the offering of the LORD with contempt.*

That's a snapshot of the situation for God's covenant people when He purposed to set in motion the events that would lead to a monarchy in Israel. And 1&2Sa. are His inspired historical record of how that took place, how it got rolling. The curtain rises on this dramatic story to reveal a faithful *man*, *Elkanah* (1:3-5), living among the tribe of Ephraim (1:1). *2 He had two wives*. So he's likely a *man* of means. *The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children*. Rising tension—barrenness was a sign of God's curse (cf. Deu.7:13-14). We hear God's voice in three scenes.

GOD SPEAKS MERCY INTO HANNAH'S DEEP GRIEF – 1:1-2:11

Hannah's situation was grievous to her. And I believe the writer of Samuel opened with it so his readers would get a unique take on life in Israel in those days—a people not enjoying the blessing of *the LORD*. "*Hannah*" means "*favored one*," ... *but her condition contradicted her name: How could the favored one be barren?* (Leithart 38) Israel was God's *favored one*, but increasingly in these days, she was spiritually barren (Ibid.).

But *Hannah* was modeling just what should've been the response of her people. She was calling out to God for His blessing. She was pleading with Him out of her deep and abiding grief, magnified by insensitive and incessant goading from *Penninah*. *6... Her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. 7 So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. Elkanah* tried to console her (8), but nothing worked. *11 (So) she vowed a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, 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."* He'll be devoted to *the LORD*. *12 As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman.* There's the perception of Israel's shepherd! *14 And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you." 15 But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. ... 17 Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him."* Did he know what he was saying? Was he actually aware of God telling him to speak? Or did he just think he had the freedom to say whatever he wanted to help people feel better, regardless of whether it would prove true? We don't know. But *Hannah* trusted her *priest*. *18 And she said,*

"Let your servant find favor in your eyes." Then (she) went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.
 Faith is a beautiful thing!

Well, God honored the word spoken by *Eli*. *(He spoke) mercy to Hannah in her deep grief. 20 And in due time (she) conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the LORD." Samuel means name of God* (Baldwin 58), and sounds like the Hebrew for *heard of God* (Tsumura). *24 And she kept her promise: when she had weaned him* (age two?), *she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. And the child was young. 25 Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. Imagine! 26 And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. 27 For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him. 28 Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD."* When a formerly barren woman gives up her first-born son to the LORD, God is doing something!

And the best way to get a glimpse is to drink in Hannah's response (2:1-10). She's rejoicing in God's grace beyond what she could have known or understood. And in the process she captured not just the joy of answered prayer in the midst of intense spiritual and emotional pain, but she opened the window to see some of what God is doing at this point in Israel's history. She's been enabled by His Spirit to speak *prophetically*, not just *worshipfully*. Look, for instance, at v.10: *10 The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."*

But not only was *Hannah* enabled to speak of a *king* even when *there was no king in Israel* (Jud.21:25), she was also empowered to sing of great reversals achieved by the LORD Who grants salvation (2:1) to His people—the God of the gospel! *1Sa.2:4 The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. 5 Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. 6 The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. 7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts.*
 Reversals!

It almost seems like the writer (*Samuel* himself?) opened with Hannah's experience not only as a metaphor for life in Israel at this time, but in order to include her song of praise as a course-setting expression here at the start of this book of history: *Great Reversals!* And he anchored his work beginning, middle and end to songs: Hannah's here (1Sa.2:1-10), then David's psalm of worship at the end (2Sa.22:1-51 [cf. Psa.18]), and David's lament for Saul and Jonathan in the middle (2Sa.1:19-27; ... *how the mighty have fallen...*).

But Hannah's story doesn't end with her song. God spoke to her again through *Eli* on a subsequent occasion as she and *Elkanah* visited *Samuel* in *Shiloh*, bringing him his annual gift of a new *little priest's robe* (2:19), **220** *Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the LORD." So then they would return to their home. And 21 indeed the LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew in the presence of the LORD.*

GOD SPEAKS JUDGMENT INTO ELI'S TWISTED FAMILY – 2:12-36

Right on the heels of this statement, the writer returned to the subject of *Eli's sons* (stark contrast), calling them *worthless men* (2:12). He proceeded to explain their utter disregard for the Law of God in handling the (*sacrifices*), saying they **217**... *treated the offering of the LORD with contempt*. Then we read that **222**... *Eli... kept hearing about things like this, and like their indiscretions with the female servants at the tent of meeting* (2:22), yet all he did was scold them (2:23-25).

225... *But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.* The narrator clues us in to this, but we see it clearly when *the LORD* sends a nameless **27**... *man of God to Eli (who) said to him, "Thus says the LORD... (2:27-36).* And he proceeded to remind *Eli* of the promises God made regarding Levi and office of the *priest* in Israel. Then he asked: **29** *Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?' 30 Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: 'I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me forever,' but now the LORD declares: 'Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. 31 Behold, the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. ... 34 And this that shall come upon your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day. 35 And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him*

a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever. Thus, God (spoke) judgment into Eli's twisted family. He's not letting sin in Israel go unaddressed in these days. God is doing something!

GOD SPEAKS TRUTH INTO SAMUEL'S LISTENING EARS – 3:1-21

The final scene in this drama is a familiar one. *3¹ Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. 2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. 3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, meaning it was still night, so the lamp that was lit from evening to morning was still burning* (Baldwin 68), *and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD* (there's the contrast), *where the ark of God was.* Look where *Eli was lying down* (2, in his own place) and where *Samuel was lying down* (3, in the temple of the LORD). It's like young *Samuel* was on duty even at night while *Eli* increasing *could not see* even in the daytime.

What happened here, then, is the familiar part. Three times *Samuel* hears his name called. And three times he gets up to see what *Eli* wants. But it wasn't until the third time that *Eli* *3⁸... perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10 And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." 11 Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. This is the way God speaks when He's about to pour out judgment* (2Ki.21:12; Jer.19:3; cf. Hab.1:5). What He promised was *3¹⁴... the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.*

Eli pressed *Samuel* to know what the LORD said (3:17), and did so in words that recall the threats issued by his sons' servant (2:16). *3¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him.*

3¹⁹ And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. The LORD raised up a man to facilitate His work—a forerunner to identify His coming king. 21 And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

CONCLUSION

So, what does this mean for us today? First, we have to see this as Israel's story—God intervening in the days of the Judges to establish a monarchy in preparation for His promised, coming *King*.

But second, we also have to appreciate it as our own story, as part of our history, but also as a window into our own needy souls. We surely see ourselves in the grieving intercessions of *Hannah*, lamenting and pleading against the barrenness of this broken world, but also in the spiritual dullness of *Eli*, and at times even in the stubborn rebellion of his *sons*. We're reminded that there is a God in heaven Who is not only our Helper, but is also working out His eternal plan in this world, which leaves us with a question: Are we living in line with that plan? If you're *Hannah*, press on! If you're *Eli* get moving! If you're one of *Eli's sons*, repent and believe.

THREE LESSONS

OBSTACLES ARE NEVER SO GREAT THAT GOD CANNOT OVERCOME THEM.

Hannah's barrenness, paralyzing to her, was no hardship for God, just as Sarah's and Rebekah's and Rachel's and Elizabeth's and others' were not. *Barren women seem to be God's instruments in raising up key figures in the history of redemption* (Davis 16). The question is not whether God is able. The question is simply whether we're willing to cling to Him alone in the midst of our need, and keep clinging to Him even while that need remains unmet.

It's hard to name a present-day need that competes with barrenness, especially in the ancient world. But it helps if we understand Hannah's prayer as pouring out from a heart that felt abandoned by God, cursed—a heart that yearned for His glory, the blessing of His presence with her. We can feel that yearning as we pray for a spiritually wayward child, or a rift that has divided our family, our church. We can feel it as our wait for marriage grows longer, or, like *Hannah*, as our desire for children goes unmet. We can feel it as we yearn to see the Spirit of God move among His people today as He's done at other times in history. But we can also feel it as we seek God for victory over some stubborn, personal sin.

And as we pray, and wait, it is then that we can actually begin to wonder whether some obstacles are just too big for God. So, we must remember: *obstacles like these are never so great that God cannot overcome them.*

SIN IS NEVER SO COMMON THAT GOD WILL NOT JUDGE IT.

This corrects us in the other direction. Sometimes sin seems so entrenched, even among God's people—in our own hearts!—that we can wonder whether God is actually able to overcome it, and cleanse, and bless. But other times we can go the opposite direction and wonder if God really does hate sin, as we've heard, really hate it! We can wonder if He'll really judge it!

It must have seemed hopeless in Israel in the days of *Eli and Hophni and Phinehas*. With that kind of corruption in precisely the place where you'd hope and expect to see holiness, it must have seemed like you could get away with anything—like there was no hope of righteousness returning to the Land. But that will never be so. No matter how wicked the practices become around us, we never need to wonder whether God really will judge sin. He's not soft on sin. He's *patient*. *2Pe.3* *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise to judge, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar.... 11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness? Sin is never so common that God will not judge it.*

TIMES ARE NEVER SO DESPERATE THAT GOD WILL ABANDON HIS PLAN.

And His plan is not just to judge sin, but to institute eternal righteousness and holiness. And if He needs to cause a barren *woman* to give birth, then give away her son to His purpose in order to restore righteousness among His people, He's quite able, and willing, to do that!

In fact, He did it again in human history, and even more dramatically—the ultimate step fulfilling His plan to judge sin and restore righteousness and holiness! It was the stage of His plan where your sin and mine were addressed so that we can be reconciled to Him, grafted into His family. Paul wrote in Gal.4 that *4 ... when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman—this time born of a virgin!—born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons—of the*

promised *king*. The *king Hannah* spoke of was not *Saul* or even *David*, but was great David's greatest Son, our *LORD* Jesus Christ Who Himself *will judge to the ends of the earth* (2:10). And He offers the greatest reversal to all who will receive the price He paid for our redemption.