

## A Promise Made...A Promise Paid: 1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:11

Welcome back to those of you People's of the Word veterans! I hope you got plenty of rest this summer and were able to spend time with the Lord and let Him remind you how much He loves you. It's a special privilege to see the new faces today! You are in for a real treat in coming to this Bible study as I am certain God is going to speak to you time and time again in ways you didn't know was possible – finding places you need healing and reassurance of His presence.

I want to begin not just this section of reading but also this entire year of study by asking you a question. *What is the biggest problem facing humanity today?*” These are no doubt serious issues, but I would propose the number one challenge for every human today is, *“Coming to understand the truth of the depth of God's love for him/her.”* This may sound like an oversimplified statement or maybe even too spiritual, but think about this challenge for a moment. If you fully trusted in God's love for you, you would be ultimately safe in His love as it brings *unwavering and unconditional devotion, complete protection, and total provision.*

If you can fully trust in that kind of love, is there anything you need to be afraid of? Fear comes from our fleshly understanding of our circumstances, but God is spiritual. The spiritual is superior to the flesh. The Bible tells us that He Who is in **us** is greater than he who is in the world. You might be wondering why I am starting with this question and topic. Sometimes, when we study the Old Testament, it is easy to get caught up in the stories, the geography, and the genealogy, and lose sight of the real dynamic that is happening – God's working through humanity. This year, we're going to get up close and personal with some key characters of

Scripture – Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon, among others. Our challenge as lecturers and your challenges as students is to look for God’s love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and other important components of His character in His dealings with these people.

The God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament. God does not change – Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Thirty-one lessons cover a lot of Scripture, so it is possible to get fatigued with some of the stories. This is why I am suggesting you focus on how God is dealing with the people of the stories. Look at how **their** choices and decisions impact their relationship with God. Think about how **God’s** reactions to their choices impact your understanding of Him. Finally, regularly ask Him to reveal to you what you learn of Him in the reading in a way that will better help **you** understand **Who He is** in your life.

My suggestion that the greatest challenge facing humanity is our misunderstanding of God’s deep love for us is no less true today than it was for the people we’re about to read about during this Bible study. As you see their actions and inactions, think about how they might have been different had they truly trusted in God’s love for them? Imagine the pain and suffering that could have been avoided had they believed God when He told them through Moses in Deuteronomy 31:6, “*Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, **He** is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.*”

Please don’t let the enemy detract you from the glorious ways God is going to reveal Himself to you this year. Each of us has our own personal needs, and God, being our Creator, knows them better than we do. I am believing for you that through this year’s study, He is going to speak to at least one area of each of your lives that needs His loving presence,

forgiveness, and healing. This is our God – He proved our love for us by sending His Son to the Cross. His love doesn't stop there. Jesus is alive and here **right now in joy** ready to minister to your needs. Does that sound good? Ok, let's get to today's reading.

We're beginning in 1 Samuel where we are introduced to a man named Elkinah who is the son of a lot of weird generational names – the most notable being the last one – him being an Ephraimite. Ephraim is one of the two sons of Joseph, and Joseph was one of the 12 sons of Jacob who later God would re-name, Israel. When you hear of the 12 tribes of Israel, they are, for the most part, named after the sons of Israel. However, there is not a tribe called “Joseph”. Near Israel's death, he in effect adopted Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Therefore, Joseph was passed over as a tribal name and two tribes came out of Joseph – Manasseh and Ephraim.

For you math wizards, you are already calculating  $12-1+2 = 13$ . If there are 13 tribes of Israel, why does Scripture only mention 12? Israel had a son named Levi, and his descendants were known as the Levites. The Levites were separated out as the Levitical line, which was dedicated to being priests. Therefore, they never inherited any land. They were distributed among the tribes serving as priests. By them being separated out, you get back to 12 tribes. You can remember all of this next time you're on Jeopardy.

Back to Elkinah, he had two wives, which was not uncommon in these times. However, we're about to learn why polygamy doesn't work. One wife's name was Peninnah, and she was able to bear children. The other wife's name was Hannah, but she was barren at this point of the story. Being able to bear children was a HUGE deal at this time in history, so not being able to provide succession of a family name was a point of great shame.

Annually, the people of Israel were to come to Jerusalem to worship and sacrifice to the Lord – this was celebrating the Feasts of the Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits. Elkinah went up and made sacrifices for Peninnah and her children. However, Hannah, despite her inability to bear Elkinah a child, had a special place in his heart – he loved her. Because of this love, he would give a **double** portion of sacrifices for her. This favoritism no doubt didn't sit well with Peninnah, so she was relentless in making Hannah feel even worse than she already did because of her barrenness.

Now, there's an important point that needs to be made at this juncture of the story. Verse 6 tells us why she was barren, "...because ***the Lord*** had closed her womb." I emboldened "the Lord" for a reason. As we work through our understanding of God, one of the most challenging aspects of coming to know Him is when Scripture tells us God did something that doesn't sound very loving or kind. This is one of those places. God knows the shame that is heaped on women who can't have children, so why on Earth would He willingly close Hannah's womb?

In this story, we're going to find out why, and we will see that God's reasons, as they always are, were rooted in the long-term good for all. The problem for the rest of us who may be in the midst of suffering and pain, it is hard to hear about God's loving plan and goodness. We're in pain, and we want out of it. I'm not going to pretend to know what each of you is suffering with, but I do understand your desire to be relieved of it. The longer the pain and suffering, the harder it is to see or feel God's presence and deliverance. Waiting on the Lord gets tougher and tougher. What are we supposed to be waiting for – shouldn't it be the deliverance from our pain and suffering? One possible reason God isn't providing you what you want,

is because *He's preparing to provide you even more than what you want – He's preparing you for you what you need – a greater revelation of His love and good purposes for you.*

Watch for this as we continue with our story about Hannah. So her barrenness goes on for years, and we're told she's weeping and not eating. In verse 8, Elkinah, being the always-sensitive husband to his wife's needs, makes it about him and asks her "*am I not better than ten sons?*" Ladies, thank you for your patience as you deal with us bone-headed guys. We really do love you, but sometimes we can't get past ourselves when trying to make you feel better. We're not perfect – we are major works-in-progress. Remember, with God, all things are possible. There's always hope for the man who confesses Jesus as His Savior and Lord!

Hannah is now sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the Lord, and she is bitter in her soul over her condition. She is in a place of desperation – she's exhausted her attempts to understand what is going on or engineer a resolution to her problem. You might find this a weird thing to say, but she is in the best place she has ever been in her life. She is at a point of surrender. She is willing to hand the mess of her life over to God and let Him take over. When we give up control, God can take control, and God's knowledge, ability, power, love, and care for us are now directing our lives. Since He knows all things and is eternal, He is going to lead us to the best possible place for us. We can't get there on our own, so the place of surrendering our will to God is the best place we can be to see our lives forgiven, healed, and restored.

Hannah prays to the Lord and makes a vow in verse 11, "*O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your*

*maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.”* Up until this moment, Hannah had wanted a child. In her desperation, she let’s go of her original desire and modifies it to dedicate the child, should He give her one, to the Lord.

Now some of you might find God is being cruel with Hannah. He knowingly closed her womb and, therefore, knew the shame and anguish she would feel from society. Why didn’t He just let her have children and choose one of them to be Samuel? God knows how easily our commitment to Him wavers when we just get what we want. He’s not above allowing some temporary suffering for the long-term benefit. What is “temporary” to God may seem like forever to us. This is why learning to wait on God can be so difficult.

So we’re introduced to a priest named Eli, and he’s watching Hannah. This prayer that she has just prayed was in her **heart** – she’s not saying out loud but is moving her lips. Eli takes this as she is drunk – even priests are not perfect folks. Hannah corrects him that she is not drinking or drunk – she is pouring out her soul before the Lord. She asks Eli to show her mercy for all the complaining she has spoken up until now. Eli regains his footing and lovingly assures her in verse 17, *“Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him.”*

Verse 18 tells us that upon this pinnacle of her anguish, her surrendering prayer to God, and hearing God’s messenger affirm God’s goodness towards her, Hannah’s face was no longer sad. The fruit of sincere surrender to God’s will is one of relief. All the struggle, all the fighting, all the pain is given up and handed over to God. The pressure is off - and now on God. God is more than willing to take it and is more than capable of managing it. As we trust in God’s love, protection, and provision, the

burdens of our lives are removed. Our only burden **going forward** is trusting in God, and what did Jesus say about His burden? – It is light.

The Lord remembered her prayer, and she conceived and bore a son and called his name, Samuel. Names were a big deal in Biblical times – they always had a meaning. The name Samuel literally means “Heard by God”. The subsequent year when it was time to go to Jerusalem and make offerings to the Lord and worship Him, Hannah chose to not go up with Elkinah and the rest of his family. This seems strange as it would seem she would want to do this as an act of thanksgiving for what God had provided. **Her** expression of her gratitude was to be greater – it would be to honor the vow she made to God. She wanted to wean Samuel because once she would take him to the temple, she was going to leave him there to become fully dedicated to servicing the Lord.

It is easy to say “Praise the Lord” or “Thank God”, but do our **actions** demonstrate such praise or thanksgiving? As they say, “Talk is cheap”. Hebrews 13:15 speaks of the concept of “*the sacrifice of praise*”. I remember vividly when we were in the darkest moments of a trial related to my wife Vickie’s health, we were in church one evening. The praise band was playing worship music, but I was not in a good place. I could not worship, I could not sing, and all I wanted to do was get out of there. A brother saw me and pulled me aside and reminded me of the notion of the sacrifice of praise. I couldn’t see **God** in anything that was going on, and I was, frankly, pretty angry with Him. I can look back now and see how foolish I was, but those were very real feelings. To let go of those feelings and praise God for His goodness even when we’re not seeing it is a sacrifice on our part.

I said earlier, God does not change, and this is true. Our circumstances will always change but God is no different in them. There's a good saying, "*The problem isn't the problem. How we respond to the problem is the problem.*" Since God does not change, He is no less praise worthy in difficult circumstances than He is in obviously good circumstances. When we rely solely on our hearts to determine our actions, we can get into trouble. What does the Bible say about our hearts? "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*" (Jeremiah 17:9)

This verse brings me back to my original case that the number one challenge for humanity is to understand the depth of God's love for us. Love involves the heart, so if our hearts are deceived, then our concept of love – much less God's love, is not formed in truth. That is why Bible studies such as People of the Word are so important – they are in effect performing "love transplants" – exchanging the lies about love that we have come to believe through our personal experiences for the **truth** of God's **agape** love for us. As we allow these transplants of truth to take place, healing comes and our lives change for the far greater good.

Back to our story – Elkinah tells Hannah her desire to stay behind is cool with him, but he makes an important exhortation in verse 23b, "*Only let the Lord establish His word.*" Again, that is what we are doing here – we are asking the Lord to establish His word in our hearts and minds, so that we may come to know the truth of Who He is and how we can learn to completely trust Him.

Hannah finally weans Samuel, so she heads up to Jerusalem with three bulls, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine for consecrating Samuel to the Lord. She slaughters a bull and brings Samuel to Eli. What's not said but is

implied in the story is while the vow *Hannah* made to the Lord in giving Samuel to Him, we should not forget that *Elkinah* had to agree to this as well. As a gesture of Elkinah's love for Hannah, he helped her keep her vow by coming into agreement with her and allowed Samuel to be given to the Lord. This was as much a sacrifice of Elkinah's as it was Hannah's.

This is an important point to note regarding married people. Sadly, there are examples where either the husband or the wife believes he/she has been given a directive from the Lord, but the other spouse has not yet heard this directive. This can lead to serious friction in a marriage. There is precedent that God confirms messages with both husbands and wives with Gabriel bringing the news of Jesus' birth to both Mary and Joseph. If one spouse hasn't heard the confirmation, they should go into prayer *together* to see if the Lord would confirm the message with *both* of them.

Heading into Chapter 2, we get the privilege of reading Hannah's great prayer to the Lord. I'll get into what she says in a moment, but for those of you who struggle with praying out loud or what to pray about, watch what she does in her prayer. She is merely stating truths of Who God is. Remember, prayer is a **conversation** between you and God. If you can't think of anything to pray about, just start telling God what you know of Him by quoting Scripture. He'll respond to these truths by making them more real to you to build your faith in Him. **Because** what Hannah has gone through to get to this point, her heart is in the right place, and God honors the sincerity of her prayer by putting it into His holy Word.

Her prayer begins in verse 1 with, "*My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation.*" Hannah's heart could rejoice in the Lord because she realized once she gave up control over her heart and gave that control to the Lord, He

proved His faithfulness to His promise to do what is best for her. It was a custom of females in those days to wear a tin or silver horn on the forehead, from which a veil was suspended. Wives who had no children wore it projecting downward, but those who were mothers wore it projecting upward. It was considered a great honor and blessing by women thus to make known their maternal character. Therefore, when Hannah said, “My horn is exalted”, she merely meant that she was now privileged to turn her ornament upward.

Whom do you think she is referring to when she mentions her “enemies”? Peninnah would be a good guess. These are real and raw feelings being shared between her and the Lord – she’s no doubt feeling a little bit of “nanny-nanny goat” to her rival. Sometimes we think we have to be so holy in how we pray. Let me clue you in on something, God knows what’s going on in your heart – He can handle real emotions. Personally, I think He prefers the raw feelings because they are honest. God may end up working in you why those feelings are not the way *He* sees things, but He will appreciate the integrity of the honesty.

Verse 2 is a great affirmation of God, “*No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.*” One of the failings in most **modern** Biblical teaching is the importance of understanding God’s holiness. By itself, God’s holiness can be scary to some and off-putting to others. The truth is God’s holiness drives His goodness and purity in His love. His love is undefiled because He is holy. We humans cannot say that because everyone of us has experienced something less than undefiled love. God knows this, so to maintain an undefiled relationship with each of us, He sent His Son to die on a Cross, so that by our faith in Jesus’ sacrificial act, we are forever covered by the holy blood of the Lamb.

That is the way God sees us going forward – our holiness is not of anything *we do*, it's because of everything *Jesus did*.

In verse 3, she continues with the problem every person struggles with – pride and arrogance. C.S. Lewis in his great book, “*Mere Christianity*” calls pride the “*great sin*”. The foundation of pride is the **lie** that we are more knowledgeable than everyone else – including God. Hannah rightly acknowledges that the **Lord** is the God of knowledge. Because He knows everything, He and He alone is in a position to evaluate the condition of a heart towards Him. One that is walking around in pride and arrogance is not someone who is honoring the Lord. She goes on in verse 4 as to what will happen to the mighty men of pride and arrogance – their bows will be broken. Psalm 138:6 sums up God’s opinion of the humble person vs. the prideful person, “*Though the LORD is on high, yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar.*”

Her prayer is really zeroing in on this issue of the prideful and the humble – the latter would include mentioning the lowly, the hungry, and the barren. You can see the thinly veiled shot she takes at Peninnah when she says in verse 5b, “*Even the barren has borne seven, and she who has many children has become feeble.*” This is pretty raw emotion and God is allowing it to be in His Word. That should be freeing to us who are afraid to be completely truthful with the Lord of what is going on in our hearts. Again, He already knows, so what’s the point in trying to hide it?

Beginning in verse 6, Hannah kicks into a higher gear when it comes to acknowledging God’s power. The first proclamation might cause some problems for some of us – “*The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up.*” (1 Samuel 2:6) The idea of “making alive” and bringing people up – or resurrecting - is within our wheelhouse of

understanding a loving God. However, the idea that He kills and brings down to the grave should cause us to tremble – at least a bit. To be clear, Scripture tells us that God takes **no joy** in the death of the wicked. Each human is His creation, so it grieves Him when He sees not just **utter rejection** of Him but **willful infliction** of pain on others. At some point, though, God will honor the repeated rejections of His extension of His mercy and grace and will deal with them accordingly. That truth should motivate us to tell the truth of the unsaved’s eternal destination without faith in Jesus.

In verses 7 & 8, Hannah speaks to God’s role in dealing with the poor. Now, there is an unfortunate segment of the church today preaching a prosperity doctrine. In other words, if you have the right amount of faith, God will bless you financially. Can God bless the faithful financially? Absolutely! But there is nothing in Scripture anywhere that promises the greater the faith the greater the *financial* reward. All you have to do is look to the Apostle Paul, who was known as the Apostle of Faith. He lived in poverty most of His Christian life. Yet, he was lifted up by the gift of his teaching and the letters he wrote that bless us even to today. God will indeed reward faith, but what that reward looks like is totally up to God. Yes, it can be financial, but it also may be just putting you in a position to use the gifts He’s given to you to expand the Kingdom of God.

In verse 9, Hannah moves into God’s protective nature for His children as well as another reminder of God’s opinion of the wicked and prideful, “*He will guard the feet of His saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness. For by strength no man shall prevail.*” I have often wondered how much trouble God has delivered me from, without knowing it. I am fully aware of the extraordinary protection He has provided me in the face of

my stupidity and rebellion. He could have let me feel the full brunt of the consequences of my idiocy, but He stepped in and showed me completely undeserved mercy. What I'm wondering about is all the other things that could have happened to me that I didn't know about, but He again stepped in and protected my family and me. I'm kind of hoping He'll reveal those things when I get to heaven. Then again, I'll be so glad I'm there, I probably won't care at that point.

Her statement, "*For by strength no man shall prevail*" is one worth spending a moment or two on. What strength do you rely on in life? I'm not talking just in the midst of trouble – I'm talking what strength do you rely on to breathe, eat, walk, talk, think, etc.? Yes, you may have earned a college degree or you have kept yourself in good shape, but do you really think that strength you have is your own? God gives us all these things out of His grace, and it is in His strength that we can continue to do them. Zechariah 4:6 makes this point clear, "*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.*"

When we were in our trial, we fought, kicked, scratched, begged, and did everything in our power to gain victory over the trial. You know how much all that "strength" worked? None of it. Let me be clear about something, if God does not want to provide something for you, it ain't gonna happen. Again, if God isn't providing you the strength to get you through something, then there must be something He wants you to learn about Him in the situation. He may want you to simply realize that it is **His** strength that will deliver you – not yours. He knows there is something else coming in the future where you will be more effective for Him if you surrender **your** idea of what needs to be done with God's wisdom and strength. His delay in responding *now* could be preparing you for something *later*.

Hannah in verse 10 once again refers to Peninnah as an adversary of the Lord and warns such people will be broken in pieces; from heaven He will thunder against them. She then makes an important statement that the Lord will judge the ends of the earth. *“He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed.”* Who is this King and Anointed One Who will have His strength and be exalted? Jesus Christ. The One Who took **our** judgment for **our** sin on the Cross, will administer the judgment of all of humanity. *Judgment is Jesus’ job – not ours. Our job is to love others.* Period.

Our reading wraps up with the child Samuel ministering to the Lord before Eli the priest. I have the privilege to be involved with a unique Christian college back in Virginia. God is moving powerfully through these students, and I have spent a little time with them over the years. I have been humbled and awestruck by such extraordinary maturity in the Lord and amazing insights these young people have regarding God’s character. Few things bring me more amazement of God’s goodness and glory than seeing Him work powerfully through young people. Samuel is likely no more than 4-5 years old, and we read **he** is ministering before the Lord. We will come to see that Samuel is an extraordinary man of God, and His influence on the future leadership of the Nation of Israel will be profound.

Today we covered the first of many characters that we’ll be learning about during this year – Hannah. As I mentioned earlier, one of the ways to keep this year’s study fresh is to examine how God is working through the characters’ lives. Hannah’s predicament of barrenness might not be yours, but her desperation for something God isn’t initially willing to grant her should ring true for most of us. Is it healing from a sickness or disease? – Comfort from a failed or failing marriage? – Restoration from a financial

crisis? You're crying out for God's help, but you're not getting the answer you're looking for.

Hannah let her emotions and understanding of how her life “**should be working**” rob her of any joy in life. Does that sound familiar? The pain and suffering we're incurring is clouding our ability to see the never-changing **goodness** and **love** of God. The key moment in our story today was when she surrendered **her** understanding of her situation to God and began to trust **Him** to take care of her problem. It was ONLY then that she found peace. Notice the peace she felt came **BEFORE** God allowed her to become pregnant. Her circumstances had not yet changed, but she took a step of faith and found something she would not have found had she not taken that step. What did Jesus so frequently tell people when He entered a scene? “Do not be afraid.” He could say this because when God is in our presence, there is nothing to fear. There is total peace. The circumstances may not have changed, but the mere fact we are now aware that God is in our presence, we no longer need to be afraid of the circumstances. *God is bigger than our circumstances.*

Isn't that comforting? It is if you **choose** to believe the **true** character of God. Have you been battling for what you think your life should be like, what your spouse should be like, what your child or children should be like, what job or profession you should have? Have you ever considered the thought that maybe what **you think should be** isn't what **God thinks should be**? I proposed to you at the beginning of this lecture that the number one challenge for all of us is coming to understand the truth of the depth of God's love for us. Since He knows everything, loves us more than we love ourselves, and wants nothing but good things for us, maybe we should give this “surrender thing” a try and see what God does? If things aren't going so

well, what do you have to lose? God is faithful, and He loves you. Why don't you give Him a chance to prove it? Romans 8:32 tells us, "*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*" God gave Himself to save you. He's alive! Give Him a chance to show you how much more He will freely give you. It may not be a baby, but it will no doubt be full of new life. Let's pray.