

Elkanah and Hannah: Being True to a Promise



SABBATH—AUGUST 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Samuel 1:1–2:26.

MEMORY VERSE: “There isn’t [is not] anyone holy like the Lord. There isn’t [is not] anyone except him. There isn’t [is not] any Rock like our God” (1 Samuel 2:2, NlrV).

USUALLY CHILDREN ARE KNOWN BY WHO THEIR PARENTS ARE. But, sometimes, parents are known by their children. Such is the case with Elkanah and Hannah. This couple did nothing unusual except have Samuel as their son. Elkanah and Hannah were not the first ones nor the last ones to have a child after a long, long period of worry and prayer. If it had not been for Samuel, these faithful¹ parents would have gone into history without being known, except by God and the angels. But their wonderful child Samuel caused the memory of Elkanah and Hannah to be written down in the Holy Bible. So this couple, though dead, still speaks to us today.

Most of the couples for study this quarter involve husbands who were leaders, prophets,² or rulers. Most of us are not leaders, prophets, or rulers. But we can all be like Elkanah and Hannah. We may not have a famous child. But we can show the same trust in God they did to bring the unusual out of the usual.

THIS WEEK'S STUDY UP CLOSE: Elkanah and Hannah were a faithful couple. The Lord did a wonderful work in their lives. What can we learn from their example?

1. faithful—being true and loyal; being someone that others can trust and count on.

2. prophets—men and women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

SUNDAY—AUGUST 19**ELKANAH (1 Samuel 1:1–8)**

What can we learn about the kind of person Elkanah is from 1 Samuel 1:1–8?

“The father of Samuel was Elkanah, a Levite.³ Elkanah lived at Ramah, in [the hill country of] Mount Ephraim. He was a person of wealth and influence.⁴ He was a kind husband. He was also a man who feared [obeyed] and honored God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times* (Oct. 27, 1881), vol. 7, no. 40.

Not much is said about Elkanah. He is somewhat in the background of this story. But a few points about him do come forth. Elkanah truly seemed to love Hannah. He did what he could to comfort her in her grief. He also seemed to be a faithful⁵ person who tried to obey the Lord.

“Elkanah was not needed to serve in the house of the Lord. But like many other Levites during the time of the judges⁶ (Judges 17:8, 9), Elkanah went up to the house of the Lord as a common Israelite. He brought his own gifts to offer the Lord. He did this to encourage his neighbors and set them a good example. Elkanah lived in the middle of an evil place. But Elkanah’s faith was very strong. He

was not like Hophni and Phinehas, who were evil priests. Instead, Elkanah was faithful in his worship. He was faithful in giving gifts to the Lord.”—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 455.

But the way Elkanah acted toward Hannah’s vow tells us just how unselfish he was. After all, that was Elkanah’s own son Hannah vowed to give to the Lord. Giving up his son certainly would not have been an easy thing for Elkanah to do.

How did Elkanah answer Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:23 when she told him her vow to the Lord? Did Elkanah have the right to refuse to let her keep her vow? Numbers 30:1–15.

Ask yourself, which parts of Elkanah’s life can I copy in my own life? How can I show those traits⁷ in the way I deal with others? How can I show those traits in my walk with the Lord?

MONDAY—AUGUST 20**THE MARRIAGE (1 Samuel 1:4–8)**

As we saw yesterday, Elkanah was clearly a faithful (true) follower of the Lord. But his faith did not stop Elkanah from marrying more than

3. Levite—a Hebrew from the tribe of Levi.

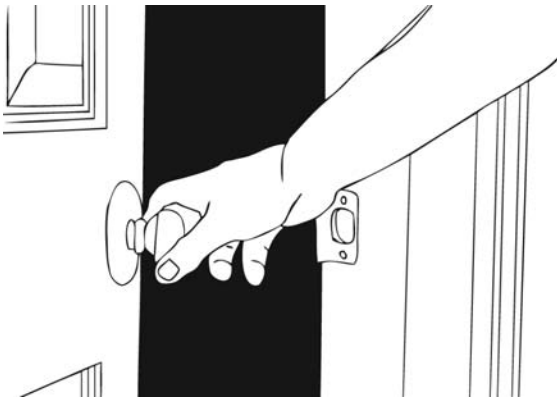
4. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.

5. faithful—being true and loyal; being someone that others can trust and count on.

6. time of the judges—the period of time that began at Joshua’s death and ended when Saul became the first king of Israel.

7. traits—qualities or features that make you who you are, such as being honest and faithful.

one wife. Just because people practiced polygamy⁸ did not make it right—or good. God has given us the best plan for marriage: one man and one wife. He knows what is best for us. When we fail to follow His plan, we open the door for trouble to come into our lives.



God's plan for marriage is for a man to have only one wife. When we fail to follow God's plan, we open the door to trouble.

Ellen G. White says that Hannah was Elkanah's first wife. When Hannah did not have children, Elkanah took another wife. "But Elkanah took this step . . . because he did not have enough faith in God. And the peace of the family was broken. Peninnah, the new wife, was jealous and narrow-minded.⁹ Peninnah carried herself with pride and rudeness. To Hannah, hope seemed crushed. To her life was a weary burden." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God*, p. 39.

What other examples can you find in the Bible of people who did not have enough faith and good judgment? How did they fail to show enough faith and good judgment? What were the results?

As we all should know, we have "forgiveness of sins in Jesus" (Colossians 1:14; read also Exodus 34:7; Psalm 130:4; Ephesians 1:7). Even our worst deeds have been forgiven. But the worse the deed is, the worse the results are. We may receive the promise of forgiveness for our sins. But the Bible does not promise freedom from the results of those sins. And even if we do something that is not against the law, we can still suffer from bitter results. Elkanah's case is proof that this is true. So, we must not fool ourselves into thinking our own faith is enough to save us from our mistakes. We need to let God guide us in all we do. Even the best among us will show poor judgment without His wisdom.

Think of a few examples in your own life in which you did not show enough faith or good judgment. How did this cause bad results? What lessons did you learn that could help you not make the same mistakes again?

8. polygamy—the practice of having more than one wife or husband at the same time.

9. narrow-minded—not keeping an open mind about the beliefs, ways of life, and so forth, of others; prejudiced; not liberal.

TUESDAY—AUGUST 21**HANNAH'S VOW (PROMISE)**
(1 Samuel 1:1, 6)

What were the two problems that Hannah faced in 1 Samuel 1:1, 6?

Hannah means something like “Someone who is graceful.”¹⁰ *Peninnah* means almost the same as “the fertile”¹¹ one.” How true sometimes names turn out to be! The Bible does not say that Elkanah loved Hannah more. But it does seem that way. But it is Peninnah who gave Elkanah children. Hannah’s problem is both the fact that she has no sons and that Peninnah has several.

Elkanah and his family traveled to the place of worship every year (1 Samuel 1:3). What festivals¹² in Exodus 23:14–19 must all Israelite males go to?

The most joyous of these was the Feast of Tabernacles.¹³ It is probably to the Feast of Tabernacles that Elkanah went. He took his family with him. But even if they went on this trip for personal reasons, the time should have been a happy one. But Hannah became very sad. Maybe this is because Peninnah enjoyed teasing Hannah about not having any children (1 Samuel 1:7).



Hannah was very sad during the feast and prayed to God for a son.

What was the nature of Hannah’s vow in 1 Samuel 1:10, 11? What gave her hope that the Lord heard her prayer?

The Bible makes it clear that God answered Hannah’s prayer (1 Samuel 1:19). Hannah then had a son. Hannah’s story shows us the powerful effect that feelings can have on the body. After Eli spoke with Hannah (1 Samuel 1:17), she changed how she felt and acted. Before, she would not eat, but now she ate. Before, she was looking sad, but now her face was full of joy. First Samuel 1:19 shows that Hannah and her husband rose early and worshiped the Lord. The next thing we are told, Hannah has a baby. Not just a child but a son, just like she asked the Lord to give her!

10. graceful—having beauty of form or movement; having a pleasing manner; having a sense of what is right or being kind to others.

11. fertile—able to have a lot of children.

12. festivals—days or times of feasting or celebrating.

13. Feast of Tabernacles—a time of joy that celebrated the harvest or gathering in of the grain, olives, and grapes at the end of the year. The word *tabernacles* refers to living during the feast in booths made of branches. This was a way of always remembering how the children of Israel once wandered in the wilderness before they had homes to live in.



God heard Hannah's prayer and gave her a son.

We might not always have such a clear answer to our prayers as Hannah did. But what Bible promises can you depend on that help you trust in the Lord's goodness and care? What promises in the Bible give you the kind of peace Hannah knew and felt in 1 Samuel 1:18?

WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 22

HANNAH, MOTHER IN ISRAEL (1 Samuel 1:20)

Hannah named her son Samuel. His name sounds like the Hebrew word for "God heard." But the meaning of the name Samuel is related to "asked of God." Hannah explains the name: " 'Because I asked the Lord for him' " (1 Samuel 1:20, NIV). Hannah did not want to go to the house of the

Lord until she could keep her vow (promise) and leave her son there. So, she waited until she had weaned¹⁴ him. Without modern refrigerators to keep milk fresh, this was perhaps as long as three years.

"From Samuel's earliest days, Hannah had taught her son to love and honor God. She taught him to know that he belonged to the Lord. . . . Hannah did not ask God to give worldly greatness to her son. But she prayed with her whole heart that Samuel might reach that greatness which heaven values. She prayed that he might honor God and bless his fellow men."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*,¹⁵ p. 572.



Hannah kept her promise to God. She took her son, Samuel, to the house of the Lord to serve God.

14. weaned—to get a baby or young animal, little by little, to stop drinking its mother's breast milk.

15. patriarchs and prophets—patriarchs were early Bible leaders, such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men and women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

After the child Samuel was born and weaned, Hannah kept her vow to the Lord and brought her son to Eli. Hannah expected Eli to remember the event that had taken place. At that time Eli had told her, without knowing why she prayed, “ ‘May the God of Israel grant [give] you what you have asked’ ” (1 Samuel 1:17, NIV). Now Hannah reminds Eli, “ ‘I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted [given] me what I asked of him’ ” (1 Samuel 1:27, NIV). How easy it might have been for Hannah to forget the vow she made to God. She could have made many excuses for not keeping the vow. After all, this was her only child!

What reasons could Hannah have used to make an excuse for not keeping the vow?

Read Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1–11. What does it tell us about the goodness of God? What important parts of the prayer mean the most to you right now in facing certain personal situations?¹⁶

THURSDAY—AUGUST 23

THE FAMILY LEGACY (GIFT) (1 Samuel 2:20, 21)

Hannah prayed for God to give her a son. Then Hannah made a vow (promise) to give her son to the Lord. And as we saw earlier, none of this could have happened if Elkanah had

not agreed. Clearly, Hannah told Elkanah what she vowed (promised). Elkanah, too, saw the miracle¹⁷ of the birth of their son. And as a man of God, Elkanah agreed to go along. What he did was proof of his faith too.

Elkanah’s words in 1 Samuel 1:23 have three important parts. Which words show his concern for the happiness of his wife? Which words show his concern for his son? Which words show his desire that he and his wife be faithful¹⁸ to the Lord?

Giving up the child would have been hard no matter what. But something else made it even harder to give up their son.

What kind of people does 1 Samuel 12:12–26 say that the boy Samuel would be serving under? What were these men like? How could Elkanah and Hannah have used this as another excuse not to fulfill the vow?

No matter what Elkanah and Hannah feared might happen, they kept their vow to God. Clearly they had to trust in the Lord. It might have been hard for them, but they did it anyway. The Lord rewarded their faith (1 Samuel 2:20). After leaving Samuel at the house of the Lord, Hannah gave birth to five more children (1 Samuel 2:21). The couple

16. situations—the way things are as a result of things that have happened.

17. miracle—an event or action that takes place only because God causes it to happen.

18. faithful—being true and loyal; being someone that others can trust and count on.

themselves no longer appear in the Bible. Their part in the story is over. But, of course, Samuel's story is just beginning. Through the faith of his parents, a great leader in Israel (Samuel) arose. Truly, Elkanah and Hannah are an example of the principle¹⁹ found in words written long after they were gone: " 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord' " for " 'their deeds [actions] will follow them' " (Revelation 14:13, NIV).

Were you to "die in the Lord" today, what deeds would follow you? What does your answer tell you about how you are living your life? What changes might you think about making?

FRIDAY—AUGUST 24

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, "Heaven's Estimate [Value] of Children," p. 279, in *The Adventist Home*.

"What a reward was Hannah's! And what hope her example gives us to be faithful [true]! There are opportunities²⁰ of great worth given to every mother. . . . If the mother fails in her duty to instruct, guide, and help her children do what is right, her children

will accept the evil and turn away from the good. Let every mother go often to her Saviour with the prayer, 'Teach us, how shall we order [train] the child, and what shall we do unto him?' " —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*,²¹ pp. 572, 573.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Elkanah and Hannah's story is a wonderful example of a faithful²² couple being rewarded for their trust in God. What about examples that show faithful people who do not seem to be rewarded now in any positive (good) way? Why do you think this is so? As a class, talk about such examples. What answers do you have?

❷ So many people have been so terribly damaged (hurt) by the way their parents raised them. What promises and hope can you offer to someone who struggles to overcome the damage done to him or her in childhood?

❸ We all know stories of faithful parents who do their best to raise their children right but suffer terribly when those children leave the faith. Talk honestly about this situation.²³ What hope can you share with one another?

19. principle—a basic rule or standard of good behavior.

20. opportunities—times or occasions that are right for doing things.

21. patriarchs and prophets—patriarchs were early Bible leaders, such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men and women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

22. faithful—being true and loyal; being someone that others can trust and count on.

23. situation—the way things are as a result of things that have happened.