



CAPITOL COMMISSION

God's Mighty Power in Distress (I Samuel 1)

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Capitol Commission state directors are missionaries who teach weekly verse-by-verse Bible studies for legislators, lobbyists, and staff members. These Bible studies are hand-distributed to each legislative office, emailed, and made available throughout the Capitol community. The love and grace of God compels us to proclaim the truth of the Gospel with a heartfelt compassion for the Capitol community, to faithfully teach and apply the Word of God, and it is our desire to build meaningful relationships that bear fruit for an eternity to come.

With the Bible as our foundation and authority, the mission of Capitol Commission is obedience to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) within the Capitol communities of the world. We are not a lobbying group attempting to garner votes or reform society. Our mandate is to see the hearts and lives of elected officials transformed with the Word of God. Capitol Commission is a ministry of the church seeking to proclaim the gospel message, and to help believers mature through the verse-by-verse teaching of Scripture. In the Bible, we see God's great love for the world, especially for those who have been placed in authority. This is the foundation for our ministry to you.

The church is instructed to submit and to honor government leaders (Rom 13:1-7), and as a matter of first importance, to pray for their salvation (1 Tim 2:1-4). Our desire is witness God transform the hearts and lives of elected officials, lobbyists, and staff members. We apply this mandate to four major areas of making disciples: (1) *evangelize* those who have not experienced saving faith in Jesus Christ; (2) *establish* those who desire to grow in their faith and knowledge of Scripture; (3) *equip* those called to spiritual leadership; and, (4) *encourage* churches to participate with us in ministry.

Introduction to I Samuel

The two books of Samuel were originally one in the Hebrew Bible. The division between them is the result of the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint). The Septuagint divided the two books of Samuel and the two books of Kings into four parts, which were respectively called First, Second, Third, and Fourth Kings. Therefore, the King James Version employs the subtitle First and Second Kings for the two books of Samuel.

Although the prophet Samuel substantially wrote the material for the two books bearing his name, there is also composition of many events following his death. Apparently, these compositions were based upon a number of documents since portions of the books of Chronicles demonstrate an almost word-for-word correspondence with the record in the books of Samuel (cf. 1 Chron 29:29). Of course, such compiling does not negate the inspiration of the books of Samuel because the Holy Spirit guided the arrangement of the material to produce an inerrant record (cf. Luke 1:1-4).

Israel's history may be divided into three primary periods: (1) theocracy: government by God through leaders such as Moses and the judges; (2) monarchy: government by kings; and, (3) dependency: government by foreigners. First Samuel is important historically because it records the transition from theocracy to monarchy. First Samuel 1—7 records the end of the period of the judges, with particular biographical attention upon Eli and Samuel. First Samuel 8—31 records the establishment of the monarchy, and groups the material biographically upon Saul and David. First Samuel records the difficult transition from the prior established government to a new organization ruled by a king, and the disappointment of this transition to the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 8:5-6, 10-18, 22).

INABILITY PRIOR TO BLESSING

The history of the period of the judges continues into the first section of the narrative. Eli, the high priest, will die in old age. His lineage will be rejected because his sons are wicked. God will, therefore, appoint a new leader of His people. The narrative is focused upon the last judge, Samuel, and his family, which are a stark contrast to Eli and his family.

(1:1-8) The narrative begins with Hannah's longing for a son. The account of her disappointment and distress is in contrast to the festive atmosphere of the religious celebration. Hannah entered the Tabernacle to outpour her soul to God. Although Hannah had nearly everything an 1100 BC wife could desire (1:1-3, 5, 8), she did not have any children. Moreover, she shared Elkanah with Peninnah,¹ who "would provoke her bitterly to irritate her."

... OUR INABILITY IS OFTEN THE PRELUDE TO A MIGHTY WORK OF GOD IN OUR LIVES.

Hannah was not the only barren wife in Scripture. Sarah (Gen 11:30), Rachel (29:31—30:24), Manoah's wife (Judg 13:2), and Elizabeth (Luke 1:7) were barren women. Nevertheless, these women were blessed with children that God used mightily in the accomplishing of his salvific purposes. It is noteworthy that man's inability often becomes the basis for God to demonstrate his omnipotence. Helplessness and hopelessness do not prevent the mighty power of God, but very often this incapacity becomes the basis for God to outpour His blessing. It is entirely prudent to

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know where God often delights to demonstrate His power. Hannah's disappointment and distress was certainly not delightful—nor are difficulties for God's people in the present—but it is crucial not to let distress become overwhelming and unbearable because our inability is often the prelude to a mighty work of God in our lives. The circumstance of being without ability or hope can be favorable because it indicates the possibility of God's intervention in a manner more significant than can be imagined (cf. Phil 1:12).²

CAPABILITY AFTER THE BLESSING

(1:9-20) Whereas difficulties sometimes cause God's people to protest wrongly and sinfully against Him, the response of Hannah to Peninnah's provocation was humble and dependent prayer to God. Hannah is a remarkable example to believers that life's difficulties should not cause us to abandon faith in God or to question His actions, but rather to allow our distress to bring us closer to God. Hannah was "greatly distressed" and cried to God to alleviate her distress (cf. Ps 6:8). Hannah prayed to the "LORD of hosts," which indicates her trust in God's sovereignty over "every force or army, heavenly, cosmic and earthly."³ Hannah demonstrated the proper relation to the Lord as one of complete subjection.

Eli mistook her earnest and devoted prayer as drunkenness and therefore rebuked Hannah. Hannah replied that all she had outpoured was her soul. The narrative indicates the spiritual wantonness of Israel's worship. Evidently, drunkenness was an occurrence at the Tabernacle (cf. 1 Cor 11:21), which was characteristic of Canaanite worship and evidently influenced Israel's practice. The narrative also reveals Eli's lack of spiritual sensitivity to Hannah's sorrow. Hannah was "oppressed in spirit," but Eli could not recognize it. Eli's lack of spiritual maturity is also evident in his failure as a parent (1 Sam 2:12-17). Hannah demonstrated the spiritual maturity that Eli should have demonstrated as a parent.

Hannah's prayer is noteworthy for her liberty. There is nothing external or formal about her prayer. Hannah certainly knew the freedom to outpour her soul to God. "I cry aloud with my voice to the LORD; I make supplication with my voice to the LORD. I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare my trouble before Him. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, You knew my path" (Ps 142:1-3a). Hannah teaches believers how to have communion with God. Outpouring one's soul to God will not make Him uncomfortable, but believers should recognize the reality that God allows His people to outpour their distresses to Him, and with tears and intense sobbing if necessary. Indeed, spiritual victory was realized through the voice of her weeping (cf. Ps 6:8).

Eli's accusation of Hannah (1 Sam 1:14) became a benediction (1:17). Hannah knew God heard her prayer, and returned to her family from the Tabernacle (1:18). God indeed answered Hannah's prayer with the birth of Samuel (1:19-20).

... GOD ALLOWS HIS PEOPLE TO OUTPOUR THEIR
DISTRESSES TO HIM. ...

(1:21-28) The remainder of chapter 1 is focused upon the fulfillment of Hannah's vow (1:11). Knowing a mother's love for her child, Elkanah was hesitant (1:23). Hannah was determined to give to the Lord what He had given in answer to her prayer. Hannah is an example that God's gifts should be given to Him. Four times in her dedication (1:27-28), Hannah used a form of the Hebrew root שָׁאַל (*shā'al*, "to ask") which would be translated as follows: "For this boy I prayed, and the LORD has given me my *asking* which I *asked* of Him. 'So I have also dedicated what was *asked* to the LORD; as long as He lives he is *asked* to the LORD" (cf. asking in Matt 7:7 and Jas 4:2-3).

Her words recall Eli's benediction: "may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him" (1:17). Even the naming of Samuel ("Because I have asked him of the LORD") is a wordplay of this Hebrew root. Hannah recalled God's blessing and then returned Samuel to the LORD. Hannah is an example of receiving God's grace, and with such blessing, to have the capability of returning to God the gifts that He gives. Certainly, she is an example of praying not merely for herself, but with entire commitment to God for everything in life. What Hannah desired most from the Lord, she was willing to give to Him. God's blessing provides the capability of returning to Him what we receive by His grace to be used for His glory. It is more important that God's gifts be His than ours. Do we regard God's blessings as believers and His grace towards our nation to be opportunities to glorify Him? As believers, we give what we cannot keep to retain what can never be taken from us.

¹ The will of God for marriage is a monogamous relationship between a man and a woman (Gen 2:23-25; Prov 31:3, 10-31; Mal 2:14, 16; Matt 19:4-6, 8-9; Mark 10:5-9; Rom 7:2; 1 Tim 3:2, 12; Heb 13:4). The first indication of disobedience to God's will is Lamech (Gen 4:19). With the exception of the kings of Israel and Judah, there are approximately 20 indications of polygamous marriages in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, monogamous marriage is the biblical standard (Prov 5:15-23; Songs). The opening chapter of I Samuel does not reprove Elkanah for his polygamous marriage, but the reader is expected to know that the practice was contrary to the morality and will of God. Elkanah's desire for an heir may have been the reason for his second wife since this was a serious matter in the Ancient Near East. With regard to marriage and sexual relations, the biblical characters often reflected the culture of their time in the same manner as many today who profess faith in Jesus Christ reflect the marital and sexual practices of the culture.

² Robert D. Bergen wrote, "To the reader familiar with the Torah the connection [barrenness] is a favorable one, for it suggests the possibility—later realized—that a child of great significance to God's kingdom may ultimately result" (*1, 2 Samuel* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996] 65).

³ R. Laird Harris, et al., eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 2:750.