

Elkanah *and* Hannah: Fulfilling a VOW



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Sam. 1:1–2:26.*

Memory Text: “There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God” (*1 Samuel 2:2*).

Usually children are known by who their parents are; sometimes, though, parents are known by their children. Such is the case with Elkanah and Hannah. This couple did nothing extraordinary except create Samuel. They were neither the first ones nor the last ones to acquire a child after a prolonged period of anxiety and prayer. Were it not for the child, these two—however faithful to the Lord—most likely would have passed away into obscurity, known now only to God and the angels. But the remarkable child Samuel caused the memory of Elkanah and Hannah to be preserved in the sacred Scriptures, and so this couple, though dead, still speak to us today.

Most of the couples for study this quarter involve husbands who were either patriarchs, prophets, or rulers, whom most of us aren't. But we can all be like Elkanah and Hannah. We may not have as distinguished a child, but we can show the same dedication and thus perhaps bring the extraordinary out of the ordinary.

The Week at a Glance: We can find in the story of Elkanah and Hannah a faithful couple whom the Lord was able to use in a remarkable way. What can we learn from their example?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 25.*

Elkanah

Read 1 Samuel 1. From what’s found in this text, what can we gather about the character of Elkanah?

“The father of Samuel was Elkanah, a Levite, who dwelt at Ramah, in Mount Ephraim. He was a person of wealth and influence, a kind husband, and a man who feared and revered God.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*[®] (Oct. 27, 1881), vol. 7, no. 40.

Though not much is said about Elkanah, and he’s somewhat in the background of this story, a few points do emerge. He truly seemed to love Hannah and did what he could to console her in her grief. He also seemed to be a devout person, one who sought to obey the Lord.

“Although his services were not required at the sanctuary, yet, like many another Levite during the period of the judges (*Judges 17:8, 9*), Elkanah went up as a common Israelite with his own sacrifices to encourage his neighbors and set them a good example. Though he lived in the midst of an evil environment, his spirituality was evidently at a high level. Even though Hophni and Phinehas were corrupt, Elkanah was faithful in his worship and in the offering of his sacrifices.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 455.

Perhaps what’s most impressive about Elkanah was in regard to Hannah’s vow. After all, that was his own son she was giving to the Lord. It certainly wouldn’t have been an easy thing for him to do, as well.

How did Elkanah respond to Hannah’s vow before the Lord? Did he have the right to void that vow? See *Num. 30:1–15*.

Ask yourself, What aspects of Elkanah’s character could I better emulate in my own personal relations and in my relationship with the Lord?

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

▶ **Key Text:** *1 Samuel 2:2*

▶ **Teach the Class to:**

Know: God listens to and answers prayer.

Feel: The joy in keeping their vow to the Lord.

Do: Dedicate their children anew to the Lord.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

I. Asking and Believing (*1 Sam. 1:1–19*)

A The Bible lists Hannah’s name before Penninah’s, implying she was the first wife; her childlessness most likely motivated a second marriage, fomenting strife. What practices threaten peace in modern marriages?

B Elkanah asks, “Hannah, why weepst thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am I not better to thee than ten sons?” (*1 Sam. 1:8*). His last question offers dubious comfort, especially since by taking a second wife he makes it clear to Hannah that her love is obviously not enough for him! How can we build up love instead of tearing it down?

II. Promising and Receiving (*1 Sam. 1:19–23, Heb. 4:16*)

A Hannah doesn’t wallow in self-pity. She finds refuge in the sanctuary, where Eli blesses her with “May the God of Israel grant thee thy petition” (*1 Sam. 1:17*). Why does Hannah’s prayer give us hope that Jesus answers the petitions we bring Him?

B Hannah recognized that her gift to God was His gift to her. What gifts has God given you? How have you given them back to Him?

III. Fulfilling the Vow (*1 Sam. 1:24–2:21, Isa. 64:6*)

A Wearing the priestly ephod at such a young age is a testament to Samuel’s upbringing. What can we learn from Elkanah and Hannah about rearing children?

B Each year, Hannah sews a garment and takes it to her son in the temple. Jesus brings us the beautiful garment of His character. What are the “filthy rags” that He wants to rid us of first?

▶ **Summary:** The Lord honors the prayer of faith. Children are His gift to us.

The Marriage

As we saw yesterday, Elkanah was apparently a faithful follower of the Lord. Yet, that faithfulness didn't prevent him from deviating from God's ideal in marriage, one man and one wife. That polygamy was permitted didn't make it right—or good. God has given us an ideal because He knows what's best for us. When we depart from it, no good can arise.

According to Ellen White, Hannah was Elkanah's first wife. When she didn't produce offspring, he took another wife. "But this step, prompted by a lack of faith in God, did not bring happiness. Sons and daughters were added to the household; but the joy and beauty of God's sacred institution had been marred and the peace of the family was broken. Peninnah, the new wife, was jealous and narrow-minded, and she bore herself with pride and insolence. To Hannah, hope seemed crushed and life a weary burden. . . ."—Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God*, p. 39.

What examples of lapses of faith and judgment can you find in other Bible "heroes"? What were those lapses, and what were the consequences?

As we all should know, thanks to Jesus, in whom we have "forgiveness of sins" (*Col. 1:14; see also Exod. 34:7, Ps. 130:4, Eph. 1:7*), even our worst deeds have been atoned for. But the worse the deed, the worse the consequences, usually. We might be given the promise of forgiveness for our sins, but the Bible doesn't promise freedom from the immediate consequences of those sins. And even, as in the case of Elkanah, if we do something that isn't expressly forbidden, we can still reap bitter consequences by deviating from principle. Thus, we mustn't fool ourselves with our own "piety" and "faithfulness." Even the best among us are not immune to lapses in faith and good judgment.

Think of a few examples in your own life in which lack of faith or a simple lapse of good judgment brought choices that reaped bad consequences. What lessons did you learn that could help you from making the same mistakes again?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners' experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

Elkanah and Hannah lived in quiet consecration to God. From the standpoint of most observers, they would have been deemed decent but nondescript people. But their dedication to God moved them into circumstances that enabled them to become parents of one of the noblest men this world has ever seen—a man who helped Israel regain and maintain its corporate identity as God's chosen people. One thing is clear from their story: We are not to despise our ordinary talents and opportunities or underestimate what God can do through us to advance His kingdom if we are faithful to Him.

Consider This: Think of someone (outside your family) who made a strikingly positive difference in your life. What qualities did they possess, and what virtues did they exercise that favorably influenced you?


► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *What do I need to know from God's Word?*

Bible Commentary

I. Elkanah

Elkanah was a Kohathite of the Levites. The Kohathites served as judges and rulers. They were bearers of the ark, keepers of the sacred treasures, and singers in the sanctuary (*Num. 3:27–32; 1 Sam. 1:1; 1 Chron. 6:22–27, 34; 2 Chron. 20:19–22*). But in Elkanah's day the Kohathites had fallen into relative obscurity because of the irreligious domination of high priest Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, whom God called sons of Belial (*1 Sam. 2:12*). But Elkanah remained faithful in the midst of this apostasy. He made

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Hannah's Vow

What were the two problems that Hannah faced? *1 Sam. 1:1, 6.*

Hannah means something like “the graceful one,” and *Peninnah* is similar to “the fertile one.” How prophetic sometimes names turn out to be! The Bible does not say that Elkanah loved Hannah more, but we do get that impression. However, it is Peninnah who provided him with children. Hannah’s problem is not only that she has no sons but that Peninnah has several.

Elkanah and his family journeyed to the sanctuary annually (*1 Sam. 1:3*). **What festivals were all Israelite males required to attend?** *Exod. 23:14–19.*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The most festive of these was the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Ingathering, and it is probably to this that Elkanah took his family with him. But even if it was a personal family pilgrimage, it would have been a happy occasion. In spite of all the joy and gaiety, or maybe because of it, Hannah became despondent. More so because Peninnah took pleasure in provoking her (*1 Sam. 1:7*).

What was the nature of Hannah’s vow? **What assurance did she have that the Lord heard her prayer?**

The Bible makes it clear that God intervened (*1 Sam. 1:19*), and Hannah conceived a son. At the same time, too, the influence of emotions on the body can be powerful. After Eli spoke with her (*vs. 17*), there was a change in her whole demeanor. Whereas before she refused to eat, now she ate; whereas before she looked sad, now her countenance was changed. Verse 19 states that they, meaning at least her and her husband, rose up early and worshiped before the Lord. The next thing we are told, she conceives, and not just a child but a male, as well.

We might not always have such a clear answer to our prayers, but what Bible promises can you lean on that help you trust in the Lord’s goodness and care, promises that should give you the kind of peace Hannah experienced?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

a yearly visit to worship and sacrifice to the Lord at Shiloh.

In those days of spiritual darkness, it was not unusual for a man to have two wives as Elkanah did. Elkanah was good to his family but was unable to assuage the grief of his godly wife Hannah over her barrenness (*1 Sam. 1:4–8*).

II. The Marriage


Elkanah would have done well to consider the heartbreak and turmoil that Abraham brought on himself and his household by marrying Hagar, his wife Sarah's servant, in order to have a child (*Genesis 16*). This was a deviation from God's original law of marriage (*Gen. 2:18–24; Mal. 2:14, 15*). God's Word presents an account of the failings of even His finest followers, not to discredit them or to condone their failings but to warn all future generations that sin is not excusable in anyone (*see 1 Cor. 10:11–14*). Faithfulness in some aspects of life does not atone for departure from God's instruction in other particulars. Elkanah's bigamy tarnished his record and blighted the happiness of everyone in his household—particularly that of Hannah, his first wife, who, unlike her rival Peninnah, was a truly consecrated woman. Peninnah had a fertile womb but a barren heart, while it was the converse with Hannah.

Consider This: What are the results of faithful adherence to the Word of God? (*Deut. 28:1–14, Prov. 28:20, Matt. 24:45–47, Rev. 2:10*). What are the results of ignoring God's instructions (*Deut. 28:15–37, Matt. 25:24–30*)?

III. Hannah's Vow

What kept the grieving Hannah from becoming resentful and vindictive in her relations with Peninnah, who mocked Hannah for her infertility and gloried in her own fruitfulness in childbearing? Hannah was a woman of prayer. She learned to roll her burden on the Lord and specifically pour out her woes and longings into the ear of the only One who could really do anything about her plight (*see Ps. 37:1–7, Rom. 5:5, 8:24*).

Hannah prayed for a son, not merely for her own gratification but to bring a godly child into the world who would be a blessing to God's cause. She renounced all selfish claims on the child that she hoped to bear (*1 Sam. 1:11*).

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Hannah, Mother in Israel

Hannah named her son Samuel, which sounds like the Hebrew for “God heard” but which is related to “asked of God.” Hannah explains the name: “ ‘Because I asked the Lord for him’ ” (*1 Sam. 1:20, NIV*). Not wishing to go to the tabernacle until she could carry out her vow and leave her son there, she waited until she had weaned him. In the absence of refrigeration to keep milk fresh, this was perhaps as long as three years.

“From the earliest dawn of intellect [Hannah] had taught her son to love and reverence God and to regard himself as the Lord’s. By every familiar object surrounding him she had sought to lead his thoughts up to the Creator. When separated from her child, the faithful mother’s solicitude did not cease. Every day he was the subject of her prayers. Every year she made, with her own hands, a robe of service for him; and as she went up with her husband to worship at Shiloh, she gave the child this reminder of her love. Every fiber of the little garment had been woven with a prayer that he might be pure, noble, and true. She did not ask for her son worldly greatness, but she earnestly pleaded that he might attain that greatness which Heaven values—that he might honor God and bless his fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 572.

After the child was born and weaned, Hannah fulfilled her vow to the Lord and brought him to Eli. Hannah expected Eli, with a little prompting, to remember the incident that had taken place. At that time Eli had told her, without knowing her petition, “ ‘May the God of Israel grant you what you have asked’ ” (*1 Sam. 1:17, NIV*). Now Hannah reminds him, “ ‘I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him’ ” (*vs. 27, NIV*). How easy it might have been for her to forget the vow, to rationalize away all the reasons for fulfilling it. After all, this was her only child!

What reasons could Hannah have used to justify not fulfilling the vow?

Read Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1–11. What does it tell us about the nature and character of God? What specific elements mean the most to you right now, in whatever personal situations you are facing? How can you make these words your own?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: How can we deal with life's cruel disappointments in a way that can turn them from stumbling blocks into stepping stones for the development of our character and faith? (*Ps. 119:67–71; Rom. 5:1–5; 2 Cor. 4:17, 18; 12:8–10; Heb. 12:11; 1 Pet. 4:12–19*).

IV. Hannah, Mother in Israel

God graciously answered Hannah's petition for a son. Her heart must have ached as she relinquished little Samuel, after weaning him, to the care of Eli at the temple. Eli was not an exemplary father, and her son would be away from all the gracious, supportive influences of home. But with her husband's full support, Hannah remained true to her vow. She had dedicated Samuel to the Lord in this specific way and would not retract her word, despite the poignant claims of maternal love (*1 Sam. 1:19–28*).

Under the Spirit's inspiration, Hannah sang a hymn of praise and prophetic insight into the future triumph of God's cause—and this at a time when the word of the Lord was scarce, and there was no open vision (*1 Sam. 2:1–11, 3:1*). She could hardly have foreseen how vital a role Samuel would have in preserving the heritage of Israel and reversing the inroads of apostasy (*see 1 Samuel 7*). Eli truly appreciated Samuel and fostered early his calling to the priesthood (*1 Sam. 2:18, 26; 3:1–18*).

Consider This: Hannah and Elkanah could not have had Samuel in their home for much more than three years, and yet, how enduring was their parental influence! What does this tell us about the importance of the spiritual and emotional influences of home life and the importance of laying the right foundation at the beginning of a child's life, as well as prenatally? (*See Deut. 6:4–9, Luke 1:13–17, Eph. 6:4, 2 Tim. 3:15*).


Identify basic elements that make for a wholesome family life.

► STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

Thought Questions:

What values did Hannah and Elkanah have that distinguished them from

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The Family Legacy

As we saw earlier, none of this could have happened had not Elkanah agreed. Hannah, obviously, told him what she vowed; he, too, was witness to the miracle and, as a man of God, agreed to go along. That he did was a testimony to his faith, as well.

Read again 1 Samuel 1:23. There are three elements to Elkanah’s words. What words show his concern for the happiness of his wife? What words show his concern for his son? What words show his desire that they be faithful to the Lord?

While giving up the child would have been hard in the best of circumstances, another element that only complicated things, making the decision even harder to fulfill, enters into the picture.

Read 1 Samuel 2:12–26. What kind of moral environment was Samuel going to be subjected to? How could this have been used as another reason not to fulfill the vow?

Regardless of that problem, this faithful husband and wife went ahead and gave the child over. Obviously they had to trust in the Lord, no matter how hard it might have been at times. The Lord rewarded that faithfulness (*see 1 Sam. 2:20*). After leaving Samuel at the tabernacle, Hannah gave birth to five more children (*1 Sam. 2:21*). The couple themselves do not appear again in the Bible. As far as they are concerned, the story is over. But, of course, it’s not. Through their faithfulness a great leader in Israel arose. Truly they are an example of the principle found in words written long after they were gone: “ ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord’ ” for “ ‘their deeds will follow them’ ” (*Rev. 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’re living your life? What changes might you consider making?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

the Hebrew people in their day? Review the spiritual condition of Israel at that time (*Judg. 21:25; 1 Sam. 2:17, 22–24, 29; 3:1, 11–14; 4:21, 22*). There were two primary categories of people in those days of spiritual dearth—the immoral and the demoralized. But then there was a third group, relatively small—the consecrated. How were they able to maintain their devotion to God amid such widespread apostasy? (*1 Sam. 12:20–25; Psalms 118; 125; Rom. 8:31–39; 12:1, 2; Titus 2:11–14*).

Application Question:

Based on the thought questions above, what can you do to sharpen spiritual discernment in our world today? (*1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 1:18–20; 5:17; 1 John 5:19, 20*).

Witnessing

“The greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the world is a well-ordered, well-disciplined family. This will recommend the truth as nothing else can.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 32.

Consider This: How can even a single person benefit from this counsel? (*Psalms 133, Eph. 4:1–18*).

► STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: Review Hannah and Elkanah’s story. List five characteristics that made them stand as a bulwark against spiritual darkness and discouragement. Parallel that list with specific examples of their actions that demonstrate each of these characteristics.

What can keep you from being polluted by the godless mores of contemporary culture?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Heaven’s Estimate of Children,” p. 279, in *The Adventist Home*.

“What a reward was Hannah’s! and what an encouragement to faithfulness is her example! There are opportunities of inestimable worth, interests infinitely precious, committed to every mother. The humble round of duties which women have come to regard as a wearisome task should be looked upon as a grand and noble work. It is the mother’s privilege to bless the world by her influence, and in doing this she will bring joy to her own heart. She may make straight paths for the feet of her children, through sunshine and shadow, to the glorious heights above. But it is only when she seeks, in her own life, to follow the teachings of Christ that the mother can hope to form the character of her children after the divine pattern. The world teems with corrupting influences. Fashion and custom exert a strong power over the young. If the mother fails in her duty to instruct, guide, and restrain, her children will naturally accept the evil, and turn from the good. Let every mother go often to her Saviour with the prayer, ‘Teach us, how shall we order the child, and what shall we do unto him?’ ”
—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 572, 573.

Discussion Questions:

- ① This story is a nice example of a faithful couple being rewarded for their fidelity. What about cases in which, it seems, faithful people aren’t rewarded, at least now in what appears to be in any tangible way? As a class, talk about such cases. What answers do you have?
- ② So many people have been so terribly damaged by a poor upbringing. What promises and hope can you offer to someone who struggles in overcoming the damage done to them in childhood?
- ③ We all know stories of faithful parents who, though doing their best to raise their children right, suffer terribly when those children leave the faith. Talk frankly about this situation. What encouragement and hope can you share with each other?

Summary: Common people were made uncommon by their dedication to God. Hannah’s vow was unusual, but she carried it out, and God blessed her and her husband, Elkanah, for it.