
Hannah's Prayer and God's Big Answer

DARRELL DELANEY

Sometimes the deepest prayers are the ones nobody hears but God. A woman sits in a crowded room carrying years of disappointment, misunderstanding, and grief. Her lips move, but no sound comes out. The people around her do not get it; one of them even gets it wrong; but heaven is not confused. God listens to the kind of prayer that rises out of pain too deep for polished words. Today on *Groundwork*, we begin our series on 1 Samuel by meeting Hannah, a woman whose sorrow became a song and whose private prayer becomes part of God's public plan for his people. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are beginning a new, seven-part series on the book of 1 Samuel; and there are a lot of things going on in this book. This book is full of unforgettable people, dramatic turning points, and some stories that seem pretty rough, but this is one of the books of the Bible that remind us that God does not need us to have an airbrushed or perfect life, but he can still work in spite of all the things that are happening.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is exactly right. God works through our imperfections...through our brokenness...for his larger purpose. Speaking of brokenness, we can remind our listeners and ourselves kind of where 1 and 2 Samuel are situated. Most scholars think 1 and 2 Samuel were originally one book that then got broken up into two; but it is following, Darrell, the chaotic years that are recorded in the book of Judges, where everybody did what was right in their own eyes. Nobody was even trying to follow God very much. God did raise up some memorable judges: Samson and Gideon and Deborah and others, but it was a chaotic period, and it revealed that Israel, as God's covenant people, needed some stable leadership, and so, 1 and 2 Samuel...these books are like the bridge from that chaos of Judges to the unified kingdom under David, where we will end at the end of 2 Samuel. This series is just on 1 Samuel for now, but that is sort of the longer look.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, it is good to understand where we are in Israel's history, Scott; and we've got this brokenness and this drama that is happening that they are living in instability, and it takes a while, in this book, even, for them to become stable. So, we will see longing; we will see rivalry; we will see political chaos and failure; we will see spiritual drift and leadership breakdown; and the deep need for God to intervene. We will see that stuff, and we will see them transition from that period of Judges to the rise of the kingship in Israel. So, we will see the prophets; we will see the priests and kings, all in motion; and underneath that, God is at work, even though he is not mentioned very much in the book.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, along the way, we are going to meet characters named Hannah, Eli, Samuel, Saul eventually in this series, Jonathan, David...more; again, that transition from the Judges to the kingship of Israel. So, you know, that is a good word for us right away, because 1 Samuel opens, not in a palace, not on a battlefield, not in the center of national politics; it opens more quietly than that, Darrell. It opens in the pain of one woman

and one family; and you know, that is often kind of where God starts. You know, we tend to look for God in the loud places, but he often begins in the quiet ache of someone, an ache that no one else can fully see.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, let's begin with the opening verses of Chapter 1 of 1 Samuel. It says: There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ²He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

SCOTT HOEZEE

³Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord. ⁴Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. ⁶Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. ⁷This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. ⁸Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, this is painful right off the bat here. There is a lot of family tension; there is repeated grief and the kind of suffering that you see that does not pass very quickly. It says the Lord closed Hannah's womb. She has no children. In that time and culture, it was a humiliation; it was a disgrace; and there was a lot of shame around barrenness—not being able to provide your family with an heir—the social shame; and then, Peninnah rubs it in and makes it even worse.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; that is just mean, but people are mean sometimes. Elkanah seems like a good guy. I mean, he means well: Don't I mean more to you than tens sons? And he would give her even more food than he gave Peninnah and her sons, because he loved her. He means well, but her heart is broken; and although she no doubt loves Elkanah, and is so glad he loves her, he could not quite substitute for the child that Hannah wanted to bear. But it is interesting to note, too, Darrell, that Hannah's suffering as it is detailed here is often taking place in a worship setting. They go to Shiloh, which at some point had become sort of the spiritual hub of Israel at that time; long before Jerusalem became the center of everything. So, she comes into worship, but you know, I would often say to people when I was a preacher: You don't have to hang your pain up with your coat in the church narthex or lobby. Don't hang your pain up with your coat. Bring your pain in. God is here to receive it, and that is what he does with Hannah in this worship space of the temple at Shiloh.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is really beautiful to see the fact that she is bringing her problems, her faith, and her issues to God; not sugarcoating it, not minimizing it; and I think that if you are listening today and you have these issues that are going on in your life, bringing them into worship is a good thing, because God cares; God sees; and God understands. So, Hannah is having this issue that is going on for years and years and is not stopping; and she is continuing to bring it to God. Even though Elkanah tries his best to comfort her, his love is not enough to remove her suffering.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, that is why this beginning of 1 Samuel matters so much, because before 1 Samuel becomes a story *about* Samuel the prophet, and then later Saul the king and David the anointed one and king, it is first a story about a woman in agony and the God who sees her; because this, then, really, Darrell, is kind of where redemption begins; and as you just said, this is a word for all of us, that God sees our pain, he wants us to be honest with him about our pain; he wants us to lay it before him and not hide it, or not, you know, as a church sign I once saw said: Put on a happy faith. No; God does not want you to put on a happy faith if you are

unhappy. Come before God, lament, express your sorrow; because God is going to be closer to your anguish than maybe you think.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and the fact that God does not change in character and the fact that he sees her, we know that he sees us in our troubles and our sorrows and in our pain as well; and God does not explain them away; he does not minimize them; he actually invites us to bring them in.

Well, in just a moment, we are going to watch Hannah take that pain and pour it out before the Lord in one of the most moving prayers of all of scripture. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And, Darrell, in the first part of this episode, we saw Hannah's anguish at not being able to have children; how Elkanah's other wife just really needled her about it and made her feel horrible, to the point of weeping. Elkanah tried to comfort her, but he just could not quite reach her pain. But now, we are going to turn to 1 Samuel 1:9-20. They are back at Shiloh, at the temple:

Once they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. ¹⁰In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. ¹¹And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head." ¹²As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."

DARRELL DELANEY

¹⁵"Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. ¹⁶Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief." ¹⁷Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." ¹⁸She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast. ¹⁹Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. ²⁰So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there we are; and again, you know, Hannah is not praying some neat little church prayer here. This isn't some nice, you know, sweetened up bit of piety. She is laying it out before God from her deep, deep well of the anguish that she is carrying in her heart. And you know, even she describes it as: I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. That is a vivid, vivid image. She is not performing; she is not pretending; she is just emptying herself out before God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and notice too, she calls on him as the Lord Almighty, and that is one of the first times in scripture that that title comes up—the Lord Almighty. Hannah is in deep pain, but she is bringing her pain to the God who rules over all things; and so, it is really powerful for us to understand that God is not intimidated by big emotions in prayers. I mean, bitter tears do not scare off our God. I am so glad to hear that, that trembling

prayers don't disqualify us and we don't need to sound strong. We can bring our heartbreaking moments right before him, and God will understand.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; you don't have to sound strong in order to be before the Lord. You know, sometimes maybe as pastors we have even heard this. People have maybe stopped coming to church and when we sort of say why, they say: Well, you know, kind of going through a rough time. Once I get my act together, I will come back to church. It is like: No, no, no, no; it is like saying, you know: Yes, my appendix might burst, but once I get myself back to health, I will check myself in the hospital. No, no, no; you go to hospital when you are sick, you go to church when you are in need; and you don't hide it. As you just said, Darrell, God isn't intimidated by even our most intense emotions. So, the Lord understands; but then, we see once again, Darrell, that the men in this story just are not coming off that great. Elkanah was kind to say: Hey, I should be worth more to you than ten sons. If Hannah were honest, she would say: "No; you are actually not! I would rather have ten sons." Now, here is Eli, kind of a heartbreaking moment; he sees her praying, and maybe... You know, these days, I think, you know, people sometimes pray silently. We are kind of used to it, but maybe back then it wasn't so usual just to see somebody praying quietly, even though their lips are moving. So, he thinks she is drunk. He thinks that she is just over there, all tipsy and talking to herself, and that just, you know, layers on one more layer of misunderstanding. Peninnah misunderstands her pain and exploits it, uses it against her. Elkanah loves her, but doesn't fully understand her either. The priest sees her praying and he misreads the whole thing. But Darrell, thankfully God is not misreading it.

DARRELL DELANEY

So glad that God does not misread her pain or our pain. We have had people misunderstand our pain. We have had people judge us or minimize or try to spiritualize...explain away...our pain, but we know that our Lord knows the difference between rebellion and brokenness. He knows the difference between performance and a poured-out soul; and in this moment, there is a poured-out soul who is broken before him. Scripture says that the broken and contrite heart God will not despise. And when you pour out your heart with deep pain, God is there for you. Then Eli happens to finally do something well. He gives her...he speaks a blessing over her, and he says: Go away and be blessed...or whatnot. Then when she goes away, even though her circumstances have not changed, sometime happened in her heart during that prayer.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; the prayer has not been answered yet. She is not expecting a child yet. So, the circumstances are, on the outside, the same; but somehow, having the sense that God heard her, and even though Eli said the absolutely wrong thing the first time, when he says the right thing and blesses her and, you know, says: May God grant you your prayer; she takes that seriously. I mean, she does not dismiss Eli just because he had just done a stupid thing. But she takes solace, and so, her face brightens up and she starts to eat, and she has the sense that she really has met with God. Then the text tells us that the Lord remembered her and she becomes pregnant. And of course, that does not mean God had forgotten her; you know, when the text says the Lord remembered her, it is like: Oh, yes; Hannah. I forgot all about her. No, no, no, no. It just means he is remembering his faithfulness; he is remembering his promise; he is remembering his covenant. So, God moves; God acts; and God keeps God's word.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is definitely a faithful action for God, and when it says the Lord remembered, it is definitely a reminder of his covenant-keeping, promise-keeping personality if you will; it's beautiful, because when the Lord blesses her womb and she names him Samuel because: I asked the Lord and he heard me—this is what Samuel means—God has heard. So, it is really powerful that she names him that and dedicates his life to God. But then, not only that is a blessing, but God in his infinite wisdom has allowed Samuel to be, not just a blessing for Hannah and her family, but for the entire Israel. Samuel becomes a prominent figure, as we have read and as we know.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, we start 1 Samuel with a seemingly small situation. Here is just a husband with two wives; one of them cannot have children and so she prays about it. It seems kind of small, you know. It is sort of like, in the global perspective, we have kind of zoomed in on just one little person; and then, all of a sudden, we are going to zoom out, because through the faithful prayer of this woman and her pleas with God...through God's faithfulness in answering her prayer and giving her a son, guess what? He is going to bless all of Israel; and guess what? By blessing all of Israel, it is, in a lot of ways...and we are going to see this in other episodes, too...this all becomes kind of links in the chain that leads to us to Jesus, ultimately. So, what seems like a small situation with one lonely woman whose heart broke, God answers her prayer, but he answers it in ways that are going to go way, way beyond just this little situation or just that little private sorrow. It is going to become part of a much, much larger story.

Well, in just a moment, we are going to hear Hannah's response to all of this in 1 Samuel 2, and she is going to express more than just gratitude for a baby. It is going to become a song she sings about the very character of God, the great reversals of grace and the way God lifts the lowly. We are going to talk about that, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and Scott, we have seen Hannah's sorrow and we have heard Hannah's prayer; and now we come to Hannah's song, and this is where her personal story opens out a much bigger theology of who God is. So, let's look at it in 1 Samuel 2. It says: Then Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. ²There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. ³Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. ⁴The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. ⁵Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry are hungry no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away."

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁶The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. ⁷The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. ⁸He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's; on them he has set the world. ⁹He will guard the feet of his faithful servants, but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness. It is not by strength that one prevails; ¹⁰those who oppose the Lord will be broken. The Most High will thunder from heaven; the Lord will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."

DARRELL DELANEY

So, this is an amazing prayer, because, I mean, Hannah starts with her own joy; she starts with her own story; but she does not stay there. She says: She who was barren has borne seven children. That is kind of part of what she was experiencing herself; but then, she zooms out, like you said earlier, that God has begun doing a work, and moving into, not only what he has done for her, but who he always has been. So, this isn't just: I got what I wanted. This is: Now I see clearly what kind of God you are; you are a holy God; you are a Rock; you know things; you weigh these; you reverse human expectations; and you bring the lowly up and you bring the proud down. So, God, you have been justice-minded; you have been redemption-minded the whole time. That is who you are.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, she is celebrating some of the great reversals that we see in scripture, and that runs all through this song, as you just said. A barren woman bears children; the poor are lifted from the dust and from the ash heap, and so forth. That is one of the reasons that Hannah's song here matters so much in the wider context of the

Bible, because, as you just said, Darrell, it doesn't just celebrate a private blessing, it announces the kind of kingdom God brings; and God does not operate according to human swagger, status, or self-importance. He sees differently; he acts differently; he assigns worth differently; and you know, we read this and we might think of Jesus' Beatitudes, where it is the meek who inherit the earth; it is the lowly who are exalted; it is those who weep who will be comforted; but if you were just listening to Hannah's song as we read it there from 1 Samuel 2...if it sounded kind of familiar to you...if you thought "that kind of reminds me of something"....you are right. It reminds you of Mary's song, which we call the *Magnificat*, as it is recorded in Luke 1.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, Mary sings it in a way that sounds a lot like Hannah here, because the God who made Hannah is the same God who will one day send Jesus into the world. The same pattern is happening in her song. God looks on the lowly; God overturns human pride; and God brings salvation in a way that nobody expects. That means that the book of 1 Samuel is a story of redemption, and it will eventually give us King David, Israel's great king; but even here in this chapter, Hannah's song reaches forward, because she says the Lord will give strength in the last line of the scripture: He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed. There is no king; they have never had a king; so, she is actually tipping into the prophetic when she is singing this song. It's crazy!

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is exactly right; and as for Mary, after the archangel Gabriel visited her lowly little hovel and told her she was going to bear no less than the Son of God, that reversal of fortune for Mary made her ponder the same thing Hannah said: This is just how God operates. God always goes with the least likely. He goes, not for the top rung of the ladder, but the bottom rung of the ladder. Even Jesus is going to come into the world in that way. Not born in a palace; not thundering onto the scene with a silver spoon in his mouth; no, he is going to be born in a barn to kind of poor parents, and so forth. Yes; what we are getting at here is a central dynamic of all of scripture.

So, as we close out this first program of this series, let's see what it means of us today; and we are going to close, Darrell, with the three simple truths: First, bring God your real pain. You know, Hannah does not sanitize or downgrade her anguish. She pours out her soul to the Lord. Some of us have learned how to talk around our pain, you know; we manage it; we spiritualize it; we hide it; we don't bring it into worship with us, as we said. But you know, Darrell, healing often begins when we stop pretending and we start praying honestly, because God can handle the truth. So, that is the first takeaway: Bring God your real pain.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; cast your cares on him for he cares for you is really powerful, and it is a burden lifted for us; and I think, along those lines secondly, we need to trust that God sees what others often miss; because Hannah...she is misread by Peninnah, by Elkanah, and even by Eli; but the Lord sees her clearly and he hears her prayer. So, some of us need to be reminded sometimes we know what it is like to be misunderstood when we are grieving, when we are waiting, when we are disappointed, even when we are faithful for a long time. She has been coming to worship over and over for years and she is still misunderstood. But this story reminds us that heaven is not confused by our condition because the Lord...he knows.

SCOTT HOEZEE

1) Bring out your real pain; 2) Trust that God sees in us what others often miss; and 3) Remember that God often starts his big redemption in small, even hidden, places. Before there is this national renewal in Israel, before there were kings to be anointed, before those big, public moments arrive, here is one woman praying quietly from her deep anguish. So, never despise the hidden place; never assume your quiet obedience does not matter to God, because God, Darrell, does some of his greatest works in rooms where only God can see what is happening. Probably for some people listening to this program, Darrell, that is maybe where they are at in their lives right now.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; some of you might not feel like you are in a breakthrough moment, or you might be in a season of waiting or praying or grieving and hoping; but you should know from God speaking in this story that even Hannah's story can show you that your tears are not wasted and your prayers are not unheard, and your life is not outside of God's reach and his redemptive plan.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are going to keep seeing that as we go on in this series. Again, this is the first program; we have six more to go. We are going to see, Darrell, eventually, more brokenness, more conflict and more evidence that human leaders just usually cannot actually deliver and carry the weight of human hope; but here we are in the very beginning of this pivotal, biblical book of 1 Samuel, and from the very beginning, this book is teaching us to look to the Lord...to look to the Lord as the one who hears; as the one who remembers; as the God who is going to raise up the lowly. He sees us where we are and he meets us where we are. Thanks be to God.

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we continue our study of 1 Samuel by examining the spiritual state of Israel, and then the call of Samuel in Chapters 2 and 3.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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