



ABUNDANT FAVOR • God Intervenes in the Lives of His People

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

1 Samuel 1:1-3:21

First Samuel records the establishment of Israel's monarchy, starting with the birth of Samuel and carrying on to the death of Saul. This narrative happens during a time when everyone does what is right in their own eyes (see Judges 21:25). It's not unlike today's world where most people think they can do whatever they want without consequences. As we know, God is not a fan of relativism. Take time during your study to discuss that this passage shows the depravity of our intentions and actions, as well as the beautiful grace, mercy and provision of God in the midst of our sin.

There are three distinct stories that make up our nice narrative package of 1 Samuel 1-3. The author of the book (possibly Samuel himself, but nobody knows for sure) starts by telling the story of Hannah and her desire for a son. After Hannah gives birth to a son, Samuel, the story continues to tell of Eli's worthless sons who worked as priests in the temple. Finally, the narrative closes with the Lord specially calling Samuel to a life-time of service. Make sure the group discovers that in all three stories God is behind the work, active in the lives of everyone involved.

God Gives Hannah a Son (1:1-2:11)

The first narrative piece is about Hannah. Hannah is married to a guy named Elkanah, and she's unable to have children. For many people today, it wouldn't have been that big of a deal, but not in those times. Being infertile in Jewish society meant you could be considered an outcast. Other Jews even thought it meant God was punishing you. To add insult to injury, Hannah has a rival wife Phineas (yes, Elkanah had two!) who does have children and makes fun of Hannah for being barren. After some time, Hannah had enough of Phineas and starts praying for a son.

Though she is "deeply distressed" (v. 10), Hannah prays in faith that God will give her a son. Hannah loves God so much, in fact, that if God grants her a son, she promises to give him to full-time ministry! Make sure you communicate to your group the passion, perseverance and faith of Hannah's prayer. Eli, the priest at the time, sees how devastated she looks in prayer. He actually thinks she's drunk! But Hannah explains, "I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord" (v. 15).

God honors Hannah's prayer and gives her a son and Hannah keeps her promise and gives her son to the Lord. What is her response after giving Samuel up? She bursts out in worshipful prayer at how wonderful God is. Later

What's the Big Idea?

This passage gives us a look into corrupt leadership, but that theme is sandwiched between stories of hope. Despite Eli's sons' failures, God intervenes to raise up faithful leadership for his people. The focus is on God: He judges those who don't honor Him, yet graciously provides for His people to hear His word and respond to it. The narrative points us to the day when God will send Jesus, the high priest who will be faithful in all that is in God's heart and mind (2:35).

What's the Problem?

We've heard it said, "Pride goes before the fall." Chances are you have seen a spiritual leader not live up to God's standards because they have let power and authority go to their head. Everyone is sinful and our tendency as fallen people, even if we aren't spiritual leaders, is to look to give honor to others and ourselves instead of Almighty God.



in chapter 2, we find out that because of Hannah's faithfulness, God gives her more children with Elkanah. I'm sure Phineas is a bit humbled after all this! Help your group experience Hannah's dependence on God in devastating times. Show them how Hannah's life should stir us to lean wholly on Jesus when we face insurmountable circumstances.

God Punishes Eli's Sons (2:12-36)

The leadership of Eli and his sons sadly illustrates the fact that everyone during this time did what they pleased. In 2:12, Eli's sons are called "worthless." They are priests, so they are supposed to be exemplary above all other people. Even more, they are the ones who ministered to God for the people. Talk about having to live up to high standards! Instead of honoring their position, they abuse their privileges as priests to take advantage of the food supply. On top of that, they commit acts of sexual immorality with the women who serve at the entrance of the tent of meeting. It's essential to catch the point from this section that even spiritual leaders are susceptible to grievous sin.

You might be asking, "Where was Eli in all this?" Well, Eli doesn't help the situation. He could have played a more active role in his sons' lives and brought them up in the counsel of the Lord. Instead, Eli acts cowardly and honors his sons above God by letting them profane God's laws. Because of this, God tells Eli, "Behold, the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. Then in distress you will look with envious eye on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed on Israel" (2:31-32a).

However, God doesn't leave the situation hopeless. He promises Eli the day will come when He will send a faithful priest who will "do according to what is in my heart and in my mind" (2:35). This is immediately fulfilled in Samuel, but the ultimate fulfillment is found in Jesus. The most important thing for your group to understand is that the brokenness in this section is not final. God foreshadows the coming of Jesus and for us today, we can take our brokenness to the Lord and trust in Jesus to be our faithful priest who will never let us down.

God Calls Samuel (3:1-21)

During all this, God was still not speaking to His people like He had been earlier in Israel's history. Verse 1 says, "And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision." God was giving His people the cold shoulder because of their wickedness. But God, as He had done so many times, intervenes and calls Samuel. This starts an eventual mini turn-around for the nation of Israel. Notice the sheer grace and compassion that God has on His people! He is the hero who steps in and provides a way for Israel to hear His word. God raised up Samuel to be a "prophet of the Lord" (v. 20), which means that he has the authority to speak God's word. God worked through Samuel to bring about His righteousness and glory in His people.

Conclusion

As you prepare to end the study, pray that God would help the group see, like Hannah, that even in the midst of despair, we have a solid rock who can provide everything we need in our lives. Pray also that God will call you and the group members to recognize and repent of your own pride and selfish living. God has provided a faithful high priest named Jesus who has healed our brokenness and brought us back to Him.

What's Our Response?

We need to depend on God's grace and trust that He can work in any circumstance we face. We can do this by obeying His commands, humbling ourselves, and having faith that His word is reliable.

What Are the Questions?

I Samuel 1:1-3:21

LAUNCH

Describe a time in your life when you were very disappointed because a spiritual leader didn't seem to live up to his calling. What did you do?

EXPLORE

Read I Samuel 1:1-28

1. What is Hannah's situation, and how does she respond?
2. How does God respond to Hannah's cry?

Read I Samuel 2:1-10

3. What stands out to you about the focus of Hannah's prayer?

Read I Samuel 2:11-36.

4. How would you contrast Samuel with Eli's sons?
5. Why does God rebuke Eli for his sons' conduct?
6. What does God promise in the face of the religious abuses of Eli's sons, and who seems to be the immediate fulfillment of this promise?
7. Read Hebrews 2:17-18. In what way is Jesus the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise in I Samuel 2:35?

Read I Samuel 3:1-4:1a.

8. What does it say about God that He intervenes in the history of His people at a time when word from Him was rare and everyone was going their own way (3:1; cf. Judges 21:25)?
9. What are the results of God calling Samuel (3:15-4a), and how do these results address the corruption of religious leadership that had come about through Eli and his sons?
10. Read John 1:14 and Hebrews 1:1-3. How is Jesus the ultimate expression of God's heart to speak His word to His people?
11. What are the main things we learn about God from this passage?

APPLY

12. How do you think you would have felt if you were Hannah, crying out to God but seemingly getting no answer?
13. Read John 15:7-8. How do Jesus' words combined with Hannah's experience summarized in I Samuel 2:1-10 encourage you to trust God to do His will in the face of seemingly impossible circumstances?
14. In what ways do you struggle as Eli did with honoring others above God instead of giving Him the reverence He deserves?
15. How are you comforted knowing that you can go to Jesus as the faithful priest who will always do what is on God's heart and mind?

What Are the Answers?

1. She's barren, so she asks God for a son and promises to dedicate him to the LORD if He answers her.
2. He gives her a son.
3. Allow the group to discuss.
4. Samuel genuinely and humbly ministered to God while Eli's sons wickedly used their spiritual position for their own gain.
5. Eli honored his sons above God by not rebuking them for their wickedness.
6. He promises to raise up a faithful priest (Jesus Christ) who will do according to what is in his heart and soul.
7. He does perfectly what is in God's heart and soul.
8. It shows His graciousness and that God is not going to let His people live life on their own and leave them in the dark.
9. God's word came to all Israel, and God worked through Samuel to restore righteousness to Israel's leadership.
10. Jesus embodies as well as articulates God's word perfectly and shows overwhelming grace to those who don't deserve to hear His word at all. Because of this, Jesus is worthy of all our praise and adoration.
11. Although God in His holiness judges those who honor others above Himself, He graciously provides ways for His people to hear His word and respond to it.
12. Allow the group to discuss.
13. Allow the group to discuss.
14. Allow the group to discuss.
15. Jesus will never disappoint us, even though we are continually unfaithful to Him – He always speaks to God on our behalf. He gives us grace to have faith in Him so that even when a spiritual leader may let us down, we may ultimately look to Jesus for leadership in our lives.

Memorize

And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever.

I Samuel 2:35