

Contents

Acknowledgments	7
Foreword	9
Introduction	13
Jonah	27
Lydia	35
Elisha	43
Esther	53
Ruth	63
Nicodemus	73
Solomon	83
Zacchaeus	95
Rahab	103
Hannah	113
The Widow of Zarephath	123
Joseph	133
Epilogue	143
Answers and Commentary	147
Appendix A: What Does All This Have to Do with Me?	207
Appendix B: Where Can I Learn More?	213

Hannah

¹⁰ In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. ¹¹ And she made a vow, saying, “O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon 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.” (1 Samuel 1:10-11)

How do you know when you’ve hit rock bottom? Is it when you don’t want to roll out of bed in the morning because there just isn’t any reason to get up? What sparks such depression in our lives? Surely tragedies come in all shapes and sizes, but when these events include our families, they’re often escalated to a level that few can understand unless they’ve experienced it themselves. Hannah knew this grief – the inescapable sorrow and depression that wash over a person like black waves of distress. Hannah was the wife of Elkanah, a man that you have probably never heard of. Thus, Hannah is a virtually unknown woman from an unknown family. Like other characters in this study, her name isn’t on the tip of your tongue. It’s difficult to place where you’ve heard of her. One of the scariest things in life is being completely unknown. We get the feeling that not only did Hannah realize this fear, but she agonized over it. She even began to think that God had forgotten about her as well.

Being a wife has its privileges, but less so if you’re only one of two wives, as was common in Hannah’s time. While Elkanah’s other wife, Peninnah, bore him children, Hannah was barren. A wife’s ability to bear many children was a great measure of status in ancient Biblical times, especially if those children were strong and healthy sons.

Study Questions

- Q1. See page 113. The first part of Hannah's life was very difficult (**1 Samuel 1:1-16**). There had to be times when she felt that everyone, even God, had forgotten her. Do you ever feel like God has forgotten about you? Read **Deuteronomy 31:8** and **Jeremiah 29:11**. Is it possible that God could ever forget us?
- Q2. In the midst of her prayer and sorrow, Eli intercedes to make Hannah even more miserable. Although she had reached rock bottom, Hannah responds with respect and dignity to Eli's accusation of drunkenness (**1 Samuel 1:15-16**). How does Hannah's behavior mirror Christ's own behavior? Read **Isaiah 53:7**. What can we learn from this?
- Q3. See page 117. Hannah's life was little more than a blip on the radar of Samuel's life. Do you ever feel like you're in the supporting cast for someone else's story? Read **Matthew 10:29-30**. Is this the reality?

Hannah

1. While we cannot relate to Hannah's marital situation (one of two wives in a polygamous marriage), some of us *can* relate to her barrenness, and most of us can remember times in our lives when we felt forgotten. These may have been times of extreme hardship, when we felt as if our support group was nowhere to be found. They may also have been times when we were lonely, with no one around to comfort us. In times like these, it's pretty easy to feel as if God is elsewhere as well. After all, it's natural to think that if God was near us, we wouldn't be so miserable!

Throughout the Bible, we see passages of comfort (such as **Deuteronomy 31** and **Jeremiah 29**) that promise God's presence in our lives. God is always around to care for us and He always knows what we need. Unfortunately, we don't possess God's wisdom or foresight, and we don't understand why certain things happen in our lives. He may be testing us now to shape us for the future (**Psalms 66:10**). One thing we can be certain of, however, is our salvation through Jesus Christ. The hope that we have for our future in heaven is greater than any sorrows in this life (**Revelation 2:10**).

2. Hannah would have been justified if she had responded in anger to Eli. This belligerent priest, ignorant of Hannah's barren womb, marital problems, and extreme depression, has accused her of being a drunkard. Instead of putting Eli in his place, which probably wouldn't have done any good anyway, she defends herself and begs Eli to change his opinion of her. This reminds us of what Peter writes in **1 Peter 2:12** concerning the lives of Christians. Eli and his family were not without fault themselves (**1**