



# Judges Period

## Big Questions, Big Decisions

### Hannah and Her Family

#### 1 Samuel 1

#### Teaching Aim

To consider some simple, and sometimes unasked, questions, the answers to which can drastically affect ordinary lives.

#### Setting the Scene

Many of the big decisions we have to make don't have world-changing implications but arise out of ordinary family problems. Sometimes these are never spoken about but they affect the harmony of family life and the happiness of its members.

Here we have an ordinary family but not one of the adults is really happy. Elkanah should be happy because he has two dutiful wives but he isn't happy because they don't get on with each other. Peninnah should be happy because she has children but she is jealous because Elkanah loves Hannah more than her. Hannah should be happy because her husband really loves her but she isn't happy because she has no children and Peninnah torments her about this.

#### Hannah and Peninnah

Read 1 Sam 1:1-8. Hannah lived in an age when having children was seen as a blessing from God. Children not only continued the family line, and the nation, but also ensured you were remembered down the generations. With few written records, the custom was to prove who you were by reciting your ancestry as far back as you could go. Look at some family lines in the Bible eg Matt 1:1-16. Being childless was not only a personal tragedy but also a social stigma, of which Hannah's sense of failure at not having lived up to the expectations of both her husband and her community would have been increased by insensitive remarks made by others and especially from the cruel comments from Peninnah (v6). The taunts of Peninnah, with the insinuation that Hannah's childlessness was a punishment from God for some supposed sinfulness, became unbearable, particularly as Peninnah timed her insults to coincide with the special celebration when the family went to worship at Shiloh. How do you deal with insults? Hannah found it difficult, except by tears and not eating, but her ultimate answer was to take it to the Lord.

#### Hannah and Eli

Read 1 Sam 1:9-18. The insensitive remarks were not only made by Peninnah but were also made by her husband, Elkanah, and by Eli the priest. Although he loved Hannah, Elkanah did not understand her problems. With his comment in v8, 'Why do you need children when you've got me!', he dismissed

her heartache, and the seeming indication of favouritism towards Hannah, the 'double portion' of meat (v5) is misleading as many modern translations say 'only one' share (see GNB, LB, NEB). Elkanah did not provide the support Hannah needed. He certainly did not seem to speak to Peninnah about her involvement.

At first Eli was also insensitive mistaking Hannah's silently moving lips as a sign that she was drunk, and, therefore, unfit to be worshipping in God's house. In those days, prayers would have been said aloud, never silently. However, when he realised the seriousness of the problem, he listened, giving her his blessing and, with it, the assurance her childlessness was not the result of God's condemnation of her.

How insensitive am I to the things which trouble other people? Insensitive comments and jokes deepen feelings of sadness and rejection. How can I help in such circumstances? Eli provided a listening ear and an understanding heart which Elkanah seemed to lack even though he loved Hannah.

## Hannah and God

Read 1 Sam 1:19-28. Hannah's dream came true and her prayer was answered. It is easy to try to bargain with God and make promises to 'force His hand'. Is this a good practice? Hannah's promise (v11) was an indication of the depth of her faith and commitment to the Lord. Such a faith made her the ideal person to be the mother of a great prophet. It would be difficult to leave her young child with Eli, but there was never any doubt that Hannah would keep her promise. She never wavered regarding her promise to God.

## Summing Up

The questions asked in this story may seem trivial to many but the result, if they are not faced and answered truthfully, may be much unhappiness. Hannah could have kept her distress bottled up, but she took it to the Lord in prayer. She found someone who was able to offer her the support she needed. And she kept the promise she had made. This did not leave her childless. She had the joy of knowing that her son was serving the Lord (1Sam 3:21), and the Lord gave her more children (1Sam 2:21). She had faith in the One who always keeps His promises.

## Resources

### Reading

Contemporary Moral Issues: Joe Jenkins (Heinemann) section 12 - Family

### Discussion

Consider the following :

- 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me!' How difficult is it to ignore insults? How do you deal with insults?
- Ask yourself 'Am I guilty of making insensitive remarks?'
- How can you help and support people who have been insulted and humiliated or have negative views about themselves.
- 'Promises! Promises!' How easily do we make them? How faithfully do we keep them? See Jephthah (Jud 11:29-39) and Jesus (John 4:34; Phil 2:5-8).

### Prayer Points

Pray for those:

- Who regularly have to face bullying.
- who make a habit of insulting or bullying others.
- who can help to change such situations.