

Barrenness & Brokenness

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Date: 27 August 2023

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. 1 Samuel 1.

Page 271, if you're using the Pew Bible. 1 Samuel 1. I'm reading from the beginning. There was a certain man of Ramathayim, Zophim, of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah, the son of Jehoram, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuth, and Ephrathite.

He had two wives. The name of one was Hannah, the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the Lord, and so on.

I was reading this week that Sister's Wives is, Sister Wives as it is, it's a popular American reality TV series that follows the lives of the Brown family.

The Brown family. Where Cody Brown, he is the father figure in the Brown family. But what's unique about Cody Brown is that he has not one, not two, not three, but four wives.

[1 : 39] He has four wives and 18 children. And despite polygamy being illegal in every state in America, Cody Brown claims that he's only legally married to one of his wives, and that the other three marriages, they are spiritual unions.

And they're spiritual unions because the Brown family, they're all Mormons. And Mormons, they wrongly believe that polygamist marriages are biblical.

Now I've never watched Sister Wives. I don't intend to start watching it, but apparently it's a very popular program in America. It's been running for over 10 years. There have been over 200 episodes produced.

There are millions and millions of viewers who tune in to watch it. In fact, it's now on to its 18th season, which began last weekend. But the 18th season is probably going to be the season finale.

Because over the past few years, three out of the four wives in the Brown family, they have now divorced themselves from this problematic and polygamous marriage.

[2 : 49] With a lot of it, if you look into it, I didn't watch it. But if you look into it, a lot of it relates to rivalry, envy, and jealousy. And you know, when we come to the opening chapter in the book of Samuel, the problem of a polygamous marriage is what should jump out at us.

It's what should jump off the page, because we're told there that Elkanah is husband to two wives. And his polygamous and problematic marriage is actually having an impact upon his first wife, Hannah.

Because Hannah, we're told, she's not only a barren woman, she's also a broken woman. Hannah is a barren woman and a broken woman. And this morning, I want us to focus our attention upon Hannah.

She's actually the main character in this opening chapter. And so I want us to think about Hannah this morning under those two simple headings. Hannah is a barren woman and she's a broken woman.

She's a barren woman and a broken woman. So first of all, we see that Hannah is a barren woman. Look at verse 4. We're told there that on the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah, his wife, and all her sons and daughters.

[4 : 02] But to Hannah, he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb. And her rival used to provoke her grievously, to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb.

Now, as you know, last Lord's Day, we began studying the book of Samuel. And we did so by looking at the opening verses from this opening chapter. And from there, we considered the context and the concern and the conflict of the story.

The context of the story of Samuel is that it's part of God's perfectly planned story of salvation. A story which began in the book of Genesis with a promise, the promise of a seed, son, and saviour to come.

Where the Lord said to Eve, the seed of the woman will come and crush the head of the serpent. And with that promise of a seed, son, and saviour, the story of salvation, it follows this golden thread throughout the pages of the Bible, and ultimately throughout the pages of history.

And where Samuel fits into that story of salvation, is that there was no king in Israel. Everyone was doing what's right in their own eyes. Therefore, there needs to be a king in Israel.

[5 : 18] And that king, as we see, we'll go through the book of Samuel, that king becomes King David. Because King David is the seed, son, and saviour. He's of that line and lineage that was promised in the book of Genesis.

But of course, David is a pointer. He's a preparation for us to see the greater king. The greater seed, son, and saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. But you know, the context of Samuel here, it's overshadowed by this concern.

The concern about Elkanah. Elkanah was meant to be a Levitical priest. He was meant to be a minister. But Elkanah had rejected and refused the calling of the Lord upon his life.

And he did so by putting his prosperity, all the money that he had, and also his posterity first. He put himself first, which created conflict. So the concern became conflict in Elkanah's home.

Because Elkanah had married two wives. God had created marriage to be a covenant commitment between one man and one woman. But Elkanah married two wives.

[6 : 28] And it was all because he was doing what was right in his own eyes. Just like everybody else in his day and generation. Everyone was doing right in their own eyes. Everyone was king.

Everyone was doing what they wanted to do. But the thing is, polygamy, as we said last week, polygamy was never promoted. It was never permitted in the Bible.

In fact, the Bible never actually states that polygamy is wrong. The Bible shows us that polygamy is wrong. And it clearly shows us in the conflict between Elkanah's two wives, Hannah and Peninnah.

Elkanah loved Hannah. We're told that in the passage. He loved her for who she was. But he also loved Peninnah. He loved Peninnah because she gave him children. She gave him an heir for all his prosperity.

She gave him posterity. But this, as you can see, it created conflict within the family. There was this problem in this polygamous marriage. But the problem was all paternal.

[7 : 33] It all related to Elkanah. The problem was all Elkanah. Because Elkanah had rejected the Lord. And by rejecting the Lord, it had withheld blessing and brought barrenness to his first wife, Hannah.

Hannah was a barren woman. And that's emphasized to us. We see that in verse 5 and in verse 6. The same phrase is used at the end of both verses. The Lord had closed her womb.

The Lord had closed her womb. Now, as I mentioned last week, we have to be very careful and very compassionate when explaining Hannah's barrenness and why the Lord had closed her womb.

Especially because, you know, someone reading this passage, they may come to the conclusion, and it's a wrong conclusion, that if a couple are unable to conceive and have children, the Lord has closed the womb because they've rejected the Lord.

Or they've sinned against the Lord. Or they've disobeyed the Lord. But that's not what's been taught here. If a couple are unable to have children, which is often a very, as I said last week, a very heartbreaking and heartaching experience to go through, it's not necessarily a result of specific sin or a specific sin against the Lord.

[8 : 54] Neither have they been punished by the Lord. It's certainly a painful providence. But they're not being punished by the Lord. And we have to make that distinction. I want to emphasize that distinction because within this context, this covenant context in the Old Testament, what we see here is God's covenant people, Israel.

And the Lord had told His covenant people, Israel, that covenant obedience would bring blessing. But covenant disobedience would bring barrenness.

Covenant obedience would bring blessing. Covenant disobedience would bring barrenness. The Lord had said to His people, to the Israelites, if you are obedient, I will bless you.

I will multiply the fruit of your womb. But if you are disobedient, I will withhold blessing and bring barrenness. And that's what we've been shown here right at the start of the book of Samuel.

We've been told here that Elkanah's disobedience had withheld blessing. And brought barrenness. Which is why we're introduced to Elkanah right from the beginning.

[10 : 02] Elkanah is this picture. He's a portrait of the people of Israel. Because in those days, in those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes.

Everybody was disobeying their covenant God. They rejected the Lord. And Israel, they had entered into what Elkanah had entered into.

They had entered into a polygamous marriage. Israel was in a polygamous marriage. They had a divided loyalty. They had a divided love for the Lord. Because, well, they had the Lord.

That was one wife. And then they also had their idols. There's the other wife. They had a divided loyalty and love for the Lord. And with their disobedience, the Lord withheld blessing and brought barrenness.

And so it's not only Elkanah who's a picture of Israel. Hannah is also an image and illustration of Israel's divided loyalty and love for the Lord.

[11 : 03] Hannah is a picture of Israel's barrenness. Hannah was a barren woman. The Lord had closed her womb. And, you know, although it wouldn't have changed Hannah's circumstances, it may have comforted Hannah to know that Hannah's barrenness enabled her to share in a fellowship of barren women in the Bible.

Hannah's barrenness enabled her to share in a fellowship of barren women in the Bible. She's not the only barren woman in the Bible. And we often see that, you know, with people who go through hard providences in life.

They join a fellowship. They join a group where they can speak and share and sympathize with one another. With people who have gone through similar circumstances, similar experiences, where they can share about their sickness.

If it's a cancer group. Or they can share about their sufferings. Or they can share about their sorrows. They're able to explain and empathize with one another. They're able to have fellowship and share their feelings and support one another.

Because they've all gone through similar situations and similar circumstances. And that was Hannah. Because Hannah's barrenness enabled her to share in this fellowship of barren women in the Bible.

[12 : 27] Hannah's not the first barren woman in the Bible who's part of this perfectly planned story of salvation. You remember Sarah. Sarah was Abraham's wife.

Who had been barren all her life. And yet she received the promise of the seed son and saviour. That she would give birth to a son, Isaac.

At the age of 90. At the age of 90. And we read the Bible. She did. And what's remarkable is that the following generation. Isaac who got married to Rebekah.

Rebekah, Isaac's wife. She also shared in this fellowship of barren women in the Bible. Because Rebekah was barren for the first 20 years of their marriage.

Until she gave birth to twins. Jacob and Esau. And when Jacob fell in love with his beautiful wife, Rachel. She also shared in the fellowship of barren women in the Bible.

[13 : 23] Until the Lord remembered Rachel. Opened her womb. And she gave birth to Joseph. And when you follow the story of the Bible. You see them all there. You see this fellowship of barren women in the Bible.

Three generations of family. And barrenness was no barrier to the Lord. Because God's promise was there all the time.

The promise of a seed son and saviour. And you know what it was teaching them? Right in the book of Genesis. What it was teaching them was not to depend upon people.

But to depend upon the promises of God. Not to depend upon people. But to depend upon the promises of God. A good lesson for all of us to remember.

Because throughout every generation. The Lord was faithful to his people. And faithful to his promises. Which should remind us and reassure us.

[14 : 22] That you know when we feel absolutely helpless. When we feel hopeless in our circumstances. And our situations that we go through in life. It's good to depend upon people to a point.

But you know we need to depend upon the promises of the Lord. We need to depend upon the promises of the Lord. And you know the wonderful thing about the Bible.

Is that there are over 7,000 promises in this book. 7,000 promises in the Bible. And we are called.

We are invited. As we were saying to the children. We are invited to come. And claim these promises. And cling to these promises. And even confess these promises.

And hold God to these promises. These great and precious promises. Do you know we can actually come to God in prayer. And say God you said.

[15 : 21] You said. I will never leave you nor forsake you. So don't leave me. Don't forsake me. You said. If you confess your sin. You are faithful and just.

To forgive our sin. And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Lord you said. And you know we can claim. And cling to these precious promises.

Just like Hannah did. We need to keep coming back to these great and precious promises. Because there are many of them. In the Bible. And so we see that Hannah was a barren woman.

But secondly we see that Hannah was a broken woman. Hannah was a broken woman. We read there in verse 7. So it went on year by year.

As often as she went up to the house of the Lord. She used to provoke her. She used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. And Elkanah her husband said to her. Hannah why do you weep?

[16 : 21] Why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons? Hannah's barrenness was not only an image and illustration of the barrenness of Israel.

Hannah's barrenness was also an opportunity and an occasion for her opposition to bully her. Because as we said Elkanah's polygamous marriage.

It was problematic. His love may have been devoted. But his love was always divided. Elkanah loved Hannah for who she was. And he would give to her we read there.

He would give to her a double portion. Because he loved her. But Elkanah also loved the other one. The other wife. Peninnah. Because she gave him children.

She gave him posterity. Peninnah had given him lots of children. Lots of sons. Lots of daughters. And we're told that this went on year by year. Year.

[17 : 19] Verse 7. So it went on year by year. In fact the way it's worded in the text. Makes you think that Peninnah was actually producing children almost annually.

Almost every year she was producing a child. Now we're not told that Peninnah was younger or fitter or prettier than Hannah. But we are told that she was more fertile than Hannah.

And for that reason Peninnah, the other woman. She would always provoke Hannah. Peninnah would insult and irritate Hannah. Peninnah would taunt and tease and torment Hannah.

Peninnah would bully Hannah because of her barrenness. And you know although it's an awful experience to be bullied in school. Or to be bullied in the workplace.

The one place you don't ever expect to be bullied. Is in your home. Because that's where you're meant to feel safe and secure. That's where you're meant to feel loved and looked after.

[18 : 23] But not Hannah. She didn't feel safe and secure. She didn't feel loved and looked after in her home. She didn't feel loved and looked after by her husband. If anything, Hannah felt isolated and ignored in her own home by her own husband.

In fact, maybe you might think I'm being hard on Elkanah. But I think Elkanah had no backbone at all. I think he had no backbone as a man.

In my book, Elkanah was this spineless man who was unwilling to stand up to Peninnah. And you know, it's such a human story. You look at this and it's so human, isn't it?

Because we read there in verses 7 and 8, we're given this scene, this scenario there, of this polygamous and problematic family. And they're all gathered around the dinner table.

What a dinner table that would have been. We're told there in verse 7, So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Peninnah would provoke her.

[19 : 24] Hannah wept and would not eat. And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons? So they're all gathered around the dinner table.

And Peninnah would start. She would start provoking Hannah and insulting Hannah and irritating Hannah and taunting her and tormenting her and teasing her and bullying her because of her barrenness.

And you're in his commentary, Dale Ralph Davis, he's a brilliant Old Testament theologian. In his commentary, he animates verses 7 and 8. He brings it to life. He creates this imaginary conversation around the dinner table in the house at Shiloh.

Where all the family, the two wives and the husband and the children, they're all there. Elkanah's there and Hannah's there and Peninnah's there and all of Peninnah's children. They're all gathered around the dinner table.

And Peninnah says, now children, do you all have your food? Dear me, there are so many of you. It's hard to keep track of you. It's hard to count you. Then as children would do usually around a dinner table, they're always talking.

[20 : 34] There's always table talk with children at the dinner table. And the children start asking questions. Mummy, why doesn't Aunt Hannah have children? Doesn't she want any children?

Of course Aunt Hannah wants children, says Peninnah. Don't you, Hannah? Do you want children? Does Daddy not want Aunt Hannah to have some children? Of course she does.

But Aunt Hannah keeps disappointing Daddy and letting him down. Why, Mummy? Why does she do that? Because God doesn't let Aunt Hannah have children. Doesn't God like Aunt Hannah?

I don't know. You'll have to ask Aunt Hannah yourself. Anna? Hannah, does God like you? Is that why you're not having children? By the way, Hannah, I'm pregnant again.

Do you ever think you'll be pregnant, Hannah? And you can see it. You can imagine what the table talk was like at the dinner table. Year on year, it went on and on and on.

[21 : 33] Spineless. Elkanah would say nothing to his wife. He wouldn't stand up to Peninnah. He just said nothing and sat there silently. He only made it about himself.

He was actually a very selfish man because as Peninnah bullied Hannah, Elkanah would turn to Hannah at the dinner table and ask, Hannah, why are you crying? Why are you weeping?

Why are you not eating your dinner? Why is your heart sad? We're all here as a family. Am I not more to you than ten sons? And you know, you read the passage and you see it coming to life and you think, Elkanah, you've completely misunderstood your wife.

Which only confirms to Hannah that in her barrenness and in her brokenness, she needs to turn to the Lord. She needs to turn to the Lord because you follow the passage.

Verse 9. After they had eaten and drunk, after dinner in Shiloh, Hannah rose. She got out of there. Now Eli the priest was sitting at the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord.

[22 : 39] She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. Hannah was not only a barren woman, she's now a broken woman. But what made things worse was that Hannah was not only misunderstood by her husband, she was also misunderstood by her minister.

Because we read that when barren and broken Hannah went into the temple to pray, verse 12, As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart, only her lips moved and her voice was not heard.

Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. And Eli said to her, How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you. But Hannah answered, No, my Lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit.

I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Hannah was not only misunderstood by her husband, Elkanah, she's also misunderstood by her minister, Eli, the high priest.

Eli, whose calling in life was to be caring and compassionate towards his congregation. And yet here we see the minister, Eli, castigating this woman.

[23 : 55] Castigating and criticizing broken Hannah for being a drunk in church. Eli completely misreads and misunderstands the situation. He completely misreads and misunderstands the situation.

Now to be fair to old Eli, he was very old at this point. We're told that in a later chapter. To be fair to old Eli, the high priest, things were at such a low ebb spiritually in Israel.

Everyone was doing what's right in their own eyes. So nobody usually came to God's house to pray. There was a day when everybody did. There was a day when it was expected for everybody to come to God's house.

There was a day when everyone in the community of Israel would gather to worship the Lord on the Lord's day. Just as it was here in our own community. But in those days, as it is in our day, those days are gone.

Because now everyone's doing what's right in their own eyes. Everyone is seeking and searching for satisfaction and security from everywhere else and in everything else apart from the Lord.

[25 : 10] And so to be fair to old Eli, the high priest, it was unusual. It was unknown to see someone praying. To see someone pouring out their heart before the Lord.

It was unusual to see even a woman in church. So much so that the minister, the minister here, he misreads and misunderstands and mistakes Hannah's genuine and godly prayers for drunkenness.

And you know, it's such a human story. Isn't it? Maybe you've been misread. Maybe you've been misunderstood by your family.

Misunderstood by your friends. Misunderstood by your employer. Misunderstood by your elder. Misunderstood by your minister. And when it happens, it hurts.

Because we expect those who know us and love us to care for us and show compassion to us and have a concern towards us. But you know, this passage, it's showing us how human we are.

[26 : 17] Because we let people down. And we have expectations of people and yet they let us down. Our family lets us down. Our friends let us down. Our employer lets us down.

Our elder lets us down. Our minister lets us down. They let us down. Because they're human. But as Hannah shows us here, when Eli failed, the Lord was faithful.

When Eli failed, the Lord was faithful. Because when Hannah's high priest, Eli, let her down, Hannah knew in her barrenness and in her brokenness, Hannah knew that she had a high priest in heaven who would never let her down.

Hannah knew that she had a high priest in heaven who would never let her down. And you know, that's who we're to come to. That's who we're to come to without burdens and outbrokenness.

That's who we're to come to in our sicknesses and our sorrows. That's who we're to pray to and bring all our petitions to. That's who we're to confess all our sins and all our shortcomings to.

[27 : 22] Because we have a great high priest in heaven, says the Bible. Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And you know what's wonderful about the Bible is that the Bible reminds us that He took on our humanity.

He became human for us so that He could be touched with a feeling of our infirmities and so that He would know what we are going through.

And that's what the writer to the Hebrews tells us. He exhorts us. He encourages us. He says to us, Therefore, let us all come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.

And you know, the writer to the Hebrews says, Why would you want to stay away from the throne of grace? You should be coming so boldly, because the one there is human just like you are.

He knows what you're going through. Our great high priest, Jesus, He will never misread us, never misunderstand us, never misjudge us, never misrepresent us before God, because He knows our heart.

[28 : 35] He knows our helplessness. He knows our burdens. He knows our baggage. He knows our brokenness. He knows our sicknesses. He knows all our sorrows. He knows our sins. He knows all our shortcomings. And you know what's even better? And I love this about the Lord. He understands our sighs.

He understands our groans. He knows all our tears. He recognizes every one of them. He knows why they're there.

And He can see where they're there. In fact, Psalm 56 tells us, He receives our tears into His bottle and writes them in a book.

He receives our tears in His bottle and He writes them in a book. My friend, we have a great high priest.

[29 : 33] Eli was just human. Many faults, many failings, but this high priest, He was human. He is human. Jesus, and He knows all our faults. He knows all our failings, but He will never fail. He will never fault us. And you know what, my friend? As barren and broken Hannah discovered, people will let us down, but the Lord will never let us down.

The Lord will never let us down, which is why this passage is teaching us that we need to come to the Lord in prayer because we're invited to come. And we need to keep coming to Him.

We need to keep coming to Him in prayer. And you know, I'm sure we're all familiar with that well-known hymn. What a friend we have in Jesus.

All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege it is to carry everything to God in prayer. Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

[30 : 36] And the hymn writer asks, Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged to take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful?

Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Are we weak and heavy laden, he asks, cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer.

In His arms He'll take and shield thee. Thou wilt find a solace there. What a friend, my friend. What a friend we have in Jesus.

And Hannah, who was this barren woman and this broken woman, that's who she came to in prayer. And that's who we need to keep going to in prayer.

[31 : 36] Because we have a great high priest who was touched with a feeling of our infirmities. And we are called to go to His throne. His throne of grace that we might find mercy and grace to help in our time of need.

So come to Him and keep coming to Him. And God willing, next Lord's Day, we'll consider Hannah's prayer to the Lord.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, it is our privilege to call upon Thy name and to know that we have access to the very throne room of heaven in and through Thy Son, the Lord Jesus, that He is our great high priest.

We thank Thee that He ever lives, even today, to make intercession for us, that He is our advocate with the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the righteous. Help us, we pray, as broken people living broken lives in this broken world, to come to Him and to keep coming to Him.

To know that vain is the help of man, but my strength is made perfect in weakness. When I come to the Lord, Lord bless us together, we pray.

[33 : 00] Encourage us, we ask. Teach us, we plead. That we would look ever to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith. Cleanse us, we plead, for Jesus' sake.

Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning. We're going to sing the words of Psalm 147.

Psalm 147, it's in the Scottish Psalter, page 446 in the Blue Psalm book. Psalm 147. Psalm 147, page 446.

We're singing from the beginning down to the verse marked five. Praise ye the Lord, for it is good. Praise to our God to sing, for it is pleasant and to praise.

It is a comely thing. God doth build up Jerusalem, and he it is alone, that the dispersed of Israel doth gather into one. Those that are broken in their heart and grieved in their minds, he healeth and their painful wounds he tenderly abinds.

[34 : 11] He counts the number of the stars, he names them every one. Great is our Lord, and of great power his wisdom's search can numb. We'll sing these verses of Psalm 147, and we'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise.

Praise ye the Lord, for it is good.

Praise to our God to sing, for it is pleasant and to praise.

It is a comely thing. God doth build up Jerusalem, and he it is alone, that that is first of Israel, that hath gathered it to one.

Those that are broken in their heart, and grieved in their minds, ye healeth and their painful wounds, He tenderly abides.

[36 : 10] He counts the number of the stars, he names them every one.

Great is our Lord, and of great power his wisdom's search can numb.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen. Thank you.

Amen.