

1 Samuel 1; 2:18-21

Aim of lesson

To show how God answered a woman's fervent prayer, and how he rewarded her faithfulness.

Background study

Numbers 6:1-8; Joshua 18:1; 1 Samuel 2:1-11; 1 Chronicles 6:33-38.

Suggested outline of lesson

Begin this lesson by talking to the children about prayer. Do they pray? To whom? How often? What for? Have they experienced answers to their prayers? Consider now the prayer of a very sad woman.

Describe the family background, the two wives of Elkanah, and the concern Elkanah felt for Hannah. Explain the disgrace felt by Hebrew women who were childless, and Hannah's great longing for a baby of her own. Although Elkanah lived in Ephraim, he was a descendent of the priestly tribe of Levi.

In Shiloh

Talk about the annual journey made by Elkanah and his family from their home in Ramah, to Shiloh where they went to worship and sacrifice at the tabernacle. On one such occasion Hannah felt particularly unhappy. She saw other women with their children and, in particular, her husband's other wife with her sons and daughters, and she felt so miserable that she cried bitterly and even refused to eat. Elkanah tried to understand and to comfort her, but she was inconsolable.

Take it to the Lord in prayer

Hannah decided (no doubt not for the first time) to take her troubles to the Lord. Recite Hannah's prayer and her solemn promise to give back to God the gift of the son for which she earnestly prayed. It will be necessary to explain some of the words or to put the whole prayer into everyday language, and reference should be made to the meaning of total dedication to the Lord, under the Nazirite vow. Eli, the old priest, had been watching Hannah as she prayed. Seeing her lips moving, but hearing no words, the priest thought that Hannah was drunk. Show how Eli's attitude changed as he listened to her, and how he blessed her. Emphasize that Hannah left the tabernacle feeling utterly relieved, having unburdened herself and left the problem with God. She trusted that God would answer her prayer, whatever the answer might be.

Asked of God

Hannah was overjoyed when God granted her request and she called her son Samuel, which means "asked of God". Imagine the happiness she must have felt on first holding

her new-born son. Hannah remembered the promise that she had made to God about the baby, and began preparing him for his priestly life. Ask the children if they have had a baby in their house and discuss teaching it to walk, to talk, to feed itself, to wash and dress itself. These would have been Hannah's tasks during the first two or three years of Samuel's life and she would have done them with loving care. Then came the time for Hannah to keep her promise.

I will give him to the LORD

All the family went to Shiloh. Convey the excitement of Samuel, and the preparations Hannah would have made to provide suitable clothing for him for the next twelve months. It was more than half a day's journey from home and many thoughts must have gone through Hannah's mind as they travelled. Upon arriving at the tabernacle, they first offered their sacrifice and then took Samuel to Eli, the High Priest. Hannah made herself known and reminded the priest of the day, a few years earlier, when she had spoken to him of her prayer for a child. She explained her vow and her intention of leaving the child with him. Convey how those involved might have felt: Hannah's mixed feelings of sadness and devotion to God, Samuel's homesickness, Elkanah's respect for, and support of, his wife, and Eli's joy and thankfulness to God for this great blessing. Samuel was welcomed gladly by the old man, who was to care for him as his own son and to teach him the ways of the Lord.

Relevance to the children's lives

There are at least two lessons we can learn from the story of Hannah and Samuel. The first is that whatever our problem (or reason for celebration) we should talk to God about it. Secondly, we must believe that God will answer our prayer in the way that is best for us. What problems or joys can we pray about, concerning ourselves or others? How should we feel when we have prayed?

Point out that, having received a child in answer to her prayer, Hannah did not forget to say thank you to God. Her prayer of thanksgiving in chapter two shows clearly that her life was dedicated to the Lord's service. God blessed her with five more children.

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you for letting us know about Hannah, who is such a good example to us. Please help us to remember to talk to you whenever we have a problem, and to thank you whenever you have made us happy. Amen.

Memory verse

"The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth. He fulfils the desire of those who fear him" (Psalm 145:18-19).