

THE STORY

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Chapter 10: Standing Tall, Falling Hard

Key Question: What attributes helped Hannah and Samuel stand tall?

Hannah

Pages 129–131

This week we look at two people who stood tall before the Lord, and at two who were in positions to stand tall, but instead fell hard. We begin with Hannah, a woman of downcast circumstances whose faith stood strong.

In Hannah's day, barrenness was a great disgrace; some even considered it a sign of God's disfavor.

1. (a) In 1 Samuel 1:10–13, what did Hannah do about her anguish over not having children? (b) How did Hannah address God (verse 11)? (c) She is the first person in Scripture to address God like this. What does her use of this title suggest about her relationship to God? (d) What strikes you about Hannah's prayer, both in what she says and what she doesn't say? (e) Why do you think Hannah's misery drew her closer to God, rather than driving her farther from Him?

When God answered Hannah's prayer, she gave him credit by naming the child Samuel, which sounds like the Hebrew for *heard of God*. She also wrote a lengthy poetic prayer praising God.

2. (a) Why is it important to tell others about answered prayers and to give thanks? (b) Write a prayer of thanksgiving that incorporates something from 1 Samuel 2:1–2.

Eli*Pages 131–132*

The child Samuel served under Eli, who was both priest and judge in Israel. Eli had two adult sons who were priests, like he. Unfortunately, they had no regard for God. They took for themselves and Eli the portions of peoples' sacrifices that were supposed to go to the Lord, thus treating the offerings with contempt.¹³¹ They also had sex with the women who served at the tabernacle with them.¹³² God sent a prophet to warn Eli and ask him why he honored his sons over God. But nothing changed.

One night God called to the boy Samuel while he was lying down in the temple near the ark.

3. (a) What did God tell Samuel he was going to do to Eli's family (1 Samuel 3:12–14)? (b) What are some possible reasons why Eli didn't stop his sons from misusing their office? (c) Why was Eli's failure to restrain his sons so serious?

Samuel*Pages 133–136*

Like other children we've seen born to barren women after a long wait, Samuel had a special calling.

4. (a) What was Samuel attested as (1 Samuel 3:19–21)? (b) Why do you think God raised up a godly prophet like Samuel after Israel had suffered under the poor leadership of Eli and his sons?

Eli's sons hadn't faith in God to obey him or treat him respectfully. On the other hand, they treated the ark of the covenant of God as if it were a good-luck charm, taking it to a battle against the Philistines in the hope of securing victory from the God with whom they had no relationship. But the Philistines captured the ark and killed Eli's sons.

¹³¹ 1 Samuel 2:12–17.

¹³² 1 Samuel 2:22.

5. What are ways people today treat things of God as good-luck charms?

God miraculously brought back the ark, proving he was God.

Samuel became judge over Israel. He gathered the people together, calling them to repent and turn back to God. Unexpectedly, the Philistines attacked them. Samuel cried out to God, who responded with loud thunder crashes against the Philistines. The Philistines panicked and the Israelites routed them. It was a perfect example of God going before them as King to lead their battles.

But the people weren't satisfied with that and eventually asked for a change.

6. (a) When Samuel grew old, what did the Israelites ask him to do (1 Samuel 8:5)? (b) Whom were they trying to imitate? (c) If possible, describe a time you wanted something so that you could be like everybody else, but it turned out not to be the best for you.

7. (a) Their request displeased Samuel, so what did he do (1 Samuel 8:6)? (b) In what way was he imitating his godly mother, Hannah? (c) Explain how you can respond as Samuel did to something displeasing you today.

8. (a) Whom did God say the people were really rejecting (1 Samuel 8:7–8)? (b) Nonetheless, what does God tell Samuel to do (verse 9)? (c) Samuel warns them what having a king will cost them. How do the people respond (verses 19–20)?

Saul Starts Well

Pages 136–141

God brought Saul to Samuel and told him to anoint Saul king.

9. In what ways was Saul like the kings of other nations, just as the people had requested (1 Samuel 9:1–2)?

Samuel anointed Saul king. Shortly after, Ammonites threatened one of the Israelite cities.¹³³ When Saul heard about it, “the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him” and he successfully delivered the city, solidifying his position as king in the eyes of the people.

10. What warning did Samuel give the people when he reaffirmed Saul as king (1 Samuel 12:14–15)?

11. (a) What did Samuel assure the people of, despite their having rejected his advice (1 Samuel 12:23)? (b) How can you apply this to your own relationships, particularly difficult ones?

Saul Finishes Poorly

Pages 141–143

Saul summoned troops to meet him at Gilgal for another battle against the Philistines.

¹³³ Saul had relatives in the city, Jabesh Gilead.

12. (a) What had Samuel instructed Saul to do at Gilgal (1 Samuel 10:8)? (b) What did Saul do instead (1 Samuel 13:8–10)? (c) What did his lack of obedience to God’s command through Samuel show?

The kings of other nations performed priestly duties; in fact, they often claimed deity themselves. But that was strictly forbidden in Israel. The Israelite kings were to be submissive to God, and that included both following direction from godly prophets speaking in his name and obeying God’s laws regarding kingship. Saul failed both.

Nonetheless, the Lord rescued Israel again, this time through the hand of Saul’s courageous son Jonathan and an earthquake.

Later, Samuel came to Saul with a prophetic message from God.

13. What assignment did the Lord Almighty give to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:1–3?

The Amalekites were not among the Canaanite groups God told the Israelites to drive out of the land.¹³⁴ They were descended from Esau’s grandson, Amalek.¹³⁵ As Moses led the weary Israelites out of Egypt and through the Sinai Peninsula, the Amalekites attacked them from behind, cutting off those who lagged behind. Joshua turned back to lead the fight against the Amalekite army at their rear. A hard and difficult battle ensued, but the Israelites finally drove them away.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ The Amalekites were nomads dwelling mostly in the Sinai Peninsula. They often acted as mercenaries, assisting others in wars and raids.

¹³⁵ Genesis 36:12. Amalek would have known about the promises God made to his great-great-grandfather Abraham, including that some of his descendants would be enslaved 400 years and then brought to the land of Canaan to drive out the inhabitants when the inhabitants’ sin had reached the measure warranting it (Genesis 15:13–16). Perhaps Amalek continued the jealousy over Jacob being chosen over Esau for the birthright. Did the Amalekites upon hearing of the miraculous deliverance of Jacob’s descendants now think they could prevent God from completing his plans? Whatever the case, they set out to destroy the people God had just rescued from Pharaoh, and in so doing set themselves against God.

¹³⁶ Exodus 17:8-16.

The Lord pronounced the severest form of judgment on the Amalekites: total destruction.¹³⁷ He told Moses to write down that God himself would be at war against the Amalekites.¹³⁸

During the time of the judges, the Amalekites often oppressed the Israelites, joining forces with other peoples raiding them.

Samuel told Saul the time had now come to bring God's judgment against the Amalekites. They were to take no spoils or prisoners.

14. Did Saul obey God's command completely (1 Samuel 15:8–9)?

When Samuel confronted Saul, he claimed the people kept the animals in order to sacrifice them to God.¹³⁹ But that's not what God told Saul to do.¹⁴⁰

Saul's refusal to obey God yet again brought consequences: his kingdom would not endure.

15. (a) What caused Saul to finish poorly? (b) What attributes did Saul and Eli lack that caused them to fall? (c) What attributes did Hannah and Samuel have that helped them stand tall?

We've seen how Hannah cried out to God in her misery and praised him in her joy. We saw Samuel talk to God when he was displeased, and we saw his commitment to intercede for those who had rejected his advice.

16. Write a prayer below based on one of these examples.

¹³⁷ The Hebrew word refers to the irrevocably giving over of things or persons to God, often by destruction.

¹³⁸ Later, when Moses addressed the next generation of Israelites just before they entered the Promised Land, he told them to remember, "When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God" (Deuteronomy 25:18). Moses gave them this charge: "When the LORD your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!" (Deuteronomy 25:19).

¹³⁹ Note that those offering such fellowship sacrifices ate much of the offering.

¹⁴⁰ Saul did not kill all the Amalekites. Quite a few survived and David later fought against them too. They remained in the land until the time of Hezekiah. It's unclear whether Saul was to go after just the Amalekites residing in that portion of the land to which Samuel sent him.

Timeline: Israel’s First Leaders (1500–586 BC)

