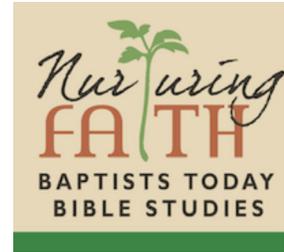


Adult Teaching Resources

November 15, 2015



A Time for Gratitude

You're All I Have — Ruth 1:1-2:23

An Odd Road to a Happy Ending — Ruth 3:1-4:21

Transformational Tears — 1 Samuel 1:1-28

Thanks for the Promises — 2 Samuel 23:1-7

Hope Waits

A Time for Anticipation — 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

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Transformational Tears

1 Samuel 1:1-28

FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Note to the Teacher: Today's lesson deals with the infertility of Hannah. Be sensitive to members of your class who may have struggled or who are now struggling with this issue. A very good blog to read, which will be used in the Transformational Exercise, is here: <http://rationalfaiths.com/so-when-you-gonna-have-kids/>

Fellowship Question

Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

What is one thing you would love to be able to do, but is physically impossible for you?

How would you respond to this question about your family: If someone doesn't have _____, it's a shame.

Information

There are some things you might love to do, but they will always be impossible for you. You may wish to do back flips like a cheerleader or dunk a basketball like a pro player — but you do not have the flexibility or height or coordination. Not being able to do those things has probably not hurt you socially or financially. But in today's story, not being able to bear children was an emotional burden and much more.

“A woman capable of reproduction is accorded an increased level of social status in proportion to her fertility, which may seem of negligible significance in contemporary life, but which was highly prized in traditional economies, where status is untethered from money, since hardly anyone has any. The accrual of honor (increased social status) or shame (decreased social status) is the fundamental means among these people for establishing the pecking order in a community, which is its way of keeping track of who is doing better or worse at embodying its common values. Barrenness in such contexts is a source of tremendous shame for both the family, as well the woman, who gets a double-shot of it, first from the community, but then also from her family, who experience her as a “lost opportunity,” like a first round draft pick who can't perform at the required level, who seemed to be such a good idea at the time but who, despite all the best hopes, doesn't pan out.” (Timothy F. Simpson. *The Politics of 1 Samuel 1:4-20*. <http://www.politicaltheology.com/blog/politics-1samuel-14-20/>)

Information *continued*

[Have a class member read I Samuel 1:1-8.]

We have a man with two wives. In our world, that is illegal, but “in [Elkanah’s] world, every man was expected to beget sons to perpetuate his name, inherit his land, and carry on his business. If his wife could not bear him children, he was allowed to take another.” (From the online resource, “Digging Deeper: Multiple wives”)

How would you describe the relationship between Elkanah and Hannah? Between Peninnah and Hannah?

Where do we see evidence of shaming in this story? How would you define “shame”?

Even today, there can be shame about infertility. “Shame is a searing, painful feeling associated with faltering self-esteem, and a sense of inadequacy, defectiveness and helplessness. As repeated attempts to get pregnant come to naught, there is a realization that this intensely strived-for goal has not been, and may never be, attained. As this failure becomes more and more evident, one’s self-image is assaulted. It is easy to move from procedures that have failed to the feeling that ‘I am a failure.’ Anguish, self-doubt, and chronic sadness converge as couples come to think of themselves as failing, not only in realizing their own dream to reproduce and nurture, but failing their spouse, parents, and siblings as well.” (<http://www.resolve.org/support/Managing-Infertility-Stress/emotional-aspects.html>)

Peninnah delighted in making Hannah feel like a failure. What do you think drove Peninnah to be so cruel to Hannah?

How would you describe Elkanah’s reaction to Hannah’s despair? Have you seen that men and women sometimes experience infertility (or pregnancy loss) differently?

Hannah is going to plead with God about this situation.

[Have a class member read I Samuel 1:9-11.]

How would you describe Hannah’s mood? What do you think are her motivations?

We might describe Hannah’s prayer as a bargaining prayer. “If you will answer this prayer, then I will...” However, in verse 11, her prayer is described as a vow. Is there a difference between a bargain and a vow? [Others also bargained with God — Abraham for Sodom’s salvation, for example — but a vow was a binding, holy promise that must not be broken. [See Numbers 30:1-8.]

Hannah vows that if God will bless her with a son, she will dedicate him to God as a nazrite, that is, someone separated to the Lord.

[Have a class member read Numbers 6:1-8.]

“They are holy to the Lord,” verse 8 reads. Hannah does not plan “to keep” this child, if God should provide a child, but “to separate” the child from herself and for the Lord’s service.

Information *continued*

Abstaining from wine, haircuts, and corpses were outward signs of this separation.

Hannah is distraught. The nearby priest misinterprets that grief as something else.

[Have a class member read I Samuel 1:12-20.]

Eli misinterprets Hannah's appearance. When she tells him what was really going on, Eli does not apologize, but he does bless. "Go in peace," he says and she does experience peace.

Socially, infertility had a terrible stigma. Economically, you were not providing for the future and you had no one in the future to provide for you. There were theological implications as well. Children were a sign of God's favor. Barrenness was a sign of God's displeasure.

Hannah leaves Eli with a lighter heart. Why? (Hope that she will now have a child; a belief that the blessing was a promise of future fertility; etc.)

Maybe Hannah was so identified (and self-identified?) by her infertility, she had forgotten that she was beloved by God regardless of her fertility. How do we allow our identities to be shaped by our perceived weaknesses?

Henri Nouwen says this of Hannah's prayer: "It was her agonizing prayer, which brought all of her feelings of humiliation, rejection, and resentment before God, that took her inner darkness away...Prayer is so important. It invites us to live in ever closer communion with the one who loves us more than any human being ever can. After her prayer, Hannah knew once again that she was loved by God. In prayer she rediscovered her true self. Her happiness was no longer dependent upon having a child, but only upon the total and unlimited love of God. Thus she could wipe away her tears, eat again, and see her depression depart. When God in his love gave her a son, she was truly grateful. Because God's goodness, not her own, was the main source of her joy." [Henri J. M. Nouwen. *The Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey*. "Healing Prayer: January 14." NY: Image Books, Doubleday. 1988.]

[Have a class member read I Samuel 1:21-28.]

Why do you think Hannah did not give Samuel up immediately?

[Here is one interpretation: "She had been made a mother, and she needed to mother. She'd honour her vow once the child was weaned. She'd been childless for so long and now she wasn't going to let her child go into the world unmothered. I am so glad that the scripture writer included this detail. Our human relationships are the location of our honouring God. Hannah would not have been faithful if she had too quickly handed her son to Eli. Samuel needed to know something of a mother's love — something about trust and patience and deep abiding love — if he was to faithfully listen to the call of God in the midst of a noisy, broken world." (Katie Munnik. "Hannah and her sisters." *Presbyterian Record*. <http://presbyterianrecord.ca/2012/11/12/hannah-and-her-sisters/>)

One writer notes, "while God is indeed presented both here and elsewhere as a personal God who takes seriously the cries of his people, what should be read as a text which presents

Information *continued*

God as the champion of and in solidarity with the oppressed, can all too quickly be read as presenting God as the Santa Claus at the mall promising you everything you want. And that's not what this text is about." (Timothy F. Simpson. *The Politics of 1 Samuel 1:4-20*. <http://www.politicaltheology.com/blog/politics-1samuel-14-20/>)

What is this text about, if it is not about getting what we want from God?

Transformational Exercise

Hannah and Elkanah had Samuel. Other infertile couples who desire children remain infertile. We risk being members of the Peninnah club if we constantly ask them "when are you going to have a child?" We may be well-meaning (unlike Peninnah), but the pain we can cause is just as painful as her taunts. Here are three suggestions from one man who struggled with infertility:

1. Don't ask. It's frankly none of your business. It's as personal as asking how often they make love, and you'd never dream of asking that question. So don't ask, let them bring it up if it comes up.
2. The culture within the church needs to change to be mindful of those who might possibly be in your group or congregation who are struggling with infertility. So don't ever make statements that may make those with fertility issues feel excluded. "Unless you have a child of your own, you'll NEVER understand the true love of a child" (true story). "Until you're pregnant, you'll never understand what it means to truly bond with your child..." etc etc—because maybe someone in that group just got the news that they will NEVER get pregnant. Just remember, not everyone is following your timeline, and not everyone CAN follow your timeline—but would love to.
3. If you find out that someone is struggling with infertility, please please please love them with everything you got. Hug them if you can. Cry with them if you can. A dream of theirs just got shattered and taken away. Yes, there's adoption, but let them accept that later on. Be with them NOW, as if they'd just lost a loved one. Trust me, whatever brave face they are showing you is trying to hide some serious pain of all kinds. (<http://rationalfaiths.com/so-when-you-gonna-have-kids/>)

[Close in a prayer something like this:] *God of Elkanah and Hannah, We thank you for this story. We trust that we, too, can bring to you whatever issues are traumatizing our souls. We trust that you love us, regardless of our status or situation. Hear our prayers. And when we do get the answer we hope for, give us a generous spirit to use what you have answered for your glory. Amen.*]

Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan? You may send comments to the lesson plan author at rjordan@cbfnc.org. Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The text — While the Revised Common Lectionary includes only 1 Sam. 1:4-20, we get a better understanding of the text by beginning at v. 1.

The Book of 1 Samuel describes a time of transition between the period of the “judges” and Israel’s first experiment with kingship. It opens with the birth of a miracle baby who would become Israel’s final judge and the mentor of its first king. The extended story of Samuel’s birth, including his mother Hannah’s life-changing vow, emphasizes Samuel’s central role in the following narrative.

The account begins with a mother who is willing to sacrifice her own son for God’s greater good. It continues with a boy-become-man who follows his mother’s example and devotes his entire life to the service of God.

Multiple wives — Bigamy was not the rule in ancient Israel, but it was allowed under certain circumstances, especially when the first wife appeared unable to have children. In ancient Israel, a woman’s status and social value was related to the number of children she had. Unmarried or childless women had lower social status and suffered a measure of shame.

The rabbis claimed that Elkanah had married Hannah for love, and the Bible clearly says that he loved her even though she had no children. Elkanah could have divorced Hannah for failing to produce offspring. He did not choose to do so, but the lack of children remained a problem. In his world, every man was expected to beget sons to perpetuate his name, inherit his land, and carry on his business. If his wife could not bear him children, he was allowed to take another.

Dinner on the grounds — By the time the legal material that codified Israel’s sacrificial system was fully in place, sacrifices could be offered only in Jerusalem (Deut 12:13-14); but earlier Hebrews could offer sacrifices at family altars or local shrines, such as the temple (or tabernacle) at Shiloh, where the Ark of the Covenant had come to rest after Israel’s entry into Canaan.

Most sacrifices offered at the harvest festival were *shelamim* offerings, typically translated as “peace offerings” or “communion offerings.” The root of *shelamim* is the word *shalom*, which can refer to peace, wholeness, or health. The sacrifices were intended to maintain a healthy relationship with God.

With these sacrifices, only the blood, visceral fat and fat tail of the sheep were burned on the altar (Lev. 3:16-17; 7:22-26; 17:11, 14). A front quarter of the carcass was kept by the priests (Lev 7:28-34; 10:14-15), while the remainder of the animal was eaten by the family,

Digging Deeper *continued*

with the proviso that it be eaten within three days (Lev 7:16-17; 22:18-23). Thus, the festivals were characterized by days of happy eating and drinking, often to excess.

A double portion — The expression usually translated as “a double portion” literally means “a portion of two faces,” or enough for two.

Vows — In the Old Testament period and throughout the ancient Near East, vows were not unconditional promises as we tend to think of them today. Rather, the *neder* (translated as “vow”) was always a conditional promise to God in which someone asked God for a benison, and pledged to give something to God in return. Vows were serious business, sacred promises that could not be ignored. If God granted the prayer, the petitioner was bound to follow through on his or her promise.

Other examples of biblical vows include Israel’s vow to destroy everything without taking any booty if God gave them victory over the king of Arad (Num. 21:1-3), and Jephthah’s unfortunate vow to sacrifice whatever first came from his house if he returned victorious from battle with the Ammonites (Judg. 11:30-31). Jephthah probably expected an animal to emerge from the first-floor stables, and was shocked when his daughter was the first to come out and greet him: but he kept his vow.

Regulations regarding vow making found in Numbers 30 indicate that a woman’s vow could be annulled by her husband (if married) or father (if single) if they objected on first hearing of it. If not, the vow would stand. If such rules were known and in force at Shiloh during this period, we would assume that Elkanah had also agreed to Hannah’s vow and supported it.

Heard of God — In Hebrew, Samuel’s name would sound like *shmu-ēl*. The first part is the passive voice of the verb *shamah*, meaning “to hear,” while the last part, *el*, as a generic word for “god.” Thus, it probably means “heard of God.”

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Did Hannah promise that Samuel would be a Nazirite for life?

The NRSV says Hannah pledged that Samuel would be a Nazirite (1 Sam. 1:11). So, to begin with, what was a Nazirite? Persons making a Nazirite vow in its classic form, described in Numbers 6, pledged that for a given period of time — three months, perhaps — they would not cut their hair or beard, drink anything alcoholic, or become “unclean” by touching a dead body. At the end of the period, if such persons had been faithful, they would shave their entire bodies and offer specified sacrifices at the temple in order to be released from their vow. This type of Nazirite vow could be as conditional as any other vow (see Tony W. Cartlege, “Were Nazirite Vows Unconditional?” CBQ 51 [Jul 1989]: 409-22; and in a less technical treatment, “The Nazirites,” BI 19 [Oct–Dec 1992]: 54-58).

Another category of Nazirites made lifelong pledges of separation to God’s service, in a similar way to Catholic monastic orders of our own day. These persons were not to cut their hair or drink wine; the prohibition against touching the dead was not as clear. For example, Samson’s mother was told before his birth that she should avoid drinking alcohol or eating anything unclean, and that the son she would bear “shall be a nazirite to God from birth.” (Judg. 13:1-5). This is why the cutting of Samson’s hair was so significant, but the way: it violated his status as a devoted Nazirite.

Did Hannah promise that Samuel would be a Nazirite?

The NRSV translation of 1:11 has this reading: “She made this vow: ‘O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.’”

Compare that to the NET: “She made a vow saying, ‘O LORD of hosts, if you will look with compassion on the suffering of your female servant, remembering me and not forgetting your servant, and give a male child to your servant, then I will dedicate him to the LORD all the days of his life. His hair will never be cut.’”

The NET translation follows the Masoretic Text (MT), the standard Hebrew exemplar with which critical editions begin. It says nothing about Hannah pledging that Samuel would be a Nazirite, only that his hair would not be cut (literally, “a razor shall not come up on his head”). But the MT dates to the 7-10th centuries C.E., more than 1300 years after 1 Samuel was written.

The NRSV attributes to Hannah a full-blown pledge that Samuel would be a Nazirite, neither cutting his hair nor imbibing alcohol. These additions are drawn from the

The Hardest Question *continued*

Septuagint (LXX) — a Greek translation of the Old Testament that was made in the second century B.C.E. Most New Testament quotations are from the LXX, and relatively complete versions of it are known from the 4th century C.E. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, one Hebrew scroll (called 4QSama) containing parts of the books of Samuel dates to the first century B.C.E. Its text is closer in form to the LXX than the MT.

Thus, the question of whether Samuel was a Nazirite depends on which manuscript evidence we find to be most convincing. Scholars such as P. Kyle McCarter and Ralph Klein find the evidence from LXX and 4QSama to be compelling, and favor a reading that counts Samuel among the Nazirites (McCarter, *1 Samuel*, Anchor Bible, vol. 8 [Doubleday, 1980], 49-50, 53; Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 10 [Thomas Nelson, 1983], 3).

The longer readings could be original, accidentally deleted from the MT during copying over many years, or they may reflect later attempts to harmonize the vow with typical Nazirite practice. It seems more likely that the Nazirite elements would be added to the text than that a later editor would delete them, but the argument remains inconclusive. Nazirite or not, Samuel's later life revealed him to be wholly devoted to Yahweh all the days of his life.