

40
days in

1 SAMUEL

DUANE GARRETT

— *edited by* —

WILLIAM F. COOK III



40
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Titles in 40 Days Series

40 Days in 1 Samuel

40 Days in Mark

40 Days in Psalms (release March 2021)

40 Days in 1 Corinthians (release March 2021)

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1 SAMUEL—STUDY AND TEACHING / CHRISTIAN LIFE

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Preface

Forty is an important number in the Bible. Moses was on Mount Sinai with the Lord God for forty days (Exod. 34:28), Elijah traveled for forty days before arriving at Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:3–8), and Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for forty days (Mark 1:13). Some self-help experts believe it takes forty days to develop a habit. Whether they're right or wrong, there is no habit more important for a Christian to develop than a consistent devotional life.

In *40 Days in the Word*, readers will discover a humble attempt to assist believers longing for a fresh moving of God's Spirit in their life. This series intends to enable believers to read though books of the Bible in their devotional time discovering God's truth within its biblical context. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to mature believers in their faith and increase their passion and zeal for Jesus Christ.

Many Christians find it difficult to sustain momentum in their devotional life. They desire to read the Bible consistently but lack encouragement, guidance, and direction. Commentaries are often too technical, and devotionals may fail to challenge them to dig deeply into God's Word. The *40 Days* series offers both a deeper discussion of a biblical passage and encouragement for the reader to make personal applications based upon what the text *actually* says.

We live in a day where casual Christianity (which is not biblical Christianity at all!) has infected the church in the West. People are clamoring for shorter sermons that are more focused on felt-needs rather than on the Bible, and many in the pulpits are obliging. Furthermore, the songs that are often sung fail to extol the greatness of God, but instead make people feel better about themselves and their comfortable lifestyles.

If the church in the West is to recapture the passion of the early church, God's people must spend time on their knees with their Bibles open, allowing God's Spirit to convict them of their sin, build them up in their faith, and empower them to take the gospel across the street and around the world. The hope of the authors of this series is that God's Spirit will use these volumes to help God's people develop an ever-increasing love for their Savior, Jesus Christ.

In addition to helping individual believers, the series holds out hope for small groups desiring to focus their meetings on the study of the Bible. A group would spend approximately two months (five days of readings per week) reading through a book of the Bible along with the *40 Days* volume, and then base their discipleship time encouraging each other with what they discovered during the previous week.

The Spirit of God and the Word of God work together to strengthen God's church. The apostle Paul put it this way: "Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts" (Col. 3:16). Paul's hope is my prayer for you as you journey through these next forty days.

Bill Cook
Holy Week, 2020

Day One

Hannah's Prayer

1 Samuel 1:1–28

The Big Picture

As 1 Samuel begins, Israel is a loose confederation of tribes that were sporadically under the leadership of warriors we call the “judges.” Israel had no central government and no capital city. There was no regular succession of judges. Individual judges arose and were recognized in times of crisis, as called by Yahweh, and it seems that the authority of any given judge rarely extended far beyond his own tribe. There was no temple; Israel worshiped at the Tent of Meeting, which was set up at Shiloh. The first thing we read is the account of the birth and calling of the last and greatest judge, Samuel.

Digging In

Hannah's anguish over her inability to bear children is understandable to any woman who longs for children and cannot have them. But for an ancient Israelite, the distress was especially severe. Israel had no social safety net whatsoever. There was no provision for a pension, for health care, or public assistance of any kind. If a woman's husband

predeceased her, she depended entirely on her children, particularly her sons, to provide for her in old age. Absent that, she might very well starve, and she would certainly have to beg. Charitable giving was entirely a private matter; there was no state to enforce it. When Hannah's husband, Elkanah, asked, "Am I not better to you than ten sons?" he was not making an ego-centric claim that she should be thrilled to have such a fine husband. He was stating that he provided for her generously (he gave her a double portion). While there is no doubt that he did love her and gave her all she needed—and he did not neglect her because she was barren—from her perspective there was still a major problem. If Elkanah predeceased Hannah, the son of Hannah's rival, Peninnah, would be the heir of the estate. Peninnah could then eject Hannah from the household, leaving her destitute.

In addition, there was great cultural pressure for women to have children. A woman who bore no children would probably be regarded as a failure and a disgrace—especially by other women, just as men would despise a man who fled from a battle or who did not properly work his land. For Hannah, her condition meant that she had not fulfilled her role as a woman and was at risk of losing everything. We should not judge her by modern, Western standards.

We read that the priest Eli noticed Hannah because her lips were moving but made no sound (1 Sam. 1:13). We might think that she would have been expected to pray silently, with her mouth shut. In fact, it appears that people in the ancient world always prayed aloud; they did not pray in their minds alone. Thus, what was strange to Eli was that she made no audible words, and thus he thought that she was just a distraught drunk mumbling incoherently. Hannah denied that she was drunk and spoke of her great despair, implying she was so upset she could hardly make her voice work while she prayed.

Eli saw the truth in this and pronounced a blessing over her, telling her she could depart "in peace." A priest is someone who stands between God and other people to serve as an intermediary and intercessor on their behalf. As the high priest, Eli had authority from God to pronounce a blessing over people in Yahweh's name. This did not mean that his blessings were always efficacious; he did not have a superpower. He did, however, speak as God's representative, and Hannah

received his words with faith and gratitude, and it gave her peace. In fact, God heard Hannah's prayer and Eli's blessing, and she became pregnant.

Hannah named her son Samuel after he was born, saying, "I requested him from the LORD." We do not, in fact, know what the name "Samuel" means. It sounds somewhat like the Hebrew for "God heard" or for "requested," but it does not actually mean either of these. Whatever the name meant to Hannah, she felt it was an appropriate name for a boy whom she conceived in answer to prayer.

Samuel stayed with his mother until he was weaned. In the ancient world, this could last for a long time, even until a child was between five and seven years of age. We have ancient statuary in which a standing child is nursed by his standing mother. Thus, we should not suppose that when Samuel went to stay with Eli at Shiloh, he was little more than a crawling infant.

Hannah kept the vows she had made about Samuel. First, he was a Nazirite, meaning that during the period of his vow he did not have his hair cut, and he stayed away from whatever would defile him in a ritual sense (such as touching a dead body). The Bible does not elsewhere speak of Samuel as a Nazirite; it may be that she kept him under a Nazirite vow only while he lived with her. Normally, a Nazirite vow was temporary, but we should also see Samuel as a contrast to Samson, the previous judge, who was also a Nazirite but was far less faithful than Samuel. Second, she said that Samuel would stay with Yahweh all his life. Obviously, Hannah could not control what Samuel would do when he was a grown man. What she meant was that she would commit him to Yahweh's service as soon as possible, right after he was weaned. This was a great sacrifice on her part. By surrendering her son to service in the sanctuary, she would release him from his commitment to take care of her. If she had no other sons, she would again face the prospect of poverty. Thus, her vow was a great step of faith.

Living It Out

This passage holds several lessons for us. First, Hannah's distress and subsequent prayer reminds us that we should take our problems to

God and not assume that our mundane troubles do not interest him. Hannah suffered disgrace and reproach and feared falling into poverty. We, too, should cast all our worries on God (1 Pet. 5:7). Second, Eli's blessing over Hannah is a model for what a priest should do: Invoke God's blessing upon other people. Some people speak of the "universal priesthood of the believer" as though it has something to do with freedom of conscience in doctrinal matters. That is not the point at all; it means that we can go directly to God on behalf of others. For Christians, the power to invoke God's blessing on someone is not reserved to an exclusive, ordained priesthood, but it is wasted on us if we do not bless others and intercede for them. Third, Hannah's dedication of her son to God's service, as an act of faith, is a model for us. While we should be careful about making vows (Eccles. 5:4–5), God does desire us to step out in faith and not cling to worldly security.



Day Two

Hannah's Praise

1 Samuel 2:1–10

The Big Picture

We sometimes think of a psalm strictly as one of the 150 chapters of the book of Psalms, but in fact, one can find many psalms in other books. Hannah's song of praise is such a psalm, and this event, a woman singing a psalm as an expression of her faith in Yahweh, would have been to an ancient Israelite a normal part of religious life. David was the most famous psalmist of Israel, but he was not the only one, and he was not the first. In fact, the psalms we have in the Bible represent only a tiny fraction of the psalms people sang through the history of ancient Israel. Most of them were never written down, just as most of our prayers are never written down.

Hannah composed this psalm to give thanks to God for answered prayer. Even though it was her own composition, it was not entirely original. If you read the Psalms, you will see that they reuse many ideas several times, and sometimes one psalm will repeat phrases verbatim that are found in other psalms. Thus, one did not need to be highly gifted in composition to "create" a new psalm. Much of the psalm composition would be a matter of mixing and matching words and concepts that were part of the standard repertoire of psalms. Finally, although

we do not know much about ancient Israelite music, it appears that they were sung to a fairly simple chant. For that reason, an ordinary person could sing a psalm (and all psalms were sung) without being a skilled or trained singer. We should not be surprised that Hannah created and sang a psalm in thanks for the grace she had received; for a pious Israelite woman, it was the normal thing to do.

Digging In

For us, perhaps the most remarkable thing about Hannah's prayer is what she does not say: She never says, "I thank you, God, for giving me a son." This does not mean that she was not grateful for the fact that God answered her earlier prayer and allowed her to have a son. Clearly, she was grateful for this, and she probably voiced her thanks in other, more specific and private prayers. Psalms, however, are almost always general and non-specific. David often prays for deliverance from his enemies in the Psalms, but it is often unclear who these enemies were and what precisely they were doing. Often, we have very little information about what problem David specifically prays about in his psalms. Was he sick? Were his enemies closing in, or was it something else? We often don't know. In the great psalm of confession, Psalm 51, David never mentions that he had committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah (we only know that this is in the background of the psalm because of the heading, called a "superscript," at the top of the psalm).

The fact that the Psalms (including Hannah's psalm) are non-specific is of great advantage to us as readers. It allows us to read and pray the psalms in our situation and apply the words of the psalm to our needs, sorrows, and joys. If the psalms were specific, they would be of historical interest but would be of much less value as texts of prayer and praise for us. Anyone, male or female, who has experienced answers to prayer and God's help can pray Hannah's psalm. It is not just for women who had been barren and who now have a baby.

Hannah's psalm is in four parts, as follows: opening praise to Yahweh (1 Sam. 2:1–2); exhortations against arrogant behavior (2:3–5); how Yahweh responds to arrogance and to humility (2:6–9); Yahweh's future work of judgment and salvation (2:10).

The opening praise begins with Hannah's joy in Yahweh (v. 1), and then proceeds to describe the greatness of Yahweh (v. 2). This may seem logically backward, as if we should assert first that God is great and then describe how we love him. But the Old Testament is often very personal, focusing on how humans feel and react first and then moving to theological concepts. That is what gives it such great appeal. Hannah says her heart exults, her horn is raised, and her mouth opens against her enemies (the NRSV translates "horn" as "strength" and translates "opens" as "derides"). The "heart" is the mind and personality; her whole being rejoices in God. The "horn" is a metaphor taken from how a ram or bull raises high its horns as a show of power and confidence; Hannah feels that God has given her great power and a victory. Her mouth is "open" in that she is not put to shame and silenced but can boast in God before all who hate her. Hannah did not necessarily have a large number of personal enemies (although her rival-wife Peninnah no doubt hated her). But language about one's "enemies" is common in psalms; it is a literary motif. It describes anyone who might despise those who fear God. Hannah can rejoice because God has vindicated her.

Verse 2 says there is no "Holy One" like Yahweh (NRSV). The other holy beings could be angels, but it is more likely that it refers to the gods of the nations. The Old Testament will often describe the other gods as though they were real for the purpose of making a comparison to Yahweh. For example, Exodus 15:11 says, "LORD, who is like you among the gods?" The nations have no one like Yahweh to turn to. Hannah then says there is "no one besides you," indicating that the other gods do not exist at all. She finally says Yahweh is her incomparable "rock," meaning that no other god offers such safety.

In her exhortations against arrogant behavior (2:3–5), Hannah talks directly to her audience—those of us who hear or read her words. Psalms are not private prayers or meditations; they are given so that other people can learn from them. She tells us to avoid arrogant behavior and attitudes, warning us that God knows all and carefully weighs all our actions. Again, focusing on human experience, she then gives us three examples of what has befallen people who either did or did not heed her warning (vv. 4–5). Mighty warriors have suffered defeat

(because of their arrogance), but physically weak people won victories (if in humility they sought God's help). Rich people (who thought they did not need God) fell into poverty, but the poor (who trusted in God rather than wealth) never went hungry. A barren woman finds herself with a household full of children, but a woman who gave birth to many sons finds herself with no children to care for her. This last example obviously ties to Hannah's own experience, in that she prayed to God for a son, but even so, her psalm is not meant to be read as autobiographical. This idea—that God gives children to the barren but leaves the arrogant woman with many sons destitute—is a biblical motif for how God exalts the lowly and humbles the proud (Isa. 54:1).

When Hannah describes how Yahweh responds with hostility to arrogance but with compassion to humility (1 Sam. 2:6–10a), she asserts that it is not blind fate or “karma” that balances the scales. It is God who brings down the proud and exalts those that turn from their brokenness to him. We serve a living God, and we should take our fears to him. Also, Hannah's psalm effectively equates pride with wickedness. In the Bible, the fear of God comes out of true humility and leads to a devout and upright life.

In her account of Yahweh's future work of judgment and salvation (2:10), Hannah first declares simply that God is great and will judge the wicked and then says he will give strength to his “king” and “anointed.” But when Hannah prayed, there was no king in Israel. This is what marks her psalm as truly inspired, just like the psalms of David. She foresaw that God's great work of salvation would be in the anointed king. Although this was fulfilled in a limited way in David, we should remember that the word for “anointed” in Hebrew also means “Messiah.”

Living It Out

Hannah exhorts those of us who are doing well to humble ourselves and those of us who are suffering to turn to God. A broken heart can drive us to God, but prosperity can drive us from him. It is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (Matt. 19:24).

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The Holy Spirit uses God's Word to grow believers in their faith and increase their passion for Jesus. As each volume focuses on a particular book in the Bible, believers will find the study useful for the enrichment of daily devotional reading or as the basis for small group Bible study discussion.

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