Reflections [17 - 23 November 2024](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2024/134-november-december-2024-bc/proper-28)

[What song shall we sing?](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2024/134-november-december-2024-bc/proper-28)

**1 Samuel 1:4-20**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Father God,  
whether our hearts are full of songs of joy,  
or songs of sadness,  
we come before you this day,  
offering you all that we are,  
that our whole lives may become a song of praise to you.  
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

**4**Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. **5**But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. **6**Because the Lord had closed Hannah’s womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. **7**This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. **8**Her husband Elkanah would say to her, “Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don’t you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?”

**9**Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord’s house. **10**In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. **11**And she made a vow, saying, “Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.”

**12**As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. **13**Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk **14**and said to her, “How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine.”

**15**“Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. **16**Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.”

**17**Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”

**18**She said, “May your servant find favour in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

**19**Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. **20**So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Samuel%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-7233b)] saying, “Because I asked the Lord for him.”

**Hannah’s Prayer**

**2**Then Hannah prayed and said:

“My heart rejoices in the Lord;  
    in the Lord my horn[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Samuel%202&version=NIV#fen-NIV-7242a)] is lifted high.  
My mouth boasts over my enemies,  
    for I delight in your deliverance.

**2**“There is no one holy like the Lord;  
    there is no one besides you;  
    there is no Rock like our God.

**3**“Do not keep talking so proudly  
    or let your mouth speak such arrogance,  
for the Lord is a God who knows,  
    and by him deeds are weighed.

**4**“The bows of the warriors are broken,  
    but those who stumbled are armed with strength.  
**5**Those who were full hire themselves out for food,  
    but those who were hungry are hungry no more.  
She who was barren has borne seven children,  
    but she who has had many sons pines away.

**6**“The Lord brings death and makes alive;  
    he brings down to the grave and raises up.  
**7**The Lord sends poverty and wealth;  
    he humbles and he exalts.  
**8**He raises the poor from the dust  
    and lifts the needy from the ash heap;  
he seats them with princes  
    and has them inherit a throne of honor.

“For the foundations of the earth are the Lord’s;  
    on them he has set the world.  
**9**He will guard the feet of his faithful servants,  
    but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.

“It is not by strength that one prevails;  
**10**    those who oppose the Lord will be broken.  
The Most High will thunder from heaven;  
    the Lord will judge the ends of the earth.

“He will give strength to his king  
    and exalt the horn of his anointed.”

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

A new chapter in Israel’s story opens with the birth of Samuel, who goes on to anoint Saul and then David as Israel’s first kings (1 Samuel 10:1ff, 16:1ff). In an unstable and anarchic world, the tribes have no king to lead them against their Philistine enemies (Judges 21:25), and the shrine at Shiloh, where the Ark of the Covenant has been housed since Joshua’s time (Joshua 18:1), is corrupted by Eli’s sons (1 Samuel 2:12ff). Yet here we find a devout family with a husband devoted to a wife unable to bear children. Hannah’s inability to conceive is a common Old Testament theme – Abraham’s wife Sarah and Jacob’s wife Rachel are both childless for many years (Genesis 16:1, 30:2) – as is rivalry among wives for their husband’s favour (e.g. Sarah and Hagar in Gen 16:1ff, 21:8ff). In Hannah’s world a woman’s infertility is more than a medical issue. It is seen as God’s withholding the gift of sharing his creative power (v.6; cf Genesis 1:22), ample reason for mockery and humiliation. Elkanah’s well-meaning compassion can’t compensate for Hannah’s lack of a son (1:5, 8). She has to endure Peninnah’s persistent provocation, which is aggravated by the annual pilgrimage to a festival that celebrates the earth’s God-given fertility. It has become an occasion for rehearsing her woe.

We can imagine Hannah’s silent song as she worships – lamentation tinged with hopeful petition and promise. If only God would remember her by removing her shame, she would willingly dedicate her son to God’s service (on the Nazirite vow of dedication see Numbers 6:1ff). She is empowered as she prays, enough to correct the venerable priest Eli’s misreading of her silent prayer and win his blessing (1:12-18). Her final act of worship is no doubt filled with songs of joy and thanksgiving. She leaves for home a transformed woman (v.18), and later conceives as a result of Elkanah’s ‘knowing her’ and God’s ‘remembering her’ (1:19-20). Surprisingly for modern readers, once Samuel is weaned, his parents leave him at Shiloh with Eli, his life an offering to God’s service (1:21-28).

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

We all have choices about how we respond to our circumstances. In 1 Samuel 1, Hannah, in her pain, chose to turn to God, and remain faithful to him. Peninnah, who had everything that Hannah so desperately wanted, chose to taunt Hannah. Samuel also had to make a choice about how to respond to being sent to live at the temple at Shiloh. What might we learn from Hannah and Samuel in how we choose to respond to the situations we find ourselves in?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* What song would you like to sing right now – one of joy/sorrow/something else?
* When have you prayed wholeheartedly to God?
* What situations would you like to see transformed from sorrow to joy?

**A Prayer to finish**

We praise you, Living God,  
for showing us in Scripture and in the world, that:  
trust can triumph; longings can be fulfilled;  
wounds can be healed; circumstances can change;  
dreams can come true;  
the light of your kingdom can overcome  
the destructiveness of darkness  
and your song of redemption will never be silenced.  
**Amen.**