

May Teaching Theme: The Characters in Samuel 1-4

讲员 Speaker: Pastor Tian

题目 Topic: Elkanah

经文 Scripture: 1 Samuel 1

Monthly Theme: As we continue under our year's theme, "Rebuild," we will spend the month of May looking at the key characters in 1 Samuel 1-4. Those characters include Elkanah, Hannah, Eli, Samuel, Hophni & Phinehas. We will see what we can learn from the life of these character's stories.

五月 May: 撒母耳記中的人物 The Characters in Samuel 1-4

May 1st – 以利加拿 Elkanah

May 8th – 哈拿 Hannah (Mother's Day)

May 15th – 以利 Eli

May 22nd – 撒母耳 Samuel

May 29th - 何弗尼 & 非尼哈 Hophni & Phinehas

Resources:

[Sermon Video](#)

[Sermon Slides](#)

[Bible Project: 1 Samuel Overview](#) (English)

[Bible Project: 1 Samuel Overview](#) (Chinese)

Discussion Questions (Pastor William R. Horne)

- (1) Read 1 Samuel 1 together. What observations do you make, and what stands out to you? How would you summarize the passage? What do we know about Elkanah?
- (2) Elkanah shows consistency in his worship by continually bringing his family for the annual sacrifice. What are ways we can increase the faithfulness and consistency of our worship?
- (3) Elkanah attempts to meet Hannah in her grief over not being able to bear children (1 Samuel 1:8). How can we better meet one another in seasons of grief?
- (4) Elkanah (potentially) does something countercultural in choosing to love his wife by submitting to her and the vow she took (recall, the husband had the power to negate the wife's vow). How can you better submit to your wife if you are a husband? If you are not, what are some ways we can better care for and elevate women in our life and society?

Important Notes (Pastor William R. Horne):

Notes on Q1: The text does not give us much information about Elkanah because he is a minor character in the story. We want to be careful not to read too much into the text or assume more about Elkanah than we actually know. However, we know some biographical information and have a few hints on what his life potentially looked like.

- Scholars differ in their understanding of the genealogy of Elkanah's line that opens the book of 1 Samuel. This short genealogy alludes to four different sons of Jacob through names and places:
 1. Ramathaim (likely in the territory of Benjamin)
 2. Ephraim (the territory of Joseph's son)
 3. Ephrath (the region of Bethlehem, in Judah)
 4. through a connected genealogy, to the priestly tribe of Levi (1 Chr 6:16–28, 33–38)

Therefore, it is unclear whether Elkanah was a Benjaminite, an Ephraimite, an Ephrathite, or a Levite. (Nyberg, M. F.)
- We know that he had two wives Hannah and Peninnah (1 Samuel 1:2). Though this is typical in the biblical storyline, it is never held up as godly but, in fact, constantly brings about problems (which we see in the family conflict and tension of Elkanah's life). It is clear that Elkanah, like many, followed what was culturally acceptable rather than necessarily what God desired. Hannah is a more central character in the narrative than Elkanah or Peninnah.
- We know that Elkanah and his family are faithful worshipers, at least according to the tradition of the time, as Elkanah and his family traveled yearly to worship at the tabernacle in Shiloh, where the ark of the covenant was kept. Elkanah is introduced in 1 Sam 1 as a faithful worshiper of God during a time when many of the religious and community leaders of Israel were corrupt (Judg 19–21; 1 Sam 1–4; Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel). (Nyberg, M. F.)
- We are told that Elkanah has a greater love for Hannah. Elkanah's attempt to soothe Hannah in 1 Sam 1:8 is seen by some as tender and caring, while others see Elkanah's succession of four questions as coming from a man who does not understand his wife's deep desire for a son and who wonders why she needs anyone besides himself (Bodner, 1 Samuel, 16) (Nyberg, M. F.) So, we could either take this positively or negatively or maybe a mix of both like so many characters. Elkanah could have a deep love and care for Hannah while also battling the insecurity that his love isn't sufficient for Hannah, who desires a son.
- Elkanah practices the "mutual submission" Paul talks about in New Testament times in Ephesians 5 by submitting to his wife in her taking of a vow. "When Elkanah agreed to his wife's vow to dedicate their son to serve the Lord at the temple in Shiloh, it was an act of participation on his part. According to Jewish law, he could have nullified her vow, but he let it stand." (Num 30:10–15; Eslinger, Kingship, 85) (Nyberg, M. F.)
- "After dedicating their son Samuel to the Lord, Elkanah and Hannah continue to perform their annual sacrifice to the Lord and to care for their son Samuel even though he remains in Shiloh (1 Sam 2:18–20)" (Nyberg, M. F.). So we know that, at least at some level, Elkanah cares for his children.

So, as we saw with Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah (and again, most biblical characters), from what little we know of Elkanah, he was a mixed bag of good, bad, and neutral. We can assume primarily positive, but he isn't a main character in the story; thus, the details of his life are lacking.

Notes on Q3: The ability for us to mourn, weep, and grieve with one another is key to the body of Christ and the life of God's people. We can look to passages like Romans 12:15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." Or 1 Corinthians 12:26, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." Or even look to ancient Jewish wisdom in Sirach 7:34, "Do not avoid those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn."

Elkanah attempts to comfort his wife but doesn't seem to hit the mark, though his care for his wife is evident. We all, on a global scale, have experienced various levels of mourning and grieving, even trauma, throughout this pandemic. The brokenness of our community spaces has become increasingly evident. We have experienced incredible harm and loss over the political cycles of the last 5-6 years. We have seen violence and injustice in our streets and on the global stage, with a war currently raging on in Europe. This doesn't include or name our personal griefs or experiences of death and loss in our lives. There is undoubtedly much to grieve about. Grief is the normal and natural reaction to loss of any kind. No human life is without its share of losses. Thus, grief goes beyond experiencing death and, more broadly, experiencing loss. So you may experience grief with the loss of a job, moving to a new community, or the disconnect from community life during the pandemic, change of any kind that leaves a sense of loss of what once was, is no longer - and maybe the peak of all losses is the experience of death. Grief is about a broken heart, a separation, a disconnection, a realization that the past is gone and the future is out of our control—confusion over a pain that often words cannot describe. In my opinion, grief is the most misunderstood and neglected of all human emotions and processes. It is a bundle of emotions entangled together that come and go over a long period, if not for life.

So I want you to notice in the passages that Paul writes that to come alongside one another in grief is not to "find words of comfort for those weeping" or "cheer up those who mourn." Nope, Paul writes, "Weep with those who weep." We must be willing to be present with one another in suffering and feel the pain of one another so that we can walk through it together. Love requires weeping, Unity requires pain, and Resurrection requires death.