

**Opening Prayer**

**Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.**

**1 Samuel 1:4-20**

<sup>4</sup>On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; <sup>5</sup>but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. <sup>6</sup>Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. <sup>7</sup>So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. <sup>8</sup>Her husband Elkanah said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”

<sup>9</sup>After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. <sup>10</sup>She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. <sup>11</sup>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.” <sup>12</sup>As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. <sup>13</sup>Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. <sup>14</sup>So Eli said to her, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine.” <sup>15</sup>But Hannah answered, “No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. <sup>16</sup>Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time.” <sup>17</sup>Then Eli answered, “Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.” <sup>18</sup>And she said, “Let your servant find favor in your sight.” Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

<sup>19</sup>They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. <sup>20</sup>In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, “I have asked him of the LORD.”

## Commentary

Knowing that the Bible seldom highlights a woman's story, the reader is immediately put on notice that this is not business as usual. Hannah's barrenness puts the reader on notice that her child will be a special blessing from God that will impact the story of Israel for generations to come.

In a world where barrenness was considered a curse, only the birth of a child could complete Hannah. Day after day, year after year, she had to live with a pain in her heart that would not go away. Her barrenness was an "unsettled ache." As if barrenness were not enough, Hannah withstood the affliction of being misunderstood. Like Job's friends who had no clue, Hannah's husband, Elkanah, just didn't get it. Thinking himself better than ten sons, his inept words of comfort made bad matters worse. Thinking herself better than Hannah, Peninnah's disdainful attitude and repeated boasts about her fertility left Hannah shattered beyond words. Adding injury to insult, Eli, an insensitive priest, accused her of being drunk.

Hannah took her concerns to God. Although she did not share the details of her situation, Eli eventually understood that hers was a heartfelt cry. Assured by Eli that God heard and would answer her prayer she went home, confident that God's answer would manifest itself. God's answer came when she gave birth to Samuel, Israel's last judge, the prophet who anointed Saul and David, Israel's first two kings. By placing Hannah's story at the beginning of the book, the writer hints that the story of Israel's transition and subsequent events cannot happen, cannot be told without first telling her story. Hannah is an integral part of this transition. This story cannot begin without her.

## Reflection

Think about time when you had an "unsettled ache" that your family and friends could not comfort or resolve, or even understand. Did you take your concerns to God? How did you know that He heard your cry?

## Hebrews 10:11-25

<sup>11</sup>And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup>But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, "he sat down at the right hand of God," <sup>13</sup>and since then has been waiting "until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet." <sup>14</sup>For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. <sup>15</sup>And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying, <sup>16</sup>"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds," <sup>17</sup>he also adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." <sup>18</sup>Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

<sup>19</sup>Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup>by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through

his flesh), <sup>21</sup>and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup>let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup>Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup>And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup>not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

### **Mark 13:1-8**

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” <sup>2</sup>Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

<sup>3</sup>When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, <sup>4</sup>“Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” <sup>5</sup>Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. <sup>6</sup>Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. <sup>7</sup>When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. <sup>8</sup>For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.”

### **Commentary**

In this chapter, Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple, the center of religious life. When compared to Jesus’ public, symbolic action in Mark 11, his words here take on an ominous tone, like the prophet Jeremiah’s tone. As clear as Jesus was about a final devastation, he was more ambiguous about the timing of the event(s). He pointed to a period when several people will “come in my name” and claim special authority (“I’m the one!”); later in the chapter, Jesus stated more directly that many false Messiahs and prophets will appear (Mark 13:22).

Today, we tend to view, rightfully, “street-corner preachers” who concentrate their words heavily on end-time affairs with skeptical eyes. Whether it is because their predictions tilt toward precise descriptions (and, are easily misguided) or their rhetoric leans toward anti-social behavior except for those who agree with their efforts. Despite the global disasters that surround us, we’d rather think about a messianic figure who has already arrived and called on us to be kind to our neighbors. But, occasionally, it may be an important reminder to hear an ancient prophet cry out about the fragile nature of the world. Perhaps we’ll appreciate our world more and care for it with a sensitivity it deserves.

### **Reflection**

How do you view Jesus’ comments on the “end times”? Do you have trouble reconciling the ominous tone of these verses with His usual emphasis on love and peacemaking? Why or why not?

<sup>113:1</sup> Praise the Lord!

**Praise, O servants of the Lord,  
praise the name of the Lord!**

<sup>2</sup> Blessed be the name of the Lord  
from this time forth and for evermore!

<sup>3</sup> **From the rising of the sun to its setting  
the name of the Lord is to be praised!**

<sup>4</sup> The Lord is high above all nations,  
God's glory above the heavens!

<sup>5</sup> **Who is like the Lord our God,  
who is seated on high,**

<sup>6</sup> **who looks far down  
upon the heavens and the earth?**

<sup>7</sup> God raises the poor from the dust,  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,

<sup>8</sup> to make them sit with princes,  
with the princes of God's people.

<sup>9</sup> **God gives the barren woman a home,  
making her the joyous mother of children.**

**Praise the Lord!**

### Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**