

Mothers Undaunted: Naomi, Hannah, and Deborah

By Gretchen Willis

[Study helps available online at www.lwml.org]

Intro: *And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deuteronomy 10:12).* Let's examine how Naomi, Hannah, and Deborah used their gifts to further the kingdom of God.

Opening Prayer: Gracious and Merciful Father, we come into Your presence today and ask You to bless our study of Your Word. Guide us so that we may be a blessing to each other. Strengthen us so that we may continue to do Your will in Your kingdom. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Warm-Up: Consider your own mother: How did faith in the Lord play a role in her life? Was she expressive about it or did she keep it more private? Can you recall a time when her faith motivated her to move into action?

Naomi

Read **Ruth 1, 4:13–17**

Naomi's life had not been an easy one. A famine caused her and her husband Elimelech to leave their home in Bethlehem and flee to Moab, along with their two sons. Shortly after arriving, Elimelech died, leaving Naomi alone to mother her sons in this unfamiliar country. Naomi's sons, who married Moabite women, also died. Naomi had the unbearable fortune of outliving her husband and her children.

As Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, what does she tell her daughters-in-law to do? Why should they do this?

How does Naomi serve as the vehicle of Ruth's journey along the path God had chosen for her?

Look at **Ruth 1:22**. How does the timing of Naomi's return to Bethlehem hint at what God is about to provide?

Upon returning to Bethlehem, how does Naomi feel? (**Ruth 1:20–21**) What event causes Naomi's empti-

ness to be changed to fullness? (**Ruth 4:14–17**)

Why are Boaz and Ruth mentioned in **Matthew 1:5**?

For sharing or reflection: Can you think of a time when you helped someone follow God's path? In what way did you help (physical presence, emotional support, monetary, or tangible donations, etc.)?

Hannah

Though barren for many years, Hannah continued to trust in the Lord. Read **1 Samuel 1:1–2:11, 2:19–21**

How would you describe Elkanah's feelings toward Hannah? (v. 5, v. 23)

What circumstances contributed to Hannah's sorrow?

While Hannah's family was at Shiloh, making sacrifices to God, Hannah went to the temple to pray. Eli the priest observed Hannah and her grief. What did he think she was doing? What was Hannah's response? (v. 15–16)

After Samuel's birth, Hannah nursed him for about three years, during which time she did not go with her family to Shiloh to make sacrifices. After Samuel had been weaned, she brought him, along with a young bull and other offerings, to Shiloh for what purpose?

Re-read **1 Samuel 2:1–10**. What is the focus of Hannah's prayer?

For sharing or personal reflection: Have you ever experienced a time when you had deep sorrow or anguish but you trusted in the Lord's power and goodness? How did your situation turn out? Share with the group.

Deborah

Read **Judges 4 and 5**

Deborah lived during a time when the chosen Children of God were truly acting like children. Many years before, they had entered the Promised Land with their voices raised together and the walls of Jericho tumbling down. But time had passed, and the Canaanites had again come to power. The

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Israelite people were in a cycle of disobeying God and turning away from their faith. This led to oppression from those around them, which caused them to cry out to God for help.

In response, God showed His graciousness by giving deliverance, and the Israelites were thankful. Then they became restless and ultimately returned to their disobedience and apostasy. God raised Deborah up to be a leader of the Israelite people to lead them out of their oppression and into a right relationship with God.

1. After seeing the oppression of her people, Deborah summons Barak and tells him to do what? What was Barak's objection and the ensuing response of Deborah?

2. In **Judges 5:7**, Deborah describes herself as "a mother in Israel." What kinds of things do mothers do? How do those things relate to Deborah?

3. What do these verses say about mothers?

Proverbs 31:26, 30

Deuteronomy 21:18–19

Proverbs 1:8

Isaiah 49:15

Isaiah 66:13

1 Thessalonians 2:7–8

4. Discuss how the attributes of mothers are a reflection of what God does for His children.

5. For personal reflection or sharing: Have you ever had to lead a group into action? What methods did you use to be an effective leader?

Closing Prayer: We thank You, our Heavenly Father, for calling us Your very own. Through You we are able to accomplish whatever task You lay before us. We eagerly await the time You will reveal Your plans for us — plans for our welfare and not for evil, plans to give us a future and a hope. Lord, as we strive daily to do Your will, protect us as we stumble and forgive us all our failures. We humbly place ourselves in Your loving hands. We pray this in the Name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Gretchen Willis previously served on the board of the Southern Illinois District LWML as the coordinator of Young Women's Representatives. She currently is a member of Grace Lutheran Church in Arlington, Texas. Married to Ryan Willis, LCMS Chaplain at the Federal Correctional Institute in Ft. Worth, Gretchen has four young children and enjoys all the blessings that come along with a full family.