

# HANNAH

## Day 1: Hannah's Pain

### INFERTILITY

Not long ago a young woman at church contacted me because she wanted to talk about some of the things she was struggling with. As she finished telling me her story of infertility and miscarriage I said, “Ten years ago I was where you are.”

Together we talked about the pain and disappointment of not having the children we desperately wanted. We shared our grief in losing children to miscarriage. We shared the pain of women who have been through infertility problems.

It is interesting that so many women in the Bible struggled with infertility. Sarah, Elizabeth, Samson's mother, Rachel, and probably the one many women know best, Hannah. As Hannah's story unfolds we feel her pain and sorrow as she struggles with the inability to have children.

### A PAINFUL COMPARISON

Read I Samuel 1:1-2

What do you learn about Hannah in these verses? \_\_\_\_\_

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In the introduction to Hannah we see a comparison made between a woman who had children and a woman who had none. Immediately, we feel the pain in Hannah's life. Who hasn't felt the pain of comparison? Whether it is our weight, our clothes, our families, or our homes, we are often tempted to compare and compete with other women.

When have you felt the sting of comparison? \_\_\_\_\_

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Hannah was compared to Elkanah's other wife, Penninah, every day. When she heard the voices of children in the house, Penninah continually reminded her she had no children. She faced the fact that she was childless when she was provoked and criticized by Penninah. When she heard the voice in her head that told her she was not a worthy wife because she had not given her husband children, she felt the pain of comparison. Hannah did not face a day without the sorrow of not having children.

Hannah was reminded of her infertility when she faced her neighbors. Her Jewish culture placed value on a woman based on the number of children she gave her husband. A woman without children was viewed by others as worthless.

Hannah's deepest desire was to have a child and that unmet desire brought her a lot of pain and anguish.

What is, or was, a deep desire you had in your life? \_\_\_\_\_

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Whether that desire has been filled or if you still have that desire, you will probably understand Hannah's disappointment.

#### A DOUBLE PORTION

Read I Samuel 1:3-8.

According to 1 Samuel 1:6, how did Penninah treat Hannah?

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What a difficult situation Hannah lived in! She shared her husband and her house with another woman. That would be a difficult situation even if the wives got along, but there was a lot of tension in Hannah's household.

How did Elkanah, Hannah's husband, treat Hannah? (1 Samuel 1:5)

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Hannah had a lot of misery in her life, but her husband was not a source of that misery. Elkanah loved Hannah and he tried to show her his love. He felt her sorrow and grief and he tried to comfort her. Elkanah knew the source of her pain, her infertility, and he tried to compensate for her deep sadness. Elkanah was a blessing in her life, but Hannah wanted more—she wanted a child.

When have you desperately wanted something that all of the other blessings in your life could not overcome? \_\_\_\_\_

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As much as Elkanah tried to comfort Hannah, he did not understand her grief. He thought a double portion of meat for sacrifice would help her get over her deep sorrow. Hannah had a husband who loved her and she had twice as much meat as the other wife in the house, yet still she was sad.

When have you had someone close to you not understand the struggle and pain in your life? \_\_\_\_\_

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#### SUFFERING

Read I Samuel 1:9-16.

Throughout these verses are clues as to the depth of Hannah's sorrow. From the verses listed below, write the words that describe Hannah's grief and pain.

Verse 10: \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 11: \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 15: \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 16: \_\_\_\_\_

“Bitterness”, “misery,” “deeply troubled,” “anguish and grief,” are all words Hannah used to describe herself. Hannah suffered through years of infertility. Her husband and the extra portions of meat he gave her did not comfort her. As many times as she may have told herself to move on and accept the blessings in her life, she was still a woman in deep pain.

#### BITTERNESS OF SOUL

The phrase *bitterness of soul* describes Job, another follower of God who suffered. Job was a man of great wealth who lost his oxen, sheep and camels, his servants, and all of his children. When that suffering was not enough for Satan, Job was afflicted with health problems. Job 10:1 says, “I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the *bitterness of my soul*” (emphasis mine).

This phrase used for both Hannah and Job describes the struggle in life for two people who lost so much. Job lost people, possessions, and health while Hannah lost the children she so desperately wanted.

#### MISERY

Hannah also described herself as being in “misery” and “deeply troubled.” When the Israelites were living in slavery under Egyptian oppression, the Lord looked down and said, “I have indeed seen the *misery* of my people in Egypt” (Exodus 3:7). The Israelites

lived each day in misery and so did Hannah. Her misery was caused by being childless and living in a miserable home situation with another wife who was fertile and reminded her regularly.

## ANGUISH

Hannah described herself to Eli as being in “great anguish.” Job (Job 6:2, 7:11), David (Psalm 6:3, 31:10), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 4:19), and Paul (Romans 9:2, 2 Corinthians 2:4) all described themselves as being in anguish. Probably the most stirring image of anguish was Jesus on the Mount of Olives.

Read Luke 22:44 and compare the anguish that Jesus and Hannah felt in their prayers.

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## GRIEF

The last word we should consider that Hannah used to describe herself is “grief.” When we use the word “grief” we think of the feelings we have when someone dies. Maybe Hannah suffered in a way similar to the way many women mourn the death of children in the womb. Maybe Hannah had known the joy of getting pregnant, but had suffered with the death of that child before giving birth. Hannah’s grief was also for the death of her dream of becoming a mother.

Hannah's pain and suffering in her life was constant and deep. Bitterness, anguish, grief, and misery can come to women in many different forms. Whether suffering through health problems, depression, loneliness, unfulfilled dreams, or something else, we all have times in our lives when we struggle with some of the same feelings that Hannah felt.

When have you had some of these same feelings that Hannah experienced?

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Hannah lived with her bitterness, misery, anguish, and grief, for many years, but that was not the end of her story. Hannah did not allow her grief and anguish to keep her away from God, but she allowed her disappointment to lead her to Him.

Hannah

**Day 2: Pouring Out Her Soul**

*Sometimes I wonder when was the last time I was happy. I have known for a long time that I could not have children and Penninah, my husband Elkanah's other wife, reminds me regularly that I have no children. I am reminded by the children who fill our home with noise. When I see my husband, I think about not giving him children. Every month brings another reminder that I am not expecting a child.*

*I feel like my life would be complete if I only had children. I know that may not be completely true, but I think I could handle everything else if I was blessed with children.*

*My infertility must be a sign that I have displeased God. What have I done to deserve this? Have I sinned? Have I not offered the right sacrifice? Why am I being punished by God?*

*I had been to the temple before, but this time I was more desperate. My sorrow, bitterness, and misery had reached a new level. I cried out to God. In my anguish, I begged God to bless me with a child. I had never prayed like that. I even promised God that I would give my son back to Him. That promise was not said in haste; I had thought about it for a long time. I had decided I would give back to God the child I so desperately wanted.*

*My intense prayers drew attention to myself, and Eli, the priest, thought I was drunk when he saw me. I assured him that I was not drunk, only desperate to be heard by God.*

In her anguish and misery, Hannah poured out her soul to God. When describing her prayer, Jerram Barrs says, “God does not reject Hannah; nor does God reject us when we pour out to him our anxieties, our frustrations, our disappointed hopes and expectations. We may even say this is a basic part of what prayer is to be—we are encouraged to bring to the Lord all the saddest and most broken places in our hearts and lives.”<sup>i</sup>

When have you poured your soul out to God? \_\_\_\_\_

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Praying in this way may seem strange to some. We may feel that we need to be more reserved in our prayers. We can be assured that God honors our prayers when we pour out soul out to Him, just as He heard and honored Hannah’s prayer.

What do you need to spend time in fervent prayer about? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Hannah

### Day 3: Her Vow

#### PROMISES

Have you ever made a promise in haste? Have you ever promised something that you realized later you could never keep? Sometimes we take our promises lightly. We promise that we will never do something again and later realize how difficult it is to keep that promise. We promise to do something with someone only to break that promise when something else comes up.

Promises can be quickly made and quickly broken. Hannah made a vow to God, but she did not make it in haste and she was faithful to keep her vow.

#### THE VOW

As we have learned in our study, Hannah was desperate for a child. She suffered greatly because she had not given her husband any children. One year when Elkanah took the entire family to Shiloh to offer sacrifices, Hannah went to the temple to pray.

Read again I Samuel 1:9-11.

What were the two parts to Hannah's vow?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

Hannah’s vow was not a spontaneous promise, nor was it a bargain with God to get what she wanted. Vows were serious to God and taken seriously by the Israelites.

Read Numbers 30:2.

What was the Lord’s requirement when making a vow? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

This vow was so serious that Hannah must have considered making it for a very long time. She knew that this vow would have lifelong consequences for her, Elkanah, and their son. This boy would be given to the Lord for “all the days of his life.” She may not have known how that promise would take shape, but she knew that this child would not be like other children.

#### NAZIRITE VOW

The second part of Hannah’s vow was known as *the Nazirite vow*. To learn more about the Nazirite vow, read Numbers 6:1-8.

This vow was noted to be a “special vow,” a “vow of separation.”

What were the requirements of this vow?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

It is clear from reading Numbers chapter 6 that this vow was typically taken for a period of time. When Hannah vowed to God “no razor will ever be used on his head,” she made the vow not for a short time, but for a lifetime.

Hannah vowed to God that if He gave her a son, that child would be dedicated to Him and would be a Nazirite his entire life. These were radical vows that Hannah made to God.

Why do you think Hannah made such a radical vow to God?

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#### ANSWERED PRAYER

Read 1 Samuel 1:17-20.

After waiting so long for a child, Hannah’s prayer was answered. She was given the son she so desperately wanted. Can you imagine her joy when she discovered she was pregnant? And when she gave birth to her son she remembered the one who gave him to her.

How do you think Hannah felt about her prayer being answered by God?

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## TRAINING HER CHILD

Read 1 Samuel 1:21-24.

After Samuel was born we learn what his dedication to God meant for him, Hannah, and Elkanah.

What did Hannah tell Elkanah would happen to the boy after he was weaned?

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This boy who Hannah so desperately desired was not her son alone, he was also the first child born to Elkanah through Hannah. When Hannah made this vow about her son, Elkanah was also affected.

What was Elkanah's response to Hannah's vow? \_\_\_\_\_

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According to Numbers 30:6-8, what could Elkanah have done if he did not approve of the vow that Hannah made concerning their son? \_\_\_\_\_

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Hannah's vow meant that she only had a few years with her son living in her house. In their culture, children were weaned when they were around three or four years of age.

At most, Hannah had four years with the child she had so desperately prayed for. Hannah knew that these few years in her home would be her opportunity to train her child.

How would you feel if you knew your child would live in your home only three or four years? \_\_\_\_\_

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Hannah took her vows seriously and she also took her job as a parent seriously. She dedicated this child to the Lord and knew it was her responsibility to make sure that this child came to know the Lord during the few years that he lived in her home.

How might you parent differently if you knew you only had three or four years with your child? \_\_\_\_\_

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Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

According to this Scripture, when did God instruct the Israelites to teach their children?

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This was the way that Hannah taught Samuel the Lord's commands. She spent her days training and teaching her son. As she cleaned she told the boy stories about her God. As she cooked she taught Samuel about the God who provided manna that for the Israelites. She told Samuel the stories about the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea.

She taught Samuel about the mighty God who brought down the walls of Jericho. She told her son about how God answered her prayer for a child. Hannah had only a few years to teach Samuel about the Lord and she did not waste those years.

#### A PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITY

When it comes to parenting our children, do we take our job as seriously as Hannah took hers? Do we spend time with our children impressing on them the Lord's commands?

God expects us to pass our faith on to our children. While the Church community should play a role in the formation of our children's faith, our homes should be the primary place where they hear the Word of the Lord.

In his book *Our Father Abraham, Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, Marvin Wilson says this:

In Jewish tradition, the center of religious life has always been the home. . . .

Unfortunately, many Christians believe it is God's purpose that the Church function as the main formative influence in the spiritual development of the family. For various reasons—ignorance, convenience, or default of responsibilities—the Church has often taken the place of the family. But the Church was never intended to be a substitute for the home. Nothing in God's plan has ever replaced the home as bearing primary responsibility for imparting Christian values and insuring godly nourishment and growth for each family member.<sup>ii</sup>

Our homes are where our children are taught to pray and learn about God. It is the responsibility of the parents to make sure that their children do not leave their homes without knowing the Lord. Parents, grandparents, and other family members should be teaching their children about God and His commands. As parents, this is our most important job. Just as Hannah taught her son for the few years she had with him, we should be teaching our children about God, His love for us, and about Jesus and His great sacrifice for us.

If you are a parent, grandparent, or have children in your life, how are you teaching them about God? \_\_\_\_\_

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Hannah took her vow to the Lord seriously and she also took the training of her son seriously. Daily Hannah prepared her son to be a servant of the Lord.

Hannah, Elkanah, and Samuel were not the only ones affected by Hannah's vow. When Hannah pledged her son to God, the entire Israelite nation was affected.

Hannah

#### **Day 4: Trusting God**

*When I made my vow to God I knew that it meant that someone else would raise my son. It was not a vow that I took lightly, but I felt that God led me to dedicate this child to Him.*

*I worried about my son living with other people and what that would mean for Him. I knew that for Samuel to be dedicated to God he would have to go live at the temple in Shiloh. I had heard about Eli and his ungodly sons. Would he have the same influence on my son? I decided that I had to trust God with this decision and let Him handle the details.*

*My trust in God allowed me to be joyful when leaving Samuel with Eli at the temple. I trusted God to take care of Samuel and give him everything he needed. My trust in God continued to grow as I saw how God answered my prayers about Samuel.*

*Through all of my suffering over not having a child, I now know that God was preparing me and growing me. I had to learn to trust Him and through the years of not having a child I see that God was building my faith and trust in Him.*

Describing how God helped the Israelites in battle, 1 Chronicles 5:20 says, “He answered their prayers, because they trusted in Him.” Hannah showed trust in God when she dedicated her son to Him and God answered her prayer.

Maybe our prayers are not answered because we lack trust in God.

What can keep us from trusting God? \_\_\_\_\_

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Nahum 1:7 says, “The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.”

In order to trust in God we need to focus on His goodness and understand that He will carry us through whatever we face. Hannah made a radical vow to God and He cared for her and comforted her when she had to deal with the fact that her son would not live in her home.

What worry, concern, or decision do you need to trust God with? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Hannah

### Day 5: Praising God

#### ACTIONS OR WORDS?

In her book *Being a Great Mom, Raising Great Kids* Sharon James says, “No matter what we say to our children, no matter what values we attempt to instill in their hearts, nothing speaks louder than our actions.”<sup>iii</sup> Hannah was a woman of God who not only taught with words, but she also taught with her actions. When she and Elkanah went to Shiloh to leave Samuel with Eli, the priest, she demonstrated her love for the Lord to Samuel through her prayer of praise.

#### LETTING GO

Read 1 Samuel 1:24-28.

The day arrived for Hannah to take her only child, Samuel, to live at the temple in Shiloh. She had prepared for the day she would take her son to live in the temple. She had prepared her son to live without her.

How would you feel if you had to give your child to be raised by someone else?

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How could she leave her only child? He embodied all of her hopes and dreams. Plus she would have to leave him with Eli, the priest who did not have a stellar record of

raising children. As we find out in 1 Samuel chapter 2, Eli's sons were wicked men. They were priests who did not honor the Lord's sacrifices as they were instructed.

According to 1 Samuel 2:17, why was Eli's sons' sin considered so great to the Lord?

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Hannah believed that she was giving this child over to God and not to a man. She had vowed to give him to the Lord, and that is what she was doing the day she took Samuel to Shiloh.

Were there tears of joy, or tears of sorrow? Was she sad to leave her son behind? Did she have an empty place in her heart when she returned to Ramah? Or did her joy outweigh any sorrow? She had made a promise to God that if He would give her a child, then that child would serve Him always. Was she filled with joy because she was giving back to God who had blessed her so richly?

What do you think were some of Hannah's emotions as she left Samuel in Shiloh?

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When Hannah took Samuel to Eli she said, "I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of Him." Hannah was delighted to present her answered prayer to Eli. She was overjoyed to show this priest, who thought she was drunk when she prayed, how God had blessed her.

How does it feel to receive an answer to prayer? \_\_\_\_\_

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Write about an answered prayer that has made you rejoice. \_\_\_\_\_

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#### A SACRIFICE

Read 1 Samuel 1:28.

Hannah willingly sacrificed her son to God who answered her desperate prayer.

What does the word *sacrifice* mean to you? \_\_\_\_\_

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The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines sacrifice as “an act of offering to a deity something precious.” It is hard to imagine a greater sacrifice than a parent offering their child to God.

Throughout history there have been religions that offered children as a sacrifice. The Israelites witnessed child sacrifice in Egypt as Egyptians worshipped their god, Molech. Leviticus 18:21 says, “Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.” Baal worship also called for child sacrifice.

When Hannah sacrificed Samuel to the Lord she did not lay him on an altar to be burned. She sacrificed him to serve the Lord all of his life, and this sacrifice was honored by God. Hannah gave up what was most precious to her, not to be burned, but to serve.

Micah 6:7b-8 says,

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

According to Romans 12:1, what kind of sacrifice does God desire?

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God does not desire burnt offerings. He wants us to live for Him, act justly, love mercy, and walk with Him.

What does it mean to you to be a “living sacrifice?” \_\_\_\_\_

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#### SONG OF PRAISE

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-12.

Hannah’s response to giving her son to God was to praise Him. She did not pout or grieve. Rather, she rejoiced in the One who had given her a son. Hannah left Samuel with a song on her heart. She praised God for all he had done in her life and for who He is.

Hannah’s song came as a result of her relationship with God. Over the years, through her struggle with infertility and being ridiculed by the second wife, Hannah’s faith grew. In her book *Lost Women of the Bible*, Carolyn Curtis James says, “She (Hannah) had walked with Him (God) down a long and bitter road and because of her suffering had come to know Him better.”<sup>iv</sup>

When has your suffering led you to know God better? \_\_\_\_\_

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As Hannah stood in the temple in Shiloh with her son, she offered this song of praise to God. For all who heard her song, Elkanah, Eli, and Samuel, they must have been amazed at her faith in the One, true, Almighty God.

#### HER ROCK

Read 1 Samuel 2:2.

God was Hannah’s foundation. Whatever happened in her life, good or bad, it did not shake her foundation. Because of what she had been through, she believed that since God was her Rock, she could endure anything. When God is our foundation we can stand strong through any storm that comes our way.

What storm have you endured because God is your Rock? \_\_\_\_\_

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## OUR SOVEREIGN GOD

Read 1 Samuel 2:6-8.

According to these verses, what does God do? \_\_\_\_\_

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After everything she had been through, Hannah learned that God was in control. He was the One who decided when she would have a child. In her song of praise, she acknowledges that God is the one who brings life and death, poverty and wealth. Hannah gives God the glory and the credit for the events that happen on this earth. When we acknowledge God's activity in this world we will be humbled.

Why is it important that we acknowledge that God is the One who is in control in this world and in our lives? \_\_\_\_\_

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It could not have been easy for Hannah to leave her only son in Shiloh. Her house, and her heart, had been filled with the joy of a child for three years. She had lived with the pleasing sounds of a small child and she must have lived with a smile on her face. How hard it would be to return home without him. Even though it must have been difficult, we see Hannah's joy and peace in her song of praise.

## A DEVOTED MOTHER

Read 1 Samuel 2:19-21.

Hannah continued to be a presence in the life of Samuel. As she threaded her needle and stitched a new robe she must have thought about and prayed for her son. Even though Hannah was not with Samuel on a daily basis, she continued to be a part of his life.

Hannah learned to trust God and she sacrificed for Him. Hannah was a woman devoted to God who waited years for her first child and she dedicated him to the Lord. God honored her sacrifice and blessed her with three sons and two daughters.

## A WOMAN USED BY GOD

God raised Hannah as a strong leader who helped change the history of the Israelites. When Hannah left Samuel at the temple as a young boy the Israelites were led by Eli and his wicked sons. Samuel, a prophet and judge, was faithful to God all of His life. He led the people as they transitioned to rule under a king. He anointed the greatest king to ever rule the Israelites, David. When Samuel died we are told, “All Israel assembled and mourned for him” (1 Samuel 25:1). The life of this great leader began with a desperate prayer by a mother who honored her vow and trained her child to love her God.

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- <sup>i</sup> *Through His Eyes: God's Perspective on Women in the Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2009), 163.
- <sup>ii</sup> (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 216.
- <sup>iii</sup> (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 2000), 186.
- <sup>iv</sup> (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), 132.