

Samuel to King David

1 Samuel Ch.1 - Hannah's answered Prayer

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Greetings to you all and welcome to Truth for Today, where we are beginning a new series on First Samuel, entitled Samuel to King David. Today's talk, which obviously commences the series, is concerned with chapter one and centres around Hannah's prayer. All Scripture that I use today will be from the English Standard Version.

Hannah's Problem

Verse one of chapter one introduces us to Elkanah, the husband of Hannah, and eventually the father of Samuel. It is verse two, however, that sets the context for our talk:

“He [Elkanah] had two wives. The name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.”

The whole of chapter one revolves around the dilemma of Hannah and her childless status, which is mentioned at the end of verse two. Before traversing further into the chapter, there is the matter of Elkanah's two wives, which is an element in the account that cannot be passed over. If you are like me, it is a fact that sticks out like a sore thumb, as the saying is. We do not expect to read in Scripture of a man having two or more wives. Such behaviour does not sit easily with the way we think a person, who regularly travelled to Shiloh to worship God, ought to behave. It must be stated that it is not according to the Scriptural pattern, where one man and one woman in marriage for life was, and is, the Biblical norm. Elkanah is the only non-royal, specifically stated in the Books of Samuel and Kings, as having two wives, which is perhaps indicative of his wealth. Verse six highlights a concomitant of the two wife syndrome, where we find Peninnah described as Hannah's rival, who grievously provoked her. She also deliberately irritated her mainly because Hannah was unable to give Elkanah a child. *Perhaps another reason for Peninnah's animosity was the way Elkanah favoured Hannah, when he distributed the portion of the sacrificial offering to his wives. Despite Elkanah's rather foolish, blatant favouritism we must conclude that Peninnah was not a very nice lady.*

Verses seven to ten inform us of the care and feelings that Elkanah had for Hannah along with Hannah's response:

“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. And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, ‘Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?’ After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the

doorpost of the temple of the LORD. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly.”

I would judge that the last remark by Elkanah would suggest that he had no conception of Hannah's deep longing for a child, a longing that partially emanates from the culture of the time, where children were considered a blessing from the LORD. The insults and mockery seemed to increase when visits were made to the worship centre at Shiloh. The taunts of Peninnah, laced with suggestions that she (Penninah) was favoured of God, whereas Hannah was not. We know, from verse five, that Elkanah loved Hannah, which is why he gave her a double portion of the shared sacrificial offering. The outward signs of Hannah's sadness, and longing for a child, are given in verse eight, where she is said to be weeping and fasting. I would judge that the context of Hannah's action is significant, as the eating and drinking would be the solemn sacrificial meal. Was she reminded of the imminence of God? She was certainly in the presence of Eli the priest, the representative of God, who, according to verse nine, was on the seat, or throne, by the temple. Obviously, this was many years before Solomon's temple, so it was a structure, possibly of stone, where the Tabernacle could rest. Eli, being on his seat, would be available to administer justice and other business. It would be the ideal place, and occasion, for the bereft wife to pour out her soul to God.

Hannah's Prayer

In a minute or two we shall look more closely at her prayer, yet I wish to emphasise that she was undergoing deep exercise of spirit. It says of the Lord Jesus, in Hebrews chapter 5 and verse 7:

“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.”

We cannot fail to notice, from verse 10 of our chapter, that Hannah's demeanour was similar. Such an attitude is not typical of most of our prayers, for, usually, they will be for every day matters, such as commending our loved ones to our Father's care, or committing our day to Him before we go out into the world. Hannah's prayer was a crisis moment. She knew that God, and only God, could answer her prayer, hence the distress and tears. It would seem that the consciousness of her childless state increased with each visit to Shiloh. Perhaps she saw many mothers with their children, on these occasions, which increased the pain of Penninah's barbed remarks. We, as Christians, should always be aware of others who are going through some deep crisis, and provide support and encouragement, if at all possible. The very least, or perhaps it should be the most, we can do is to pray with them, or for them.

From 1 Samuel 1 verse 11 we read Hannah's prayer, which as we have remarked, came out of deep exercise:

“And she vowed a vow and said, ‘O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor will touch his head.’”

We know not how many years of marriage had passed; years marked with sorrow. Now Hannah took up a position at the feet of the Almighty, praying diligently to Him. Possibly three times a year she had travelled to the house of the LORD, at Shiloh, returning to Ramah, hoping against hope that each occasion of worship and sacrifice would lead to God looking favourably upon her childless state. No doubt, the many mothers, travelling with their children, had compassion upon Hannah, urging patience. Now she casts herself upon God, regardless of what people thought. Hannah's prayer, which we have just quoted, begins with a title for God, “LORD of Hosts”, which

appears for the first time in Scripture. How significant that a title, reminiscent of the huge resources of God, is uttered by a childless wife in a polygamous marriage. In her desperation, she makes a solemn vow, that if God answers her prayers she will give the child to the LORD. There is an implication resulting from this vow that needs our consideration for a moment. It illustrates the loving relationship that existed between Hannah and her husband. It would seem, from verse 9, that she went to the temple at Shiloh unaccompanied by him and yet, with perfect freedom and frankness, vows to give their child to the LORD. I would judge that she knew the mind of Elkanah and was confident of his love and understanding.

There are two solemn aspects to Hannah's vow which demand our notice. One we have just considered is that if her petition was answered favourably, then she would willingly give him to the service of God. This meant that he would assist in the temple ritual at Shiloh. The second was that Hannah promised that the child should be a Nazarite. To some of us, the letters of her vow might seem strange, though even a cursory reading of Numbers 6 verses 1 to 8 explains the vow of the Nazarite, where an Israelite pledges to be separate to the LORD. This is what Hannah was doing, unusually by proxy for Samuel, meaning he would spend his life in the service of God.

Eli's response

Hannah was so serious in her desire for a son that she did not stop praying, but rather continued, as verses 12, 13 & 14 intimate:

“As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. And Eli said to her, ‘How long will you go on being drunk? Put away your wine from you.’”

What a sad state of affairs, when Eli, the chief priest at Shiloh, interpreted the silent prayers of the distressed Hannah as a symptom of drunkenness. It might be that silent, heartfelt prayer was not usual at Shiloh, yet Eli should have been more spiritually perceptive. We learn later in the first book of Samuel, how Eli had allowed the worship at Shiloh to deteriorate, so it was no wonder that he did not empathise with Hannah, as she prayed to the LORD. This is a warning to any of us listening today who have any form of a leadership role in our local fellowship. It is important that we feed the flock of God and care for all, including the weakest and insignificant, for it is a serious matter to neglect the spiritual needs of our brethren.

Hannah had to respectfully take Eli to task by informing him that she had not taken any strong drink, being rather troubled in spirit. I say again, how wrong that she had to correct the high priest as to her true condition, as we learn by her touching reply to his accusation. “No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit” (verse 15). How blessed that we, in this day, have a High Priest who sympathises with our weakness. [I raise one more point with regard to this incident. How would we react in similar circumstances? Hannah answered Eli with reverence and humility, where as I would be tempted to retort self-righteously, seeking to justify myself. I leave you to judge which is the better action.](#)

Once he had been corrected as to the true desires of Hannah, Eli furnishes her with his blessing:

“Then Eli answered, ‘Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him.’ And she said, ‘Let your servant find favour in your eyes.’ Then the woman went on her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad” (verses 17 & 18).

How different was Hannah, compared with her demeanour recorded in verse 7, where she wept

and refused to eat. Now, after casting her burden upon the LORD we see her resting in the glad repose of faith. Her cheerful face denotes she is no longer sad, as she breaks her self-imposed fast, in all probability at the same table as the rest of Elkanah's family. Penninah's pernicious barbs are powerless when confronted by the promise of faith. Her ammunition is now of no account and never again is she mentioned in the book of Samuel.

Hannah Remembered by God

No wonder that Hannah sought the company of her husband, that together they might worship the living God, as we read in verses 19 & 20:

“They rose early in the morning and worshipped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, ‘I have asked for him from the LORD.’”

One of the important features of these verses is that Hannah and Elkanah did not forget the One who in faith had blessed them. They rose up early to worship. It was not the action of all who were at Shiloh at that time. We shall see in chapter two that some of the priests were worthless and corrupt men. We can give credit to Elkanah for exercising a pious attitude to the worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In other words, praying to the God of his fathers. The special baby, which would eventually be born into this home, would be brought up in the discipline and instruction of the LORD, as Paul so instructed the parents at Ephesus so to do. Perhaps I am not reading too much into the verse when I suggest that they were not too impatient to return to Ramah. They found time to worship God and express their thanks. No doubt, when the moment came to leave Shiloh, Hannah did so with eager steps and a lighter heart than she possessed when she left Ramah.

Before we travel with them, however, there are two other points I want to highlight from verses 19 & 20. Firstly, a rather obvious one, yet I believe it merits mentioning. In verse 11 Hannah asked to be remembered by God. This request was answered, as we read in verse 19, where it states that God remembered her. This does not mean that God was forgetful of Hannah in her childlessness, implying her condition was unknown to Him. Rather, was it a desire from Hannah for a special blessing in the sense of enabling her conception. I am instructed that the same Hebrew verb is used in Psalm 8 and verse 4 where it is translated as “mindful”:

“What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him?”

The parallelism of Hebrew poetry would suggest that “mindful” and “care” belong together, which help to provide understanding of the phrase “God remembering a person.” When we ask someone to remember it suggests that they have forgotten. My second point is for us to witness the answer to Hannah's prayer. We have heard the out-pouring of her fervent requests that she might be blessed with a son. Her prayers were granted. [Another hint of the intimate understanding between Hannah and Elkanah is that the Scripture states that it was Hannah that called their baby Samuel, which means “heard of God.” Hannah's main note of praise was her answered prayer, for she says that she had asked of God for him and God had answered.](#)

Our Need for Prayer

It is important that I do not continue with the narrative at this point, but bring in a sentence or two about the Christian's need for prayer. Very early in man's history, we find that it was in the time of Adam's grandson when man began to call upon the name of the LORD. From then onwards we, as

the human race, conscious of our frailty have sought to take our concerns, troubles and hopes to a loving, caring God. The writer of the Hebrew epistle reminds us of the privilege of prayer:

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

About 1830, Hugh Stowell, an Anglican minister living in Salford, wrote a hymn which captured similar sentiments.

“From every stormy wind that blows,
From every swelling tide of woes
There is a calm, a sweet retreat;
Tis found before the mercy-seat.

There is a place where mercy sheds,
The oil of gladness on our heads,
A place than all beside more sweet:
It is the heavenly mercy-seat.

Ah, whither could we flee for aid
When tempted, desolate, dismayed?
Or how the hosts of hell defeat
Had suffering saints no mercy-seat?

Thither by faith we'd upward soar,
Let time and sense seem all no more;
For freely God our souls can greet
Where glory crowns the mercy-seat. (1)

I trust that we all find time to regularly approach our God and Father in prayer, making our petitions and supplications known to Him, in addition to giving thanks. Hannah did just this receiving, in answer, the child she had longed for.

Samuel Weaned

We must move on now to the concluding section of our chapter, where firstly, we see Elkanah, returning to Shiloh, to give thanks as he offered the yearly sacrifice. [In harmony with Hannah, he confirms the vow promising to dedicate Samuel to the LORD.](#) Notice that Hannah did not travel to Shiloh, which might seem surprising to us after the blessing she had received from God. We see the reason for this in verse 22:

“But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, ‘As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the LORD and dwell there for ever.’”

No doubt she would enjoy the extra time with her son, though the main consideration was that the child should be strong and independent when he was left at Shiloh. The Hebrew letter specifies for us the spiritual implication of weaning:

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need

milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14).

I think that the Biblical lesson of weaning is self-evident from these verses. If we take no notice of the moral and doctrinal implications of what we are taught, we will resemble the men about whom Paul warned Timothy. They were always learning yet never arrived at the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:7). We need to set aside time, led by the Holy Spirit, to learn more of the Lord Jesus and His ways. The apostles laid out instructions for us in the epistles. The result of us absorbing this teaching is that the Holy Spirit will make us more mature in the faith. In the words of the Apostle Peter in his second letter and verse 18 of chapter three, we are to:

“...Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

We must now draw this talk to a conclusion, but we cannot leave Hannah without noticing her offering that she took to the LORD, at Shiloh, when Samuel was weaned. A bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, a token of her gratitude and profound thankfulness because the LORD had granted her petition. What signs do we exhibit when God answers our prayers?

All that is left now for me to do is remind you that you have listened to broadcast number T1277 from Truth for Today, entitled “Hannah’s Answered Prayer” in the series “Samuel to King David.”

Now may the blessing of the Lord rest upon each of us and thank you for listening.

1. Psalms Hymns & Spiritual Songs 1978 Hymn number 246.

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