



Sunday School Lesson for December 7, 2003.
Released on December 5, 2003.

Study 1 Samuel 1:20, 24-28; 2:1-8a. Samuel: A Child Dedicated to God
Questions and answers below.

TIMES: about 1105 B.C.; 1102 B.C.
PLACES: Ramah; Shiloh

1 Samuel 1:20 , 24-28

20 Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord .

.....
24 And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh: and the child was young.

25 And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli.

26 And she said, O my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord .

27 For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him:

28 Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord ; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord . And he worshipped the Lord there.

1 Samuel 2:1-8a

1 And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord , mine horn is exalted in the Lord ; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation.

2 There is none holy as the Lord : for there is none besides thee: neither is there any rock like our God.

3 Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

4 The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength.

5 They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath borne seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.

6 The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.

7 The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.

8a He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory.

Lesson Background

"The period of the judges" lasted roughly three hundred and fifty years, from about 1406 to 1050 b.c. Samuel's prophetic ministry began during the latter part of those deplorable years; this was a time when Israel had no king (Judges 18:1; 19:1). This was also a time when moral conditions among the people were chaotic as "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Just before Samuel is born, a man named Eli holds a judgeship that ultimately lasts some forty years. But Eli's judgeship is a spiritual failure, largely because he allowed his sons to pervert worship at the tabernacle and to engage in blatant sexual immorality (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22; 3:13, 14).

So God determined that new leadership was needed at the tabernacle. The birth of Samuel was God's answer to Israel's need. Samuel was to be God's leader who would bring Israel back to spiritual health. Things had to change!

One of Samuel's most important tasks would be to assist the people of Israel in their desire for a king (1 Samuel 8:4-22) even though Samuel did not think that was such a good idea (8:6). Not only would Samuel be the prophet to anoint Israel's first king, Saul (10:1), later Samuel would also anoint the second, namely King David (16:13).

But the story of Samuel's ministry begins with godly parents. Their faithfulness shows us how God often works out His will through ordinary, "blue collar" believers who struggle with the common issues of life. Hannah and Elkanah, Samuel's mother and father, were worshipers of the living God. When Hannah came to worship the Lord at the tabernacle in Shiloh (about twenty miles north of modern-day Jerusalem), she carried intense longings for a child. She understood, as so many modern believers do, that the deepest needs in life can find their answer only in the Lord of the universe. She trusted that the one true God would show His generosity to her, and she found Him to be ready to answer her prayers.

HANNA'S PROMISE (1 Samuel 1:20, 24-28)

The opening verses of 1 Samuel introduce us to Samuel's parents by mentioning several details that give us a good portrait of the couple. Elkanah is described as "a certain man" in 1:1, a phrase that gives no indication that he is of any rank or position. Apparently he is a common man. He is married to Hannah and they live in a town in the hill country of Ephraim. This is in the northern part of the spine of mountains that runs through Palestine.

In addition to Hannah, who is childless, there is another wife named Peninnah. The two are rivals because Peninnah had children (1:2) and often uses this fact to embarrass Hannah (1:6,7). In the bitterness of her soul Hannah carries her request for a child to the Lord during one of the family pilgrimages to the tabernacle for a feast day (1 Samuel 1:9, 10). As with other notable women of the Bible who faced the challenge of barrenness (Genesis 11:30; 25:21; 29:31; Judges 13:2), Hannah depends on the mercy of the Creator of life for this plea to be answered.

1. What are some indicators in 1 Samuel 1 that a common faith strengthened the relationship of Elkanah and Hannah? How did this relationship help them in some of the tough decisions they had to face (extra credit, not in lesson text)?

Elkanah and Hannah made sure that God was part of their relationship. They worshiped together (1:19). Elkanah encouraged Hannah to be faithful to her vow, although it meant personal sacrifice (1:23). When couples are united in their devotion to God, they have a common, living source of strength. They also have a common purpose. Their thoughts are not "What's in it for me?" but "How can we glorify God together?" For today, 2 Corinthians 6:14 notes that Christians are not to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers."

2. Why was the birth of Samuel so important to Hannah (1 Samuel 1:20)?

Since it was the desire of every Jewish woman to have at least one son, this was very painful for Hannah. Her pain was magnified by Peninnah's heartless reminders of her condition (v. 6). Peninnah especially enjoyed making her cruel remarks during the time of the annual sacrifices in Shiloh.

During one especially sorrowful time in Shiloh, Hannah wept and prayed so fervently that Eli the priest accused her of being drunk. Upon assuring him that she had not been drinking, Hannah explained that she was simply pouring out her anguished soul to God. Eli then blessed her, asking that God would grant her request (1 Sam. 1:13-17). When Hannah left Eli's presence, "her countenance was no more sad" (v. 18), giving evidence of her faith in the God to whom she had been praying so fervently.

Sometime later Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son she named Samuel. The name means "name of God," but Hannah's explanation for calling him this was that she had asked the Lord for him.

3. Why did Hannah feel it was necessary to present Samuel to Eli (v. 24)?

In 1 Samuel 1:11 we read that Hannah made a vow to the Lord: "She vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." This was a promise to God that she would give the son she received back to Him for a life of religious service.

When Hannah reappeared before Eli, she first reminded him of who she was and then presented Samuel as the answer to her prayers.

In Eli's culture Hannah was a shining example of a truly godly woman. Her greatest act of godliness was taking place as she brought Samuel to Eli and consecrated him to serve the Lord the rest of his life. The word "lent" in 1 Samuel 1:28 is best translated "dedicated." Hannah was not loaning Samuel to the Lord. She was giving him back to God in the same way God had given him to her in response to her requests. While it was a willing sacrifice, we can be certain it was emotionally difficult.

4. What can we learn about the nature of God as He answers Hannah's prayer? What does He expect from those who benefit from His care? What could we expect to be the result of misusing God's gifts?

The Bible gives us many examples that show us that God listens to those who follow after Him (e.g., Deuteronomy 26:7; Judges 13:9; Acts 10:4). Perhaps at times He waits for us to show dedication and persistence before granting what He knows is best for us. Much like children, we may not fully appreciate the benefits of a gift until we are truly anxious and ready to receive it. It's safe to say that God expects us to use all His gifts for His glory.

We also know, however, that to receive a gift and then ignore God and His generosity can be ill-fated. Consider all the blessings the unfaithful Israelite nation could have received! Instead they were disciplined multiple times. An interesting contrast is to see how Cain and Abel responded to the gifts God had given them, and to see God's reaction in both cases (Genesis 4:1-7). Certainly, Hannah must have known that her promise was sacred and must be fulfilled.

HANNA REJOICES IN THE LORD (1 Samuel 2:1-8a)

At such a moment Hannah expresses joy and adoration to the Lord as recorded in the verses that follow. We may compare her song with that of Mary after the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:46-55) and with the song of Zechariah at the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:67-79). See also the words of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15:1-18, 21, the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:1-43, Deborah's song in Judges 5, and David's song in 2 Samuel 22. These show how Old Testament worshipers expressed their gratitude in joyful praise.

5. In what way did Hannah realize the salvation of the Lord as mentioned in I Samuel 2:1,2?

The heart attitude of Hannah is indeed amazing. God had finally given her a son, the greatest desire she had ever known; now she was giving him back to God, leaving him with the priest and knowing he would no longer live in her home. Instead of mourning and longing for things to be different, Hannah humbled her heart before God in worship.

Hannah's prayer is a remarkable expression of joy in the Lord. Incidentally, it seems to be the basis for the song of praise Mary uttered when she realized she was to give birth to the Messiah (Luke 1:46-55). Hannah began her prayer with an expression of rejoicing in the Lord. She then acknowledged that God had exalted her to such a degree that she could smile at her enemies. Hannah used the expression "mine horn" (I Samuel 2:1) because a "horn" was a symbol of strength. God had provided salvation from her barrenness and the accompanying shame heaped upon her by others, including Peninnah.

No longer was Hannah an embarrassment to her husband for not giving him a male heir. No longer could others mock and belittle her. No longer would she suffer the depression she had known. In this glorious provision, Hannah saw the working of the holy God. She spoke of the fact that God is unique in His holiness; that is, there is none like Him (v. 22). In referring to Him as a rock, she used a metaphor that speaks of His being strength for His own, a place of refuge for those in need, and a deliverer from trouble.

6. What were Hannah's thoughts concerning those who had spoken cruelly toward her (vs. 3,4)?

Hannah's words now sound like she had experienced so much grief from others during her barren condition that she felt compelled to warn them about brash talking. After all, those who had belittled her now had to face the fact that they were wrong. In their pride they had ignored the fact that God can do whatever He wants and can, therefore, reverse any situation, as He had done for her.

Pride and arrogance should never come from the mouth of humans, for God is the God of knowledge and His knowledge is far superior to that of all humanity. Hannah knew that she did not need to get even with those who had persecuted her; God weighs what people do and say against His children, and He Himself determines what needs to be done to defend them.

First Samuel 2:4 contains the first of seven contrasts listed in Hannah's prayer (or song, as many prefer to call it). This contrast is between those who are mighty and those who are weak. Reference to bows indicates weaponry used by the strong against the weak. In some cases the weapons might be words instead of physical weapons. Such was the case for Hannah, but God had broken the strength of her enemies' belittling words and given them nothing more to say against her.

At the same time, God had clothed her with new strength. She walked with her head held up and rejoiced in the Lord who had provided her salvation.

7. What do we learn about placing our trust in possessions from Hannah's prayer (v. 5)?

Two more contrasts are mentioned in this verse. The first is between the full and the hungry, and the second is between the barren and the fertile. As in each of the other contrasts, Hannah reflected on the fact that God can completely change any circumstance He wishes at any time.

Here is an example of how fleeting riches can be and why we should not place our trust in possessions. The one who once was full was at one time wealthy enough to never worry about food. When God removes the wealth, however, that person must work for wages in order to buy what is needed. On the other hand, when God chooses to bless someone who is poor, that person who once regularly suffered hunger now has plenty. Hannah's point was that God can easily bring about such a change whenever He determines it.

She then made a much more personal application of the principle by referring to one who was barren. After Samuel's birth Hannah eventually gave birth to five more children (I Sam. 2:21). Her mention of seven children in verse 5 is reference to the perfection this number stood for. Having Samuel made her feel complete and fulfilled. She felt strong and blessed, as opposed to others who may have given birth to many but lacked the same sense of God's blessing upon them.

8. What did Hannah say about God's control over life (vs. 6,7)?

Hannah recognized that all life is in the hand of God. He alone has the power and authority to give and take life (I Sam. 2:6). His power is so great that He can even resurrect those who are dead. While the second statements of this verse appears to simply repeat the truth of the first statement, there are those who prefer to see another contrast here. Some see this as a reference to sickness and health, namely

that God can bring people to the point of death in illness but can also restore them when He chooses to do so.

God also has control over the status in life each person experiences, something Hannah had already mention in I Samuel 2:5. While people may think their success is due solely to their own ingenuity and hard work, it is really the blessing of God that makes a person rich (Prov. 10:22). He likewise can cause the disappearance of riches from those who have them.

9. Why could Hannah be certain that God can elevate whomever He wishes (v. 8)?

Hanna was particularly thankful that God helps those with special needs, for she had just witnessed His helping her her with great need. To illustrate this truth graphically, she spoke of how God can raise a poor beggar to a position of wealth and honor. She described someone who sat in the dust and among ashes, not having a nice home or the comfort of clean and new clothing. This person had nothing to eat unless someone kindly gave him food or money.

God, however, sometimes reaches down to such a person and dramatically causes a change of circumstances that is almost unbelievable. Instead of begging, he may suddenly find himself seated among those who have plenty and respected by all those around him. There is no need to speculate exactly how God does such a thing, for His ways are infinite and He is able to accomplish something like this with anyone.

The reason we can maintain hope in the midst of trials is that everything in the universe is God's and under His complete control. Hannah spoke of the earth as being supported by pillars. While we know that is not literally so, her point was that everything on earth is stable because God is in control of it (Ps. 104:5). He may or may not choose to give us the wealth of princes, but no matter what, His choices are good and right.

***Bonus Questions**

10. What final contrast did Hannah make to encourage God's children (v. 9)?

Hannah concluded her prayer with one final contrast: God will take good care of His saints, but He will judge and destroy all those who are His wicked adversaries. She knew it was safe for saints to walk through life, for God guards their steps. At the same time, she knew it was dangerous to ignore God and His ways, for eventually those who do so will be silenced by eternal darkness and broken forever. The Lord will "thunder upon them" in judgment from His place in heaven.

Hannah also had amazing insight into the truth that "by strength shall no man prevail" (I Sam. 2:9). Psalm 33:17 says, "An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength." A similar thought is found in Proverbs 21:31, which says, "The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord." No human army or cavalry can win against the Lord.

11. Who was the "anointed" (v. 10) of whom Hannah spoke?

Hannah's final statement has a prophetic element to it: "He shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed" (I Sam. 2:10). It is interesting that she referred to a king, for she lived prior to the time when Israel had kings. She looked forward to a coming king who will rule the world. This concept was not foreign to the Jews, who looked for the Anointed One.

12. In retrospect we are sometimes amazed to see how common occurrences fell into place as God achieved a complex plan. In the great scheme of history, who benefited when God answered Hannah's prayer for a child, and why?

Certainly Hannah herself benefited from God's answer to her prayer. Her reproach was lifted and her esteem was changed.

But Hannah's child was not just (or even primarily) for her benefit. The Israelite nation-which God was preparing to usher in the Messiah-was ready for a new type of leader. Here was a child dedicated to the Lord from birth who could redirect the people of Israel to God's plan. As the lesson text implies, Samuel truly becomes a "pivot point" in sacred history. Ultimately, all God's people who follow from the time of Samuel benefit from this birth.

CONCLUSION

When Hannah dedicated Samuel to God's service, she unknowingly presented to Israel a powerful force for reform of the nation. She did it without knowing how God would use this future prophet to draw an entire people back to Him. She did it without knowing that Samuel would be the first prophet to foretell the days of Christ (Acts 3:24). What courage! What faith!

PRAYER

Lord, we pray today that You will take our lives and let them be wholly consecrated to You. May we withhold nothing today that we have promised to give to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Trust God to know "the bigger picture."

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week we will look at how God prepared the way for the Messiah, His special Child to come. Study Background Scripture: Luke 1:5-80.

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