

THE PRAYER OF HANNAH AND THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL: A LESSON ON TOTAL DEDICATION 1 SAMUEL 01:01–18

Introduction

Society had become a cesspool, a pit of depravity and corruption, when Samuel was born. His day was a time when people had slipped into an immoral, lawless, abusive, violent, compromising and permissive lifestyle. The depth of their moral decay was seen in cases such as gang rape, homosexuality, wife abuse, child abuse, murder, kidnapping, widespread polygamy, greed, injustice, idolatry and civil war (see notes, Jud 17-21).

But in the midst of such an immoral and lawless society, there were a few persons who lived for God. Their lives demonstrated the light of God's Holy Word. They loved the LORD and obeyed Him, keeping His commandments. Such a person was Hannah, Samuel's mother. This chapter begins the story of Hannah and her son Samuel. This is: *The Prayer of Hannah and the Birth of Samuel: A Lesson on Total Dedication*, 1 Samuel 1:1-28.

- I. The family into which Samuel was born: carnal, bigamist parents who conformed to the culture of their day (vv. 1-2).
- II. The deep sorrow and broken heart of Samuel's mother, Hannah: a picture of anguish, agony, helplessness and hopelessness (vv. 3-8).
- III. The answer to the distressful circumstances of Samuel's mother: prayer and trust in God (vv. 9-18).
- IV. The result of the prayer and faith of Samuel's mother: God heard and healed her affliction — gave her a son, Samuel (vv. 19-20).
- V. The faithfulness of Samuel's mother: she nursed the child and kept her promise to dedicate Samuel to the LORD (w. 21-28).

I. 1 Samuel 01:01–02 The Family of Samuel

There was the family into which Samuel was born. His parents were bigamists, parents who conformed to the carnal, social order and culture of their day. Note this fact in the two verses of this point:

1. The father of Samuel was Elkanah, a priest with no apparent religious function (v. 1). We know that Elkanah was a priest from the genealogy of Samuel (1 Chr 6:25-27; 31-36). The family was of the Kohathite branch of the tribe of Levi or priests, and the family was to become ancestors of skilled musicians, musicians who served in the Tabernacle and temple (1 Chr 6:16, 23,31-33). (Ronald F. Youngblood. *1 Samuel*. "The Expositor's Bible Commentary," Vol. 3. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), p. 570)
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The family lived in Ramathaim Zophim, which is another name for Ramah, a town about five miles north of Jerusalem (v. 19). Ramah was not one of the priestly cities that had originally been assigned to the tribe of Levi, but for some reason a branch of the tribe moved to the hill country of Ephraim (see note, Jos 21:3-42). Just when is not known, but in the book of *Judges* there is the story of a priest coming from Bethlehem to Ephraim to serve a large property owner named Micah (Jud 17:1-13). We know from this passage that at least five generations of priests had lived in Ephraim (v. 1).

2. Elkanah was a bigamist, marrying two wives: Hannah and Peninnah (v. 2). By taking two wives, he conformed to the culture, the carnal, fleshly society of his day. The fact that a priest committed bigamy shows just how carnal, fleshly, and lawless God's people had become during Samuel's day. It was common practice for a man to take a second wife when his first wife could not bear children. Hannah had obviously been the first wife of Elkanah, but she could not bear a child; consequently, he married Peninnah who was able to bear him children. Apparently Elkanah lacked faith in the LORD, failing to trust Him to give Hannah a child.

1 SAMUEL 01:01–02

BIGAMY; POLYGAMY; MONOGAMY, ONE WIFE; ONE HUSBAND

There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. 1 Samuel 01:01–02

Bigamy or polygamy is a transgression of God's explicit will. Marrying two or more people violates God's Holy Word, His original institution for marriage. God's will is clearly stated: man and woman are to leave their parents and be united in marriage, becoming one flesh. God's clearly stated purpose is monogamy: one husband, one wife. Together they form a union, a union so tightly knit together that they become as one flesh. As one flesh, husband and wife become the foundation of the family and the very basic unit of society. Becoming one flesh or one body, the husband and wife are God's chosen way for the human race to continue and for the great values of human life to be learned. All the great values of life are to be found in the union of husband and wife and the family they establish: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, control, fulfilment, satisfaction, purpose, meaning, significance. Again, bigamy and polygamy are not God's way for man and woman to be united; it is the practice of man's carnal, fleshly lust. This is the clear teaching of Scripture:

Gen 4:19 *Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah.*

Gen 2:24 *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*

Deut 17:17 *He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.*

Mala 2:15 *Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.*

Mat 19:5, 8 *And said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?....Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this from the beginning."*

1 Tim 3:2, 12 *Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.... A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.*

1 John 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. □*

II. 1 Samuel 01:03–08 The Deep Sorrow and Broken Heart of Hannah

There was the deep sorrow and broken heart of Samuel's mother, Hannah. Her sorrow and broken heart were caused by strife within the family. The family was deeply divided, in particular the two wives. This is clearly seen in the Scripture and outline:

1. The family was devout, deeply religious. Year after year the family made an annual trip to Shiloh to worship the LORD (v. 3). Remember, the Tabernacle and Ark had been at Shiloh for some time now (4:3-4; Jos 18:1; Jud 18:31). All Israelite men were required by law to attend the three major religious festivals each year, three festivals that were always held at the central worship centre (Exo 34:23; Deut 12:5-7; Luke 2:41). Keep in mind the immoral and lawless society during the days of the judges. Few were obeying the law of God; consequently, there were probably few attending the religious feast in obedience to God's commandment. Thus, Elkanah's faithfulness and devotion to the LORD stood out as a strong testimony to his neighbours, setting a dynamic example for them. Note this fact as well: Elkanah was faithful in worshipping the LORD at the Tabernacle despite the hypocrisy of Eli's two sons who were serving as priests. Elkanah did not use their immoral, reprobate behaviour as an excuse for not worshipping the LORD (see notes, 1 Sam 2:12-36).

2. The family was deeply divided despite its religious devotion (vv. 4-8). The basic cause of the division was the bigamist relationship created by Elkanah. In ancient days, it was important for a man to have a son to perpetuate his name and to inherit his property. Thus, it was a devastating blow to Hannah when she could not bear a son for her husband. The great tragedy was that Elkanah and Hannah failed to trust God, for it was the LORD who closed her womb. And if He had closed the womb, the LORD could just as easily have opened the womb and caused Hannah to conceive a son. But their lack of trust led Elkanah to marry Peninnah. Consequently, when Peninnah bore children, she began to taunt, provoke, antagonize and belittle Hannah. No doubt, Peninnah was filled with jealousy because her husband loved and favoured Hannah more.

Apparently, the taunting and provoking of Hannah usually reached its peak at the annual festival attended by the family. Elkanah always gave a double portion of meat to Hannah because of his special love for her (vv. 4-5). Of course, this only provoked the jealousy of Peninnah even more and caused her to badger and poke fun at Hannah until Hannah broke down in tears and could not eat (v. 7). Year after year, Hannah experienced a deep, grieving sorrow, anguish and agony. Her heart was plainly broken. No matter how much Elkanah attempted to console and comfort her, Hannah could not be consoled. She was gripped by a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, suffering deep pain, feeling that she was cursed by God and that she had failed her husband.

Thought 1. So many hearts are broken today, filled with sorrow, grief, agony and anguish. So many people are suffering hurt and pain, gripped by a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. A broken heart may be caused by the inability to bear a child or by the loss of a child. But sorrow and pain can also be caused by the loss of a job, financial difficulties, disease, injury, death or a host of other disturbances and problems that arise in our lives. Just as Hannah suffered deep sorrow and a broken heart, so we too can suffer the pain and agony of trials and the helplessness and hopelessness of circumstances. Listen to what Scripture says:

Eph 2:12 *Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.*

1 Th 4:13 *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.*

Job 3:20-22 *“Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure, who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave?”*

Job 7:6 *“My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and they come to an end without hope.”*

Job 7:15 *So that I prefer strangling and death, rather than this body of mine.*

Job 10:1 *“I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul.”*

Job 17:15 *Where then is my hope — who can see any hope for me?*

Psa 42:6 *My God, My soul is downcast within me.*

Psa 73:2-3 *But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

Psa 119:67 *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.*

Prov 13:12 *Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.*

Eccl 2:17 *So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*

Eccl 4:1-2 *Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed — and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors — and they have no comforter. And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive.*

Isa 49:14 *But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.”*

Lam 1:21 *“People have heard my groaning, but there is no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my distress; they rejoice at what you have done. May you bring the day you have announced so they may become like me.”*

Lam 3:18 *So I say, “My splendour is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD.”*

Jona 4:3 *Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”*

1 SAMUEL 01:03

LORD OF HOSTS; LORD ALMIGHTY (YHWH SEBAOT)

Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD. 1 Samuel 01:03

This is the first time God is referred to as the LORD of hosts or armies. The term stresses God’s sovereignty, rule and supremacy — His ultimate leadership of Israel’s armies and His supreme control over all the armies and hosts of the universe, both in heaven and earth. God is...

- the LORD of heavenly hosts such as angels (Jos 5:14; 1 Kng 22:19; Psa 148:2)
- the LORD of human hosts such as human armies (Exo 7:4; Psa 44:9)
- the LORD of celestial hosts such as the sun, moon and stars (Gen 2:1; Deut 4:19; Isa 40:26)
- the LORD who will ultimately subject all who oppose Him and His dear people (Isa 24:21-23; 34:1-10; Phil 2:9-11)

“The LORD of hosts” is a name of royalty, the name that refers to God as the Supreme Ruler over all the beings and powers of the universe. He is the Sovereign LORD over the entire universe. Samuel was probably the first person to use this term or to call upon the LORD of hosts. The LORD’s supremacy over the people and powers of this earth was a message desperately needed. The Israelites were weak and their enemies strong. And the enemies were constantly attacking, brutalizing, oppressing and enslaving them during the days of the judges. Their only hope was the intervention of God in their behalf, a mighty act of deliverance by the LORD of hosts.

LORD of hosts is a military term used over 260 times in the Old Testament, primarily by the prophets. Just picture the prophets ministering to God’s people during the days of their terrible suffering, enslavement and captivity. When they prayed and cried out to God, they did not often address Him simply as LORD nor use the term that we often use, “Father.” But they cried to Him, “O LORD` of hosts” — you who are LORD Almighty, the Supreme Ruler of the universe, the LORD in control of all the armies of earth and heaven....” For example, it is used by Isaiah (62 times), Jeremiah (79 times), Zechariah (53 times), and Malachi (24 times). □

III. 1 Samuel 01:09–18 *Prayer and Trust in God*

There was the answer to the distressful circumstances of Samuel’s mother, that of prayer and trust in God.

1. Hannah’s bitter misery peaked at one of the festivals, and she rushed to the Tabernacle to pray and seek the LORD (vv. 9-11). In deep anguish and bitterness of soul, Hannah wept and cried out to the Lord. In her prayer she made a special vow to the LORD, addressing him as the “LORD of hosts,” the Almighty LORD who controlled all the events of human life (v. 11). She first requested that the LORD give her a son, and then she made an astounding promise: to give the son back to the LORD. She promised to dedicate the son to God so the son could serve the LORD all the days of his life.
2. This vow was known as the Nazarite vow, a very special vow of separation to the LORD. By promising never to cut his hair, Hannah was fulfilling one of the requirements of the Nazarite vow (see note, Num 6:3-12).

Note the renewed commitment of Hannah: she calls herself God’s servant (v. 11). She asked God to look upon her affliction and to remember, not forget, His servant. Hannah was suffering deep, intense pain and anguish. Her heart was broken. She desperately needed the LORD to meet her need. She was doing all she could, praying and seeking the face of the LORD for help.

3. But note what happened: Hannah’s lips were moving in silent prayer, and Eli, the High Priest, misunderstood and condemned her (vv. 12-14). Eli had been sitting on a

chair by the doorpost of the temple when Hannah rushed by him into the Tabernacle. Seeing her lips move silently, Eli wrongly concluded that she was drunk. He protested against her behaviour in the Tabernacle and strongly rebuked her. In the corrupt, degenerate days of the judges, it was perhaps a common thing for the religious festival to become a drunken party. Thus, Eli simply assumed that Hannah was drunk.

4. Hannah clarified the situation, denying that she was intoxicated. She had not been drinking wine nor any other strong drink. She was merely pouring out her soul to the LORD, seeking for Him to meet her desperate need. In deep anguish, she continued to insist that she was not a wicked woman, that she had been praying out of painful agony and sorrow.
5. Hearing this, Eli gave great assurance and peace of heart to Hannah. He told her to go in peace and then asked God to grant Hannah's prayer (vv. 17-18). From this point on, Hannah experienced a deep-seated assurance and confidence. Real peace gripped her heart. She went her way and ate. And note: her countenance was no longer sad or downcast (v. 18).

Thought 1. Prayer is the answer to distressful circumstances. When we are in deep sorrow and our hearts are broken, prayer is the answer. When we are gripped by anguish, agony, grief, helplessness or hopelessness — prayer is the answer. When we are sad, downcast, discouraged or disheartened — prayer is the answer. Very simply stated, no matter the trouble or problem, situation or circumstance, trial or tribulation — prayer is the answer.

Mat 7:7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

Mat 26:41 “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

John 16:24 “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”

Rom 8:26-27 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for; but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

James 5:13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

Psa 105:4 Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.

Isa 55:6 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ■