
From Sorrow to Song

1 Samuel 1:1-2:1

What do you want more than anything in life? So many wants are desires for good things. We have a strong passion about them that brings us to prayer for them.

Let's think about that as we approach our text.

Sometimes we pick a portion of the Scriptures and find the whole trajectory of the Bible

Barrenness to fruitfulness...

Problems to provision...

Pain to Praise...

No son to the true Son...

The opening section of this book is 1 Samuel 1:1 - 4:1.

There two households - Hannah's and Eli's

There two parents: Hannah and Eli

There are two children: Samuel and Eli's

There are two prophets: Eli and Samuel

All this will lead to two kings. A great transition is taking place: from Eli with little Word from God to Samuel with the Word from God.

Her Sorrow

(1:1-8)

Barren in the midst of being loved, we enter into Hannah's sorrow.

Her Situation

(1:1-2)

¹ There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite. ² He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

The camera of the writer's narrative zooms in to a particular household in Rhama, a village in the hill country of Israel. We are introduced to the family. Elkannah is the husband and his lineage as an Israelite is established. He is a polygamist. It was common in Israel even though not what God intended from the beginning. Polygamy brought many troubles including to this family. His two wives are Hannah and Peninnah.

Her Struggle**(1:3-8)**

³ Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the Lord. ⁴ On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵ But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb. ⁶ And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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?"

In spite of having two wives, Elkanah is a godly man. He faithfully goes to the tabernacle as required by the Mosaic Law. We are introduced to the priests serving at this time. They are Eli and his two sons. More about them alter.

Elkanah truly loves his wives. He honors them by giving them the best of the portions left from the sacrifice. He seems to have a special love for Hannah. In spite of her having no children, he gives her a double portion.

Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah, taunts Hannah because she has no children. It is easy to see the rivalry and jealousy. It makes things so much worse for Hannah. She knows she has her husband's love. But in her culture, there was a shame and stigma attached to being barren. Hannah is heartbroken because she does not have any children.

Elkanah tries to comfort Hannah, reminding her of his love and devotion to her. Here is where the Scripture just rings true. Isn't it just like a man to say, "What, am I not enough? Am I not better than ten sons?" Elkanah might need a lesson in marital communication. But give him credit – at least he's trying.

Her Supplication**(1:9-18)**

Hannah turns to the Lord to meet to her desire.

The Promise**(1:9-11)**

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. ¹¹ 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 shall touch his head."

Hannah's deep grief over having no children brings her into the tabernacle courtyard to pray to the Lord. She appears to have just entered the tabernacle grounds (many pictures and paintings portray this as happening in a building. Not so.) The tabernacle had a cloth fence that surrounded it, marking off the tabernacle grounds. There was a portable gate with posts through which the people could enter. Eli had placed a bench there to see and greet the people as they entered.

Hannah has entered the tabernacle grounds. In her grief she prays to the Lord. She is weeping and crying. Her heart is deeply distressed. So she pleads in prayer and promises to God. If He will give her a son, she will give him to serve in the tabernacle. This reference to not cutting his hair means that she is committing him to the Lord to be a Nazirite. Nazirites were a special group of Israelites who dedicated themselves to God to serve Him. Samson was a Nazirite, though a very, very poor one.

While we must be very careful about promising God something if our prayers are answered, we also must not forbid them. God is not persuaded to change His course of action just because we promise to give Him something. God cannot be bribed by our promises. However, promises like this do help us to express how deep our desire is.

The Protest

(1:12-16)

But Eli misunderstands what is going on here.

¹² As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you." ¹⁵ But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. ¹⁶ Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation." ¹⁷ Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him." ¹⁸ And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your eyes." Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

Eli mistakes Hannah's silent praying as the incoherent mumbling of a drunk. Here is the first indication by the narrator that Eli has lost his spiritual sensitivity. He gets up and goes over to confront her. Frankly you can feel for Hannah. She is very upset. This spiritual holiday is excruciating. Her husband just wants her to be happy. And now the priest thinks she is a drunken woman.

Hannah humbly explains that she is praying to the Lord out of great anguish and sorrow. Her kind and painful reply seems to touch the heart of Eli. In a prayer-wish, Eli asks the Lord to grant Hannah's request. The Lord uses the assurance of Eli to encourage and gladden Hannah's heart. Her heart is joyful and her face is no longer sad.

One commentator has noted:

Eli accused her of pouring out too much wine, when all she was doing was pouring out her soul to God in prayer (1 Sam. 1:15). Five times Hannah called herself a "handmaid," which signified her submission to the Lord and His servants. We don't read that Eli apologized to her for judging her so severely, but at least he gave her his blessing, and she returned to the feast with peace in her heart and joy on her countenance. The burden was lifted from her heart and she knew that God had answered her prayer. (Wiersbe p. 17)

Her Son

(1:19-28)

God answers Hannah's prayer and fulfills her request by giving her a son.

His Conception

(1:19-20)

¹⁹ They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her. ²⁰ 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."

Being assured of God's moving on her behalf, Hannah goes home with joy in her heart. She conceives and bears a son. She calls him, Samuel. In Hebrew, Samuel means "Heard by the Lord." The focus is on the Lord granting a humble and godly prayer.

His Dedication

(1: 21-28)

She is faithful to her promise.

²¹ The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. 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 forever." ²³ Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him; only, may the Lord establish his word." So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. ²⁴ And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. And the child was young. ²⁵ Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. ²⁶ And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. ²⁷ For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. ²⁸ Therefore I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord." And he worshiped the Lord there.

Hannah thinks it is best to wait till Samuel is weaned. She skips going up to the religious feast with the family that year. Elkanah defers to her wisdom. But he seems concerned that God's Word be kept. What is hinted at here? Does Elkanah know the Word of God is scarce, the nation in anarchy, the priesthood in shambles? Does he possibly see in Samuel that God will meet the need of God's people?

The next year, the family goes up to Shiloh to the tabernacle for the feast. Hannah brings much to present to the Lord. A three year-old bull. A bushel of flour, and a jug (skin) of wine. These were expensive gifts and may reflect the relative wealth of her husband. But most of all, she brings a son named Samuel. She presents Samuel to the Eli and thus to the Lord. Samuel is loaned or dedicated to the Lord. He will serve in the Lord's house all his days.

Now, there are two important things to say here:

This is not a proof text for dedicating babies. What Hannah is doing here is a unique event in history. When we bring our babies here to be presented to you as a church we

are simply affirming that the parents will be faithful to rear them in God's ways and that the church will be ready to assist.

I want to warn you about keeping your promises to God. I think you should be very careful making them. But you must keep them. If you have promised God something, you should do what you promised. God does not take this lightly. Remember that God is not manipulated by your "I will do... If you do...". But you are bound to keep your vow.

Her Song

(2:1-11)

Hannah responds to God's provision by offering up her praise.

Its Praise

(2:1-3)

¹ And Hannah prayed and said,

"My heart exults in the Lord;
my horn is exalted in the Lord.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in your salvation.

² "There is none holy like the Lord:
for there is none besides you;
there is no rock like our God.

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

This song opens with a set of parallel sentences that structure her song.

Rejoices in the Lord...

Challenges her enemies...

Reveres the Lord...

Charges her enemies...

Reasons by the Lord...

A.W. Tozer says that what we think about God is the most important thing about us. So with Hannah. She praises God in the midst of her problems. Her personal enemy is near. But she is also speaking as David does. What she says also enfolds all the people. The readers of this song in this situation all resonate with her. And I love the fact that the sweet singer of Israel, the poet-King had a mother who could write and sing like this too.

Its Paradoxes

Hannah rejoices also in what God does.

⁴ The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble bind on strength.

⁵ Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.
The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.

⁶ The Lord kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

⁷ The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low and he exalts.

⁸ He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor.

For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,
and on them he has set the world.

⁹ "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,
for not by might shall a man prevail.

Here are seven reversals.

The mighty are broken but the feeble are strengthened.

The full starve but those that hunger are made full.

Those that are barren have children, but those with children are miserable.

The Lord kills, but the Lord gives life.

The Lord makes the rich, poor, but the Lord makes the poor, rich.

The Lord lifts up the lowly, but the Lord humbles the exalted.

The Lord guards the faithful but the Lord cuts off the wicked.

The man of God does not overcome by human might or power. Any success or accomplishment is God's doing. This sets the stage for the book itself. Saul will be a man who tries to prevail by human strategies and strength. His kingship will fail and he will fall into dreadful ruin. David will prevail by power of God. Though David will often fail, his kingdom is established.

It highlights the ways of God in redemptive history.

Its Prophetic Vision

(2:10)

¹⁰ The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces;
against them he will thunder in heaven.
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed."

¹¹ Then Elkanah went home to Ramah. And the boy was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest.

This prayer anticipates what God will do for David, the King.

This prayer looks beyond her age and sees the final victory of the Lord.

Reflect and Respond

Two other prayers in the Bible celebrate the birth of sons.

Zachariah's *Benedictus* in Luke 1:67-79 rejoices in the God who will save His people by raising up a King in the line of David.

⁶⁷ Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy:

⁶⁸ "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has visited and redeemed his people.

⁶⁹ He has sent us a mighty Savior
from the royal line of his servant David,
⁷⁰ just as he promised
through his holy prophets long ago.

⁷¹ Now we will be saved from our enemies
and from all who hate us.

⁷² He has been merciful to our ancestors
by remembering his sacred covenant—

⁷³ the covenant he swore with an oath
to our ancestor Abraham.

⁷⁴ We have been rescued from our enemies
so we can serve God without fear,

⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness
for as long as we live.

⁷⁶ "And you, my little son,
will be called the prophet of the Most High,
because you will prepare the way for the Lord.

⁷⁷ You will tell his people how to find salvation
through forgiveness of their sins.

⁷⁸ Because of God's tender mercy,
the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,

⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
and to guide us to the path of peace." [New Living Translation]

But the trajectory of Hannah's song lands on Mary's *Magnificant* in Luke 2:46-55

⁴⁶ Mary responded,

“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

⁴⁷ How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

⁴⁸ For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,
and from now on all generations will call me blessed.

⁴⁹ For the Mighty One is holy,
and he has done great things for me.

⁵⁰ He shows mercy from generation to generation
to all who fear him.

⁵¹ His mighty arm has done tremendous things!
He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.

⁵² He has brought down princes from their thrones
and exalted the humble.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away with empty hands.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel
and remembered to be merciful.

⁵⁵ For he made this promise to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children forever.”

What the Bible tells us about God in who He is and what He does is more than information to know. It is truth that passes through our minds and arrives in our hearts as life nourishing food for soul. Then it rests on God to fulfill His promises and answer our prayers. Then it rises up from our lips in songs of praise. This is the journey of redeemed from sorrows to songs.