

"THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL"

I. Introduction

- A. In the Hebrew Bible, the books of 1 and 2 Samuel were originally one.
1. It only came to be divided into two books because the scroll of the entire book was too unwieldy to be handled with ease.
 2. Samuel was written to trace the history of Israel from her existence as a loose tribal confederation under the judges to a unified government under the rule of a king.
 3. One of the key themes that we can see throughout Samuel is the repeated pattern of decline and rising.
 4. The book opens with the decline of Eli and the rising of Samuel.
 5. It moves on to the decline of Saul and the rising of David.
 6. Then it closes by largely focusing on David's decline, which leaves us wondering who will rise after him.
 7. This is one of the chief ways in which the books of Samuel point us to Christ.
 8. Jesus is the true, law-keeping king and deliverer for his people, the king who builds a house for God's name and thus inherits an eternal kingdom.
- B. The opening chapter of Samuel serves as a perfect example of the interrelationship between God's overall plan of redemption and his work in the individual lives of those who look to him in faith.
1. On one level, this is the story of God blessing a barren woman with a child.

2. But this is not just any child.
3. This is the child who will serve as the forerunner of Israel's king.
4. In this way, this chapter finds a very close parallel in the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus.
5. This parallel continues in chapter 2, as Hannah's prayer bears a strong resemblance to the song that Mary sings after the angel Gabriel appears to her and tells her that she will give birth to a child who will reign on the throne of his father David.
6. These similarities are not coincidences.
7. The Lord is the grand Storyteller, and as he unfolds his redemptive drama across the pages of history, he continues to develop the same themes in order to convey his truth and point forward to Christ.
8. The Lord caused all of the things that he ordained to take place in Hannah's life to work together not only for her ultimate good, but also for the furthering of his grand plan of salvation.

II. A Closed Womb (1-8)

- A. First Samuel opens by focusing in on one particular Israelite family.
 1. This man Elkanah seems to have been a godly man, though he was not without his flaws.
 2. Like other Old Testament characters, he had multiple wives.
 3. Polygamy was not God's intention at creation.
 4. This is made clear by the nature of the one flesh union of man and wife and by the use of the singular term "wife" in Genesis 2:24.
 5. Nevertheless, in his perfect wisdom, God tolerated polygamy for a time as he worked out his plan of redemption.

6. Certainly all of the instances of polygamy that are related in Scripture had negative repercussions, as we see so clearly here.
- B. Elkanah took his family with him when he made his trips to Shiloh to worship and offer sacrifices to the Lord.
1. Shiloh was about 20 miles north of Jerusalem.
 2. At that point in Israel's history, the tabernacle and the ark were located in Shiloh, making it the central place of worship.
 3. The law required Israelite males to appear and offer sacrifices at the central sanctuary during each of the three main religious festivals, and Elkanah faithfully carried out this duty.
- C. These trips to Shiloh were a source of considerable misery for Hannah, as they provided Elkanah's other wife with plenty of opportunities to call attention to Hannah's barrenness.
1. While barrenness is still a source of sorrow in our day, it was extremely tragic for a woman to be barren in the ancient world.
 2. Ancient people placed great importance upon the need for a male heir to perpetuate the family name.
 3. On top of that, it was your children who took care of you when you got old.
 4. A barren wife was considered a failure.
 5. Hannah's barrenness was probably the reason why Elkanah took a second wife.
 6. Being barren was hard enough for Hannah.
 7. Having it rubbed in by her rival made it worse.

8. And while her husband seems to have truly loved her, he was of little comfort to her.
 9. When he sees her so downcast, he asks, “why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”
 10. Husbands, let me offer you some free marital advice: never say this sort of thing to your wife.
 11. This is a classic example of a husband trying to fix a problem instead of taking time to understand and empathize with his wife.
- D. The story of a barren woman finally being blessed by God with a child is something that appears again and again in the Bible.
1. Once again, this is not a coincidence.
 2. As commentator Dale Ralph Davis points out, “Barren women seem to be God’s instruments in raising up key figures in the history of redemption, whether the promised seed (Isaac), the father of Israel (Jacob), saviors or preservers of Israel (Joseph, Samson, Samuel), or the forerunner of the great King (John the Baptist).” [Davis, 16]
 3. This pattern highlights that salvation is entirely of the Lord.
 4. God makes our helplessness the starting point for his work.
 5. God used Hannah’s despair to begin a new chapter in Israel’s history.
 6. There is a principle here that we would do well to ponder.
 7. God often works through people who are in distress, people who know they have no hope apart from him.
 8. This is how he shows that his power is made perfect in weakness.

III. A Tearful Prayer (9-18)

- A. During this particular visit to Shiloh, Hannah is overwhelmed with grief over her barrenness and over Peninnah's taunts.
 - 1. She responds to her distress by bringing her appeal to the Lord.
 - 2. As she begins her prayer, she addresses God as "LORD of hosts", the same name that is used for God in verse 3.
 - 3. This is the first appearance of this name in the Old Testament.
 - 4. In the Hebrew, this is the name *Yahweh Sabaoth*, Yahweh of the heavenly armies.
 - 5. It emphasizes the fact that God has all the armies of heaven at his disposal.
 - 6. Nothing can thwart him from carrying out his purposes.
 - 7. Nothing that Hannah asks of him is beyond his ability to carry out.

- B. Hannah's prayer tells us a great deal about her faith.
 - 1. Though she is looked upon as a failure by most of the people around her, she believes that her broken heart matters to God.
 - 2. She believes that God cares about her and about the problems that she is facing in her life.
 - 3. This is a key element of saving faith.
 - 4. It is what we mean when we call God our Father in heaven.
 - 5. As the Heidelberg Catechism reminds us, when we confess, 'I believe in God, the Father almighty', we are saying that the Creator of all things and the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ "is my God and Father because of Christ his Son. I trust him so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul,

and he will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends me in this sad world. He is able to do this because he is almighty God; he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.” [HC 26]

6. Hannah went to the Lord out of her anxiety and vexation because she believed that he cares for her.
 7. This is how God wants his children to respond when we are anxious and vexed.
 8. He is sovereign over the things that trouble us.
 9. He was the One who closed Hannah’s womb.
 10. We can bring our concerns to God with confidence because we know that he rules over everything and because we know that he loves us.
- C. As Hannah makes her request of the Lord, she also vows that this child will be specially dedicated to the Lord.
1. She will give him to the Lord all the days of his life and no razor will touch his head.
 2. This is the Nazirite vow that is described in Numbers 6.
 3. Yet Hannah’s vow is unique because Nazirite vows were normally made for a set period of time, not for life.
 4. On top of that, these vows were usually made by the individual undertaking the vow, not by a parent before they were born.
 5. Hannah’s vow was extravagant, but it was necessary because she knew that this was the only way she could adequately express her gratitude to God for answering such a request.

IV. A Gift Received and Dedicated (19-28)

- A. After Hannah offered her prayer to the Lord and received Eli's blessing, she went away in peace.
 - 1. She started eating again.
 - 2. Her face was no longer sad.
 - 3. She was content to let the matter rest in the hands of the Lord.
 - 4. This is an example that we should strive to emulate.
 - 5. We too should cast our burden on the Lord and trust that he will sustain us.

- B. Our text tells us that when Hannah went back home her husband had sexual relations with her and the Lord "remembered her" and she conceived.
 - 1. Recall what Hannah had asked of the Lord: "look on the affliction of your servant", "remember me", do "not forget your servant", "give to your servant a son."
 - 2. When the Bible speaks of God remembering someone, it does not mean that God had previously forgotten about the person.
 - 3. God never forgets anything.
 - 4. When the Bible speaks of God remembering it means that he is mindful of his covenant commitments and is going to carry them out.
 - 5. Hannah cried out to the Lord on the basis of his covenant promises, and the Lord heard her cry.

- C. When the time came for Hannah to fulfill her vow, she did not hesitate or try to find a way to get out of what she had promised.
 - 1. Samuel was probably weaned at the age of 3 or 4.

2. He was only a little boy when he was taken to live with Eli.
 3. We might wonder how a mother could do such a thing.
 4. We know she is keeping her vow, but why would she make such a vow in the first place?
 5. In spite of what we might think, this was not a matter of someone making a rash promise out of desperation, like the promises that a soldier might make to God while trapped in a foxhole.
 6. On the contrary, the fact that Hannah made this vow reveals that she wasn't thinking first and foremost about her own happiness but about the Lord's glory.
 7. As bad as her situation was, as desperately as she wanted a son, she did not want him primarily for her own sake but for the Lord's sake.
 8. She wanted her son to be a man of God.
 9. She wanted a boy who would be completely devoted to the Lord.
 10. And by God's grace, that is exactly what she was given.
 11. Her child grew up to be a source of blessing not only to his parents, but to the covenant people as a whole.
- D. Hannah's desire should be the desire of every parent.
1. Our primary goal should not be that our children would find worldly happiness and success.
 2. While there is nothing wrong with wanting those things for our children, that is not what matters most.
 3. What matters most is that they know the Lord as their God and Father through Jesus Christ, and that in view of God's mercy they

offer their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God.

4. Our children do not belong to us.
5. They belong to the Lord.
6. And the same thing is true of every gift that we receive from the hand of God.
7. God blesses us with these gifts so that we can offer them back to him.

V. Conclusion

- A. Samuel was a unique figure in redemptive history, but the story of his birth applies to every one of God's people.
- B. It reminds us that the Lord has a purpose in the pain that he brings into our lives, a purpose for our good and for the furthering of his plan of redemption.
- C. It shows us that the way to respond to pain is to pour our hearts out to the Lord in faith and to entrust ourselves to his care.
- D. And it teaches us that every gift that God gives us, even down to our children, is meant to be offered back to God with a grateful heart.