

GOD PORTRAYS WOMEN

by

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CHAPTER TEN

HANNAH

I Samuel 1-2:21

WE NOW PAY A VISIT to the ancient city of Ramah, or as it is called in the New Testament, Arimathaea. It is associated in our minds with two splendid people, Hannah the mother of the prophet Samuel, and Joseph of Arimathaea. I think when we get to Heaven we will be eager to thank Joseph for his tender care of that precious body of our Saviour which he laid in his own new tomb.

Elkanah the husband of Hannah is introduced to us in verse 1 and then we read, **“And 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”** (1:2). Plural marriages were not uncommon in those days. They never resulted in happy homes where there was peace and harmony. Elkanah’s home was no exception.

Peninnah made life difficult for Hannah, but we do not read of any retaliation from her.

Elkanah attended the solemn feasts and each year he journeyed to Shiloh with his family to worship. He was generous too and gave special gifts to Peninnah and her children at that time. He was even more lavish in his gifts to Hannah, for he loved her more than his other wife. This may have caused Peninnah to be jealous. Verse 6 says **“Her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb.”** Each year this experience was repeated until **“Hannah wept, and did not eat”** (1:7). Elkanah realized the cause of her distress and sought to comfort her saying, **“Am not I better to thee than ten sons?”**

Hannah left the table and sought help from the only one who could meet her need. She found a place where she could in quietness pour out her soul before God, pleading with Him to give her a man child.

“She was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And 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 will 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” (1:10-11).

While she prayed she made no sound, only her lips moved. Did you notice that she called herself the Lord's handmaid four times? She was not only ready to do His bidding but to give her child to Him for his entire life. The priests were required to serve only from the time they were twenty-five until fifty years of age. She would have her son a man prepared for God to use and trained from his earliest days for that purpose. Surely the Spirit of God moved her to offer that prayer.

While Hannah was praying, Eli the high priest was seated where he could observe her. He was accustomed to hearing prayers and the formal responses of the services. Hearing no sound when he saw her lips moving, he misjudged poor Hannah. He left his seat and came to her, and reproved her for drunkenness and advised her to put away her wine.

The reason Eli made this grievous mistake was because he was out of touch with God and incapable of proper discernment. He could not give a word in season to those who were in trouble.

Hannah answered the high priest with due respect saying, **“No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto”** (1:15-16).

Hannah did not tell Eli the trouble she had with Peninnah. Instead she turned this trial into a fresh occasion for seeking the Lord. It would be wonderful if we always followed her good example.

Then Eli answered and said, **“Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition which thou hast asked of him”** (1:17).

I wonder if the high priest's prayers were more fervent that day because of that meeting with Hannah. And she said, **“Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight”** (1:18). She did not seize the opportunity to tell about the things that bothered her.

“So the woman went her way and did eat and her countenance was no more sad. With the assurance of answered prayer in her heart, she faced life again with courage. The next morning the peace of God was still with her. The Lord had changed her sorrow of heart into joy, had given her the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. “They rose up in the morning early, and worshiped before the Lord and returned: and the Lord remembered her” (1:19).

In due time Hannah's son was born. Did she forget the promises made in the temple at Shiloh now that she had the desire of her heart? No, every time she called her son by his name **“Samuel”** she was reminded that he was *“asked of God,”* for that is the meaning of his name.

When the time for the next pilgrimage to Shiloh drew near she told Elkanah she would remain at home until she had weaned the baby and then she would take him with her that he might appear before the Lord and there abide forever.

Every day she anticipated the time she was to make her living sacrifice, when she would relinquish her natural claims to her son and devote him utterly to the Lord.

And Elkanah said unto her, **“Do what seemeth thee good . . . only the Lord establish His word”** (1:23).

She gave him every reason to have absolute confidence in her discretion and genuine spirituality. In those few years Hannah was most careful in the training of her Nazarite son. She was not afraid to have his upbringing different from that of other children.

When Samuel was weaned, or about three years old (for the priests were enrolled at that age, see II Chronicles 31:16), Hannah went up to Shiloh to make her costly offering with a song on her lips and generous sacrifices. This time she entered the Lord’s court with praise for answered prayer. They brought the child to Eli, offering a bullock as a whole burnt offering for the consecration ceremony.

Hannah said to Eli, **“O my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord”** (I Samuel 1:26-27). It is added, **“And he worshiped the Lord there.”** Is this an example of our Lord’s saying, **“Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise”** (Matthew 21:16)?

The service of dedication was completed with a prophetic prayer or song uttered by Hannah. I am sure the Spirit of God inspired her to compose it and gave her the grace and opportunity to present it. He has so valued it that He has preserved it for us, an example of acceptable praise. The source of her joy was not just in the blessing received but in the Lord Himself.

She 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”** (I Samuel 2:1).

Was she conscious of being anointed by the Holy Spirit to express her praise? When truly guided by the Spirit there is no room for arrogancy, vainglory, magnifying oneself or speaking proudly or grievous hard things. Therefore let us pray, **“Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord”** (Psalm 19:14).

When speaking of victory over her enemies did she imply that having tasted of God’s goodness she refused to be occupied any longer by the petty annoyances and irritations of her trying household? She resolved that her heart would from henceforth be enlarged and interested in the blessings and comforts of others as well as their salvation.

She continued: **“There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. 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”** (2:2-3).

She was conscious of the Lord's omniscience, His presence and His overruling in the affairs of men. As she studied God's dealings with men she saw His overturning power. **"The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength"** (2:4).

Mere human force will not triumph; and that which the world regards as weak, God will not despise but will strengthen to execute His purpose. **"They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble"** (2:5).

There are those who have been concerned over their unfruitfulness for Christ, who have roused themselves and sought to make up for wasted years; while some who were useful for the Lord have waxed feeble because of their complacency over past attainments.

"The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up" (2:6-7). The Lord is the arbiter of life and death. The Psalmist says, **"He is the fountain of life"** (36:9); **"He holdeth our soul in life"** (66:9). **"He is the God of my life"** (42:8).

On His girdle hang the keys of Hell and of death (Revelation 1:18). He gives life and sustains the life He gives. Our Lord said, **"I am the Bread of Life"** (John 6:35); **"he that eateth me, even he shall live by me"** (John 6:57). Thank God, if He brings us down to the grave He is able to bring us up. Jesus said, **"I am the resurrection and the life"** (John 11:25).

"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" (I Samuel 2:8).

He raises up, He lifts up, chooses our associations and gives us an inheritance. We have many examples of God's dealings in the Scriptures.

- Joseph was brought by God from the pit to the throne to save his brethren.
- Daniel a prisoner of war was raised to be second in power in a world empire.

We also can sing, **"He brought me out of an horrible pit."** We could not extricate ourselves from sin, **"Out of the miry clay he set my feet upon a rock and established my goings and he hath put a new song in my mouth even praise unto our God: many shall see it and fear, and shall trust in the Lord"** (Psalm 40:2-3). **"The pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them"** (2:8). He upholds all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). All things were created by Him and by Him all things cohere or hold together (Colossians 1:16-17). He is quite able to carry the government on His shoulder (Isaiah 9:6) yet His poor, recovered sheep require both His shoulders for keeping (Luke 15:6).

It is remarkable that immediately before and after the statement of God's upholding power of the world it is said, **"He raiseth the poor out of the dust,"** and **"He will keep the feet of his saints."**

He is as able to uphold stumbling saints as He is tottering worlds. We are **“kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation”** (I Peter 1:5). **“The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord, and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand”** (Psalm 37:23-24). **“I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness”** (Isaiah 41:10). **“Underneath are the everlasting arms”** (Deuteronomy 33:27).

“The wicked shall be silent in darkness” (I Samuel 2:9). **“The triumphing of the wicked is short”** (Job 20:5). **“Their feet are in slippery places, they are cast down to destruction and brought into desolation and consumed with terrors”** (Psalm 73:18-19).

The rich man who ignored the Lord in his lifetime found himself in a place of unanswered prayer and where he wanted no company; he pleaded that his brethren should not come there. “Silent in darkness!” an awful sentence. In contrast Lazarus was in Abraham’s bosom, enjoying the affection and companionship of the saints in Heaven.

“The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed” (I Samuel 2:10).

No one contends with the Lord and prospers. In this verse Hannah perceived the various offices of the Lord as **“Judge of the earth . . . his King . . . his Anointed.”**

This is the first time in Scripture that the Lord is spoken of as **“his Anointed,”** and in the first chapter as the **“Lord of Hosts”** (v. 3). Truly, **“the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him”** (Psalm 25:14). His secret was revealed here to a sorrowful woman in a difficult home.

Hannah is one of the Old Testament prophetesses who would crown Him Lord of all. The Lord described His own anointing prophetically in Isaiah 61 and its fulfillment in Luke 4:18-19.

“And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest” (2: 11).

“Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod. Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The Lord give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the Lord. And they went unto their own home. And the Lord visited Hannah so that she conceived and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the Lord” (2:18-21).

Though Hannah went home, her concern was for Samuel. Her loom was busy preparing a robe to fit the growing child, and many prayers were interwoven in the seamless, spotless robe. Prayers there were to keep her son spotless in the midst of a corrupt priesthood, and for his spiritual development and preparation to be a man of God for the hour of need.

I cannot refrain from quoting a delightful remark by F. B. Meyer on the influence of a mother.

“Mothers still make garments for their children, not on the loom or with their busy needles merely, but by their holy and ennobling characters displayed from day to day before young and observant eyes, by their words and conversation, and by their habits of daily devotion. What the children see they imitate, and unconsciously array themselves in the gentleness or rudeness, the reverence for religion or indifference, the refinement or coarseness of manner, which are daily presented to their gaze. Children wear the robes which their mother’s character and behavior, temper and tones, weave for them.”

Hannah was a woman of prayer. Samuel was a man of prayer. Many times in a crisis the children of Israel came to Samuel and pleaded, “**Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us that he will save us.**”

And Samuel would pray. When the children of Israel rebelled and demanded a king, anyone can recognize the Spirit of Christ in Samuel’s reply, “**God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way.**”

He surely did teach like his mother, not only by precept but by the godly example of his Christlike life.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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