

THE LESSONS FROM HANNAH'S LIFE

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Scripture: 1 Samuel 1:1-11, 1:1-28, 2:1-11

1 Samuel 1:1-11

¹There 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. ²He had two wives; one was named Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

³Year 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. ⁴Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵But to Hannah, he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. ⁶Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. ⁷This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. ⁸Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

⁹Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's temple. ¹⁰In bitterness of soul, Hannah wept and prayed to the Lord. ¹¹And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

Let's pray. Lord, we pray that as we meditate on Your Word, You would open our hearts and our minds and You would speak to each and every one of us to strengthen us, to challenge us and to encourage us in Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Now this is a fairly familiar portion for all of us. As we read this, we wonder what is the kind of trouble Hannah went through. By the way, the name 'Hannah' means a woman of grace. And she was! She lived up to be a woman of grace. In the latter portion of v. 5 it says, "The Lord closed her womb." Again v. 6 starts "Because the Lord had closed her womb her rival kept provoking her." One wonders how can God be good when it says God closed her womb.

One of the things I want all of us to learn from this particular portion that I read is that we need to be convinced about God's sovereignty over us, over others, over our nation, and over everything. I think that's the most important lesson we must learn from this particular portion. As we read vs. 6 and 7, Peninnah was such a torture and she enjoyed it. till Hannah cried, she tortured her.

What good is there in this?

God is always in control.

This is the most important lesson we need to learn here. Our problem, most of the time, is that we need an explanation for everything. Being an academic myself, I know that we try to analyze everything and anything; we want to find a reason and we also want to predict what will happen. That's a very common problem with all of us human beings. In the book of Job, and I'm sure none of

us have ever faced the kind of problems Job faced – sickness, all his children being killed. Job had a volley of questions for God, questions after questions. He even said: I want to meet God. I want to question Him. What did He find wrong with me? Finally, God showed up and instead of giving an answer to Job, God asked him more questions, 72 questions if I remember correct. Interestingly, most of the questions started with this phrase: Do you know? Do you know? The answer is you don't know. The point Job learnt at the end is finally he surrendered saying, "Lord, You know everything." That's the most important lesson for us from this portion of scripture. God knows, and that should be enough. We can keep on analyzing, we can keep on seeking for explanations. Many things we may not get, some things we might get. And that is the most important thing to learn.

God has a purpose.

Most of us go through tough times. I'm sure all of us have our own share of problems on a day-to-day basis. God has a purpose for all this. He has a blueprint in His mind for each and every one of us and God wants to execute that one step at a time. What God needs from us is our cooperation and our surrender – coming to Him, asking for help. Then God would do it, and that's what is required. And that's exactly what God expected from Hannah also. I'm sure she would have prayed many times asking for a child. But things have reached such a level; she couldn't stand it any longer. She was driven to the extreme. And that's where we find that she did what was the best.

So now in these first eleven verses, the first thing as I said is always remember when problems come to you (and all of us will have them till the day we die), God has a purpose. God has a plan for you and God is shaping you, because only you can fulfil that purpose which God planned for you. Nobody else can fulfil it. And if you don't do it, that much void will remain in God's kingdom. Therefore, remember God has a purpose.

How should we respond?

What should we do? That's what we will see next – what did Hannah do? What should we do when we are driven to our extremes? Do what Hannah did. In v.10: In bitterness of soul, Hannah wept and prayed to the Lord. And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

When she was driven to the extreme in bitterness of soul, Hannah wept much. And I believe that's exactly what God wants us to do. Most of the time the problem with us is:

1. We want an explanation.
2. We will try everything in our own strength. When we face a problem, we will try everything and then say: Now only prayer remains. What does that mean? Is prayer the last resort? In fact, that should have been the first resort. That is the biggest mistake we make in our lives – we always keep prayer as the last. By keeping prayer as last, we are telling God: You are not in control; I'm in control. Therefore, I'll try everything and if nothing works, I'll pray. No! Just the opposite!

There is one lesson that we must learn – take everything to the Lord in prayer. And I like something that the Pastor does all the time. You share something with him, immediately he says: Let's pray. I can testify to that. I believe that is so important. For anything and everything, we must pray. Develop that habit of intimacy with God so that we just pray. Don't leave it as the last resort.

Did God listen to Hannah's prayer?

Yes, He did! Hannah got the kind of confirmation that God heard her prayer. We know what happened. She was praying in the bitterness of her soul. Her lips were moving but no voice was

coming out. She was praying very close to the temple near the door where the priest Eli was sitting. He noticed this and said:

¹²As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴and said to her, "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine." ¹⁵"Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. ¹⁶Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

So we see more of her prayer from these two verses in her reply to Eli. But I believe Hannah got the confirmation that God heard her prayer. If you read the first few chapters of 1 Samuel, we see that unfortunately, Eli and his family were wicked. But God arranged for this particular high priest Eli to give a word of encouragement back to Hannah.

¹⁷Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." So Hannah got a confirmation that God had heard her prayer. When she was driven to extreme, she prayed in the bitterness of her soul. And here was a confirmation for her that God has heard her prayer and sent her a word of encouragement.

What did she do in response to that?

¹⁸She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast."

God always listens.

That's the most beautiful thing that happened to Hannah. All this time she was worried; she was literally tortured and she prayed in the bitterness of her soul, she committed her life to the Lord's hands. And she got a confirmation that the Lord has heard her prayers. She surrendered. Her face was no longer downcast. I think that's something extremely important for us once you pray. Be assured that God has heard your prayer. God may not give what you asked for. In this case, Hannah got what she asked for. But God always listens. Be sure about that.

What should be our response?

Our response should be to trust that God has heard our prayer.

Philippians 4:6-7 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

That's what happened to Hannah and that is what will happen to us. We must trust in God.

I was very touched by another story which some of you may be familiar with. People of my age group would definitely remember President Richard Nixon and also the Watergate scandal. One of the close associates of President Nixon was Charles Colson. He was also punished along with 4 or 5 others. Interestingly, Charles Colson did not have a direct involvement in the Watergate scandal, but was indicted and imprisoned. While Colson was in jail, he found Christ. This is all written in his book 'Born Again'. It's a book worth reading. He also wrote another wonderful book called 'Loving God'. If you get a chance to read them, please do. For some reason, the judge who gave this punishment, released the others after some time, but he did not release Charles Colson even though he was not directly involved. And that pained him a lot. But by then he had surrendered his life to Christ.

Later, his son unfortunately got involved with drugs and arrested for possession. As mentioned in the book, Colson was very deeply hurt. This almost broke him. He felt exactly how Hannah felt. And he

did exactly what Hannah did. He prayed! He finally surrendered totally. And exactly what happened to Hannah happened to him too. He was no longer downcast. Interestingly, what happened was that within a few days, the judge released Colson. He says, "My release actually happened on the day I prayed, though I got to know of it later.

That's the point I want to say: once you pray, believe that God has heard it. We may not get the answer like Hannah. Hannah prayed and she got assurance that God heard. She believed that God is going to answer my prayer and she was no longer downcast. That's something we learned from the life of Hannah.

Let me read another verse from Romans because we might wonder why should we read some of these narratives from the Old Testament. What is there for us to learn?

Romans 15:4 "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we may have hope."

So as we read Hannah's narrative, and we have the benefit of knowing what happened, though Hannah didn't know what would happen at that moment in time. We should remember as we meditate on Hannah's life, that the very same God is our God. We can be encouraged – what happened can happen to us. God may not answer many of the prayers which we pray in the way we want it; but God will definitely answer. What we should do is surrender and say, "Lord, You are in control. You are the boss. Take care of me and let me do as per Your will and plan."

Now the good part of the story:

Hannah fulfils her vow to the Lord.

Hannah goes back in in due course of time, God fulfils her desire.

²⁰So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him." ²¹when the man Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord and to fulfil his vow, ²²Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the Lord, and he will live there always." She waited till Samuel was fully weaned, roughly about three years, then she takes him back to the temple.

²⁴After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, and ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. ²⁵ when they had slaughtered the bull, they brought the boy to Eli, ²⁶ and she said to him, "Pardon me, my Lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. ²⁷I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. ²⁸ So now I give him to the Lord. for his whole life he will be given over to the Lord." And he worshipped the Lord there.

Again we see something from Hannah's life. As parents, we have a big role to play in the lives of our children, as Hannah did. Just like God has a purpose for our lives, He has a purpose for each of our children's lives. they are His gift to us. They belong to the Lord, and they are a trust given to us. So it is our responsibility to bring them up in the fear of the Lord so that, in turn, they will fulfil God's plan for their lives. And that's what Hannah did. I believe that each one of us has a role to play. Maybe, Hannah didn't understand the role she was playing. In the nation of Israel, Hannah and Samuel had a huge role to play. You will see that Samuel's term comes at a very crucial time. After that comes King Saul. He was the one who anointed King Saul and also King David. So, each one of us has a big role to play. That is something very important for all of us who are privileged to be parents. Remember your children are given to you as a trust and it's your responsibility to bring them up in God's fear so that in turn, they will fulfil God's plan for their lives.

Hannah's Prayer.

This beautiful prayer prayed by Hannah is in chapter 2:1-10, where she's summarizing what she learnt. Let's read a few of the verses.

¹ Then Hannah prayed and said:

"My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high.
My mouth boasts over my enemies,
for I delight in your deliverance.

³ Do not keep talking so proudly
or let your mouth speak such arrogance,
for the Lord is a God who knows,
and by Him deeds are weighed.

I think this is a warning for all of us, me included. We all boast about the things we have, our achievements, our possessions, and so on. That was the mistake Penninah made; she did not think that the children God gave her were God's. there was nothing to boast about. That was her blunder. We don't hear about Penninah anymore, but Hannah is still remembered. So always remember: do not talk proudly. don't ever be proud because God is watching our deeds. In verses 5-8, we see the sovereignty of God.

⁵ Those who were full hire themselves out for food,
but those who were hungry, hunger no more.
She who was barren has borne seven children,
but she who has had many sons pines away.

⁶ The Lord brings death and makes alive;
he brings down to the grave and raises up.

⁷ The Lord sends poverty and wealth;
he humbles and he exalts.

God is sovereign. God has a right. He knows what He is doing and He will do. God blessed Hannah. Including Samuel, Hannah had six children. that was God's plan. God knew what He was going to do.

So, in summary, let us see the lessons we learned from Hannah's life.

1. Always remember God is sovereign. You need to believe that all the time that God is good. God is loving. Whatever happens in our lives, God has a plan. Nothing is out of control. Whatever be the situation, nothing is out of control. God is in control, and that is something we must always remember. Unfortunately, that is exactly the area where Satan is always going to trouble us. If you look at the temptations that Adam and Eve had, it was all about bringing doubt about God. That's what Satan will always do. So never allow the thought that God is not good. God is good all the time.
2. Always remember to pray. Don't keep prayer as the last resort. Always pray first. Prayer is the most important thing because otherwise, you are belittling God. You are saying: God, You are not sovereign. You don't know; I know. Always remember to pray. Make prayer so natural to you that you commit everything to the Lord in prayer. never us prayer as the last resort.

3. Having prayed, trust that God is in control. Ask for God's peace. All the situations we are going to face, always remember God has heard your prayer, and God will work it out in His own time. Just as we read from Hannah's life, at the end of our lives when we look back, we will be able to see that God has done wonderfully well. I think that's the kind of privilege we have as God's children, that God is shaping each and everything that is happening in our lives, putting things in His own plans. Somebody said, "History is His Story." So God is the God of history. Everything happens according to His plan and purpose. So let's be convinced about God's plan for our life and also let us make it a point to surrender and have a close walk with God.

Let's pray.

Lord, our loving Father. We thank You for this wonderful opportunity You gave us to come and worship You and to listen to Your Word. Lord, we thank You for the life of Hannah, how she lived up to her name being a woman of grace, and how much You cared for her, and Lord, You heard her prayer. We learn from her life that she learned You are sovereign and You are in control over all situations. We thank You Lord, that as Hannah prayed and completely surrendered herself into Your hands, we pray that You would also give us that kind of grace and confidence in You so that we can surrender ourselves knowing that You are in control. Thank You Lord again for all the wonderful lessons we learned from Your Word. We pray that You will strengthen us, you will encourage us and You will give us the needed grace to live a life that is pleasing to You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
