

INTRODUCTION

There is nothing more encouraging than God answering our prayers. Perhaps we have prayed for something humbly and specifically and God very graciously answers our prayer; perhaps by being more gracious to us than we expected. God's answers to our prayers not only meet our real needs, but they increase our trust in him and our love for our God and consequently they encourage us in prayer (Psalm 116:1-2).

When God answers our prayers He is challenging us to trust him and to devote our whole lives in serving him. His answers lead to joy and a continual appreciation of his kindness and it also reminds us of his steadfast love for us. God answering Hannah's prayer led Hannah into trusting her God, so much so that she is prepared to keep the promise that she made to him (1:11).

It is no hardship for her to give to the God that she loved and trusted even when it involved her own prayed for and longed for son.

1. THE PRESENTATION OF SAMUEL (1:21-28)

Although Hannah was a very happy Mother she never forgot her promise to dedicate Samuel to the service of God's tabernacle at Shiloh. Hannah decided not to take Samuel to Shiloh until he was weaned for once he was weaned he was ready and able to be left there under the guidance of Eli. When the time came for Elkanah and his family to go to Shiloh to offer the annual sacrifices to the Lord, Hannah did not go with them (1:21-22).

Hannah obviously shared the vow that she made to God and her thoughts about staying at home until Samuel was weaned with Elkanah for she knew that she would need his permission to stay at home according to Numbers 30:10-14. Elkanah clearly agreed with Hannah's thoughts and so Hannah stayed at home and nursed her Samuel until he was weaned (1:23).

Now according to the book of 2 Maccabees 7:27 which is an extra biblical book found in the apocrypha; children were not weaned until they were three or four years old. If that is the case then Samuel and Hannah would have stayed at home each year for about three years while the rest of the family went to sacrifice at Shiloh.

However the time came when Samuel was fully weaned and so Hannah took Samuel to Shiloh and after offering the appropriate sacrifices Samuel was taken to Eli the priest in charge and Hannah gave Samuel into his care in fulfilment of her vow (1:24-25). Ultimately in doing this she is giving Samuel into the care of her God who would see to it that he would be carefully looked after and instructed in the things of God.

Now we have to understand that what this situation teaches us is the uniqueness of Samuel. Hannah is not giving us an example that every mother needs to follow; no Samuel is going to be the true leader of God's people, he is going to be God's spokesman in very uncertain and ungodly times. You see God has a unique place for Samuel in the history of redemption and that uniqueness will be unfolded throughout this book.

In one sense Samuel, Elkanah and Hannah do not stand on the same level ground as all believers today because of their unique place in God's plan of redemption. However there are some important and vital lessons that do apply to us all.

The first one is that we need to be careful in making vows to God because God expects us to pay all our vows. As I look back over my Christian life I have to confess I have made some very rash

and foolish promises that I had no intention of keeping. I suppose I was doing it to try to get the Lord to answer my prayers but we must never treat the Lord like that. He holds us accountable for every promise that we make to him and He expects us to keep them.

This is why we ought to be very careful as to what we say in prayer to the Lord. However if we do make a vow and God fulfils the condition then we must fulfil that vow no matter how costly it may be. We must keep our promises to God. Perhaps we promised some time ago to pray more; perhaps as a result of a sermon you heard and as yet you have not really kept that promise then please can I exhort you to do so today?

Likewise perhaps you promised that you would get more involved in the life of the church or that you would be more generous in your giving or that you would seek to witness more often of God's grace. Hannah knew what she was saying when she promised the Lord that if he gave her a son she would give him back to her. She knew how costly that was for her but she also knew how serious it is to make vows and not keep them. I urge you to keep your vows and if you have remaining an unfulfilled vow then I urge you to keep your promise, for the Lord has kept his promises to you.

There is another lesson to parents here about being willing to let our children serve the Lord. I know some of you would love to be in a position where your children felt the call of God to serve him and we must pray for their salvation; but for those of us who have Christian children or may do in the future then we must be prepared to let them go wherever God wants them to go in order to serve the Lord.

Hannah and Elkanah knew the sacrifice that was involved and they no doubt taught Samuel from an early age about the privilege that it was to serve God at Shiloh. Elkanah and Hannah also knew that it was a privilege for their son to be used by God in being his spokesman to the people of their time. Every parent whose child or children are serving God on the Mission field understands something of the sacrifice made by Elkanah and Hannah.

Depending where they are serving, it is likely that Parents will not see their children much and they will miss their grandchildren growing up and miss being able to help and influence their grandchildren. But that is a cost worth paying in order to see our children serving God and being used by God for his glory. If God ever asks us to give up our children in his service then we must be prepared to encourage them in that work and to pay the price and the sacrifice that is involved in that calling.

2. A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (2:1-11)

This is a prayer in the form of a poem or song, it is a spiritual song or a Psalm but it is more than that for it is a prototype of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) in which Mary praised God for the child she was soon to bring into the world. Hannah moved by the Holy Spirit prays this prayer that is both prophetic and messianic. It looks ahead to the Lord Jesus and this prayer focuses our attention of Hannah's Saviour.

There are a number of aspects to it that are worth considering but remember what I said last week for the sake of time I will not be dwelling on each point for very long or drawing all applications out, I simply want to draw your attention to various aspects and various applications that are found in this prayer.

a) Praise is brought to God (v 1) – It is clear that the birth of Samuel brought Hannah great joy, and her joy is unconfined in this prayer (v 1). But her joy was not confined to her son Samuel but she praises the God who gave Samuel to her in answer to her prayer. She rejoices in the giver of the gift rather than in the gift itself. She rejoices in the Lord and in the Lord her horn is lifted up.

The horn is a symbol for strength like the horn of an Ox and so she finds and renews her strength in her God who has strengthened her through the giving of Samuel. She boasts over her enemies (NIV) but I think the AV rendering of her mouth being enlarged over her enemies is a more accurate reading here.

The enlarging of the mouth refers to the positive content of her spiritual blessing because she has been blessed so much her mouth must open wider to praise her God. In doing so she is showing her enemies that her God is loving and gracious and powerful which is demonstrated through the giving of Samuel to her.

Now if Hannah rejoices and finds her strength in God because of the giving of Samuel then surely all believers can rejoice in God because of the gift not of children but of his Son Jesus Christ through which his deliverance or salvation comes to sinners. Hannah was helpless and could not make herself have children and God acted in answer to prayer and in the spiritual sense we were dead in our sins and unable to help ourselves, all we could do was to call out for mercy and God graciously answered our prayer and gave us the gift of his salvation which comes through his Son Jesus Christ.

Therefore our salvation should be sufficient to make us rejoice in the Lord and when we feel downcast in our souls then it is helpful to think about this wonderful gift of salvation and our strength will be lifted up. Likewise his gift of salvation should be sufficient to encourage us to speak humbly of the Lord and in of his wonderful salvation, we ought not to be afraid of telling those who oppose us of the wonderful gift of salvation and the reason why we rejoice in it.

b) The Celebration Of Who God Is (vs. 2-8) – The body of the song verses 2-8 is an exalted tribute to the character of God and to his powerful acts. We are only going to have time to look at God's character or at least at the ones that Hannah highlights. Now notice that Hannah praises him for who He is before she praises him for what He has done (vs. 2-3). Now Hannah mentions three of his attributes in this prayer before she speaks of his powerful acts, she speaks first of all of:

i) His Holiness (v 2) - There is no one holy like the Lord because there is no other god never mind a holy God. It is God's holiness that makes him distinct and distances him from sinful human beings. We are not holy but God is completely pure and his purity when shone into our lives exposes the dreadfulness of our sin. This is why sinners cannot draw near to this holy God and this is why God must distance himself from us.

The only way anyone can draw near to such a holy God is to deal with the sin problem. Now none of us is able to do that because we are all sinners and unable to make ourselves pure. But God who is holy acted to deal with sin, He sent his holy Son into this world and He took upon himself a human body in order to die in the place of sinners.

He made himself sin and thereby received the punishment from his Father that sin deserved so that all who believe in him have their sins forgiven and receive the holiness of Christ. Christians are holy people we are pure and must seek to live out that reality in this world.

Although sin is no longer dominate in our lives; it still plays a part in our lives but because we have been made holy by Christ then one day we will be as holy as Christ in his new heavens and new earth that place where righteousness dwells.

ii) His Power (v 2) - But Hannah's holy God is also the all-powerful God (v 2). There is no rock like our God and the term "rock" is used as a symbol of power. There is no one as powerful as God and there is no one who can even complete with God when it comes to power.

He has just demonstrated his power in Hannah's life by giving her a son against all the odds and his power is seen in our lives through the salvation that He has granted to us and the changed life that follows.

Our lives must be demonstrating God's power, his power to change lives and attitudes etc. which means that we have a responsibility to pray for God's Holy Spirit to change us and this change comes about as we read and understand his word and are given grace to apply his word in our lives. But this all-powerful God is the one that we can trust for there is no one who can overpower him and therefore his purposes are always fulfilled.

We need to pray that God will demonstrate his power to sinners by saving them and turning them to his Son Jesus Christ.

Most people in our day and in our society see God as some weak willed old Grandfather who is helpless to do anything about the state of the world. Therefore we need to pray that God will show his true power by bringing a revival upon our nation and displaying his power in salvation and by so doing He will bring glory to his great and wonderful name.

iii) His Knowledge (v 3) - But Hannah also knows that her God is also the all-knowing God (v 3). There is nothing that God does not know; He knows everything about everything, He knows the end from the beginning, He knows the seen and the unseen and He knows our thoughts and motives as well as our actions and our words.

This is why Hannah warns us against talking arrogantly as if we know everything; it is because the Lord knows everything that all our deeds, which include seen and unseen, are weighed in God's scales and of course we are all found guilty. He knows what we think about him and what we intend to do to others and what we would like to do to our enemies. Even our good deeds are often tainted with wrong motives.

You see how Hannah's prayer points forward to Jesus Christ if He is the all-knowing God and is therefore able to judge justly then we all need a Saviour and that Saviour is Jesus Christ. God knowing our sin knew that the only way that we could ever be rescued from our sin and from his just judgement is through his perfect Son who lived, died and rose again for all those who will trust in him.

Are you trusting in him for salvation? You need to for you are a sinner and you know it but what you may not know is just how often you sin and disobey God. But God knows that is why even those of us who are Christians need to constantly seek God's forgiveness for our daily sins. The all-knowing God even knows why we serve him. Is it out of genuine love for him or is there another motive or reason?

We find it hard to understand our own motives, which is why we must constantly seek God's help to enable us to make right assessments of our own spiritual condition before such a holy powerful and all knowing God.

It is because He is the all knowing and all powerful God that He is able to act in this world. Hannah recounts some of those actions in verses 4-8 which includes having the power to give and take away life (v 6) and the power to providentially work out his purposes for this world including bringing his judgement upon those who oppose him (vs. 7-10). It is because of who the Lord is that we all need a Saviour and it is the Lord who sends his Saviour (v 10). Therefore all must turn to him and trust in him in order to be saved and to enjoy fellowship with this God who is Holy, and is all knowing and all powerful. Can I encourage you to turn to him and trust him for salvation?

Amen