

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Women of faith: Hannah

Good morning and welcome to *Truth for Today*, where we continue our series of six talks entitled "Women of Faith". About two months ago, on 28 October 2012 to be exact, I addressed the subject of "*Biblical Faith*" so it is good that we are now having examples of women in the Scriptures, who demonstrated their belief and trust in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who redeemed His people from slavery in Egypt, to take them into their promised land. This was the eternal God, who covenanted His presence with His people, who were then governed by the laws that Moses had received, on Mount Sinai. We, at *Truth for Today*, in company with all Christians, are confident that this very God revealed Himself, in all His fullness, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's programme is concerned with Hannah, the mother of Samuel, so, if you have your Bible in front of you, please turn to 1 Samuel 1 which is where the story of Hannah and Samuel begins. 1 Samuel 1:1-2 indicate the circumstances that made Hannah seek the LORD and, as usual, I will be reading from the Authorised or King James Version of the Bible: "There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, of Mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite: 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."

There we have the crux of the matter. Hannah had no children while Peninnah, her rival for the affection of Elkanah, had provided him with a family. Before we consider the effects of Hannah's situation upon her faith in God, I would just add a few comments upon the biblical narrative here. In Mark 10:6-8, it is recorded that the Lord Jesus said: "But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they two shall be one flesh; so then they are no more two, but one flesh."

Thus, it would seem to me that the model that God has for us in marriage is one man with one woman and I suggest that Israel was in such a low moral state when Samuel was born that Elkanah was practising polygamy. He is, in fact, the only commoner appearing in the books of Samuel and Kings that had more than one wife, which was, perhaps, indicative of his affluence. This judgement of the nation's poor spiritual state is further confirmed in the early chapters of 1 Samuel, where we find corrupt priests, supposedly ministering to the nation of Israel at the sacred building, at Shiloh.

We must return to our subject this morning of Hannah's faith, which was being tested by her having no children. Despite Hannah's barren womb, Elkanah showed his love and sympathetic feelings for her, by giving her gifts in the face of Peninnah's taunts (1 Samuel 1:4-7). Though this must have been a comfort to her, it could not pacify the deep longing for a child, especially when they visited the embryonic temple, at Shiloh, to sacrifice unto the LORD (1 Samuel 1:7). It is good to notice this habit, practised by Elkanah and his family, of worshipping and sacrificing to God. Do we all have the habit of praising God, especially on the Lord's Day, when we can gather with His people to pay homage unto Him?

There is, however, another feature, at the beginning of 1 Samuel 1 that we need to note. This is found in 1 Samuel 1:9-10: "So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept bitterly."

While they were before the LORD, at Shiloh, Hannah brought her concerns to Him in prayer. I hardly need stress the importance of prayer to such an audience as is listening this morning, for I am sure that most of us value the privilege of prayer. According to Genesis 4, man began to call upon the Name of God very early in his history (Genesis 4:26). It is a good thing when we learn that we can cast our care upon God because He cares for us (see 1 Peter 5:7). Hannah had learned this lesson, even if Eli, the priest, had not. We must not fall into the habit of thought, however, that prayer is a time when we present a shopping list of our wants to God. I gladly grant that biblical prayers include petitions and requests, but they also embrace thanks, worship and praise.

Before we consider Eli's attitude, we must look at Hannah's prayer, which we can read in 1 Samuel 1:11: "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 wilt give unto thine handmaid a male child, then will I give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.”

This latter statement about a razor is, I would suggest, a reference to the vow of a Nazarite, which meant being separated unto God (see Numbers 6:1-21), and though the word “Nazarite” it is not specifically mentioned in the first book of Samuel, it is surely being referred to here. By her prayer and vow, Hannah demonstrates that she believes that children are ultimately a gift from God.

Sadly, Eli, the priest at Shiloh, observes Hannah’s lips moving without her articulating audibly and supposes she is drunk and tells her so (1 Samuel 1:14). Immediately Hannah reproves him with the words: “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 as a wicked woman; for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I been speaking” (1 Samuel 1:15-16).

Surely, the words of Hannah, when she said that she had poured out her soul before God, confirm the depth of her faith in the LORD, otherwise she could, in her sorrow and depression, be in the condition of drunkenness that Eli accused her of. Christians should never seek to drown their sorrows by an abundance of alcohol. Do we follow Hannah’s example by pouring out our soul unto the Lord Jesus? Is our confidence and faith in the God who hears and answers prayer? Another sign that Hannah was at peace, after speaking with Eli, was that she now broke her self imposed fast and began to eat again.

The rest of 1 Samuel 1, 1 Samuel 1:19-28, is concerned with the answer to Hannah’s prayer, of how she conceived and bore a male child who, because she had asked him of the LORD, she called Samuel which means “heard of God”. It might seem strange to us that Hannah did not go with Elkanah when he next travelled to worship at Shiloh (1 Samuel 1:22-23). One would expect her to go to offer thanks that God had remembered her and answered her prayer. Instead she stayed at home, with the child Samuel, keeping him with her until he was weaned. This might seem as if she was being selfish to the point of breaking her vow, yet it was that very vow that kept her with Samuel. She would leave the child to serve the LORD, at the tabernacle at Shiloh, when he was independent of her. Once that stage arrived, she was content to leave him there for the rest of his life (1 Samuel 1:24-28).

1 Samuel 1:24-28 present us with a beautiful picture of Hannah’s gratitude and faithfulness to God that He had answered her prayer. She even reminds the aged priest of who she was: “And she said, O my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman who 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” (1 Samuel 1:26-27).

In her gratitude, she offers three bullocks, or as other translations state a three year old bullock, one ephah of flour, and a skin of wine (1 Samuel 1:24). Again the question must be asked about our response to God’s faithfulness. What is our reaction to God’s gifts to us, especially the gift of His only begotten Son?

We come now to Hannah’s prayer of rejoicing which is recorded in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Before I read any of the verses, can I inform any who have just joined us that you are listening to a Bible study, from *Truth for Today*, about Hannah, a woman of faith? As I have just said, we are reading from 1 Samuel 2:1: “And Hannah prayed, and 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. There is none holy like the LORD; for there is none beside thee, neither is there any rock like our God.”

This song, or prayer, of Hannah’s has many similar phrases and imagery to David’s Song, which is recorded in 2 Samuel 22:1-51. In both is the thought of “horn” as a metaphor for strength, as well as alluding to God as the “Rock”. Both of these words cause us to view the power and presence of God as a means of stability, deliverance and safety. When we, in our day, sing of God as a “Rock” such as in the hymn “Rock of Ages” or “On Christ the solid Rock I stand”, we are following the example of Hannah, and other songs in Scripture.

One of the first choruses I ever sang, when my sister took me to Sunday School, had the line “Build on the Rock, the Rock that ever stands” which, though it might have its origin in a parable told by the Lord Jesus (see Matthew 7:24-28) also suggests the mighty power and security of God. This metaphor was not only used by hymn writers from the distant past. *Mission Praise* has many hymns that speak of a rock, though I only have time to cite number 825, which was written about 25 years ago:

“Faithful One, so unchanging;
Ageless One, You’re my rock of peace.
Lord of all, I depend on You,
I call out to You again and again,
I call out to You again and again.

*You are my rock in times of trouble,
You lift me up when I fall down;
All through the storm
Your love is my anchor
My hope is in You alone."*

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I am sure that Hannah would, in measure, be able to sing such words, if they had been written in her day.

1 Samuel 2:3 warns us that we must not be arrogant, or proud, when we seek to follow God. It could be surprising to some to learn how frequently the readers of the Bible are warned against pride. I cite but two texts as examples, the first one being Proverbs 29:23: "A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit." My second is in 1 Peter 5:5 though I shall only read part of the verse: "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." We must always remember that all the spiritual blessings we receive from the Lord are gifts that we don't deserve.

He loves us because He is love. Hannah's songs confirm that the final victory belongs to God: "The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They who were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they who were hungry have ceased to hunger; so that the barren hath born seven; and she who hath many children [languisheth]" (1 Samuel 2:4-5).

Notice the contrasts in 1 Samuel 2:4-5 that Hannah brings to the fore. I list them as follows, strong and weak, full and hungry, barren and fertile, to which could be added from the succeeding verses, dead and alive, sick and well, poor and rich, humble and exalted.

There is a general point about the number "seven" mentioned towards the end of 1 Samuel 2:5. In this context it probably means many, yet, often when that number is mentioned in Scripture, it has the thought of completion, or perfection, in the sense of ideal. In the Levitical laws, seven appears frequently, though again I cite but two examples. We read in Leviticus 16:14 that blood was sprinkled seven times before the mercy seat, on the Day of Atonement. In Leviticus 14:7 the leper to be cleansed was sprinkled, with the blood of a bird, seven times.

We must return now to the Song of Hannah and concentrate upon 1 Samuel 2:8 for a few minutes: "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the refuse, to set them amongst princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory; for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them."

I wish to use this verse in a prophetic sense by suggesting that ultimately this is the destiny of all Christians. The old spiritual song is absolutely true when it states that this world is not our home. The whole of the New Testament points to the realm that we call heaven as the final destiny of all who have been redeemed by the death of the Lord Jesus. We, at *Truth for Today*, believe that when the Lord Jesus returns we will be snatched away to live forever with Him as 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 informs us. Truly, then we will be lifted from the dust of this world to be set among princes.

What Hannah shows by her faith in God is that the strife and difficulties that beset us in this life are not solved by physical strength. Her understanding of God was of One who would help in times of trouble. Though Hannah is not mentioned in the heroes of faith, recorded in Hebrews 11, she, nonetheless, could have been included, as she seemed to be confident that her prayer would, eventually, be answered. We do not know how many times she had been to Shiloh, or how many times she had poured out her soul to God, but her prayer is one of complete confidence in the God who could act in power. The end of her prayer or song tells us just that: "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" (1 Samuel 2:10)

When Hannah speaks of the "horn", in 1 Samuel 2:10, she is taking us back to the beginning, where she used the word in a metaphorical sense. There is also here more than a hint of prophecy when God's king and His anointed are mentioned. Primarily, I believe it is David who will fulfil this role, yet ultimately it will be the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the few minutes that remain, I want to draw some features from this story that can teach us valuable lessons, but, before I do so, let us glance at Hannah's faith with respect to her love for the infant Samuel. 1 Samuel 2:11 tells us that when Elkanah and Hannah returned to their home, in Ramah, the young child was left at Shiloh to minister before the LORD, with Eli the priest. Out of sight was not out of mind, however, as 1 Samuel 2:18-19 tell us: "But 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."

How manifest is the love and care in the action of making him a little coat each year. Note also the faithfulness of Hannah and Elkanah as they returned each year to the tabernacle at Shiloh to sacrifice and give thanks.

We must also notice that Eli promises that God will grant Hannah further blessing because of her obedience in fulfilling the vow, as we can read in 1 Samuel 2:20-21: "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 bore three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD."

This passage demonstrates God's continued graciousness towards Hannah in answering her prayer for a child. Now we see that her prayer has been abundantly answered. Various commentators and expositors have pointed out the similarity of God's dealings with Sarah, the wife of Abraham, many centuries earlier (see Genesis 17). Our passage closes with a comment about Samuel growing before the LORD, a statement that is amplified in 1 Samuel 2:26, where Samuel is recorded as growing in favour with God and with men. If only Hannah could guess how great her firstborn son would become, in the history of Israel, as prophet of the living God, she would have composed many songs of gratitude and thanks unto the LORD.

We must now draw this talk to a conclusion by emphasising some of the actions of Hannah that we should seek to emulate. Probably, the major lesson from our study is the importance of bringing our requests continually to the Lord in prayer for, as Hannah realised, He is the omnipotent God. In a world with an increasing indifference to God, and to prayer, His people must continue to pour out their hearts to God. As Hannah went with Elkanah to Shiloh, so we need to meet regularly with other Christians, for worship and fellowship. In all our ways we should acknowledge Him with gratitude and thankfulness. Hannah also impresses upon us the need of humility. We follow the Lord who said that He was meek and lowly of heart (Matthew 11:29) and therefore we should seek to be like Him. Finally, despite the unbelief and materialism which marks our world, we should always retain our faith and confidence in the Lord Jesus, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (see Colossians 2:9).

As we close this morning's broadcast from *Truth for Today*, I will quote, as a benediction, some words that the Apostle Paul to the Ephesian elders, which are recorded in Acts 20:32 "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified."

Good morning and thank you for listening.

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