

For Better or For Worse - Lessons From Old Testament Couples Elkanah and Hannah: Fulfilling a Vow

Lesson #8 for August 25, 2007

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 1:1-2:26

1. Does God control human fertility? If we are dedicated enough and if we pray hard enough, will God answer our prayers in the way we think is best? Is the story of the birth of Samuel a good example of the “ABC’s of Prayer”?
2. Apparently, Hannah was desperate to have a child, especially a boy. Because her prayer was answered, was that a good enough reason to hand Samuel over to Eli when he was still a child? Would you consider leaving your child with someone who was not a relative, who was so much older, and who had two sons who were making such a mess of their lives? Even God had decided that they “needed to go!” 1Samuel 2:25 (GNB) says, “But they would not listen to their father, for the Lord had decided to kill them.”
3. Things were very bad in Israel. Eli’s sons who were in charge of the tabernacle were raping and abusing women who came to the tabernacle—things were about as low as they could be! In that setting, an ordinary couple by the name of Elkanah and Hannah lived out their lives. Although they had been married for some time, Hannah had not conceived. Elkanah, apparently following a common custom in his day, married another wife so that he could have children. Soon, his second wife began producing children. Did God bring about those events to try the faith of Hannah?
4. Given what we know about Elkanah and Hannah, did they seem to have a good marital relationship apart from not giving birth to any children?
5. What do we know about Elkanah?

The father of Samuel was Elkanah, a Levite, who dwelt at Ramah, in Mount Ephraim. He was a person of wealth and influence, a kind husband, and a man who feared and revered God. Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times* (October 27, 1881), volume 7, number 40.

He was of the order of the Kohathites. Although the entire tribe of Levi were to be supported from the proceeds of the tithes and offerings from the tabernacle, it is unlikely that Elkanah and his family received any support from that source. But in any case, he went at least once a year to give an offering to the Lord.

6. Hannah was at the tabernacle praying. Her lips were moving but she was not making a sound. Eli, on duty at the time, observed her and thought she was drunk. But instead, she was pleading with God for a child. We do not know how soon Elkanah became aware of Hannah’s vow. According to Numbers 30:1-15, he had the opportunity to nullify Hannah’s vow when he first found out about it. But he had to do so within 24 hours of finding out. Did Elkanah let Hannah’s vow stand because he doubted that she would ever give birth to a child?
7. Hannah stayed home with her new child probably for about three years and did not take him to the tabernacle. After he had been weaned, she wove clothing for him and then took him to live and work with Eli. Eli was probably in his 70s at the time. How do you think he felt about caring for a three-year-old child?
8. How soon do you think Samuel was able to begin helping with the services at the tabernacle?
9. What did Hannah do every year to show her support for her child? Would a single garment suffice for a full year? Did three-year-olds ever tear their clothes in those days?

10. While not the center of focus in this lesson, what do we know about Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah?

But this step [marrying Peninnah], prompted by a lack of faith in God, did not bring happiness. Sons and daughters were added to the household; but the joy and beauty of God's sacred institution had been marred and the peace of the family was broken. Peninnah, the new wife, was jealous and narrow-minded, and she bore herself with pride and insolence. To Hannah, hope seemed crushed and life a weary burden; yet she met the trial with uncomplaining meekness. {PP 569.2; DG 39.3}

Elkanah thought he had solved the problem of finding an heir. But a lot of trouble came as a result of his decision to have a second wife. What other examples can you recall where similar problems arose because people were not willing to wait on the Lord?

11. After Hannah's prayer at the tabernacle, Eli pronounced a blessing on her. Did that blessing from the high priest have anything to do with the fulfilment of the promise? 1 Samuel 1:19 clearly seems to indicate that it did.
12. Was Samuel's existence a miracle? Is it possible that the change in Hannah's mental attitude, which resulted from her claiming God's promise, made it possible for her to get pregnant? Were all of those events just coincidental, or did God have a direct hand in bringing about the birth of Samuel?
13. As the first of Elkanah's two wives, did Hannah get any kind of priority treatment? Did Elkanah make regular visits to the tabernacle on each of the three annual Jewish festivals?
14. Should God have refused to answer Hannah's prayer because her husband was a polygamist?
15. If you knew that you had only three years to prepare your child for a life of service, how would you go about it? Did Hannah consider Samuel to be a gift from God? Did that impact the way she treated him? Read 1 Samuel 1:23. Would you describe that as the statement of a dictatorial husband? Notice what Elkanah said to Hannah about her vow.
16. Try to imagine that you were one of the wicked sons of Eli. What do you think they said when this young child showed up and became part of the family? Did they regard him as a threat to their positions?
17. Most of the children of Israel had become disenchanted with the services at the sanctuary, and surely, some of the women must have been afraid even to go there. The people were described as immoral and demoralized. But there were still a few faithful followers who could probably best be described as the consecrated. Elkanah was among them.
18. The greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the world is a well-ordered, well-disciplined family. This will recommend the truth as nothing else can, for it is a living witness of its practical power upon the heart. Ellen G. White {4T 304.3; ChS 208.3; AH 32.2; FLB 254.8}
19. The story of Samuel as a young child is just another in a string of stories suggesting that women who do a good job in the raising of their children have an enormous impact on the development of our world, our society, and our culture. It has been said that the hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world. The work of mothers is a grand and noble work.

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