

Background Characters in the Old Testament

Hannah: Learning to Be Someone

Lesson #3 for October 16, 2010

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 1; 2:1-11,21; 1 Chronicles 6:33-36; Job 2:12,13; Matthew 6:19,20; 12:16-21.

1. This lesson is about the story of Hannah, Samuel, Elkanah, Peninnah, Eli, and Eli's evil sons. Despite the Devil's utmost efforts in a very corrupt time and situation, it shows how the child Samuel became the last and best "heaven-trained" prophet, judge, and priest of Israel.

It was Hannah, the woman of prayer and self-sacrifice and heavenly inspiration, who gave birth to Samuel, the heaven-instructed child, the incorruptible judge, the founder of Israel's sacred schools. {MH 372.1}

What is implied by the idea that Samuel was "heaven-instructed"? He began receiving messages as a prophet at the age of approximately twelve years!

2. Before the birth of Samuel, Hannah was a woman struggling with self-worth. (Compare Sarah [Genesis 16:1,2] and Rachel [Genesis 30:1]) Through Peninnah, Satan was doing everything he could to destroy her. We are told about the prayer she uttered at the tabernacle. No doubt, she had prayed to God for a child hundreds of times previously. Was this prayer particularly significant? Millions of other women have prayed to God for children—especially sons—without any answer. Why do you think God chose to answer this prayer on this occasion?
3. Elkanah, a Levite who lived in the territory of Ephraim, was a man of wealth and influence. His first wife, Hannah, was dearly loved, and she was a woman of fervent piety. But, Elkanah desperately wanted a son. So, he married a second wife named Peninnah. This new wife was jealous and narrow-minded, proud, and insolent. (PP 569.2) She made Hannah's life almost intolerable. How is one supposed to maintain a good Christian attitude under such provocation? Did God have anything to do with the failure of Hannah to have a child? What about Sarah, Rachel, and Ruth with her first husband (Naomi's son, Chilion). And what about Abimelech's wives? (Genesis 20:18) Does God practice birth control on occasion?
4. This scene was enacted again and again, not only at the yearly gatherings, but whenever circumstances furnished an opportunity for Peninnah to exalt herself at the expense of her rival. The course of this woman seemed to Hannah a trial almost beyond endurance. **Satan employed her as his agent to harass, and if possible exasperate and destroy, one of God's faithful children.** (ST Oct. 27, 1881; 2BC 1008.3)

Remember that we are living in a war zone!

5. Did Hannah feel a little like Job with his "miserable comforters"? (Job 16:2) Did all of this "persecution" help to prepare Hannah to be the great mother that she became?
6. The brief story of Hannah and her vow to give her son Samuel to the Lord is told in 1 Samuel 1,2. Understanding something of the context, many questions should be raised in your mind. The high priest of Israel was supposed to be the eldest son of a direct descendent of Aaron. Eli apparently fit those qualifications. (1 Samuel 2:27-29) But if Eli fit the criteria, then Elkanah could not and Samuel did not. But they were from the priestly

line (1 Chronicles 6:31-38; Zuph was “a Kohathite Levite, ancestor of Elkanah and Samuel”, *Strong’s Concordance*) and not from the tribe of Ephraim as some translations suggest. They lived in one of the towns assigned to the Levites but located in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim. Did that make Samuel unqualified to be high priest? Did he serve as high priest? (1 Samuel 2:35,36) Did Samuel ever cut his hair? (1 Samuel 1:11; Numbers 6:1-8) Who else was not supposed to have his hair cut? (Judges 13:5)

7. Read 1 Samuel 1:9-18. It had become a practice for some people to go to the tabernacle and consume alcohol while claiming to worship God. After years of suffering under the taunts of Peninnah, on one occasion while at the tabernacle, Hannah poured out her heart in prayer to God for a son. Eli, seeing her moving her lips without speaking out loud, assumed she was drunk. He began to condemn her, and she immediately responded saying that she was not drunk with wine or strong drink. Eli then promised that her petitions would be answered.
8. Was there something unusual about Hannah’s prayer? Why do you think God answered her prayer in such a notable way? Why are other similar prayers not answered? Was she making a deal with God?
9. The next year Hannah got her son. She named him Samuel, “asked of God.”
10. From [215] the earliest dawn of intellect, she [Hannah] had taught her son to love and reverence God, and to regard himself as the Lord’s. By every familiar object surrounding him, she had sought to lead his thoughts up to the Creator. When separated from her child, the faithful mother’s solicitude did not cease. Every day he was the subject of her prayers. {PP 572.2}

During the first three years of the life of Samuel the prophet, his mother carefully taught him to distinguish between good and evil. (RH Sept. 8, 1904). {2BC 1008.6}
11. How long does it take to make an important impression on a child? Hanna had Samuel under her direct influence for only three years. What did she do during those three years that made such a difference?
12. Shiloh, where the tabernacle was located at that time, was approximately 15 miles from Ramah where Hannah lived. We do not know how often she was able to visit little Samuel, but we know that annually she took him a new coat which she had lovingly sewn herself.
13. Hannah was abundantly rewarded for her work. Samuel became the new leader of the nation of Israel. He established the schools of the prophets, and for many years he lived a godly life as an example for the children of Israel.
14. Eli’s sons were called the sons of Belial [worthless, wicked, ungodly, naughty, *Strong’s Concordance*], for they knew not God. **They were wholly devoted to the service of Satan**; and yet because they were his sons, Eli did not deal with them as transgressors, but permitted them to dishonor God, and injure his people. But when the judge of Israel neglected his work, God took the matter in hand. {ST, April 6, 1888 par. 9}
15. The course of Eli—his sinful indulgence as a father, and his criminal neglect as a priest of God—presents a striking and painful contrast to the firmness and self-denial of the faithful Hannah. Eli was acquainted with the divine will. He knew what characters God could accept, and what he would condemn. Yet he suffered his children to grow up with unbridled passions, perverted

appetites, and corrupt morals. (*Signs of the Times*, November 10, 1881, par. 3; 2BC 1009.1)

16. Eli's sons were so evil that they actually assaulted women who went to worship at the tabernacle. (1 Samuel 2:22) They even perverted the sacrificial offerings that people brought to the tabernacle. (1 Samuel 2:12-17) God struck Aaron's sons dead in the tabernacle for drinking before entering the tabernacle. (Leviticus 10:1-11) Why didn't God strike Eli's sons?
17. It was a strange thing to see the highest official in the nation of Israel in such close association with a small child. Eli, recognizing how evil his own sons were, did everything possible to keep Samuel away from them. (See *Signs of the Times*, April 6, 1888, par. 9)
18. Read Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving in 1 Samuel 2:1-11. Like Hannah, others in Scripture have celebrated wonderful events by singing. What do you suppose Peninnah had to say when she found out that Hannah was pregnant? The women of Israel sang after crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20,21). In the days of the judges, Deborah and Barak praised God's power in their victory over human kings and armies (Judges 5:1-31). Even in New Testament times, Mary pregnant with Jesus broke out in song when she visited her relative Elizabeth (Luke 1:46-55). Each of those events was a response to some action by God in human history. In her song, it seemed to Hannah that God had changed the course of human history. It was true. Would you dare to pray as Hannah did?
19. Read 1 Samuel 2:6 (*GNB*). Did the Holy Spirit actually inspire Hannah to say, "The Lord kills and restores to life; he sends people to the world of the dead and brings them back again"? This is one of only a very few comments about resurrection in the Old Testament. Was that a comment about the experience of Moses which had happened some 300 years earlier? Remember that in the times of the Old Testament, under God's guidance the Hebrews became a monotheistic people. They did not believe in multiple gods—some of whom brought good things and some of whom brought evil things. No matter what happened, they believed God was responsible. He either did it, or He allowed it.
20. Like Hannah, our prayers should consist of requests to God, concerns which we wish to share with Him, praise and adoration for His wonderful care, and thanksgiving for specific things He has done for us.
21. God does not need to have us massage His ego. We do not need to praise Him to keep Him happy. How do you explain Revelation 4:8-11? Does God ever get tired of this praise? Every time something good is reported to God, they rejoice. We need to praise God for our own good. We need to recognize our total dependence upon Him. And we need to remember that every day.
22. Furthermore, when we pray to God praising Him and thanking Him for all that He does, we are reinforcing the idea that our universe did not come about by pure chance as evolutionists believe. We are not deists who believe that God created things in the beginning and then left them to be on their own. We believe that God was not only the Creator but also that He is the One that continues to sustain our universe, and He knows about every individual problem that affects every one of His children. He is actively involved in opposing Satan's attempts to destroy God's people.

Every act, every word, every thought, is as distinctly marked as though there were only one person in the whole world, and the attention of heaven were centered upon him. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 217.4)

Even the hairs on your head have been counted! (Matthew 10:30)

23. It must have been very difficult for Hannah to leave little Samuel with Eli. I am sure he did not understand why that was happening to him. How did he respond when Hannah came to the tabernacle? Someday, we will better understand God's involvement in this story. But, God continued to bless Hannah, and she had five more children. We are not told how that affected Peninnah.
24. Like the woman who gave all she had into the temple treasury while Jesus was watching, (Mark 12:41,42; Luke 21:2) Hannah gave all she had. When she handed Samuel over to Eli, she had no way of knowing that any more children were on the way. Or did she? Jesus warns us against hoarding. (Matthew 6:19,20; Luke 12:16-21)
25. Hannah's heart was then full. She could praise God, and out of her thankfulness she gave. Did her change of attitude make it easier for her to become pregnant?
26. How many things do we have to be thankful for? Are we prone to hoard? Or, are we generous with the Lord? Did Hannah's distress lead to her giving her child to the Lord? Is that what God needed at the time? Eli and his two sons died on the same day. (1 Sam. 4)
27. Why wasn't Elkanah—a descendant of Kohath—working at least part time at the tabernacle? Would that have changed the story of Samuel if he had been?
28. What does God want us to learn from this story? Is this just an important historical background detail to complete the story of the children of Israel? How many Israelite mothers have taken courage from this story. Hannah's example is an excellent one for all parents. Mothers who faithfully do their work will see that work rewarded in the earth made new. Hannah's trust in the Lord, her desperate pouring out of her heart to God, and especially her faithful mothering of her infant son raised that obscure family to become the "first family" of Israel.
29. When Samuel shall receive the crown of glory, he will wave it in honor before the throne and gladly acknowledge that the faithful lessons of his mother, through the merits of Christ, have crowned him with immortal glory. (*Health Reformer*, March 1, 1880 par. 7; *Adventist Home* 536.2)
30. Those who believe in the great-controversy, larger-view, trust-healing model of the plan of salvation will notice from this story that on a daily basis, the Devil is very active in the lives of individuals. He did everything he could to prevent the child Samuel from being the marvelous influence for good that he was in his generation. Samuel lived in a time of great transition. Of course, that was partly due to the fact that his own sons were not much better than Eli's sons. But, Samuel himself was responsible for miraculous victories on the military battlefield and for raising the children of Israel up from being basically slaves of the Philistines to the point where they were an independent nation about to be under the leadership of David, their greatest leader of all time. He also established the first three of the schools of the prophets which, no doubt, had an enormous effect on the nation as a whole. Who could have guessed that Hannah's prayer at the gate of the tabernacle would have such an impact! Mothers, take courage and keep praying. God will work with you.

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