

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (1-8-1976 Strandtown Baptist Church)

Hannah

1 Samuel 1:1-11,17-20,27-28; 2:1-11,18-21

Introduction

Before we look at the life of Samuel, it is fitting to look first at his mother, Hannah. Good biographies never begin with the subject, but with the parents and grandparents, c.f. Broomhall's biography of Hudson Taylor, which begins with his great grandparents. To explain the life and ministry of Samuel, it is important to look at the home he came from, and his mother and father.

The story begins on a sad note. In Old Testament days the institution of polygamy was tolerated under the old law, because of the hardness of men's hearts. But it was always a fruitful source of sorrow and sin. Even with husbands like Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon, it did not work towards righteousness or happiness. The husband soon learnt the truth of the advice once given by a wise man, "First learn to live with two tigresses, and then expect to live happily with two wives." Each wife felt wretched at having to share the love which ought to be all her own.

For Hannah there was the added misery that she was the one of Elkannah's wives who had no children. His other wife Penninah gloated over this fact, **provoked her sore for to make her fret because the Lord had shut up her womb** (1 Samuel 1:6). This continued year after year, and she wept and did not eat. It was a miserable wretched existence for Hannah. **I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit** (1 Samuel 1:15).

Happily polygamy has been banished. It was not God's original purpose according to Genesis. In the beginning God made for man but one wife. It certainly brought grief and tragedy to Elkannah's home. Yet is there not in every home, however joyous, some tragedy? The world speaks of "skeletons in the cupboard". A cross of some sort must be borne by every child of God. No one is entirely carefree. No one continually lives through unclouded days. We are going to see what help there is for everyone in this story.

Much that is precious may be connected with a sorrowful spirit

A sorrowful spirit is not the best thing in the world to have, yet despite this Hannah was lovely, attractive and a nice person. We can tell she was a godly woman as we read her story, and especially in her song of praise. Her heart was right with God. She rejoiced in God and His salvation. He was a rock to her, and she was accountable to Him.

She was also a loveable woman, and her husband thought a great deal of her, even though she had borne him no children. **Unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion, for he loved Hannah** (1 Samuel 1:5). **Am I not better to thee than ten sons?** (1 Samuel 1:8).

Hannah was a gentle woman. In the face of Penninah's harsh taunting, there is no mention of Hannah answering back. At the annual feast when her rival provoked her,

she stole away on her own to weep. She was so tender and submissive. Even the way she spoke to Eli when he accused her wrongly of being drunk is a model of gentleness. She bore his rebuke without resentment.

Hannah was also honourable. She had a great burden for a child, and she made a solemn promise that if only she had a son she would give him up to the Lord all the days of his life – and she kept her word. Months and years went by, Samuel was born and weaned, and then she took him to Eli for service in the House of the Lord. It must have been a very costly sacrifice. **For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him; therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord** (1 Samuel 1:27,28). A solemn promise had been made and kept.

How many of us have desperately wanted something, and we have prayed and promised – then conveniently forgotten? **When thou vowest a vow unto God defer not to pay it** (Ecclesiastes 5:4).

So Hannah had tragedy and sorrow in her life, aggravated by a cruel rival. Yet she had a beautiful character in and through it all – godly, loveable, gentle and honourable.

#### Lessons she learnt from her experience

Every experience, pleasant or otherwise, teaches us lessons that can be learnt nowhere else. We never pass through deep experiences and come out of it the same person. Hannah learnt to pray. That is not to say she never prayed before this sorrow, but now she prayed with more intensity than ever before. She felt so desolate and so despaired; she knew where to go with her secret sorrows and tragedies. **I have poured out my soul before the Lord** (1 Samuel 1:15).

What a relief the mercy seat is when troubles come. For every prayer in days of prosperity there are thousands in days of adversity. Abraham Lincoln declared, “I often was driven to my knees in prayer. There was nowhere else to go.”

Hannah also learnt faith. She believed the promises of God. Eli told her, **Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him** (1 Samuel 1:17). And we are told that immediately she started to eat again, and she was sad no longer. She had not yet obtained the blessing, but she was sure of the promise, and embraced it. She wiped her tears for she was sure she had been heard. By faith she held that infant son in her arms. Hannah was one of that honoured band who **through faith received the promises** (Hebrews 11:17).

Through the experience, Hannah learnt much of God. Being driven from common family joys, she had been drawn nearer to God. In seasons of nearness to God she had made heavenly discoveries of his name and nature, c.f. her song. She learnt her heart’s truest joy was not in children or earthly blessings but in the Lord Himself. **Mine horn is exalted in the Lord... I rejoice in Thy salvation** (1 Samuel 2:1). Earthly joys were in their proper place. Hannah’s priorities were right. She was impressed by God’s holiness. **There is none holy as the Lord** (1 Samuel 2:2). She knew His all sufficiency, that He was all in all **Neither is there any rock like our God**. She had learnt God’s method in providence: **Bows of mighty men are broken... He raiseth**

**up the poor out of the dust** (1 Samuel 2:4,8). She saw how faithful God was to His people. **He will keep the feet of his saints** (1 Samuel 2:9). And she foresaw the future of God's kingdom and His anointed.

How much there is to learn in days of adversity and trial about the Lord. Men start to think seriously about God, and their hearts are softened, they are humbled, and the quality of their lives is tested. Conscience is awakened, and the spiritual teacher purifies the heart.

Samuel Rutherford, who escaped martyrdom by dying before it could be carried out in 1661, faced the loss of his wife and two of his children. He was exiled and imprisoned, and yet could say, "Lord cut, Lord carve, Lord mould, Lord do anything that may perfect Thy Father's image in us and make us meet for Thy glory." He also said, "Blessed is the fever that fetcheth Christ to the bedside."

### Blessings received from her experience

The Lord answered Hannah's prayer. The child was born, and she named him Samuel, which means "asked of God". The longings, tears and prayers of many years at last received answers. Promises were honoured, answers given. And what a mother Hannah became. How well equipped by her character and previous experiences to be a perfect mother for Samuel. We see a picture of lavish care in childhood – making him a little coat every year when she visited the Temple. Also a picture of careful instruction on the ways of the Lord as she trained and laid the foundation of character of the youthful prophet.

How much Samuel owed in his character and achievement to his mother's prayers, teaching and example. For weal or woe, a mother's influence is infinitely great. "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." It is no surprise to learn that Byron's mother was proud, ill tempered and violent. Or that Nero's mother was a murderer. Sir Walter Scott's mother loved poetry, and Augustine's mother was a woman of prayer. Susannah Wesley had 19 children in total (though they did not all survive childhood), John being the second of her sons. Her home life, training of the children and beauty of Christian character had huge influence. She took each of her children aside at night for instruction in divine things, each child on a different night of the week. Later Wesley wrote, "I cannot remember ever having kept back a doubt from my mother. She was the one heart to whom I went in absolute confidence from my babyhood until the day of her death."

Lord Shaftsbury said, "Give me a generation of Christian mothers and I will undertake to change the face of society in twelve months." Napoleon said, "France's greatest need is good mothers."

But note that the training and devotion Hannah gave to Samuel were for the Lord's purposes. She knew the child was not her own, but the Lord's. She was not a possessive mother. Do we see our children as the Lord's? Are we willing to let Him do what He wants with our child? Ministry or mission field? How far do we give our children to the Lord?

Hannah knew the further blessing of an enlarged family. She had three more sons and two daughters. Parting with Samuel was necessary before she received the other little ones. God cannot bless some of us till first of all he has tried us. We are not fit to receive great blessing till we have gone through fire. **Them that honour me I will honour and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed** (1 Samuel 2:30).

### Conclusion

Hannah had a sorrowful spirit, yet what a character. She learnt many wonderful lessons through her experience, and enjoyed great blessings in the end. Regardless of our lot, this joy can be ours too.