

2. A Comparison at Its Finest

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Listen to what I say here, please: Black and white, mountain top and valley low, light and dark, and good and evil. What do you see? Of course, comparison. A smart jeweler would place a beautiful shiny diamond ring on top of a black velvet under a bright light to accentuate the diamond.

In the first portion of 1 Samuel chapter 2, the Holy Spirit directed Samuel to give us a comparison at its finest between a godly woman, Hannah and two wickedly corrupt priests, the two sons of the high priest Eli. For a good measure, the Holy Spirit inserted several Messianic prophecies in Hannah's prayer.

Last Thursday evening we learned that Hannah who was barren prayed to the Lord and asked for a son who would live all of his life as a dedicated man of God. The Lord granted her wish and gave her a son, Samuel. Now we are eavesdropping on Hannah's prayer at the tabernacle as she dedicated her child to the Lord.

A. HANNAH'S PRAYER

1 Samuel 2:1-3 And Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the Lord; My horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies, Because I rejoice in Your salvation. 2 "No one is holy like the Lord, For there is none besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God. 3 "Talk no more so very proudly; Let no arrogance come from your mouth, For the Lord is the God of knowledge; And by Him actions are weighed.

Please give me your interpretation of these three verses.

One of the best praises and prayers recorded in the Bible is here from Hannah. This time Hannah is praying to the Lord not as a barren woman, but as a blessed woman with praise. The world doesn't understand the relationship between sacrifice and song, how God's people can sing their way into sacrifice and sacrifice their way into singing.

She rejoices in the Lord. She does not, and she cannot rejoice in the leaving of her son. But she can, and she does rejoice in the Lord. In the most desperate situations, when we have nothing else to rejoice in, we can still rejoice in the Lord because of who He is.

I asked you to underline the word "horn". Does this mean that Hannah had a horn on her head?

The word "horn" is often used as a picture of strength in the Bible, such as in Psalm 75:4-5; 92:10. Hannah is speaking of her strength and power being exalted in the Lord. To have your "horn exalted" meant to receive new strength from God and be especially helped by Him at a time of crisis.

Hannah's praise and prayer should be compared with David's prayer found in 2 Samuel chapter 22, as well as in Mary's prayer in Luke 1:46-55. All three prayers tell of God's grace to undeserving people, God's victory over the enemy, and the wonderful way God turns things upside down in order to accomplish His purposes. What Mary expressed in her prayer is especially close to what Hannah prayed in her hymn of praise.

Even though her prayer is very much heavenly and praising God who came to her aid, Hannah does not forget to insert a few jabs toward her rival Peninnah. While Hannah certainly has her rival in mind, her “fellow-wife” Peninnah here, but in some way, she sees Peninnah as just a representative of all the proud and arrogant people in the world.

What are the two things you noticed in v2 of Hannah’s prayer?

It’s good for us to begin our praying with praising, because praise helps us focus on the glory of the Lord and not on the greatness of our needs. When we see the greatness of God, we start to see life in the right perspective. Hannah knew the character of God and exalted His glorious attributes. She began by affirming His holiness and uniqueness. The two go together because in both Hebrew and Greek the word “holy” means “wholly other, set apart, separated.” Orthodox Jews confess daily, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord” that is from Deuteronomy 6:4. There is no other God, and whenever Israel turned to idols for help, they lost the blessing of the Lord.

B. GRACE OF OUR GOD

1 Samuel 2:4-8 “The bows of the mighty men are broken, And those who stumbled are girded with strength. 5 Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, And the hungry have ceased to hunger. Even the barren has borne seven, And she who has many children has become feeble. 6 “The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up. 7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. 8 He raises the poor from the dust And lifts the beggar from the ash heap, To set them among princes And make them inherit the throne of glory. “For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s, And He has set the world upon them.

And your interpretation is?

Her prayer is like a poem. We may not see a format of poems in English due to lack of rhyme that was lost in translation. But according to the Hebrew scholars’ commentary, Hannah was repeating the same content in different ways. That is one of the Hebrew poem styles.

The Lord is in charge of birth and death and everything in between. He can rescue us from the grave or permit us to die. If He allows us to live, He can make us rich or poor, exalted or downcast, because He knows what’s best. This doesn’t suggest that people should meekly comply with difficult circumstances and do nothing about them, but that we can’t change these circumstances without the Lord’s help. That is the pure sovereignty of God who is the Author of our lives

Because of that, God is not a respecter of human’s social status, wealth, fame, or power. But He cares very much about those who humble themselves before Him and He rewards those who diligently seek Him more than seeking their own profits.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Without Hannah realizing, she spoke a Messianic prophecy regarding the death and resurrection in v6. This is an obvious reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that He conquered death and the grave. He laid down His own life and took it up again.

C. HANNAH'S PROPHECY ABOUT HER MESSIAH

1 Samuel 2:9-11 He will guard the feet of His saints, But the wicked shall be silent in darkness. "For by strength no man shall prevail. 10 The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces; From heaven He will thunder against them. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth. "He will give strength to His king, And exalt the horn of His anointed." 11 Then Elkanah went to his house at Ramah. But the child ministered to the Lord before Eli the priest.

Interpret this portion for me, please.

What do you see here? Any prophecies?

At this time, Israel did not have a king. So when Hannah speaks of His king, she is looking ahead to the Messiah, who will finally set all wrongs right. The original Hebrew word for "Anointed" is "Mashiyach" which translates to Messiah in English. This is the first place in the Bible where Jesus is referred to as the Messiah. Hannah first applied to Jesus the remarkable description "Messiah" in Hebrew, "Christ" in Greek, and "Anointed" in English.

This word also was adopted by David, Nathan, Ethan, Isaiah, Daniel, and the succeeding prophets of the OT; and by the apostles and inspired writers of the NT.

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, quotes Hannah in Luke 1:69, when he prophetically calls Jesus a horn of salvation, quoting from 1 Samuel 2:10. Mary, the mother of Jesus, in her beautiful prayer found in Luke 1:46-55, seems to quote Hannah's song a lot.

V11 mentions the complete trust in God by Hannah and Elkannah for Samuel's well being.

It also ends with a very interesting phrase, "*the child ministered to the Lord.*" How can a little child minister to God? With what?

I don't believe that little Samuel was actually ministering to God just as another priest-to-be. I strongly believe that he was ministering to the Lord with all of his heart and mind as the Lord sets in his little heart.

The word "minister" in Hebrew is "*sharat.*" It occurs 96 times in the OT. It has a meaning of a special relationship with God. In other words, little Samuel was having a very close and intimate relationship with God, not necessarily as a priest-to-be, but in personal base.

D. ELI'S SONS – THE OTHER BAD END OF THE SPECTRUM

1 Samuel 2:12-17 Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord. 13 And the priests' custom with the people was that when any man offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fleshhook in his hand while the meat was boiling. 14 Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; and the priest would take for himself all that the fleshhook brought up. So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. 15 Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who sacrificed, "Give meat for roasting to the priest, for he will not take boiled meat from you, but raw." 16 And if the man said to him, "They should really burn the fat first; then you may take as much as your heart desires," he would then answer him, "No, but you must give it

now; and if not, I will take it by force.” 17 Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.

Please give me your interpretation of this portion.

Would you please tell me why the sons of Eli did what they did?

So far, we were looking at a wonderful scene of praise and adoration of the Lord from Hannah and how little Samuel ministered to God. But now, all of a sudden, we are looking at a horrible scene at the tabernacle.

The Bible does not waste words, nor does it misuse words. The original word “corrupt” should be translated “worthless.” Literally, in Hebrew it means sons of Belial. Belial was a grotesque pagan god, and the phrase sons of Belial refers to worthless, wicked men. In 2 Corinthians 6:15, the apostle Paul uses Belial as a synonym for satan. This was a significant problem, because the sons of Eli were to succeed him as high priest, and were already functioning in the priesthood.

When the rapture happens, many pastors and priests will not go up with the Lord Jesus. Why? Because they don’t believe the deity of Jesus Christ, salvation through a personal relationship with Christ, and atoning sacrifice of Jesus for our sins. I always wonder why they are even in their jobs as pastors and priests. Just like Eli’s sons, these people don’t know the Lord, and they are a stench to God.

According to other passages in the OT, the priest was supposed to receive a portion of the breast and the shoulder. But now, some 400 years after the law of Moses was given, the priestly custom had changed. They would not take the prescribed portion of the breast and shoulder, but take whatever the fork brought up out of the pot.

The portion that was to be given to God was always to be given first, so it was wrong to take the priest’s portion before they burned the fat. The fat was thought to be the most luxurious, best part of the animal, so that was given to God. The idea was that God should always get the best, and God should get His portion first. But in their arrogance, the sons of Eli took their portion before they burned the fat. Then they would sell the raw meat they took away from people for their profits.

The actions of these Eli’s sons and their servants were detestable to the Lord. We can all agree with God.

It was bad enough what they themselves were doing; but the greater sin of Eli’s sons was in how they hurt other people. Our self-destructive sins are bad enough; it is even worse when we destroy someone else’s faith. It is the same today with greedy, corrupt ministers, who make others hate the offering to the Lord. God will judge them by a high standard. I don’t want to be them when they face the Lord later.

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

E. SAMUEL’S CHILDHOOD MINISTRY

1 Samuel 2:18-21 But Samuel ministered before the Lord, even as a child, wearing a linen ephod. 19 Moreover his mother used to make him a little robe, and bring it to him year by year when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. 20 And Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife,

and say, "The Lord give you descendants from this woman for the loan that was given to the Lord." Then they would go to their own home. 21 And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile the child Samuel grew before the Lord.

What is your interpretation of this?

The scene is changed again to a bright setting. Even though little Samuel was not a full pledged priest, he already earned respect from the people around him to wear a linen ephod which is a sleeveless priestly garment. I can picture Hannah making a little robe for Samuel to wear throughout that year and child Samuel standing next to Eli in the tabernacle ministering to the Lord in ceremonies.

V20 is one of those verses that shows us that we can never outgive God. Hannah gave one child to God and received more children. Never be afraid to commit our unknown future to the known God Jesus, because He will surprise us whenever we yield to His will and His ways.

E. QUESTIONS AND APPLICATIONS

1) What would please our Lord more than anything? Would it be money we bring to Him? Would it be ministries we get done in His name? Would it be a big size congregation and a church building?

The answer of "Yes" for these questions might have some good points. But the most important way of pleasing God is nothing more than simple obedience and faithful heart that we can learn from children. It is not our capabilities God desires; it is not our money He needs to run the universe; nor is it our effort to reach out to those unbelievers. **It is our loyal hearts that He desires.**

2 Chronicles 16:9 For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.

2) The way we live, the way we talk, and the way we handle crisis will lead others to Christ.

Let's be careful how we present ourselves to unbelievers at work or neighborhood. Because they may not believe in God, but they are not stupid. They can see our attitude and language. If we make them to have a wrong impression about God because of our wrong behaviors as Christians, it is better not tell anyone that we are Christians. Please remember that unbelievers would rarely pick up a Bible and start to read it and become a believer. You and I are the only Bible they are reading.