

## HANNAH AND HER GOD

1 Samuel 1:1-2:11

Intro: I don't ordinarily bring special messages on special days, such as, Mother's Day, Father's Day, etc., but this year I felt led to break away from our study in Romans to give what might be called a Mother's Day message. And yet I don't want to limit it to those of you who are mothers and grandmothers. I like for all of you to feel like I am including every one of you. I have always felt that it was bad for people to go to church and to feel like the pastor, or whoever was speaking, was speaking to someone else. So while this digression from Romans has been prompted by Mother's Day, I trust that this will be a message which will have something for all of us.

It seems to me that anyone who is aware of what is going on in American homes today, must be greatly concerned. Just recently I was in a place of business talking to a young lady who was waiting on me. She was probably in her twenties. Somehow the question of marriage came up, and she asked me how long Lucille and I had been married. When I told her, she was amazed, and said that you don't find many marriages lasting that long in these days. And then she proceeded to tell me this. She said that she and her husband had been married just under five years. They had friends, nine other couples, who also had been married within the last five years, and eight of the ten couples were already divorced! I don't know how many children were affected by the divorces, but those are really tragic statistics, aren't they? It used to be that one out of every two marriages in Oregon ended in divorce, but the average may be much higher now.

In addition to broken marriages, I don't know if anyone really knows how many couples are living together and having children who have never been married. Those relationships can be started and then break up without being recorded on anybody's chart.

And then we have that which is especially abominable in the sight of God, and that is all of the homosexual "marriages" (in quotes). It is safe to say that what we have known as "the home" in past days, has never been threatened more than it is today. And yet, instead of things getting better, they get worse and worse. It is clear that the majority of people in our country really have no idea of what God's plan for marriage and the home is. In fact, probably the majority of people would feel that God doesn't have anything to do with it. And with many there is no real belief in God at all. If there were ever a generation about which it could be said that God is not in their thoughts at all, it is our genera-

tion. Cf. Psa. 10:4. And that is where we as a nation are making our biggest mistake -- a most tragic mistake.

But, we can thank God that here and there He is pleased to touch people's hearts and open their understanding to see where they have gone wrong. And whenever He does this, you find that those people get interested in the Scriptures, and are open to what they can learn from the Word of God.

One person from whom all of us can learn a great deal is Hannah. She was a Jewish mother who had things far from ideal in her life. She was one of two wives of a man by the name of Elkanah. Many people in OT times, including some of the most godly, had multiple wives, but it was never what God wanted. His plan for marriage and the home was made clear at creation when He made only one wife for Adam. However, Elkanah had two wives.

He probably married Hannah first, and later Peninnah. Elkanah loved Hannah more than he loved Peninnah, but Peninnah had children while Hannah had none. This was a great grief to Hannah. But the story as we read it in 1 Samuel 1 and 2 tells us how God had mercy on Hannah, giving her Samuel first, and then five children after that: three sons, and two daughters. Samuel had an important place during the history of Israel between the judges and the kings, and he was an outstanding man of God.

Now when we consider the life of any child of God, whether in Scripture or since the Scriptures were written, we must be careful not to expect that the Lord will deal with us as He did with Hannah. There are certain principles or truths which God uses with all of us, but how they are worked out in our lives differs according to the will of God. What I want to do is to look at the characteristics of Hannah's life so that we can all learn from them whether we are mothers or fathers, married or single, younger or older than she was, or approximately the same age. I want to learn from God's dealings with Hannah, and the way the Lord worked in her life, hoping that we can all profit from what the Scriptures tell us on this Mother's Day of 1994.

I don't think anyone can read the story of Hannah without quickly realizing that:

I. HANNAH WAS A WOMAN WHO WAS DEEPLY DEVOTED TO THE LORD.

You could not describe woman as a moment ago I described most people in the world saying that God was not in their thoughts. God was in Hannah's thoughts. The Lord was more important to her than any other person in her life. We are

not told in Scripture how she came to know the Lord and love Him, but it is very apparent that she did.

So it was not that she just recognized that there is a God, but her life was characterized by fellowship with Him. Every year when her husband went up to Shiloh to worship the Lord, she went with him. And it seems clear that throughout the year she maintained a close fellowship with God.

We face a vastly different situation in our country today. Most people never mention God except possibly in profanity. With all of the problems we have in our country, it still is true that "there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11). No one really understands why things are so wrong in our country -- that is, no one except those who know the Lord. We have left God out of our lives. I say this about the majority of people in our country. We are not concerned about what is pleasing to Him because we are too busy seeking to please ourselves. We don't want God or anyone else telling us what to do because we want to be able to do whatever we want to do. Our families are falling apart. Moral standards have crumbled. Our children are becoming criminals. I read this past week that the majority of Americans are fearful of becoming victims of crime. We are experiencing the consequences of leaving God out of our lives, but comparatively few seem to realize what is going on.

How refreshing it is to turn to the Word of God and find a woman like Hannah who stood out in her generation as one who loved God when most people were doing that which was right in their own eyes, as the book of Judges tells us. Even the sons of Eli the priest were sinful men. The story of Hannah is in the Bible to help us to see where we have gone wrong. What a pity that so few people ever read the Bible, and so they never get the message that is so clear in Hannah's life.

But does this mean that she had an easy time? No! The second thing that I want to point out to you is that:

## II. HANNAH WAS A WOMAN WHO HAD A GREAT BURDEN.

It is stated in the last part of verse 2 in chapter 1: "~~Peninnah~~ had children, but Hannah had no children." Hannah wept a great deal about this although it seems that she understood what was going on. At the end of verse 5, and again at the end of verse 6, it is stated that "the Lord had shut up her womb."

The life of Hannah, and especially the fact that she was so devoted to the Lord, did not mean that she was without her trials. She had a great burden. She wanted to have a child.

But the only One Who could help her, the Lord, seemed to be working against her, or at least not helping her, and He had left her in a situation where Peninnah could ridicule her and make life miserable for her. Peninnah also went up to Shiloh, but it seems that she used the time more to aggravate Hannah than to worship the Lord. And she could do this in the presence of other people. But we have no indication at all that Hannah sought to retaliate against Peninnah. Peninnah was against her, but Hannah was not against Peninnah.

We don't know how long this went on, but it seems clear that it went on for several years. And with the passing of each year it seemed more unlikely that she would ever have a child.

It was apparent that Elkanah loved Hannah more than he loved Peninnah, and that he favored her whenever he had the chance to do it. He knew how heavyhearted she was and he did everything that he could to comfort her, but he was really unable to help her. She wanted to have a child, "but the Lord had shut up her womb."

I think that we have to be careful not to accuse Hannah of being determined to have something which the Lord did not want her to have. In view of the subsequent history of her son, Samuel, we have to believe that it was the Lord Who had given her such a great burden to have a child. She may not have understood all that was going on herself, but Hannah's desire indicated no rebellion at all against the Lord. The Lord often gives us desires, and then moves upon our hearts to ask for what He wants to give us. Hannah believed that "children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Psa. 127:3). She believed that children come to us from the Lord.

How different is the attitude toward children which many people have today! They don't see the hand of God at all in the birth of a child. They don't understand, as Job did, that the Lord gives when children are conceived, and that it is the Lord taking us away when we die. But Hannah knew this, and believed it. She saw the hand of God in these things. And so, when she did not have children, she saw the hand of the Lord in that. But somehow she felt constrained to move on to higher ground with the Lord.

And so let me point out a third important thing about Hannah:

### III. HANNAH WAS A WOMAN WHO PRAYED.

When Hannah finally took the child Samuel to Eli, she said to Eli the words we find in chapter 1, verse 27. (Read.)

Mothers, let me say this morning that your children are blessed if they know that they are answers to prayer, and that you have never stopped praying for them. And let me say the same to those of you who are grandmothers. Your grandchildren are especially blessed if they have a praying grandmother.

I said at the beginning that I was going to speak to all of us today. And so, fathers, how blessed your children are if they have a praying father, and perhaps a father who prayed for them before they were born. Grandfathers, the same can be said about us. Children today need praying grandfathers.

And for those of you who are not married, let this be a matter of prayer for you, too. And you seek to be a blessing to those people you love, and to those you have contact with during the week, by praying for them. I love those words in 1 Sam. 1:27. Every time Hannah mentioned the name of her child she was reminded that he was an answer to prayer because Samuel means asked of the Lord. Cf. 1 Sam. 1:20.

How we ought to pray that more mothers and fathers would be able to say this truthfully before God. Mothers, don't ever stop praying for your children.

But let me mention another thing about Hannah, and it, too, has to do with her prayers.

#### IV. HANNAH MADE A PROMISE TO THE LORD.

She not only prayed, but she made a promise. She made a promise to the Lord. She made a vow to the Lord. And the vow she made was not an easy one to keep, and she couldn't have kept it if she hadn't had a greater love in her heart for the Lord than she had for Samuel -- even though she loved Samuel with all of her heart.

Look at her promise in 1 Sam. 1:10, 11. (Read.)

Now I think it is safe to say that Hannah had to wait much longer than most women in her day before the Lord gave her Samuel. And what a promise this was in view of how long she had wanted a baby. She said to the Lord, "If you will give me a son, I will give him back to you forever." That was her vow. According to the Law Elkanah her husband could have kept her from making such a vow, but the fact that it stood means that Elkanah was in full agreement with the vow that she had made.

Years ago I memorized those verses in Ecclesiastes 5:4, 5, written by Solomon, where he said this:

When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it;  
for He hath no pleasure in fools:  
pay that which thou hast vowed.  
Better is it that thou shouldest not vow,  
than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

My mother died back in 1953 when she was only 58 years old. She used to tell me, "I gave you to the Lord before you were born." I never could get away from those words. And no one was happier than she was when I felt that the Lord was calling me into the ministry.

Now I am happy to be able to tell you a fifth thing about Hannah:

V. HANNAH KEPT THE PROMISE THAT SHE MADE TO THE LORD.

I feel sure that there must have been tears at that time, too -- not tears of regret, but tears of sorrow at the separation plus joy because Samuel was going to serve the Lord. It is generally thought that Hannah would have nursed Samuel until he was at least three, and possibly four. Read verses 22 through 24 of chapter 1.

Think of what a cute little child Samuel was at that time. and his mother was giving him up to serve the Lord. Do you want proof not only that Hannah loved the Lord, but that she loved the Lord with all her heart? Here it is. Nothing else could have made her give up her firstborn. What an illustration of our Lord's words in Luke 14:26,

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. This does not mean that we "hate" in the normal meaning of the word, but that the Lord has first place in our lives over those who are the dearest to us on the earth. There are not many who love the Lord that much, but Hannah did!

One thing remains to be said about Hannah on this Mother's Day, 1994:

VI. HANNAH PRAISED THE LORD.

See it in 1 Sam. 2:1-11. It is said that she "prayed." But there isn't a single request in it. It is all joyful worship and praise.

If you want a commentary on the spiritual life of any child of God, listen to their prayers. Was Hannah satisfied with the Lord. Oh, yes, more than satisfied! Did she believe in the sovereignty of God? She surely did. And through this

whole experience which was spread out over several years, the Lord gave her a depth of understanding in the truth and in the ways of the Lord that probably not many of the prophets, if any, could surpass.

And to show how the Lord blessed beyond what we have considered today, read 2:20, 21.

Concl: Remember what I said at the beginning. We can all learn a great deal from the way the Lord worked in Hannah's life, and how she grew under His loving and faithful work in her heart. But we need to remember that, while He will be just as faithful to us as He was to Hannah, yet His dealings with us will be different. Let us learn from her devotion to the Lord how much we need to love the Lord. Let us learn from her prayers how much we need to pray. Let us learn from her faith how much we need to trust the Lord. Let us learn from God's dealings with her how holy and faithful He will be to us, blessing us far beyond anything that we could ever deserve. And let us remember to praise the Lord for the way He works in our lives, teaching us what He wants us to know, and making us what He wants us to be. We can do no better than to walk in the steps of faithful Hannah.