



Part 3 – An Offering to the Lord

1 Samuel 1:20-28

Hannah's story would not be complete without the record of her obedience in fulfilling her vow to the Lord, and, as we consider Hannah's obedience, we must consider our own.

Back to Shiloh

Vs. 21 – Elkanah and his family return to Shiloh to worship the Lord and make sacrifices. Though we are not told anything specific, Elkanah is fulfilling a vow he had made to the Lord. Perhaps his vow was related to Samuel's birth as well. Notice

how the worship of the Lord permeates the entire account in Chapter 1 from the family's faithful sojourns to Shiloh, Hannah's persistent prayers and costly vow, to the final words in verse 28. Of all the things the writer could have highlighted, it is this family at worship that is the primary emphasis. Their prayers, vows, and sacrifices did not rise and fall upon the tide of their circumstances.

Mother and Child

Vs. 22 – Little Samuel had not yet been weaned (which typically took at least three years) so Hannah, with her husband's blessing, elected to remain home with the baby with the promise that once the child is weaned she will return to the tabernacle to fulfill her vow.

The writer of Ecclesiastes tells us that "it is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it" (5:5). And what a vow Hannah had made! After years of sorrow and longing, God had granted Hannah a son and now, after holding that baby in her arms, nursing him, and watching him grow up to be a boy of between three and five years, she will give him away to be raised by another. We may wonder whether it would have been easier for this woman never to have been given the child rather than what she must do in fulfillment of her vow.

Vs. 23 – Elkanah blesses Hannah's decision to wait until Samuel is weaned. His words, "only may the Lord establish his word," may be taken a few different ways. It may be a prayer that God would help Hannah keep her word, another indication of how difficult it was going to be to surrender her child. Perhaps Elkanah is referring to whatever extraordinary purpose the Lord has for their son. In this case, his words are a prayer that the Lord's word (his purpose) will be fulfilled. Matthew Henry understands Elkanah's words to be a prayer the Lord will "preserve the child through the perils of his infancy, that the solemn vow which God signified his acceptance of, by given us the child, may be performed in its season, and so the whole matter be accomplished."

Hannah Keeps Her Vow

Vv. 24-25 – With little Samuel in tow and a substantial thank offering, the family heads off for Shiloh to keep Hannah's promise to the Lord (vs. 24). That the family brought a bull (an early manuscript has it at three bulls) along with large measures of flour and wine tells us that they do not believe their giving of Samuel put the Lord in their debt. Their giving offers a window into the deep gratitude that occupied their hearts. Hannah serves as a model vow-keeper. What she promised the Lord was no trifle. Indeed, her vow represented a significant sacrifice on her part. She could have backed out pleading that her promise was rash but instead, she and Elkanah accompany their giving of Samuel with costly thank offerings.

We should be very careful in the promises we make to the Lord. Wedding vows and church membership vows come to mind, but what about our promises to the Lord to mortify our sin, walk in holiness, and love our neighbors? Do we understand the responsibilities such promises place upon us?

Vs. 26 – Hannah reminds Eli that she was the woman who several years before prayed with such vexation that he assumed her to be drunk. Notice again the respect with which Hannah addresses the priest. Not only that, observe Hannah's exuberance in telling Eli that the very thing she prayed for has come to pass. A.W. Tozer writes that "The faithfulness of God is a datum of sound theology, but to the believer it becomes far more than that: it passes through the processes of the understanding and goes on to become nourishing food for the soul."¹

¹ Quoted in Gordon Keddie, *1 Samuel*, (Great Britain: Evangelical Press, 1988) p. 29

Vs. 27 – “For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him.” – God does not always grant our every petition. And Hannah’s experience should not be conceived as typical for every Christian and every prayer. From the foundations of the earth, the Lord knew that he would raise up a man at a particular time to lead his people out of spiritual and national chaos. This man would be a king maker. He would point the way toward the King the people truly needed – not Saul and not even David but the Divine King whose rule will never end.

Hannah’s unique place in redemptive history, however, should not lessen our own prayerful posture before the Lord. Though none of us are called upon to bear or raise a Samuel, we nevertheless petition the same God that Hannah pleaded with. Our prayers, therefore, should be offered with the same sort of persistence and faith that characterized the prayers of Hannah.

How remarkable that what she pleaded for from the Lord, she had fully intended to give back as a living act of devotion!

Vv. 27b-28 – “...the LORD has granted me my *petition* that I *made* to him. Therefore I have *lent* him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is *lent* to the LORD.” – The italicized words are all forms of the Hebrew word for “ask.”² It is worth noting again that the name Samuel may be translated to mean “Asked for.” That Hebrew root (*Sha-ul*) is also shared by the name Saul, Israel’s first king.

It is worth pointing out that the word translated “lent,” does not carry with it the temporary connotation that it typically does for us – “I lent him my car this afternoon.” Hannah’s words may be translated “He is made over to Yahweh.” Such an attitude ought to permeate how we think about everything God has given to us. One of the reasons God called his people to place the covenant sign upon their infants is to signify that, from birth, they belong to the Lord.

“By uttering these words Hannah performed the act of dedication...Hannah entrusts her requested son to the Lord, giving him back to the Giver in a true act of worship...Like Hannah, believers too are called to approach God through prayer and worship, to ask him to grant his gift to us, and to dedicate that gift to his service. God certainly guides the life of worship according to his plan and purpose. Though the world becomes darker and darker, God in Christ is surely still working through the lives of individuals who fear and honor him.”³

“And he worshipped the LORD there.” – The passage ends with mention that, after having been given over to Eli the priest, Samuel “worshipped the Lord there.” As Samuel grew under the guidance of Eli, he became a man dedicated to service to the Lord. The Lord places children in the homes of believers so that those children may be raised in the knowledge of and devotion to the Lord. From the time of Abraham, God has called his people to welcome their children into the covenant community, even placing the sign of the covenant upon them in infancy. We understand that sometimes, some of the children of believers abandon the faith they were taught and for them we must not cease praying that the Spirit of God would bring to life in them the truths that they learned from childhood.

The sacrifice that Hannah made can hardly be understood by modern westerners. In fact, Hannah’s contemporaries would likely have been dismayed by her actions. And let us not forget that, though the vow being fulfilled is Hannah’s, the sacrifice is shared by Elkanah, Samuel’s father. Consider the place that God must have occupied in their hearts to make such a sacrifice. Consider how the worth and glory of God must have captured their hearts and their moral imagination for them to consider such a great sacrifice to be fitting.

In the end, Hannah’s story is not about Hannah. Her story is about God and his sovereign purposes. It is about his care for his people. The way that the Lord intervenes for Hannah is unusual, but that he cared and acted in particular ways is not unusual. “If we really understand God’s goodness and really appreciate God’s gifts, then there bubbles up inside an almost uncontrollable urge to respond in the fullest way we can imagine.”⁴

² John Woodbridge, *1 Samuel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008) p. 35

³ David Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) p. 132

⁴ Mary J. Evans, *The Message of Samuel*, TBST (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004) p. 29