



Part 4 – Hannah’s Song

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Hannah’s song is exuberant with joyful praise. What a contrast to the sorrowful and vexed woman we encounter in Chapter 1. But, her broken-heartedness was the essential prelude to her joy. It was in her sorrow that she had to wrestle with the truth of God’s sovereign providence. Hannah’s years of sorrowful waiting would work into her heart the knowledge of God as a Savior and Redeemer.

We learn from Hannah’s song how our sorrows and calamities can be turned to rejoicing...

Rejoice In the Incomparable God

As with the Magnificat, the real theme of this great poem is God himself – his power, his knowledge, his faithfulness, his mercy, and his actions in the world. God works a great reversal in which he redresses the injustice which has been a daily feature in the world since mankind first sinned. In particular, the Lord lifts up those who look to him in faith and will cast down those who rebel against him. As the final verse of the hymn shows, Hannah’s words are an introduction to the account of the Lord casting down and raising up. This will be demonstrated in the house of Eli, the house of Saul, and the house of David. Most significantly, Hannah’s song places the birth and life of Samuel in the larger context of Christ’s kingdom and salvation.

Vs. 1 – Hannah’s repeated use of personal pronouns tells us that her prayer begins with reference to her own experience. “Horn” is a reference to the horns or antlers of an animal. It is a metaphor for strength, power, and glory. In Hannah’s case, it was probably a metaphor for her dignity. The Lord has lifted Hannah up above her enemies: “My mouth derides my enemies.” It is unlikely that she is referring to Peninnah here even though she had treated Hannah cruelly. Given the God-centeredness of this song, Hannah is more likely referring to those who make themselves God’s enemies. Note that “horn” appears again in the last verse of the prayer in reference to the Messianic King.

- If you are troubled by what may seem to be a spirit of vindictiveness in Hannah (“My mouth boasts over my enemies...”), remember that we see this cry for vindication over enemies among the saints in heaven (Revelation 6:10). A prayer for vindication is not the same thing as sinful vindictiveness. Indeed, part of the Lord’s victory and the manifestation of his glory before the world is that his enemies will be made a footstool for his feet. The saints rejoice in this.

Vs. 2 – Here, the song goes in a particularly doctrinal direction. The sense here is that Israel’s God is without compare (Isaiah 45:21ff). The gods of the nations are nothing. Hannah declares the holiness of God and refers to him as a rock. “Holy speaks of God’s perfection, with moral overtones, while ‘rock’ speaks of the protection and security to be found in him.”¹ (Psalm 118:22; 1 Peter 2:6-8)

Rejoice In the Transforming God

Hannah now moves from the specifics of her own experience to the more general.

Following the death of his wife Idelette, John Calvin wrote to his friend William Farel: “May the Lord Jesus...support me...under his heavy affliction, which would certainly have overcome me, had not He, who raises up the prostrate, strengthens the weak, and refreshes the weary, stretch forth His hand from heaven to me.”² In his grief, Calvin was calling upon what he knew to be true of the Lord. This is what Hannah is doing. She is drawing strength (vv. 1-3) from what she knows to be true of the Lord (vv. 4-8).

Vs. 3 – The Lord’s salvation brings an end to human boasting. The prideful must cease their boasting “for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.” It is folly to be arrogant before a God who knows all and is able to redress the balance of human behavior and restore a righteous outcome.

Vv. 4-5 – The Lord transforms the world’s standards of status and power and realigns the source of boasting. He breaks the bows of those the world considers mighty and fearsome. This will be seen in the nearer term when God gives victory to David over Goliath and to Israel over the Philistines.

¹ John Woodhouse, *1 Samuel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008) p. 43

² Quoted in Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003) p. 19

Those who fill themselves at the expense of the poor will see their fortunes reversed. We see this in verse 36, in the judgment pronounced on Eli's house. His sons Hophni and Phinehas made themselves fat on the offerings of God's house, but their descendants will beg for a crust of bread.

Hannah would seem to be the most direct reference point of the words concerning seven sons. The "seven sons" motif was a popular image in the ancient Near East for fullness and prosperity.³ Hannah eventually was to have six children. Seven serves as a metaphor for the ideal number, the perfect fulfillment.

- Vv. 6-10a declare the praises of God for his direct actions in creation and the affairs of mankind.

Vv. 6-7 – The Lord reverses even the most implacable of human predicaments. He is the Lord over life and death. He does not merely allow life and death to take their course. Our very existence is never for a moment outside his sovereign governance. He sends people down to *Sheol* and just as easily raises them up from it. *Sheol* is the ancient term designating the place of the dead for the unbeliever, but it may also be understood as simply the grave. In this instance, it is likely just another way to say that God grants life and death, but what is more, he is able to bring back to life those who have died. Here we see that God's old covenant people did have a theology of resurrection. They fully anticipated that God would raise up to life those who die in faith. This belief receives its fullest justification in the resurrection of Christ and the promise of resurrection for all who believe.

The crushing power of poverty, which in the ancient Near East was nearly irreversible, will be upended by the Lord. He brings up the lowly and brings down the prideful mighty.

Vs. 8 – The "dust" (or "ash heap") was the garbage dump in the ancient Near Eastern world where the beggars were to be found. It is in keeping with the Lord's character to lift up the needy and to cast down the proud. It is the hope of those who suffer in this world that the Lord delights to show them mercy and, obviously, the Creator and Ruler of this world is able to do this if he pleases. The world belongs to the Lord. It rests, as it were, upon the pillars of his own sovereign rule.

Rejoice In the Saving God.

Vs. 9 – "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones..." – This is an image related to the Lord's salvation. He preserves the way of those who are his. Their steps are always within the bounds of his care. But those who have boasted pridefully and have set themselves up over God's people – as will be the case with Hophni and Phinehas – are forever silenced.

Vs. 10 – "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces..." – Those who pit themselves against the Lord will be judged. The picture is that of a clay vessel being smashed against a rock. There is no salvation apart from the Lord. His enemies will not prevail in their rebellion.

"...He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed." – It is here that the term "anointed one" or "Messiah" is first used of a king. Remember, the books of Samuel record the rise of the royal house of David. These words are the first indication of what is to come. Hannah prays that God "will give strength to his king" even though there was not yet a king in Israel but, as early as Deuteronomy 17, there was an expectation that the Lord would choose a king for Israel. And certainly, during the era of the Judges there was a longing for a king in Israel (8:22). In this sense, Hannah's prayer is prophetic. Her words anticipate the dawning of a new era in Israel, the era her own son will introduce. The greater fulfillment of Hannah's prayer will come in the arrival of the Lord Jesus. Little wonder then why Mary's prayer sounds similar themes (Luke 1:46-55).

The Bible is the record of the Lord reversing fortunes according to his wise and gracious will. He casts down mighty Egypt and exalts Israel, bringing her out of captivity on eagles' wings. He brings her into the Promised Land and conquers her enemies on her behalf and grants her cities she did not build and fields she did not plow. And so it will continue throughout redemptive history. In the New Testament, the prideful and violent Saul of Tarsus is brought low and transformed into the great evangelist to the gentiles. A persecutor of the church became her greatest theologian and defender. Such a radical transformation is possible only because of the great reversal of the One who left his throne and took up a humble residence in human flesh. The Lord Jesus, the anointed King was executed on a Roman cross thus reversing the curse we bore for our sin. He rose to life thus shattering into nothingness the death that once bound us.

³ Woodhouse, p. 145