

## **“Lord, Give to Me So That I Can Give Back to You”**

**I Samuel 1:1-28**

**By Dr. Derek Thomas**

...the story of Samuel. If I get my timing just about right, we should transition from Samuel to Saul as we move into September.

**Every Old Testament historical narrative is capable of being viewed from two perspectives.** The first perspective is what we might call the macrocosmic perspective, the big picture perspective. We could look at this passage, or any historical passage in the Bible, and we could ask ourselves the question, “Where does this passage fit in the unfolding story of God’s redemptive purposes?” That is to say, we could look at this historical passage tonight and we could ask the question, “How in this passage is God fulfilling the promise that He made in Genesis 3:15, that through the seed of the woman the head of Satan would be bruised?” (In other words, that God would establish His kingdom, and that kingdom finds its expression in the coming of Jesus Christ.) We could ask ourselves that big picture question. Where does I Samuel fit in the story that leads to Bethlehem, to Jesus, to Calvary?

There are some hints and adumbrations of Jesus in this passage tonight. As we read this passage you are going to be reminded of a story that we’ve looked at in recent weeks on Sunday mornings, the story of the birth of John the Baptist. You’ll read this passage, and you might be reminded of Elizabeth and Zechariah. And as we turn into chapter 2 and the song that Hannah will sing, you will be reminded of a song that Mary sings, the song that we know of as *The Magnificat*.

But just as every Old Testament passage is capable of that big picture point of view, every Old Testament passage is capable also of answering another question. We can zoom in to

I Samuel 1, a bit like Google Earth does, and we can zoom right down to a place called Ramah (or Ramathaim-zophim) in verse 1. We’re not too sure where that is. It could be on the west coast near to Tel Aviv, or it could be just a few miles north of Jerusalem. We’re going to go to a little home, and we’re going to go to a home in which Elkanah and his wife...and his wives...live. We’re not going to look at the big picture question tonight. We’re going to do that as we unfold I Samuel, but tonight I want us to go right down into that little home, and I want us to ask what is Hannah teaching us. I want to put it to you tonight that Hannah is one of the most godly women in the entirety of the

Scriptures, apart possibly from Mary. She is one godly woman.

Before we read I Samuel 1, let's look to God in prayer.

*Father, we thank You for the Scriptures, and tonight as we turn to a new section of the Bible, and perhaps for some of us a section we haven't been in for a while, we pray that the Bible that is capable of exciting us and refreshing us and teaching us and challenging us, and convicting us and drawing us to Jesus Christ...we pray that all of these things might be so tonight. We ask for the blessing of Your Spirit now as we read the Scripture. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

"There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite. He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

"Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the Lord. On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb. And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, 'Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?'

"After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, 'O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your servant and remember me and not forget Your servant, but will give to Your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.'

"As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. And Eli said to her, 'How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you.' But Hannah answered, 'No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation.' Then Eli answered, 'Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to Him.' And she said, 'Let your servant find favor in your eyes.' Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

"They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to

their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her. And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, 'I have asked for him from the Lord.'

"The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, 'As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the Lord and dwell there forever.' Elkanah her husband said to her, 'Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him; only may the Lord establish His word.' So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. And the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, 'Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed, and 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.'

"And he worshiped the Lord there."

Amen. May God add His blessing to that reading of His holy and inerrant word.

God's people may find themselves in difficult circumstances, and they may find themselves in difficult circumstances through no particular fault of their own. And what this passage teaches us is that in such circumstances God's grace will always prove to be sufficient to those who seek it.

**I want us to see first of all Hannah's desperate circumstances.** We're introduced to this family — Elkanah and Hannah, his first wife. Elkanah is a man of some means (to support two wives, for a start), but he's also a godly man. He seems on several occasions in this passage to want to observe the ritual of worship in Shiloh on an annual basis. This is long before Jerusalem becomes the base of the temple, you understand. The tabernacle is now rested in Shiloh. There are gates and pillars spoken of here — something of a more solid structure has perhaps by this time been erected around what used to be the tabernacle in Shiloh. Elkanah is a godly man. He's concerned, you notice at the end of the passage, that Hannah fulfill her vow. He's a believer. But his life is seriously compromised. He makes this annual trip to Shiloh, and there seems to be a measure of piety, but...he has two wives.

Now to be sure, in the context of the Old Testament and particularly in the context of this period of the Old Testament that wasn't all that odd. We can think of Abraham (although he wasn't married to two women). We can think of Jacob. We can think later of Solomon. God seems to have permitted polygamy at certain periods in the Old Testament, but as Paul makes it perfectly clear in the New Testament, "it wasn't so from the beginning." It was out of the hardness of men's hearts that God allowed this to continue. It was a cause of much grief. It doesn't take great imagination to understand

why.

Hannah, we are told in verse 5, seems to be his favorite. She was his first wife. At the time of sacrifice he gives her a double portion because, the text tells us, he loved her. But she is barren. She has no children. The Lord has closed her womb. And he's married another girl, a younger girl — perhaps a prettier girl now — Peninnah. And Peninnah has a mouth to match her looks: she loves to rub it in. What's it like to live in a home with two wives? Well, we could make light of it, for sure. It's a desperate situation to find yourself in. Here's the context; here's the scenario. Peninnah is having children as often as the seasons come and go. There are sons and daughters, and the text seems to imply that there are many of them.

You can imagine the trips to Shiloh, let alone the conversations in the home. Did Elkanah have both wives under the same roof, or were there two homes that he visited in turns? Perhaps the two women didn't come into contact that often, and it's on those occasions when they're making their way to Shiloh that Peninnah seems (in the text, at least) to particularly rub it in. You can imagine the conversation with Peninnah's children. One of the children says to Peninnah, 'Mommy, why does Auntie Hannah not have any children?' and Peninnah says, 'I don't know. Why don't you ask her? But, you know, I think it's because God has cursed her.' Imagine that. You think you've got trouble? You think you've got it rough? You think your lot has been cast in unpleasant circumstances? Think about Hannah, this godly woman...this incredibly godly woman. And she is in this awful context of a husband who seems to love her.... And Hannah, you understand, has no choice. Don't think here in twenty-first century terms. She has no choice here. She can't walk out of this marriage. How would she survive? These are desperate circumstances. She's trapped in this marriage. I think she loved Elkanah. Despite it all, I think she loved him. Abused women can sometime be defensive of their abusive husbands. Perhaps it's the shame thing. Hannah doesn't want to make a fuss because of the sense of shame that would surround her if she began to speak about her circumstances, because she has no children. It's a mess. It's an unholy mess. It's a mess that ethically ought never to have been. It's a *mûnage a trois*, as the French would say. It's an affair with a younger woman.

Or we can change the scenario. We can change the circumstances here. We can bring it right up to date. You don't have to marry this Peninnah in modern times, nor bother with having children. You can just have the younger woman. Some of you might well know all about this. Some of you might have passed through these dreadfully dark and unpleasant circumstances. Right here in the Bible, one of the great stories of the Bible, one of the great stories of one of the great godly women of the Bible, and here she is and she's in desperate circumstances. And Elkanah says to her — you see, you've got this picture, and she's weeping. And she's off her food, and she's depressed — classically so. Who wouldn't be? There'd be something wrong with her if she wasn't depressed. And Elkanah comes to her and says, 'What's wrong? Why are you crying? Why are you off your food? Am I not worth more to you than ten sons?' [What an oaf!] [*Laughter.*] You know, Mr. Sensitivity he is not. He comes across as though "it's all about me," as though he doesn't understand or doesn't want to understand the

desperation in which Hannah finds herself.

**Well, secondly, I want us to see that Hannah casts herself on the Lord's mercy.**

She's in Shiloh. She's made the journey for the annual feast, and she's distressed and she's praying. Her lips are moving but nothing is coming out. She's praying inwardly. She's pouring out her soul to the Lord.

“Have we trials and temptations?

Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged;

Take it to the Lord in prayer.”

She makes a vow. It's a Nazarite vow. It's the vow of Numbers 6. Do you know what she says? It takes your breath away. She says, ‘Lord, give me a son.’ You understand that. All of us here perfectly understand why Hannah is praying for a son. But what she says is, ‘Give me a son, and I’ll give him back to You.’ It's an incredible prayer. She says in verse 11, “Look on my affliction...remember me and not forget your servant....” She seems to be quoting from Exodus 3 when God says He remembered the affliction of Israel in Egypt. She may well be citing that passage. ‘Lord, You are the kind of God that looks on people's afflictions. That's the kind of God we have. Well, look on my afflictions. Have pity on me.’

Have you ever been in that circumstance where you have nothing to bargain with? You're in a state of complete desperation. Look at what she says in verse 18: “Let Your servant find favor in Your eyes.” It's a classic phrase that you find in the Old Testament. What's she's asking for is grace. What she's asking for is mercy. Have you ever found yourself in a circumstance, and all you can do...you come before the Lord and all you can say is, “Lord, I don't deserve anything here, but I want mercy. Have pity on me”?

And Eli is the priest. He's sitting on a chair — actually the Hebrew word is *throne*, and that seems to be significant because Eli is the king figure here. But Eli is going to fall. Actually, he's going to fall and break his neck. Eli is not the answer. He thinks she's drunk. You know, to add insult to injury.... You're in a holy place. You're in church, after all, and some elder comes and accuses you completely falsely and wrongly. As if there wasn't enough trouble for Hannah! And she says, ‘No, no! I'm crying in my need and in my desperation.’

She's made this vow: ‘Lord, You give me a son, and I’ll give him back to You’

“O love that will not let me go,  
I cast my weary soul on thee.  
I give thee back the life I owe...”

That's what she's saying. It's a prayer of utter selflessness. It's a prayer of unimaginable consecration and devotion to the purposes of the Lord. ‘Will you do this one thing for me? Give me a son, and I’ll give him back to You.’ I'm not sure there's a prayer quite like that in all the Bible. When you think about what we pray for in general, this is a

prayer that comes out of a heart that is entirely given over to the purposes of God. There's no bitterness here. There's no...you know, you would understand...you would perfectly understand...in fact, you might even lead the charge if Hannah were to become a little snippy with Peninnah! You might understand if in the holy place as she pours out her heart as many of the Psalms after all do, and they express this bitterness of soul and anger. There's none of that here. There's none of that here.

Do you notice in verse 18, "The woman went her way..." [this is Hannah] "...and ate, and her face was no longer sad"? I'd love to know what psychologists and psychiatrists make of that. I'd love to know, because it seems to be saying to me that if you cast your burden on the Lord and you do so in faith, it changes you physically. It changes you physically, if you do it in faith that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. And we are psychosomatic creatures, and this poor woman who's been off her food and evidently depressed has found the antidote to the depression of her soul and spirit, and seemingly her body, by casting it all on the Lord.

Now I don't mean to be trite, and I know it's way more complicated than that. I'm fully aware of that. But there does seem to me to be a lesson here — an extraordinary lesson, a very important lesson — and it's a lesson about Who are you serving? What are you living for? What is it that you ultimately want? And it seems to me that Hannah has understood something: that in the end her purpose in being in this world...her purpose (though she did not understand fully what that purpose was...she did not understand what Samuel would become and the importance of Samuel within the development of the history of redemption)...but she understood this: that her purpose was to live for the glory of God. Her purpose was to live in such a way and in such a manner that no matter what the circumstances may be... 'Lord, send the worst possible circumstances, so long as You receive the glory for it.' I genuinely think that Hannah understood that.

Now when she understood that, she understood something about biblical joy. When we understand the answer to the first question of *The Catechism* that our chief end and purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him...and enjoy Him forever...when we understand that, we've understood the most important thing of all.

**But there's a third feature I want us to see, and that is this: that Hannah realizes that God's purposes are greater than hers.** She finds herself in trouble and she pours out her heart and soul to the Lord, but she comes to the point when she realizes that God's purposes are greater than hers.

"God moves in a mysterious way,  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.  
"Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill,  
He treasures up His bright designs,

And works His sovereign will.  
“Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan his work in vain.  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.”

It's four years later (maybe three) when the little boy is weaned. She goes to Shiloh. She fulfills her vow. Now I can understand if some of you are saying tonight...because I'm saying it myself...I can understand if some of you are saying “How can a mother do that?” You know, sometimes we read the Bible as though it were a fairy tale, but we have to read the Bible in the real world here. How can a mother take a four-year-old boy to Shiloh with Eli, Hophni, and Phineas — not the best people in the world — and leave him there for the rest of his life? How do you do that? The answer in part of course is that she's fulfilling a vow. We find that difficult to understand in the twenty-first century. We sit so loose to vows in the twenty-first century. Vows were meant to be kept, and Hannah knew that.

But it's more than you, you see. I remember thirteen-and-a-half, fourteen years ago, Rosemary and I left our seventeen-year-old daughter 6,000 miles away in Belfast. I am not ashamed to tell you that first night here in Jackson when I went to bed and I put the light out.... It had been a long and difficult journey to get here, but when I lay in bed and put the light out I thought of my seventeen-year-old daughter 6,000 miles away...I am not ashamed to tell you that I was in tears. And I was saying to myself — as I've had occasion to say since, once or twice — what in the world was I thinking? Now God has in an extraordinary way overruled that in my life, in a wonderful way...in an extraordinary, wonderful, wonderful way. But it doesn't remotely touch what Hannah is doing here. She leaves a four-year-old boy in a temple in Shiloh, in the care of Eli and his two sons.

You see, Samuel was to be a Nazarite. Ligon said a few months ago when he was preaching through Numbers:

“Nazarite provides an Old Testament picture of what every New Testament disciple should be. The Nazarite is a picture of someone who is kingdom-minded, someone who is concerned for the things that concern God, someone who is concerned to advance God's kingdom. The Nazarite is a picture of someone who is consecrated to God, who is devoted to God, who is given over to God's service. As a Nazarite, he is meant to be a God-treasuring person.”

That's what Hannah wanted most of all for her son. She wanted for her son that he would be a godly man. That four-year-old boy. She was prepared to do anything to ensure that her four-year-old boy would become a godly son.

I wonder tonight: what are you working towards with your children? What do you want for them? I wonder if that is your chief concern. I wonder are you willing to make the hard sacrifices in terms of this world in order to ensure that your children turn out to be

godly, to be trained in the way of righteousness.

We've only just begun in I Samuel, but we've already been introduced to one of the most godly women in Scripture, who prays a prayer that says, 'Lord, you give to me, and I'll give him back to You.'

Let's pray together.

*Father, we thank You for the Scriptures and for this incredible story. And we pray, Lord, that we might know something — just a little something of the consecration of this woman's heart to You. Oh, that we might live our lives that You would be first and foremost in ourselves and in our families. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Please stand; receive the Lord's benediction.

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.*

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