

Bible Study October 11, 2023

1 SAUMUEL 2 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

Hannah's Prayer

1 And Hannah prayed and said,

***“My heart exults in the LORD;
my horn is exalted in the LORD.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in your salvation.***

***2 “There is none holy like the LORD:
for there is none besides you;
there is no rock like our God.***

Hannah praised God for being a Rock—firm, strong, and unchanging. In our fast-paced world, people come and go, and circumstances change. It’s difficult to find a solid foundation that will not change. Those who devote their lives to achievements, causes, or possessions try to find security in what is finite and changeable. The possessions that we work so hard to obtain will all pass away. But God is always present. Hope in him. He will never fail.

***3 Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the LORD is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed.***

No doubt as Hannah said these words, she was thinking of Peninnah’s arrogance and chiding. Hannah did not have to get even with Peninnah. She knew that God is all-knowing and that he will judge all sin and pride. Hannah wisely left judgment up to God. Resist the temptation to take justice into your own hands. God will weigh your deeds as well as the deeds of those who have wronged you.

***4 The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble bind on strength.***

***5 Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.
The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.***

***6 The LORD kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.***

***7 The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low and he exalts.***

***8 He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor.***

***For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's,
and on them he has set the world.***

***⁹ “He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,
for not by might shall a man prevail.***

***¹⁰ The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces;
against them he will thunder in heaven.
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed.”***

Hannah praised God for his answer to her prayer for a son. Her confidence in God's sovereignty and her thankfulness for everything he had done are the themes of her poetic prayer. Mary, the mother of Jesus, modeled her own praise song, called the Magnificat, after Hannah's prayer (Luke 1:46-55). Like Hannah and Mary, we should be confident in God's ultimate control over the events in our lives, and we should be thankful for the ways God has blessed us. By praising God for all good gifts, we acknowledge his ultimate control over all the affairs of life.

Because we live in a world where evil abounds and where war and terrorism always threaten, we may forget that God is in control. Hannah saw God as (1) solid as a rock (2:2), (2) the one who knows what we do (2:3), (3) sovereign over everything and everyone (2:4-8), and (4) the supreme Judge who administers perfect justice (2:10). Remembering God's sovereign control helps us put both world and personal events in perspective.

¹¹ Then Elkanah went home to Ramah. And the boy was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest.

Samuel “served the LORD by assisting Eli the priest.” In other words, Samuel was Eli's helper or assistant. In this role, Samuel's responsibilities would have included opening the Tabernacle entrances each morning (3:15), cleaning the furniture, and sweeping the floors. As he grew older, he would have assisted Eli in offering sacrifices. Wearing a special linen garment like those worn by the priests (in Hebrew called an ephod) showed that he was a priest-in-training. Because Samuel was Eli's helper, he was God's helper too. When we serve others—even in carrying out ordinary tasks—we are serving God. In God's service, every job has dignity.

Eli's Worthless Sons

¹² Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD. ¹³ The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, ¹⁴ and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.

This fork was a utensil used in the Tabernacle to handle the sacrificial meat. Made of bronze (Exodus 27:3), it usually had three prongs to hook the meat as it was put on the altar or cooked in a boiling pot. Eli's sons used this fork to take more meat from the pot than was due them. Though the burnt offerings were burned completely on the altar, some of the other offerings were cooked and shared among the priests and worshipers in a celebration feast. So in addition to other sins, Eli's sons were stealing more than their share of meat from the families worshipping at the Tabernacle.

¹⁵ Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but only raw." ¹⁶ And if the man said to him, "Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish," he would say, "No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force." ¹⁷ Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt.

What were Eli's sons doing wrong? They were taking parts of the sacrifices before they were offered to God on the altar. They were also eating meat before the fat was burned off, which was against God's law (Leviticus 3:3-5). In effect, Eli's sons were treating God's offerings with contempt. Offerings were given to show honor and respect to God while seeking forgiveness for sins, but through their irreverence, Eli's sons were actually sinning while making the offerings. To add to their sins, they were also sleeping with the women who served at the Tabernacle (1 Samuel 2:22).

Like Eli's sons, some religious leaders look down on the faith of ordinary people and treat their offerings to God casually or even with contempt. God harshly judges those who lead his people astray or scorn what has been devoted to him (Numbers 18:32).

¹⁸ Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy clothed with a linen ephod.

Samuel was a young child, and yet he "served the LORD." Children can often serve God just as effectively as adults. God will use anyone who is willing to learn from him and serve him. He has no age limits. We shouldn't discount the faith of a child or let age keep anyone from serving God. (See also the note on 1 Timothy 4:12).

Samuel wore a special linen garment, in Hebrew called an ephod. These long, sleeveless vests made of plain linen were worn by all priests. The high priest's ephod carried special significance. It was embroidered with a variety of bright colors. Attached to it was the chestpiece, a bib-like garment with gold embroidered shoulder straps. Twelve precious gemstones were attached to the chestpiece, each stone representing one of the tribes of Israel. This chestpiece also provided a pouch to hold the Urim and the Thummim, two small objects used to determine God's will in certain national matters.

¹⁹ And his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. ²⁰ Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the LORD." So then they would return to their home.

21 Indeed the LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew in the presence of the LORD.

God honored the desires of faithful Hannah. We never hear about Peninnah or her children again, but Samuel was used mightily by God. God also gave Hannah five children in addition to Samuel. God often blesses us in ways we do not expect. Hannah didn't dare expect to have a child at her age, much less six children! Fight the temptation to resent God's timing when he tells you to wait. His blessings might not be immediate, but he will bless us if we are faithful to do what he says in his Word.

Eli Rebukes His Sons

22 Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. 23 And he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. 24 No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. 25 If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.

Eli's sons knew better, but they continued to disobey God deliberately by cheating, seducing, and robbing the people. Therefore, God planned to execute them. Any sin is wrong, but sin carried out deliberately and deceitfully, especially in a religious context, is the worst kind. When we sin out of ignorance, we deserve punishment. But when we sin intentionally, the consequences will be more severe. Don't ignore God's warnings about sin. When we find ourselves continuing in habitual sin, we need to reach out to God and other believers to seek forgiveness and find help in turning from it.

Does our loving God really will or want to put people to death? Consider the situation in the Tabernacle. A person would make an offering in order to have sin forgiven, and Eli's sons would steal the offering and make a sham of the person's repentant attitude. God, in his love for Israel, could not permit this situation to continue. He allowed Eli's sons to die as a result of their own boastful presumption. They took the Ark into battle, thinking it would protect them. But God withdrew his protection, and the wicked sons of Eli were killed (4:4-11).

26 Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and also with man.

The record of Samuel's growth and maturity compares to the description of Jesus in Luke 2:52. God's hand was certainly on him.

The LORD Rejects Eli's Household

27 And there came a man of God to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Did I indeed reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of

Pharaoh? ²⁸ Did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? I gave to the house of your father all my offerings by fire from the people of Israel. ²⁹ Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?’

Eli had a difficult time raising his sons. He apparently did not take any strong disciplinary action with them when he became aware of their wrongdoing. But Eli was not just a father trying to handle his rebellious sons; he was the high priest ignoring the sins of priests under his supervision. As a result, the Lord took the necessary disciplinary action that Eli would not.

Eli was guilty of honoring his sons above God by letting them continue their sinful actions. Is there a situation in your life, family, or work that you allow to continue even though you know it is wrong? If so, you may become as guilty as those engaged in the wrong act. Honor God more highly than anything else, and don't wait for him to intervene for you.

³⁰ Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me forever,’ but now the LORD declares: ‘Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. ³¹ Behold, the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house.

For the fulfillment of this prediction, see 1 Kings 2:26-27. Here, Solomon removed Abiathar from his position, thus ending Eli's line. Then God raised up Zadok, a priest under David and then high priest under Solomon. Zadok's line was probably still in place as late as the days of Ezra

³² Then in distress you will look with envious eye on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed on Israel, and there shall not be an old man in your house forever. ³³ The only one of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep his eyes out to grieve his heart, and all the descendants of your house shall die by the sword of men. ³⁴ And this that shall come upon your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day. ³⁵ And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever. ³⁶ And everyone who is left in your house shall come to implore him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread and shall say, “Please put me in one of the priests' places, that I may eat a morsel of bread.””

The law stipulated that the needs of all the Levites were to be met through the people's tithes (Numbers 18:20-24; Joshua 13:14, 33). Because Eli's sons were priests, they were to be provided for in this way. But Eli's sons took advantage of their position to satisfy their lust for power, sex, possessions, and control. Their contempt and arrogance toward both people and worship undermined the integrity of the whole priesthood. Their evil ways contrasted sharply with young Samuel's attitudes and values, which showed complete commitment to God.

Eli knew that his sons were evil, but he did little to correct or stop them, even when the integrity of God's sanctuary was threatened. As the high priest, Eli should have responded by banishing or even executing his sons (Numbers 15:22-31). No wonder he chose not to confront the situation.

But by ignoring their selfish actions, Eli let his sons ruin their own lives and the lives of many others. It can be especially hard to confront serious sin issues in the lives of those closest to us. But there are times when serious problems must be confronted, even if the process and consequences will be painful.