



I SAMUEL



Dale Ralph Davis





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I SAMUEL

Looking on the Heart

'The best expository commentary I have read in years.'
Eric Alexander



Dale Ralph Davis

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS





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Preface

Writing a commentary on the Books of Samuel, 1 Samuel in particular, is like facing Goliath: such a massive bulk of questions and dilemmas stand in one's way. For example, one can't help but be intimidated by the spate of recent studies, both articles and monographs. One can hardly read everything and write something. Then there are numerous textual difficulties and an ongoing discussion over the corruption of the traditional Hebrew text and whether the fragments of Cave 4 Qumran show a more excellent way. Or how is one to evaluate supposed sources and complexes (Shiloh traditions, the Ark Narrative, the Saul Cycle, the History of David's Rise)? How many tentacles does the Deuteronomistic octopus—that ubiquitous mascot of current Old Testament studies—have wrapped around the Samuel materials? And how ought one to evaluate historical issues like the rise of kingship in Israel and the seemingly conflicting attitudes toward it? Maybe Goliath has swiped David's stones and is pelting students with them!

However, I feel compelled to ignore direct and extended discussion of these matters. Not because I am ignorant of them or want to demean scholarship. (In fact, I used to become exasperated with students who refused to wrestle with such problems.) But I have my reasons: 1 Samuel is a long book and I do not want to bog down in such details; the reader can find discussion of critical issues in the introductions of many



commentaries, in books on Old Testament introduction, or in articles in standard Bible encyclopedias—no need to repeat it all here; and since I have had to spend so much time in the past focusing on historical and critical questions, I have the right to have some fun. That is, this time I want to eat the cake, not look at the raw eggs. Hence *Looking on the Heart* concentrates on the literary quality of the narrative and, especially, on the theological witness of the text.

I might say that I regard the work as a theological (or, if you prefer, an expositional) commentary. It is not a devotional or a homiletical commentary. I have cast the exposition in homiletical form because I think it helps digestion and coherence. But these expositions are not sermons even though illustration, application, and exhortation appear. I believe the commentator, no less than the preacher, has the right and the duty to do something with the truth and life claims of the text. I will plead guilty to having preached many 1 Samuel passages, but that was often done in a different form than appears in this commentary. I am grateful for the encouraging response to my previous volumes on Joshua and Judges—I have discovered that the Lord's people from Idaho to New Zealand delight in his word!

I assume the reader will have Bible in hand as he or she uses this commentary. I have made use of a number of English versions; if no version is specified, the translation of the biblical text is my own.

This volume must be dedicated to our three sons, Luke, Seth, and Joel, with thanks for the entertainment and education they have given me and in prayer that they press on in the faith each has professed. You then, my sons, keep on being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:1).

Advent 1992



Abbreviations

BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>
IDB	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
IDB/S	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible/ Supplementary Volume</i>
ISBE	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
KJV	King James Version
LXX	The Septuagint
MLB	Modern Language Bible (New Berkeley Version)
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures according to the Traditional Hebrew Text (1985)
NKJV	New King James Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TEV	Today's English Version
TWOT	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
ZPEB	<i>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible</i>







Introduction

Where Shall We Cause Division?

It was a whole chicken; and it was in the early years of our marriage. My wife was an excellent cook and had frequently baked or fried chicken, but always chicken that had already been chopped into its respective pieces. She was perplexed. Was there an orthodox way, known to those in the know, by which a chicken ought to be dismembered? So Barbara left the Presbyterian manse to inquire of our Baptist neighbor next door. Mrs. Jenny was a delightful soul, a veteran of many seasons on the farm. Her tear ducts worked overtime, so that she seemed to be crying even when not sad. And she was not sad but highly amused that a neophyte cook would seriously inquire about the proper way to hack up a whole chicken.

But biblical materials matter more than chickens, and if a biblical writer (or editor) cuts his materials at particular points or joints, we should note and respect that. Although our focus is on 1 Samuel, we must, momentarily, look at the “whole chicken,” 1–2 Samuel, since all this material was originally one book.

The author or editor of 1–2 Samuel has placed four summary sections throughout this massive amount of material. These summaries are his division markers, the indicators for the overall structure of 1–2 Samuel.¹

1. I have not been able to trace the recognition of these summaries back beyond Thenius; see C. F. D. Erdmann, *The Books of Samuel*, Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, in vol. 3, *Samuel–Kings* (1877; reprint ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 18–20. Brevard S. Childs (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 267, 271–72) recognizes something of their structural importance, but H. M. Wolf (“Samuel, 1 and 2,” *ZPEB*, 5:254–64) is the only one I have found who allows this structure to govern his use of the material. There are, incidentally, some nice correspondences in 1–2 Samuel as a whole; e.g., the house of God at Shiloh at the beginning (1 Sam. 1) matched by the future site of the house of God in Jerusalem at the end (2 Sam. 24; cf. 1 Chron. 21:1–22:1); and





Textual Block	Primary Focus	Summary Section
1 Samuel 1–7	Samuel	1 Sam. 7:15-17
1 Samuel 8–14	Saul	1 Sam. 14:47-52
1 Samuel 15–2 Samuel 8	David/I	2 Sam. 8:15-18
2 Samuel 9–20	David/II	2 Sam. 20:23-26
2 Samuel 21–24	Kingdom	

Hence, in the case of 1 Samuel, our major divisions come at the end of chapters 7 and 14. Following these divisions I propose a general outline for the book:

- I. A Prophet from God's Grace, 1–7
- II. A King in God's Place, 8–14
- III. A Man after God's Heart, 15–31

Enough of chickens, summaries, and outlines. There's a woman weeping in Shiloh. We need to get there and find out what that's all about.²

a weighty kingdom passage near the beginning (1 Sam. 2:1-10) and near the end (2 Sam. 23:1-7).

2. We know neither the date nor author(s) of 1 and 2 Samuel. Some scholars hold to a very complex compositional history that places anything like the present form of the text into the Babylonian exile or beyond (see Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1968], 217–26). Others would hold that, excepting minor alterations (like the note of 1 Sam. 27:6b?), “the books seem to date close to the end of David's reign” (William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 229). See also Wolf, “Samuel, 1 and 2,” 261.





Part I
A Prophet from God's Grace

1 Samuel 1–7







Cradle and Kingdom

(1 Samuel 1:1-2:10)

It was the last straw. True, it happened every year. But the time comes when the spirit snaps. The festive mood of the religious celebration only depressed her all the more. Suddenly, she was gone. We find her at the tabernacle entrance; we watch but don't intrude. Obviously Hannah wants to pray, which she might do if the great, heaving sobs subside.

In one sense Hannah had almost everything an 1100 B.C. Israelite woman could want. She had Elkanah, a husband of social standing (note how his roots are spelled out in 1:1), moderate wealth (else he could not have supported two wives, v. 2), genuine affection (vv. 5, 8), and faithful piety (v. 3a; the antics of the priests, Hophni and Phinehas [v. 3b], severely tested piety, but then all Israel had to put up with them). The problem was that though Hannah had Elkanah, she didn't have him. She shared him. With Peninnah, an overly fertile, mouthy, thorn in the flesh (vv. 2, 6-7). We may wonder whether this domestic conflict can have anything to do with the kingdom of God. We will simply have to dive in and see.

The Beginning of God's Work (1:1-8)

The problem in the home in Zuphite Ramah¹ was not entirely new. Hannah had no children (v. 2b); Yahweh had closed

1. The name is Ramathaim-zophim in the traditional Hebrew text (v. 1). "Ramathaim" means "Double Heights"; many think that the difficult "zophim" should be



her womb (v. 5b). The fact was enough; the aggravation was worse, especially when she was worshiping at Shiloh.

Though it would not comfort Hannah, it helps us to remember that Hannah is not the first barren woman noted in Scripture. We remember Sarai/Sarah and how Genesis 11:30 (“Now Sarai continued barren; she had no child”) hangs like a dark cloud over the next ten chapters of Genesis. The mathematics of Genesis 25 (vv. 20-21, 26b) show that Rebekah had no children for the first twenty years of marriage, and Genesis 29:31–30:24 details the soap-opera turmoil swirling around the barrenness of Rachel. Yahweh raised up mighty Samson from the fruitless womb of Manoah’s wife (Judg. 13). And who would have guessed that old, childless Elizabeth would give birth to John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-25)?² Barren women seem to be God’s instruments in raising up key figures in the history of redemption, whether the promised seed (Isaac), the father of Israel (Jacob), saviors or preservers of Israel (Joseph, Samson, Samuel), or the forerunner of the great King (John the Baptist).³

Hannah, therefore, shares in a fellowship of barrenness. And it is frequently in this fellowship that new chapters in Yahweh’s history with his people begin—begin with nothing. God’s tendency is to make our total inability his starting point. Our hopelessness and our helplessness are no barrier to his work. Indeed our utter incapacity is often the prop he delights to use for his next act. This matter goes beyond the particular situations of biblical barren women. We are facing one of the principles of Yahweh’s *modus operandi*. When his people are without strength, without resources, without hope, without human gimmicks—then he loves to stretch forth his hand from heaven. Once we see where God often begins we will understand how we may be encouraged.

slightly altered to read Zuphite(s), which element would distinguish Elkanah’s Ramah from that in Benjamin. Hence it is dubbed the Zuphite Ramah. Some would locate the site at Rentis, about nine miles northeast of Lydda in the western slopes of the hill country of Ephraim. See W. H. Morton, “Ramah,” *IDB*, 4:8.

2. We might add the story of the Shunammite (2 Kings 4:8-37) to this tally.

3. The virgin conception and birth of Jesus should be added to this series. Though different in kind, it is similar in “difficulty.” Gabriel urged the improbability of Elizabeth’s pregnancy as an incentive for Mary’s faith (Luke 1:36) and alluded to Sarah’s case (Luke 1:37 reflects Gen. 18:14) for additional support. The virgin birth then is no mere dogma but also a sign that salvation is wholly God’s impossible deed!

Yahweh's work, however, began not only in barrenness but also in distress (esp. vv. 6-7). Childlessness was stigma enough for Hannah, but having it rubbed in was intolerable. Peninnah apparently used special worship occasions (vv. 3-4) for getting Hannah's goat. Peninnah herself likely chafed under Elkanah's obvious affection for Hannah (v. 5).⁴

We can imagine how it must have been...

"Now do all you children have your food? Dear me, there are so *many* of you, it's hard to keep track."

"Mommy, Miss Hannah doesn't have any children."

"What did you say, dear?"

"I said, Miss Hannah doesn't have any children."

"Miss Hannah? Oh, yes, that's right—she doesn't have any children."

"Doesn't she *want* children?"

"Oh, yes, she wants children very, very much! Wouldn't you say so, Hannah? [In a low aside] Don't you wish you had children too?"

"Doesn't Daddy want Miss Hannah to have kids?"

"Oh, certainly he does—but Miss Hannah keeps disappointing him; she just can't have kids."

"Why not?"

"Why, because God won't let her."

"Does God not like Miss Hannah?"

"Well, I don't know—what do you think? Oh, by the way, Hannah, did I tell you that I'm pregnant again?! You think you'll ever be pregnant, Hannah?"

Year after year it went on—baiting Hannah, irritating her, winding her up until the sobs broke out, goading her to complain against God.⁵ In any case, it drove Hannah to God, drove her to the throne of grace, to the presence of Yahweh, to fervent

4. Verse 5 is difficult. We cannot be sure how to take *mānāh 'ahat 'appāyim*. If it means "a double portion," the verse would be saying that Elkanah gave Hannah "a double portion because he loved Hannah." If one follows the Septuagint (LXX) the verse states that he would give Hannah "a single portion—yet he loved Hannah." See S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, 2d ed. (1913; reprint ed., Winona Lake, Ind.: Alpha, 1984), 7–8. More recent discussions have added no more certainty.

5. For this last, see C. F. D. Erdmann, *The Books of Samuel*, Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, in vol. 3, *Samuel-Kings* (1877; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 49.



supplication, from which, eventually, came Samuel. Let us not play down the heavy grief of Hannah's—or our own—bleak circumstances, but let us moderate our despair by realizing it may be but another prelude to a mighty work of God.

The Freedom of God's Presence (1:9-18)

The sacrificial meal (see Lev. 7:11-18; Deut. 12:5-14) was over; abruptly Hannah rushed away to the tabernacle entrance or court. She was oblivious to the peering, suspicious eyes of old Eli (v. 9b). Bitter in soul, she began to pray to Yahweh with many, many tears (v. 10). Sometimes tears themselves apparently constitute prayer, for the Lord hears “the sound of [our] weeping” (Ps. 6:8).

There was nowhere else to turn. She had to flee Peninnah's cruel mockery; she found no solace in Elkanah's well-meant but inadequate sympathy (v. 8); not even the clergy understood her. Old Eli, who had learned to indulge his wicked sons (2:22-25, 29-30), could yet get riled over an inebriated woman (vv. 12b-14). Hannah could only turn to “Yahweh of hosts” (v. 11), the God whose universal rule “encompasses every force or army, heavenly, cosmic and earthly,”⁶ the God with the total resources of the universe at his command. This God, Hannah's God, is clearly no provincial, ethnic mascot, no deity emeritus of an Israelite ghetto. “Yahweh of hosts”—his very title calls our faith to stretch all its imagination to catch up to such omnipotence.

Hannah's petition is rather amazing (v. 11):

Yahweh of hosts, if you will surely look upon the affliction of your maidservant and so remember me and not forget your maidservant, but give your maidservant a male seed, then I shall give him to Yahweh all the days of his life, and a razor will never touch his head.⁷

She addresses Yahweh of hosts, cosmic ruler, sovereign of every and all power, and assumes that the broken heart of

6. John E. Hartley, *TWOT*, 2:750. See also Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:192–94.

7. “No razor”—is this child to be viewed as a new Samson? Compare Judges 13:3-5 and my discussion in *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*(rpt. Fearn: Christian Focus, 2000), 173n.



a relatively obscure woman in the hill country of Ephraim matters to him. (Believers use some of their best logic in prayer.)

It is also instructive to compare Hannah's petition here to Yahweh's statement in Exodus 3:7, when he assures Moses, "I have certainly seen [looked at] the affliction of my people who are in Egypt." Hannah assumes that the God who has "certainly seen the affliction" of a corporate people can as certainly be expected to see the distress of an individual servant. Nor does she ask that her son—should Yahweh grant him—be famous or prominent; all that matters is that he will belong to Yahweh.

But perhaps the most outstanding mark of Hannah's praying is the liberty she enjoys before Yahweh. Look at the scene again. Here is Hannah in such intense anguish. She is praying but "speaking in her heart" (v. 13); her lips were moving but there was no audible sound. So Eli mistook her earnestness for drunkenness. Another soused woman, half-crocked after the sacrificial meal! But his sharp rebuke was met by Hannah's sad confession: "No sir, I am a woman with a heavy spirit; I have not drunk wine or strong drink; rather, I have been pouring out my soul before Yahweh" (v. 15).

There is the freedom Hannah knows. She is a woman with a heavy spirit (many of God's people are) and she has been pouring out her soul before Yahweh. "I pour out my complaint before him, I tell my trouble before him" (Ps. 142:2). In her bitterness of soul, with many tears, out of grief and despair, she pours out her anguish. Yahweh is a God who allows her to do that.

Now there is a myth circulating around the church that often goes like this: "Believers in the Old Testament period didn't have the freedom and personal approach in prayer that we do. Their worship consisted of a very external, formal, cut-and-dried sacrificial procedure in which ritual killed off any spontaneity or intense spirituality." Hannah would say that is hogwash. True, Hannah is still in 1 Samuel 1 and not in Hebrews 4; but once you see Hannah in prayer, how can you doubt that she has found the same throne of grace and knows something of the same boldness with its Occupant?

Christians then should allow Hannah to be our schoolmistress to lead us to Christ, to instruct us in communion with God. Many Christians need to realize that Yahweh our God allows us to do this—to pour our griefs and sobs and perplexities at his feet. Our Lord can handle our tears; it won't make him nervous or ill at ease if you unload your distress at his feet.

The Dedication of God's Gift (1:21-28)

Eli's accusation turned to benediction (v. 17) when he finally understood Hannah; Hannah went away settled (v. 18), Yahweh remembered her (v. 19; cf. v. 11), and Samuel arrived (v. 20).

The primary concern of verses 21-28 centers on the fulfillment of Hannah's vow (see v. 11) to give her son to Yahweh, that is, for service at his sanctuary. Hannah wants to wait until she has weaned Samuel (v. 22), which in the Near East could easily take three years (cf. 2 Macc. 7:27). Elkanah cautiously consents (v. 23). The year arrives and so does Hannah—with Samuel, three bulls,⁸ up to a bushel of flour, and a skin of wine (v. 24).

We should pay special attention to Hannah's words in verses 27-28 as she presents little Samuel to Eli. Four times she uses a form of the Hebrew root *š'ʾl* (to ask), a fact which English translations obscure because it is difficult to anglicize fluently. If we tolerate a rougher rendering we could read it like this:

For this child I prayed, and Yahweh gave me my asking which I asked from him; and I also have given back what was asked to Yahweh; all the days he lives he is one that is asked for Yahweh.⁹

8. Most English translations follow LXX and Syriac in verse 24, reading "a three-year-old bull," a reading that gathers indirect support from verse 25a, where only one bull is explicitly said to have been slaughtered. We can be a bit bullish for the "three bulls" of the traditional Hebrew text. R. Payne Smith pointed out that Hannah's ephah of flour was approximately three times what was required as a cereal offering for one bull, according to Numbers 15:9 (*I Samuel*, The Pulpit Commentary [London: Funk and Wagnalls, n.d.], 13; also G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 79). Three bulls would constitute (almost) an extravagant offering—but not impossible considering Elkanah's wealth (he could support two wives) and Hannah's gratitude.

9. This is the rendering of Smith, *I Samuel*, 13, with slight modifications. Smith commented: "The conjugation translated 'to give back what was asked' literally means 'to make to ask,' and so to give or lend anything asked. The sense here requires the



Hannah's words pick up Eli's blessing in verse 17 ("May the God of Israel give you the asking [lit.] which you asked from him") as well as her own apparent wordplay when "she called his name Samuel, for 'From Yahweh I asked [*sā'al*] him'" (v. 20).¹⁰ Hannah's worship then (back to vv. 27-28) gratefully rehearses Yahweh's gift and places that gift fully at Yahweh's disposal. "He is made over to Yahweh," as the New Jerusalem Bible renders the clause in verse 28.

There is a unique element in Samuel's position. He is destined to become Yahweh's prophet who guides Yahweh's people by Yahweh's word through a most critical epoch (3:19-20); he will be God's specially chosen instrument for a major task in redemptive history. So in one sense Samuel and Hannah and Elkanah do not stand on the same level as all believers do.

And yet we do share some common ground. Any parents who are living in covenant with the Lord should find themselves following Hannah in general principle even if not in precise practice. We should solemnly and passionately desire that each child be "made over to Yahweh." His gifts should be given back to him.

When I was a child there were times, though very few, when my father was away. That meant my mother would lead family worship in the evening. I always half-dreaded that because, after the Scripture was read and we were on our knees, Mom would pray for each of us five boys by name, specifically and in detail, beginning with the oldest down to the caboose (me). I say I half-dreaded this because it was difficult to hear the earnest desires of a mother's soul without tears coming to my eyes (and, after prayer, they were always fresh because I was the last prayed for). Naturally, it was not macho for an eight-, ten-, or twelve-year-old lad to shed tears. But it was tough to

restoration by Hannah of what she had prayed for (comp. Exod. xii.35, 36), but which she had asked not for herself, but that she might devote it to Jehovah's service."

10. "Samuel" probably means "name of God" or "his name is God." The point, however, of Hannah's statement in verse 20 does not rest on the Samuel-*sā'al* (to ask) wordplay, for the words *from Yahweh* are emphatic in the Hebrew and carry Hannah's primary point (see P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, The Anchor Bible [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980], 62, and Lyle M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of I Samuel 1–12* [Sheffield: Almond, 1985], 83), namely, that her son is a gift from the God who had closed her womb (vv. 5, 6).





be tough. Here was a Christian mother, on the basis of what she knew—and didn't know—"making over" her sons to the Lord. They were hers, but it was more important that they be his—and for that she prayed.

The View of God's Kingdom (2:1-10)

Hannah prays again at Shiloh (2:1a). Here in 2:1-10 we have her response, her prayer of praise, for Yahweh's gift. I want us to walk our way through Hannah's song before explaining its significance.

Hannah's song may be divided into three sections: verses 1-3, verses 4-8, and verses 9-10. Verses 1-3 express Hannah's elation over Yahweh's particular salvation, over the relief he granted to Hannah in her distress:

- ¹ My heart glories in Yahweh,
my horn is raised high in Yahweh,
my mouth opens wide against my enemies,
for I rejoice in your salvation.
- ² There is none holy like Yahweh;
Indeed, there is no one except you;
and there is no rock like our God.
- ³ Don't go on talking so high and mighty;
don't let arrogant talk go out of your mouth,
for Yahweh is a God who really knows,
and actions are under his scrutiny.

The repeated personal pronouns in verse 1 ("my," "I") indicate that Hannah begins with her own experience. She breaks forth in a confession of faith in verse 2 and directs a word of admonition in verse 3. The counsel of verse 3 is not directed specifically at Peninnah, for the first two Hebrew verbs are plural, as is the "your." It is a general warning to all self-sufficient boasters. Hannah gives praise for Yahweh's salvation granted in her crisis. We might call this "micro-salvation."

In verses 4-8 Hannah expands on the matter; the way Yahweh delivered her is characteristic of the way Yahweh rules his world:





- ⁴ The bows of the mighty warriors lie shattered,
but those ready to fall bind on strength.
- ⁵ The ones who are full hire themselves out to get bread,
but the hungry have ceased famishing.
Seven have been born to the barren
but the one with many sons gets feeble.
- ⁶ Yahweh kills and gives life,
brings down to Sheol, then he brings up.
- ⁷ Yahweh impoverishes and makes rich,
brings low – also makes high.
- ⁸ He raises up the poor from the dust,
he lifts up the needy from the ash heap
to make them sit with princes,
and he makes them inherit a seat of honor,
for the supports of the earth are Yahweh's
and he placed the world on them.

Hannah moves from the particular (vv. 1-3) to the general (vv. 4-8). What Yahweh has done for Hannah simply reflects the tendency of his ways. When John Calvin had suffered the death of his wife Idelette, he wrote his friend William Farel: "May the Lord Jesus ...support me. ..under this heavy affliction, which would certainly have overcome me, had not He, who raises up the prostrate, strengthens the weak, and refreshes the weary, stretched forth His hand from heaven to me."¹¹ Calvin was saying he would surely have been crushed but he knew a Lord who raises up the prostrate, strengthens the weak, and refreshes the weary – and that Lord had again acted in character in Calvin's grief. That is what Hannah is saying here. I was ready to fall and Yahweh gave me strength; I was barren and he made me fruitful; I was poor and he made me rich. But that is not really surprising, for that is just the way Yahweh is (vv. 4-8)!

Horizons broaden, the view expands in verses 9-10. We have come from Hannah's experience (vv. 1-3) to the way Yahweh rules (vv. 4-8) to how it will be when Yahweh fully, completely, and visibly rules (vv. 9-10). That is, we have come from micro-salvation and from Yahweh's characteristic ways to "macro-salvation."

11. Thea B. Van Halsema, *This Was John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 155.





- ⁹ He will keep the feet of his covenant one(s),
but the wicked will be silenced in darkness,
for it is not by strength that a man can conquer.
- ¹⁰ Yahweh—those who fight with him will be shattered;
he will thunder against them in the heavens.
Yahweh will judge the ends of the earth—
may he give strength to his king;
and may he lift up the horn of his anointed one.¹²

Here is what will happen when Yahweh rules and acts as he is wont to do (vv. 4-8). Here is the final result, the grand finale—the deliverance of the covenant people, the shattering of Yahweh’s opponents, the judging of the ends of the earth. Hannah expects Yahweh to accomplish this through his king, his anointed one.¹³

You must catch the logic of Hannah’s prayer. It is easy to react superficially to these opening scenes in 1 Samuel: “What’s the big deal? So Hannah has a son now — that’s nice — and that rival wife Peninnah who has kids coming out her ears has had to eat crow; so now things have been calmed down a bit at Elkanah’s flat in Ramathaim-zophim, wherever that is.” No. This is no piddly little affair—this is a manifestation of

12. The last two lines are to be translated as a wish or a prayer. The verbs are imperfects with simple *waw*, almost a certain indication of the nonindicative mood (a point once made in a seminar by J. J. Owens). English versions uniformly render these lines as statements; however, both Ralph W. Klein (*1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco: Word, 1983], 13) and McCarter (*1 Samuel*, 68) translate sub-junctively.

13. Commentators almost uniformly deny this psalm to Hannah because of verse 10b—or, at the very least, they deny verse 10b to her, because Israel had no king in Hannah’s time; hence she would not have spoken of Yahweh’s “king” or “anointed one.” The common view is that the compiler has placed a somewhat later psalm—somewhat appropriately, to be sure—into Hannah’s mouth (e.g., Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, The Old Testament Library [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964], 29, 31). However, the assumption that one must have historical experience of kingship before alluding to it does not always hold water. In fact, it’s a bit leaky. A. F. Kirkpatrick long ago pointed out that “king talk” was not impossible in Hannah’s mouth: “The idea of a king was not altogether novel to the Israelite mind. The promise to Abraham spoke of kings among his posterity (Gen. xvii. 6): the Mosaic legislation prescribes the method of election and the duty of the king (Deut. xvii. 14-20): Gideon had been invited to establish a hereditary monarchy (Jud. viii.22). Anointing too was recognized as the regular rite of admission to the office (Jud. ix.8). Amid the prevalent anarchy and growing disintegration of the nation, amid internal corruption and external attack, the desire for a king was probably taking definite shape in the popular mind” (*The First Book of Samuel*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896], 55–56). Robert P. Gordon



the way Yahweh rules and will bring his kingdom (vv. 5b, 8). Hannah's relief is a sample of the way Yahweh works (vv. 4-8) and of the way he will work when he brings his kingdom in its fullness (vv. 9-10). The saving help Yahweh gave Hannah is a foretaste, a scale-model demonstration of how Yahweh will do it when he does it in grand style.

Each one of Christ's flock should ingest this point into his or her thinking. Every time God lifts you out of the miry bog and sets your feet upon a rock is a sample of the coming of the kingdom of God, a down payment of the full deliverance, the macro-salvation that will be yours at last.

True, such tiny salvations are only samples or signs of the final salvation. A happily married woman may wear a diamond ring and/or a wedding band. And, if you asked her, she would likely admit that the ring is a token or a sign of the love her husband has for her; she would acknowledge that it is *only* a sign or a symbol and that the ring is certainly not the love itself but that the real thing is much greater than the sign or symbol of it. But she will not for that reason despise the ring; she won't reason that since it is only a symbol she might just as well sell it at her garage sale. No, because of the deeper reality it signifies she treasures it, though it is, admittedly, *relatively* insignificant.

Likewise, you should not despise or demean these little salvations Yahweh works in your behalf, these little clues he gives, these clear but small evidences he leaves that he is king and that he has this strange way of raising up the poor from the dust and lifting the needy from the ash heap to make them sit in the heavenly realms with Jesus Christ. Ponder every episode of Yahweh's saving help to you; it will help you believe Luke 12:32.

Young John Calvin, forced to leave his native France, was traveling eastward hoping to reach Strasbourg or even Basel.

(*I & II Samuel: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986], 23) would permit the psalm to Hannah but views the prayer of verse 10b as a later addendum, much like Psalm 51:18-19 might be to the bulk of Psalm 51. On the function of Hannah's song in the Books of Samuel, see Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 272–73; Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis*, 99–102, 110–12; and Willem A. VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Academie Books, 1988), 206–7, 215–16.

His desire was for a haven in which to study and write and thereby support the new Protestant faith. A straight line to Strasbourg was impossible, for a war was in the way. It was 1536, and Francis I and Emperor Charles V were having their third war; cannon, carts, and equipment plugged the roads. Calvin must detour to the south, pass through Lyon. He hoped to reach Lausanne on a certain day but failed; he would have to spend the night in Geneva. There short, stocky, fiery William Farel got hold of the young scholar and threatened him with the judgment of God if he did not stay to carry on the reformation in Geneva.¹⁴ Could we say that we owe Calvin's impact in the Reformation to Francis I and Charles V? After all, it was, humanly speaking, their war that forced Calvin to pass through Geneva.

I would not argue that case; but it is stimulating to raise such questions. Were Francis and Charles unwilling and unwitting benefactors of Geneva? By the same token (getting back to 1 Samuel), do we owe it all to Peninnah? I know that in one sense that is a perverse way to put the matter. Yet without Peninnah's goading, mockery, and malice would Hannah ever have been driven to the distraction that moved her to desperate prayer? As one looks back how crucial becomes the fact that Hannah was crushed with grief and moved to prayer. For Hannah this was grievous personal distress—yet in it Yahweh drove her to prayer through which he brought forth a lad who would shield his whole people. God moves our prayers and magnifies their effectiveness. The severe trial of Hannah proved to be the salvation of a whole people. Without Peninnah that may not have been the case. Do we owe it all to Peninnah? Certainly not. We owe it to the God who takes even the smirks and digs and venom of Peninnahs and uses them to fill a cradle with another kingdom servant. Can we not see the wonder of Israel's God? Can we not see the comfort of his people?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Bible stories of barren women given children by God encourage us in our 'impossible' situations. Consider the relevance of this to you at this stage in your life with God.

14. Van Halsema, *This Was John Calvin*, 59–60, 76–78.



2. Am I ever in danger of substituting 'human gimmicks' for dependence on 'the God of the impossible'?
3. 'Our despair ... may be another prelude to a mighty work of God.' Seek illustrations of this from Scripture and experience.
4. Consider the place of logic in prayer. What about 'Lord, you said therefore, please do it!'
5. Which is your greatest concern for your children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews – fame, prosperity or godliness?

