

Lessons from the Life of Hannah

*“She vowed a vow,
and said, ... I will
give him unto the
LORD all the days
of his life.”*

—I Samuel 1:11

NEAR THE END OF THE

time period of the Judges in Israel, there was a man named Elkanah who had two wives. Elkanah's wife Peninnah had borne children, while his wife

Hannah had not. Each year Elkanah took his family with him to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to God. (I Sam. 1:1-3) Shiloh was located a few miles north of Jerusalem. It was the site of Israel's Tabernacle at that time, and also of one of the nation's annual feasts to God.—Josh. 18:1; Judg. 21:19

When Elkanah went to Shiloh each year, he gave a portion of the sacrifices he brought to each member of his family, but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her greatly. (I Sam. 1:4,5) Elkanah's wife Peninnah regularly ridiculed Hannah because she had no children. This cruel behavior went on year after year, each time Elkanah took his family to Shiloh. These painful mockings were very troubling for Hannah, so much that she would weep and would not eat.—vss. 6-8

In her despair, Hannah silently prayed, pouring out her soul to God. (vs. 10) One of the initial lessons we can glean from Hannah's experience is that when we are troubled, anxious, distressed, or discouraged, and perhaps see no end nor any solution to a particular experience we are going through, we should draw near to God in prayer. By so doing we can obtain inner peace, and "find grace to help in time of need."—Phil. 4:6,7; Heb. 4:16

Hannah asked God if he would let her bear a son, she would give him to God all the days of his life. She would also never permit a razor to come upon his head. (I Sam. 1:11) We notice that Hannah did not ask for several children, but in humility she asked God for only one, a son.

A LIFELONG VOW

It may seem strange that Hannah would pray to have a son, and then vow to give him to God for all the days of his life. However, the scriptural account records a possible reason for Hannah's vow. We are told that Eli, Israel's priest at that time, had sons who "knew not the LORD," and whose sins were "very great." Furthermore, they "abhorred the offering of the LORD." (I Sam. 2:12-17) Eli's sons also practiced immorality, when they should have been examples to the people in righteousness. (vss. 22-25) Every year Hannah went with Elkanah's family to Shiloh in order to offer sacrifice to the Lord. On each visit they would have seen the increasing evil behavior of the sons of Eli, noting also that he was getting older and growing more feeble. After Eli's death, they reasoned, the tabernacle services would be completely profaned by his

sons. Thus, to Hannah, the future of the tabernacle services at Shiloh looked bleak.

We suggest this may have been the motivation for Hannah's prayer. As a faithful and dedicated Israelite, she prayed to God not just to have a child, but to specifically have a son. In her prayer, Hannah further promised that, if given a son, she would dedicate, or consecrate, him to serve the Heavenly Father at Shiloh. She greatly desired that there might be someone, other than Eli's two unfaithful sons, to continue the tabernacle services in a proper way.

THE LAW OF VOWS

The law of vows which God gave to Israel is recorded in Numbers chapter 30. One of the stipulations concerning vows was that a husband could disallow any vow his wife made, as long as he indicated his decision to cancel her vow the very first day he heard about it. However, if a husband knew about his wife's vow and kept silent on the first day he had knowledge of it, the vow would stand and must be kept. (vss. 3-8) In the case of Hannah's vow, her husband Elkanah agreed with the promise she had made to God.—I Sam. 1:22,23

In due time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son, as she had desired. She named him Samuel, which means "heard of God," and gave the reason for his name, "because I have asked him of the LORD." (vss. 19,20) Hannah kept Samuel until he was "weaned." Various commentators suggest that the thought was not merely the weaning from the breast, but also from the general nourishment and upbringing provided by his parents, and thus he may have been around the age of twelve years.

From the time of Samuel's birth until the day his mother left him at Shiloh, Hannah would naturally have become very attached to her son. She saw him grow, learn to walk, talk, and become a young boy. The account tells us that when Hannah took Samuel to Shiloh, "the child was young," and that "the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest." (I Sam. 1:24-28; 2:11) If Samuel was around the age of twelve when he was presented to the priest at Shiloh, he would have been of sufficient age to be of some assistance to Eli, and to begin learning details of the many laws and precepts of God.

THE NAZARITE VOW

We believe the vow Hannah made to God is that which the Scriptures refer to as the "vow of the Nazarite." Nazarite means "separate or consecrated." The vow of the Nazarite could be taken by either a man or a woman, and included three requirements. The first of these was abstinence from wine, strong drink, and from eating anything produced by the grape vine. Secondly, during all the days of a Nazarite vow no razor was to be used on the person's head, but they were to let their hair grow long. Thirdly, one taking a Nazarite vow was not to go near any dead person, including members of their own family, when they died.—Num. 6:1-7

We note that the Nazarite vow was not a promise to live in an isolated place, neither was it to dress in a peculiar way with robes or collars, nor was it a vow to remain unmarried. Rather, the vow of the Nazarite was a pledge of dedication to God. It was a vow quite similar to that of Israel's high priests, who were also not permitted to drink wine or strong

drink, nor to approach any dead person. (Lev. 10:9; 21:10,11) Very few in Israel took the Nazarite vow for their entire life. The Bible records just three people who did so—Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist. (Judg. 13:5; I Sam. 1:11; Luke 1:15) The three requirements of the Nazarite vow contain some helpful lessons for the footstep followers of Christ, which we will now consider.

NO WINE OR STRONG DRINK

The first Nazarite vow requirement was to abstain from drinking wine or strong drink, and avoid eating any fruit or product which came from the grape vine. Here we see an illustration of the importance that we avoid having the potentially intoxicating “spirit of the world” enter into our heart and mind, wherein it might find a dwelling place.

Regarding this precept the Apostle John writes: “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If any one loves the world, there is no love in his heart for the Father. For the things in the world—the cravings of the earthly nature, the cravings of the eyes, the show and pride of life—they all come, not from the Father, but from the world. And the world, with its cravings, is passing away, but he who does God’s will continues for ever.” (I John 2:15-17, *Weymouth New Testament*) James likewise states: “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”—James 4:4

In these verses the word “world” does not refer to our fellow human beings, nor to the planet earth on which we live. Rather, it is a translation of the Greek word *kosmos*, which signifies “orderly arrangement.”

The orderly, but often sinful, arrangements of today's world include such things as an increasing love of self, and a decreasing of moral standards. They also comprise sinful behaviors such as lying, evil speaking, and slander. These are all increasingly present in today's society and have become accepted by many as normal behavior. However, the children of God are not to follow such things, but are to strive after godliness and to set their hearts upon doing the Heavenly Father's will.—I Tim. 6:11,12

SECOND VOW REQUIREMENT

The second Nazarite requirement was for one to let his hair grow long and never use a razor upon his head. We suggest the letting of one's hair grow is a figurative illustration of the importance of trusting the Heavenly Father to increase our spiritual strength during the course of our experiences and trials of the Christian walk.

We recall the life of Samson, another faithful one from Old Testament times who also took the Nazarite vow. (Judges chapters 13-16) The Scriptures record Samson's zeal for God and for his people, faithfulness to his vow as a Nazarite, and his God-given great strength. They also note his undoing through fleshly weakness, brought to bear by the deceitfulness of his enemies. In these experiences we see many lessons. The Philistines, who knew Samson was a powerful enemy, planned for his seduction and submission by using a beautiful woman, named Delilah. Samson, who was so strong in nearly all other respects, was found to be vulnerable from this point of attack. One day, as Samson was resting his head on Delilah's lap, he fell asleep. Delilah shaved

the hair from his head. When Samson awoke, his strength was gone, because he had violated one of the requirements of the Nazarite vow.

What a lesson this is for us! We must realize that the church's great enemy, Satan, is on the alert to use any snare or trap for the undoing of those who are striving to faithfully follow in the footsteps of Christ. (I Pet. 5:8) Comparing Samson's temptation with those which come upon the Christian, we realize that we should be specially on guard against the enticements and allurements of the spirit of the world, the tendencies of our fallen flesh, and the deceitful workings of the Adversary along any and all lines in which he might see weakness in us.

One of the chief deceptions of Satan during this present Gospel Age, to which many have fallen prey, has been the unauthorized union of church systems with earthly governments rather than with "one husband," Christ. In the Book of Revelation, the term "harlot" is used to indicate church systems that had joined with the kings of the earth, causing them to commit "fornication" with her, resulting in their being made "drunk with the wine of her fornication." In this highly symbolic picture, we understand "the wine of her fornication" to be false doctrines, misunderstandings and misrepresentations of God and of his promises which are given in the Bible. Many throughout the world have been intoxicated by these false doctrines.—II Cor. 11:1-4; Rev. 17:1-5; 18:1-9; 19:2

If we have made a full and unreserved consecration of our all to God now, we could also be in danger of going to sleep in the lap of the modern Delilah, whether it be with the church systems themselves,

or by inculcating a similar spirit of formalism, self-confidence, or by allowing the spirit of pride to enter into our hearts. If we allow a spirit of drowsiness or rest from our study of the Lord's Word and our activities in his service, or a lessening of the fulfillment of our consecration vows, then we too could be at risk of falling into a spirit of slumber, just as Samson did.

The Apostle Paul's admonition to us is: "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." (Eph. 6:10) This exhortation has been applicable to the people of God throughout the Gospel Age, under all conditions and circumstances. As we consider all the devoted servants of God recounted in Hebrews chapter 11, we see that the secret of their strength of character, by which they endured and overcame many difficulties, resided in their life of faith and trust in God, and in his many promises. So it must be with us.—Prov. 3:5,6

CONTACT WITH DEAD BODIES

The third Nazarite requirement, avoiding contact with dead bodies, suggests the thought that we should avoid the earthly inclinations of our fallen, dying flesh. The Apostle Paul wrote: "If ... you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above. ... Give your minds to the things that are above, not to the things that are on the earth. ... Put to death your earthward inclinations—fornication, impurity, sensual passion, unholy desire, and all greed, for that is a form of idolatry. ... You also were once addicted to them, while you were living under their power. But now you must rid yourselves of every kind of sin—angry and passionate outbreaks, ill-will,

evil speaking, foul-mouthed abuse—so that these may never soil your lips. Do not speak falsehoods to one another, for you have stripped off the old self with its doings.”—Col. 3:1-9, *Weymouth*

We must do more, however, than just avoid earthly inclinations. Paul continues, “Clothe yourselves therefore, as God’s own people holy and dearly loved, with tender-heartedness, kindness, lowliness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; bearing with one another and readily forgiving each other. ... And over all these put on love, which is the perfect bond of union; and let the peace which Christ gives settle all questionings in your hearts, to which peace indeed you were called as belonging to His one Body; and be thankful.”—vss. 12-15, *Weymouth*

GROWTH OF SAMUEL

Prior to being given to Eli the high priest, Samuel undoubtedly received much in the way of instruction from his parents concerning the God of Israel, his principles, attributes, and promises. Samuel must have also learned the importance of living in a way that would please God. He must also have come to understand what the Nazarite vow meant, not just outwardly, but especially in his heart.

As the years went by Samuel grew from infancy into a young boy. When the proper time came, Hannah kept the vow she had made and willingly gave her young Samuel to God, to serve at the Tabernacle. In a certain sense, Hannah gave all that she had to God, because Samuel was her only child at that time.

When Hannah took Samuel up to the “house of the LORD in Shiloh,” she also brought with her for

an offering “three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine.” (I Sam. 1:24) These quantities are significantly greater than the measures which were required to be given when a burnt offering was made for a special vow. (Num. 15:8-10) Thus we have a further indication of the completeness of the vow which Hannah had made to God.

HANNAH’S PRAYER

When the time came for Hannah to leave her young son Samuel at the Tabernacle, where he would serve for the rest of his life, human reasoning might suppose that she was sad or even depressed. However, this was not the case at all. At the very moment when Hannah gave her son, she prayed saying, “My heart rejoiceth in the LORD.” Hannah’s prayer is recorded in I Samuel 2:1-10, and is among some of the longest and most beautiful prayers recorded in the Bible.

There are many similarities between the prayer of Hannah and the words of Jesus’ mother Mary to her relative Elizabeth. Perhaps Mary recalled the words of Hannah’s prayer, “My heart rejoiceth in the LORD.” Similarly, Mary said to Elizabeth, “My spirit hath rejoiced in God.” Hannah prayed, “There is none holy as the LORD,” and Mary said, “Holy is his name.” Hannah’s prayer continued, “The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength,” while Mary spoke the words, “He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.” Hannah had prayed, “They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased,” and Mary said to Elizabeth, “He hath filled the hungry

with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.”—I Sam. 2:1-5; Luke 1:47-53

After Elkanah and Hannah left their son Samuel at Shiloh, they returned home, and “the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest.” Each year thereafter, Hannah made a small robe for Samuel, no doubt increasing its size as he grew. She gave him the new robe each year when she came with her husband to offer sacrifice at the Tabernacle.—I Sam. 2:11,19

A REWARD FROM GOD

Hannah’s faithfulness in fulfilling the vow she made to God did not go unnoticed by the Heavenly Father. After she had left her son Samuel at Shiloh to serve God for the rest of his life, we are told, “The LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters.” (I Sam. 2:21) Truly, God rewarded Hannah much more than she had ever hoped or asked for, allowing her to be blessed with five more children!

During the present Gospel Age, the reward God has promised now to the faithful consecrated followers of Christ is not material prosperity, good health, nor an abundance of friends. Rather, if we are faithful, to the best of our ability, in following and applying in our daily lives the lessons and instructions given to us in the Scriptures by Christ Jesus, the apostles and the other inspired writers of the Bible, we are promised that in the future, “great is your reward in heaven.”—Matt. 5:12

We are also promised, for the present time, “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.” (Phil. 4:7-9) As the Prophet Isaiah writes, “Thou

wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever; for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.” (Isa. 26:3,4) Herein lies a key promise from God. If we keep our hearts and minds “stayed,” or focused, upon our Heavenly Father and upon the many precious promises which he has given to us in the Bible, this will help us to develop fully the peace and trust in God which is needed in all the experiences which he permits in our life.

SHE BOTH “GAVE” AND “LENT” HIM

When Hannah had prayed for a son, she vowed to “give him unto the LORD all the days of his life.” (I Sam. 1:11) However, when the time came for Hannah to leave Samuel with Eli at Shiloh in order to serve God, she said “I have lent him to the LORD.” (vs. 28) How can we reconcile this difference between her prayer to “give” her son, versus later saying she had “lent” him to God? Had she compromised her vow? We think not.

We believe the answer is that Hannah had faith in the resurrection of the dead. From the standpoint of the remaining years of her life at that time, she indeed gave Samuel to serve God for that entire period. However, in the future resurrection on earth, it will seem as if she had merely “lent” Samuel to God for a relatively short time, compared to all eternity and the future “ages to come.” Thus, Hannah had faith that one day she would be re-united with her son Samuel in the Messianic kingdom which will soon be established on the earth.

In the New Testament we are told that some of the faithful ones of old had trials of “cruel mockings”

and were “tormented,” meaning evil-treated. (Heb. 11:36,37) The bitter mockings and ill treatment from Elkanah’s wife Peninnah, which Hannah endured year after year, are an indication that she might be included among the ancient heroes of faith cited by Paul in Hebrews chapter 11.

A LIFE OF PRAYER

Hannah lived a life of prayer. She prayed when she was troubled, pouring out her soul before the Lord. (I Sam. 1:15) Likewise, so we should do. The psalmist writes, “My refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times; ... pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us.”—Ps. 62:7,8

Hannah prayed when she was thankful. When she presented Samuel to Eli the high priest, she offered a prayer of thankfulness. Our prayers should also be full of thanksgiving to the Heavenly Father. In his letters to the brethren, the Apostle Paul repeatedly mentions the importance of continually giving thanks to God. Here are just a few of Paul’s admonitions concerning thankfulness: “Giving thanks always for all things unto God.” “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God.” “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God ... concerning you.”—Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:17; I Thess. 5:18

Hannah made a great sacrifice. While still childless, she pledged that if blessed with a son, he would live the Nazarite vow of complete dedication to God. When she bore Samuel and, together with her husband Elkanah, nurtured him sufficiently as a child, Hannah gave him to God for the rest of his life. We, too, have made a lifelong vow of consecration to do

the will of our Heavenly Father. May the lessons from the life of Hannah encourage us to have greater zeal and love for God and for his son Christ Jesus, and that such devotion may be exemplified in everything we think, say, and do each day. ■