

Remembered by the Lord

“They rose up in the morning early, and worshiped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her.”
—*I Samuel 1:19*

AMONG THE PEOPLE WHO went up to worship and sacrifice every year at Shiloh, where the tabernacle was located in the days of Eli, a priest of Israel, there was a family from Ramah. This family consisted of Elkanah, his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah, and the children of the latter.

Only the males were bound to go up to the great feasts. (Exod. 23:17) However, Elkanah took his whole family. This was not as difficult in his case as in some others, for his home was only about fifteen miles distant from Shiloh. Perhaps there were others who lived just as close to Shiloh as Elkanah, but who did not trouble to take their whole families to the house of the Lord. It requires something more than nearness to draw some together for worship, praise, and service. Let none of us be easily satisfied with doing as little as we can.

As consecrated children of God, our present position is represented by the Holy compartment of the Tabernacle. Truly has it been said that there were no rocking chairs in the Holy. The Bible says that we are not to be slothful in the Lord's business, but "fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." (Rom. 12:11) Thus will we be following in the steps of him of whom it was written, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."—Ps. 69:9

HANNAH AND PENINNAH

All the family went up together but, as is always unfortunate, this was not a united family. We know why. Plural marriages were not uncommon at that time. It is evident that Elkanah and Hannah were of one mind in their worship of God, and of one mind in their affection for each other. Concerning Peninnah, we know nothing of her and her children, except as revealed by her conduct, to which we shall refer presently.

One of that family went up to Shiloh with a heavy heart. She had a longing desire which was unsatisfied. Hannah, the first and beloved wife of Elkanah, had no child. (I Sam. 1:2) It has been suggested that this was the reason Elkanah took Peninnah as his second wife. Although Peninnah bore him children, Hannah continued to be his most beloved. This was manifested at the time of making the offerings to God. When Elkanah offered, "he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters; but to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah."—I Sam. 1:4,5, *New American Standard Bible*

Apparently this aroused the anger and jealousy of Peninnah. She taunted Hannah with her barrenness. Verses 6 and 7 state that Hannah's "adversary," a reference to Peninnah, "provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she [Peninnah] provoked her [Hannah]." The jealous and cruel taunts of Peninnah show very plainly her character and disposition.

Peninnah's taunts came upon a sore and sorrowful heart. These provocations must have been hard to bear, but we read of no angry retort by Hannah. Appropriately, the name Hannah in Hebrew means "grace." All that is said of her is, "She wept, and did not eat." (vs. 7) That was the effect upon Hannah. If she had shown a different spirit she might have missed a double blessing. She might have missed the loving comfort of her husband, and she might have also missed the precious gift of God which would soon be given to her—the birth of a son.

HANNAH'S CHARACTER

How filled with lessons is the record of Hannah's behavior! Although reviled, she reviled not again. Those who seek to right themselves when injured; those who spend consecrated time in an endeavor to justify themselves; those who revile when reviled—these are not eligible for the blessings which God bestows upon the meek.—I Cor. 4:11-13; 6:9-11; I Pet. 2:21-23

Elkanah spoke words of comfort to Hannah. He could not turn the heart of Peninnah to her, nor

could he give Hannah the blessing for which she longed. He could, and did, however, show his love for her. “Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?” (I Sam. 1:8) Perhaps in our longing desire for blessings which are not ours, we are apt to overlook those we do have. As we read in Psalm 103:2: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” Even in our lowest state we can always find something for which to thank the Heavenly Father.

Concerning Hannah we read: “And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.” (I Sam. 1:10) Some may have been near Hannah, but she was alone in spirit. There, in her earnest desire, she made a vow to the Lord. “And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.”— vs. 11

From Numbers 8:23-25, we learn that the Levites were bound to serve the Lord in the service of the Tabernacle from the age of twenty-five to fifty. Similarly, in Numbers 6:1-21, those who took a Nazarite vow would normally do so for a limited period called “days of separation.” Hannah, however, vowed that her child would be given to the Lord “all the days of his life.”

ELI'S MISTAKEN REBUKE

Hannah prayed silently, but her lips moved as she framed the words. Apparently she was long in prayer, pleading earnestly again and again. This drew the attention of Eli the priest. He saw her lips move, but heard no voice. As this went on for some time, Eli thought Hannah was intoxicated, and he rebuked her sharply: "And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee."—I Sam. 1:12-14

Some possibly would have keenly resented such a charge. There are those who cannot bear to be reprov'd, even for a fault, much less for no fault. It was not so with Hannah. She doubtless was pained by such an accusation, but she felt no anger. In meekness and humility she replied to Eli from the depths of her heart. "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint [Hebrew: meditation] and grief have I spoken hitherto."—vss. 15,16

Realizing his mistake, Eli answered Hannah very kindly, using the words of verse 17: "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him." Did Eli know what that petition was? The record does not tell us. However, it may well be that Hannah explained to Eli her desire for a son, though not specifically

stated in the narrative. As a priest of Israel, Eli spoke as the mouthpiece of God. Hannah seems to have received his words as assurance from God, for we read in verse 18: “Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.” Hannah went away filled with a new and joyful hope, no longer refusing to eat, and no longer wearing a sad look.

REMEMBERED BY THE LORD

Now we come to our opening text, verse 19, the closing words of which are: “The LORD remembered her.” This precious phrase is one of those many evidences we have of the glorious truth of Isaiah 57:15: “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

Was not this Hannah’s experience? Were not her spirit and heart revived? God will continue to dwell with those whose hearts are wholly given to him; those who have made a vow, a covenant with him by sacrifice; those who are endeavoring to walk in the steps of the Master, following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. (Ps. 50:5; Rev. 14:4) Indeed, Jesus said of these, “In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.”—Matt. 18:10

In this connection we are reminded of another Scripture: “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of

her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.” (Isa. 49:15,16) The evidence that the Lord did remember Hannah was that in due time she gave birth to a son. She gave him a name which expressed her gratitude to God, the name Samuel, which means, “in God’s name,” or “heard of God.”—I Sam. 1:19,20

HANNAH’S THANKFULNESS

Hannah was not like some who forget to give thanks when the blessing comes. How sad are those two questions asked by Jesus, concerning the one leper only who returned with thanks. “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?” (Luke 17:17) Hannah asked God for a son. When the request was granted, she expressed her thankfulness in the name Samuel. How we need to continually remind ourselves of those words in I Thessalonians 5:18: “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

God can do much with a thankful heart. He can do nothing, or very little, with an unthankful heart. In II Timothy 3:2, we are told that people would become “unthankful, unholy.” Indeed, a decrease in holiness will follow a lack of thankfulness as surely as night follows day. Contrariwise, if we are thankful, then we will be kept holy, because our hearts are entirely for the Lord.

KEEPING A SOLEMN VOW

Hannah had done something more than ask for a son. In addition, she had, by a solemn vow, dedicated him to the Lord. It would perhaps be relatively easy to do this while she was childless. When the

child was born, and that fond tie had been formed which only a mother's heart can fully know, would she then part with him? Would she regret the vow she had made? Would she be tempted to draw back from it? No, the vow had been made; it would be kept without any reservations or adjustments. It was not a rash vow that Hannah had made. Although she was of a sorrowful spirit and troubled in mind, yet her vow was a solemn declaration.

We are reminded here of Psalm 66:13,14, which seems to fit accurately Hannah's experience: "I will go into thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay thee my vows, Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble." The child had been dedicated to God, and hard as the parting might be, the vow would be kept.

What shall we say to these things written for our learning? What lesson is conveyed to us by Hannah, who kept her vow faithfully? The Bible says, "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay."—Eccles. 5:4,5

We read in Hebrews 10:38: "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Jesus expressed it thus: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62) Whatever else he is fit for, he is not fit for the heavenly kingdom promised to those who overcome as Jesus overcame. (Rev. 3:21) The psalmist wrote, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the

LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.”—Ps. 116:12-14

SAMUEL’S UPBRINGING

Samuel, from his birth, was given to God. However, an infant can do no acceptable or intelligent service. Hannah therefore kept her son until she had weaned him. Until that time she did not go up to the house of the Lord. Elkanah went and all his house, but not Hannah. (I Sam. 1:21,22) Here again we find Elkanah and Hannah of one mind. Her vow was also his vow. To what Hannah purposed to do, he gave his full consent. Elkanah said to her, “Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the LORD establish his word.”—vs. 23

After Samuel was weaned, the time for parting came. One of the great yearly feasts came around, and Hannah went up with Elkanah and took the child with her. The record states, “She took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh.” (vs. 24) There was no holding back in their offering. Seeing that they were giving up their only child, they might have excused themselves from any other offering. On the contrary, they made the presentation of their only child to God the occasion for a thank offering. May we have such an attitude in paying of our vows to the Lord!

CHEERFULLY GIVEN

Truly does the Bible say, “God loveth a cheerful giver.” (II Cor. 9:7) We are reminded here of those words of the hymn concerning Jesus, in whose steps we are privileged to follow: “I’ve found a friend; O! such a friend! He gave his life to save me;

And not alone the gift of life, But his own self he gave me.” For three and a half years Jesus laid down his life, pouring out his soul unto death. He is our perfect example.

“They slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli.” (I Sam. 1:25) Some time had passed since Hannah was there, and Eli did not seem to recognize her. So Hannah introduced herself: “Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD.” (vs. 26) Perhaps when Hannah thus spoke, Eli remembered—remembered her prayer, remembered his mistake; remembered his words of blessing to her.

Hannah continued: “For this boy I prayed, and the LORD has given me my petition which I asked of Him. So I have also dedicated him to the LORD; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the LORD.”—vss. 27,28, *NASB*

Filled with thankfulness, and speaking under the direction of the Holy Spirit, Hannah gave utterance to her feelings in a prayer and psalm of thanksgiving recorded in I Samuel 2:1-10. Elkanah and Hannah returned to their home at Ramah, leaving young Samuel with Eli. “Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.” (vs. 18) Being a loving mother, Hannah never forgot her young son Samuel. She “made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.”—vs. 19

A SPECIAL BLESSING

When they parted from their child, Samuel’s parents received a special blessing from the aged

priest. We read that Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, “May the LORD give you children from this woman in place of the one she dedicated to the LORD. And they went to their own home.”
—I Sam. 2:20, *NASB*

Eli’s words were fulfilled, for we read in verse 21: “And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters.” So they were not left childless. Their firstborn was absent, returned to the Lord, but their home was not empty. What a wonderful example of how God honors those who honor him.—vs. 30

We read no more of Hannah. If she lived to see her firstborn become a courageous prophet, a faithful servant of the Most High, an upholder of the true religion in Israel, it must have been real joy to her. What higher blessing can we desire for ourselves than that our lives be spent in the joyful service of our Heavenly Father? The signs of the times tell us with deafening emphasis that we are living in the closing days of the present Gospel Age. What manner of persons ought we to be—living up to our privileges and discharging faithfully our responsibilities!—II Pet. 3:11-14

Let those who are comparatively young in years rejoice to be used in God’s service. Let those of more mature years bear up bravely and wisely under the heat and burden of the day. Let the more aged pilgrims, leaning upon the staff of God’s Word, press on as beacon lights to others. Let us all—the young, the not so young, and the aged—in full assurance of faith, never doubt that God remembers us. If faithful, we will be able to fully realize this, because in the Bible it is written of Hannah, “The LORD remembered her.” ■