



“A Mother’s Promise”

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The second Sunday in May is, most importantly, the Lord’s Day when Christians meet together to honor Christ and remember His death by eating the Lord’s Supper. We do that every week. But on this one Lord’s Day every year, we as a nation take time to honor and celebrate mothers. We should be thankful for mothers and their irreplaceable role in our lives each day we live, but we usually take this day to thank them and show our appreciation in special ways. The current pandemic may prevent us from celebrating with our families in the usual ways, but it shouldn’t stop us from honoring our mothers. The Bible places an even greater and more important kind of emphasis on mothers than our modern world does. As we’ll see in our study today, the Bible depicts the work and influence of a mother as much more than feeding, cleaning, and taking care of children physically, kissing bumps and bruises and so forth. The word of God sets her forth as one of the greatest influences in her children’s lives, and also consequently, in the world. Many accuse the Bible of demeaning women, of giving them a lesser and even humiliating role in the church and in society. But anyone who says that has not looked very carefully at the lives and experiences of some of the great women whose lives are chronicled in the word of God.

The fact is, though ancient cultures may have demeaned and looked down upon women, God has not. Rather, He has exalted women to a crucial place of honor and influence in the structure and fabric of our homes, our churches, and our world. It is a shame that so many don’t recognize the God-given role of the woman in that light but instead mock and despise it.

I want us to go back to the story of a woman who lived a long time ago in Israel in very, very dark times. She took her role as a wife and mother so seriously, and as a result, she changed the course of God’s people and of the world. She is one of the greatest mothers of all time. Let’s see what made her such a wonderful mother. If you haven’t already guessed, her name is Hannah. Her story is recorded in **I Samuel 1**.

1 Samuel 1:19-20 “Then they rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD, and returned and came to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, “Because I have asked for him from the LORD.”

This is such a wonderful story out of which comes one of the most wonderful men in the Old Testament and history of the Jewish people. If you’re a parent today, I hope you’ll make the same promises that Hannah made to God. I assure you it will bring a great blessing if you do.

No name in the Bible is being identified as being a wonderful mother than Hannah. Her story, like so many others of the Bible, shows just what the faith of an ordinary person can lead to. Hannah was not a famous woman because of her business ventures, her education credentials, nor because of some act that the world would see as heroic. She was an ordinary woman who faced great challenges in her life, but who had a deep and reverent love for God and for the house of God. She wanted to make a difference for her people, but how she went about it was not the way most people would. She lived in dark and difficult times. These were the days of the judges. In that period of time, God’s people were a mess—involved in idolatry, immorality, and worldliness of every sort, and were without any real spiritual leadership. They were looking to solve their problems as a nation by imitating the world and the other nations about them. They were crying out to God to give them a king like all the other nations had. While they were looking to human government to save them, Hannah was instead looking to the cradle. Well before her time, she seemed to understand the saying, *The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world*. That was her approach. She knew in her heart that if God would hear her prayer and give her a child that she could raise that child to serve the Lord and be the leader her people so desperately needed. She eventually became the mother of the great prophet Samuel. What a joy it must’ve been to be the mother of one of the most impactful and effectual prophets in the history of the nation of Israel. But don’t get the idea that all of this came easily—that Hannah had a baby, raised him, and things just worked out that way. No, not at all. Hannah faced tremendous challenges. For one thing, the times in which she lived, which really aren’t that different from our own troubled times. In the days of the judges, the Bible says that *every man did that which was right in his own eyes*, meaning that every man was a law unto himself. So, it was anarchy, rebellion, and unimaginable spiritual confusion. Just read the book of **Judges** and you’ll get a very eye-opening picture of what those days were like. In many ways, you’ll see a reflection of our own confused and crazy times.

So, Hannah desired to bring a child into a world like that—when even the very people of God seemed to be so corrupt, wicked, and astray. If you think it’s impossible to raise moral, godly, Christ-centered children in the midst of our wicked world today, you need to look back at the story of Hannah because she did it. If we’re the kind of parents that Hannah was, we can raise Samuels even today. This world could certainly use some Samuels right now.

The other challenge was that though Hannah wanted a baby, she couldn’t have one. Hannah was barren. Back in that day, God permitted polygamy. He did not endorse or desire it, but He permitted it for a period of time. Elkanah happened to have two wives, one of which was Hannah. The other wife was able to have children, but Hannah was not. This other wife was sort of a mean woman. She mocked Hannah and put her down because she couldn’t have children. When they would go to the tabernacle on their yearly pilgrimage, she would mock and deride Hannah for her barrenness. That’s painful enough for women today who desire to have children but cannot, but especially back in that dispensation when

God's people were a physical nation and there was great emphasis placed upon lineage and genealogy. It was a distressing and humiliating thing to a woman to not be able to bear children.

When Elkanah's other wife came along making fun and impugning Hannah, it was nearly more than she could bear. So, she took her burden to the Lord. The Bible paints a heart-wrenching scene. She went out near the door of the tabernacle in Shiloh and began to pray about it. She was so intense in her prayer that those who could see her thought she was drunk. Eli, the high priest, thought she was drunk because her mouth was moving but he couldn't hear the words she was intently praying to God. But she hadn't been drinking. As Eli sat at the doorpost watching her, she was quietly pouring out her heart to God and begging Him to give her a child. Not just a child, a son. Not just a son, a son she could dedicate to the service of the Lord. Those were not empty words. She meant them from the depths of her heart and God heard and answered her prayer because of what was in her heart. Listen to her as she is sobbing and in agony of spirit is pouring out her womanly heart.

1 Samuel 1:10-11 "And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head."

We'll get to all of that in a moment but the first thing I want you to see is Hannah's desire. She desperately wants a child. Hannah had an instinctive desire to be a mother. That is a natural thing that God placed within a woman's heart. It is nothing to apologize for or be ashamed of. It's perhaps the greatest and most influential role and work in all the world.

Psalms 127:3 "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward."

Children are a gift from God that He grants in His grace to a woman. It's not just the woman. In the very next psalm, the psalmist poetically says this:

Psalms 128:3-4 "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD."

Did you get that? Children are one of the ways that God blesses His faithful people. Children are not a burden; they are a blessing. They are to be desired, not dreaded. The attitude of God's people long ago is a far cry from the idea that many have about children today. There is something desperately wrong when babies and little children today are looked at and treated as anything less than a blessing from God. Whether they are aborted from their mother's wombs, abused, neglected, and mistreated when they're born into this world, unwanted...the fact is that children are endowments and sacred trusts from God, given to us to raise up for God, as we will see in the story of Hannah.

Please note that having and raising godly children has always been one of God's first and most primary means of preserving His truth and passing it down from one generation to the next. Maybe that's one of the reasons that Satan is waging such a war against the home today, trying to destroy the fabric and structure of it as the Bible sets it forth. It all begins in the home. If Christians today fail to raise up children to serve the Lord, we are failing in our mission no matter what else we may try to do.

Notice not only Hannah's desire to have a child, but her devotion. She had a sacred purpose for wanting to be a mother. She didn't want to be a mother just so she could experience the joys of motherhood although there is nothing wrong with that. One of life's great joys is to be a parent and experience all those great things. I'm sure that Hannah enjoyed the time that she had to raise her little boy once God gave him to her, but that's not what this is about. This was not a selfish prayer. She made a vow.

I Samuel 1:11 "Then she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head."

That last phrase refers to the Nazarite vow that people took back under that dispensation. The Nazarites were a group of people who were set apart for God in an unusual and extraordinary way. They reflected this in that they never cut their hair. Paul said much later that nature teaches us that *if a man has long hair, it is a shame to him, but a woman's long hair is a glory to her (I Corinthians 11:14-15)*. So, God's usual rule is that it's the other way around. It's a glory when a woman lets her hair grow, but a shame if a man does. But in this one case of the Nazarite vow, God made an exception. These men were clearly identified as Nazarites by the fact that they did not cut their hair. What Hannah is saying is that she wanted a holy child. She wanted to raise a servant of God. She is saying, *If You will give me this child by your grace, I will turn right around and give this child back to you in service*. And THAT she did. It is such a remarkable and powerful story.

God takes vows seriously. And Hannah took her vow seriously. She meant what she prayed and she followed through. For one thing, she named this little child Samuel. Names had meaning in Bible times. Today, we might name a child because we like the sound of the name. We might name a child after mom, dad, memaw, papaw, or great uncle so-and-so. But that wasn't the way it was in Bible times. Names had definitions and meanings. *Samuel* means *asked of the Lord*. Every time Hannah called that little boy's name, she was reminded that she had asked God of him and of the promise she had made to give him over to God's service.

What is your desire for your children, if you have children or desire to have children? What is the most important thing in all this world for your children to be, to do, or to know? You can pretty well answer that question by what you pray for concerning your children. Do you pray for health? For comfort and success in life? Nothing wrong with that. We want healthy children and we want our children to have good lives. But listen, if you or I bring a child into this world and don't teach them to know, love, and serve the Lord before anything else, we have failed as parents in the eyes of God. It doesn't matter how much money they make, how successful they become, how far they can throw a ball, or whatever things they may accomplish. If they don't know Jesus Christ and His salvation, if they're not part of His kingdom, it's all a waste. Hannah understood that. She dedicated that little boy to God even before he was conceived. Is that your attitude toward your children? Is that reflected in the priorities of your home?

I wish I had time to go through and read all of the story; it's such a beautiful and tender story. You can read it in **I Samuel 1-3**. But let me finish by pointing out not only Hannah's desire, not only her devotion, but also her dedication. Hannah followed through. In her case, it took a great step of faith to do so. You see, Hannah did something remarkable as soon as Samuel was weaned. In Bible times, that was a good bit later than today, and Samuel would've likely no longer been a baby, but a wide-eyed, impressionable, teachable little boy.

1 Samuel 1:24-28 “Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bulls, one ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh. And the child was young. Then they slaughtered a bull, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, “O my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood by you here, praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD.” So they worshiped the LORD there.”

As the story goes, if you can imagine this, she left him there in the keeping of the high priest to train him up in the service of God. She would come back to visit year by year and she would make a little cloak to bring to him when he was still a boy. What a wonderful, beautiful story the Bible tells about this woman and her relationship to this child that God graciously gave her. Her taking the child to Eli at the tabernacle and leaving him there was a very special circumstance. God doesn't ask you to drop your child off with the preacher to raise him. That's not the point. What I want to emphasize is that God DOES expect you to take your child to Shiloh.

Shiloh was several miles north of Jerusalem and it is where the tabernacle resided. This was before the temple was built. The people of God were required to make their pilgrimage there to sacrifice from year to year. Today, we don't have a tabernacle or temple as they did, but we DO have the church. OUR Shiloh is the church, the Christian life, the worship of God, spiritual activity within our lives. Just as that was the center of Elkanah and Hannah's home, it needs to be the center of our homes if we're to be parents like they were. If you want to raise children like Samuel, you need to have a home like Hannah's. A home like Hannah's is a home that revolves around the service and worship of God. Godly children who grow up to love and serve the Lord come from homes where that is taught, exemplified, and prioritized.

Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.”

That word *train* doesn't just mean *teach*. It doesn't just mean to set aside an hour of the day to sit your child down and lecture them on *do this and don't do that* and tell them a bunch of Bible stories. While there is a time and place to be teaching our children the truths of scripture, there is much more involved in the phrase *train up a child*. It doesn't merely mean *to tell them*. It means *to lead them*. You point them in the direction they need to go. You train them like you would train a climbing rose to follow a trellis in a particular way. You prune it, place it, and point it in the direction you want it to grow. It's the same with our children. You train them to be Christians—not merely by what you say to them, but by living the Christian life before them. By teaching them by example to love the church and to *seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33)*. Is that going on in your home? You take them to the assemblies of the church and make that first priority. By showing them the word of God applied to your life every day, in every circumstance.

Are Christ and His church the very heart and center of your home, or just maybe a small part of it? If it's not the center of your home, you are failing your children. I don't care what kind of home, clothes, food, education, or anything else we might provide for our children. The most important duty we have with our children as a sacred trust from God is to lead them to Jesus Christ. What made Hannah a good mother? Did you have a good mother? I suppose on this day that your heart is full of all kinds of memories of childhood. I hope you had a mother that you feel is worthy of your love and devotion. I hope you had a childhood that you can look back on with fondness and a home that was filled with love

and affection. Most people have mothers who were involved in their lives, who loved them, and who put their children first and cared for them—that's wonderful. What made them good mothers? Perhaps Hannah spent a lot of quality time with Samuel. In fact, I'm certain she did. But that's not necessarily what made her a good mother. I'm certain she doted over him and showed all kinds of motherly affection to him, but that's not what made her a good mother. Maybe she was a good cook. The Bible indicates that she was a seamstress. You may have wonderful memories of your mother, the meals she cooked, the clothes she made, the memories she provided, the time she was always there to meet you when you got off the school bus and all the times she kissed your bumps and bruises. All of that is wonderful, but it's not really what makes her a good mother.

What makes a woman a good mother is when she teaches and raises her children to know Christ and love and serve Him. If you have a mother like that, honor her and thank God for her. We need more mothers like Hannah today because we need more Samuels today. If you have children in your home now or you want to have children, may I encourage you to dedicate them to God right now. How do you do that? By beginning to put spiritual things first in your life. Take them to the assembly of the church. Show them how important their eternal souls are. Point them to Jesus. Maybe you need to learn more about Jesus yourself and get your own life on track. In so doing, you can lead your children to eternal life. I hope you'll take the example of Hannah seriously today and do just that.

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