

• *An unknown woman with a great part to play*

### 1. God has a habit of using our personal problems

• *Polygamy – a lapse but common in those times*

• *Polygamy – the consequences*

• *Tribulations – if we allow God to do so will carry forward God's kingdom*

### 2. What Hannah's troubles did for her was to drive her to pray

### 3. The opportunity to forgive.

### 4. A breakthrough came in her life when her will and God's will came together

The story of 1 and 2 Samuel begins by showing us how the personal problems of one individual can be something greatly used by God in the progress of his kingdom. Hannah was just one woman. One might ask what significance does one unknown woman have in the kingdom of God? Sometimes one person has a great part to play in what God is doing. That person may not be very famous or very important. He or she may be in the middle of some awful problem.

1. **God has a habit of using our personal problems.** Consider the first eight verses of 1 Samuel chapter 1. In some respects you would think Hannah might be quite happy. Her husband Elkanah came from a notable Levite family<sup>□1</sup>. His great-great-grandfather Zuph had the 'district of Zuph' named after him<sup>□2</sup>. Elkanah himself was gentle, considerate, a regular worshipper at Israel's centre of worship, Shiloh. As his polygamy reveals, he was a man of wealth.

But Hannah was unable to have children and lived in a culture that set a high value upon the number of children a man's wife had. Elkanah had turned to polygamy, a lapse from God's original intention but common - for those who could afford it - in Elkanah's day. A second wife had been taken in the hope of a child.

Polygamy either leads to strife or it involves the abandonment of close family life for the husband. In this case, Peninah, the second wife was exceptionally unpleasant. Her provocation was deliberate and persistent. Hannah could not take the strain. Her husband did not understand. God did not seem to be in a hurry to answer prayer.

But as we are about to discover, God greatly used this problem of hers. It is through tribulations that we come into a rich experience of the kingdom of God. In the world we shall have tribulations, but God will use them and - if we allow him to do so - will carry forward his kingdom through our very troubles.

2. **What Hannah's troubles did for her was to drive her to pray<sup>□1</sup>.** It is often easier for the people of God to pray when we are in bad trouble. It produces a kind of desperation in us. We give God more time. We are willing to come to terms with him. Trouble may lead us to pray with fervency, with energy, with determination, with persistency. Hannah was praying so fervently that Eli thought she was drunk. We ought to pray like this all the time, but when trouble comes along it often gives our praying a push in the right direction.

3. **Her troubles gave her the opportunity to forgive.** She had to forgive her husband for his tactlessness. She had to forgive Peninah for her perverse animosity. She had to forgive Eli for his false accusation. And she had to break through the feeling of being betrayed by God for his delayed help.

4. **A breakthrough came in her life when her will and God's will came together.** There came a point where she was ready to make a 'bargain' with God<sup>□1</sup>. 'God, give me a son, and I'll give him to you to be brought up as a full-time worker in your temple,' she prayed. God took her seriously. Actually that was precisely what he wanted. He needed a little boy as well! Because the leadership of Israel was so corrupt, what was needed was a young boy that God could reveal himself to and so start a new leadership in Israel altogether. When our will and God's will come together, things are likely to happen. The Holy Spirit was at work in leading Hannah to make this offer to God.

□1 1 Chr 6:16-26  
□2 9:5

□1 1:9-20

□1 1:11

## 5. Hannah's prayer answered

5. **Hannah's prayer was answered**<sup>□1</sup>. But notice that she found peace before the answer came<sup>□2</sup>! She was given the peace that passes all understanding simply by casting her care upon God, even though the answer had not yet come.

□1 1:19-28  
□2 1:18

## 6. Deeper and richer praise of God

6. When the breakthrough came **it led Hannah into deeper and richer praise of God**<sup>□1</sup>. Her psalm in 1 Samuel could have been a psalm that was already in existence. Or she may have written it herself. It certainly looks out to wider matters than her own concerns. She seems to have praised and worshipped God as energetically as she had put her requests to God before.

□1 2:1-10

• *Hannah glories in God*

She glories in God's character, his holiness<sup>□1</sup>, his uniqueness<sup>□1</sup>, his reliability<sup>□1</sup>, his knowledge<sup>□2</sup>, his justice<sup>□2</sup>.

□1 2:2  
□2 2:3

• *Applies these things to herself*

She applies everything she knows about God to herself. She finds joy in him<sup>□1</sup>, strength in him<sup>□2</sup>. She finds courage not to be intimidated, as perhaps she had been by Peninah. *'My mouth boasts over my enemies*<sup>□3</sup>. She is expecting similar deliverances in the future.

□1 2:1b  
□2 2:1c  
□3 2:1b

• *God rules the world*

She has come to see, through her experience of God's ways, that God rules the world. He rules over warriors and armies<sup>□1</sup>, over barren women<sup>□2</sup>, over life and death<sup>□3</sup>, over money<sup>□4</sup>. The very foundations of the world belong to the LORD<sup>□5</sup>. If God can bring justice in a dispute between her and Peninah, she knows that God can do the same thing at a world-wide level. *'Those who oppose the LORD will be shattered*<sup>□6</sup>.

□1 2:4  
□2 2:5  
□3 2:6  
□4 2:7-8  
□5 2:8b  
□6 2:10

• *Applies these things to her nation*

She applies everything she has learnt not only to herself but to her nation. She is expecting God to send a king to Israel, and knows that he too will be protected in the same way she has been helped and protected.

• *Through trials and tribulations we learn God's ways and discover his greatness*

So there are advantages in trials and tribulations. From them we learn God's ways and discover his greatness. In the end our knowledge of God is deepened. Amazingly, our troubles have a part to play in getting the will of God done. Hannah could not have known, at the beginning of her story, that her giving this little boy to serve at Shiloh would lead to a forward step in God's dealings with Israel. Samuel would be the king-maker who brought David to his position as model king for Israel. It all began with Hannah and her praying when in trouble.



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