

Hope During Seasons of Barrenness (1 Samuel 1:1-8)

Context:

Moses has already led the nation of Israel out of Egypt (mid 1400 BC). After receiving the Law from Mount Sinai and wandering 40 years in the wilderness, the nation of Israel is about to enter the Promised Land.

Under the leadership of Joshua, Israel enters the Promised Land, has many military victories, but fails to obey the LORD completely and drive out the inhabitants as commanded (Numbers 33:52).

After Joshua's death, the LORD establishes Judges who were to turn the hearts of the people back to the LORD (Judges 1:27, 29-31,33, 2:7-8, 10-12, 16-19, 8:34).

The events in the early portions of 1 Samuel transition the nation of Israel from a dark place of rebellion and sin to a renewed love of worship to the LORD. Three main characters will come to fruition in 1 Samuel: Samuel, Saul and David.

1. Hannah's Barrenness

- Children were crucial for the preservation and development of the family and society. Children were also necessary for heirship (especially males).
- In the ancient Near Eastern mindset, having children was understood to be a divine blessing (Psalm 127:3).
- Infertility, or barrenness, was understood to be the result of a divine curse (Job 15:34). Additionally, the Mosaic Law listed barrenness as a sign of God's curse for covenant-breaking (Deuteronomy 28:15-18).
- Barrenness in this culture would cause a woman to question the very state and reason for her existence; she was seen as cursed and culturally irrelevant.
- Barrenness is a theme in Scripture; Sarah (Genesis 12-23), Rebekah (Genesis 25), Rachel (Genesis 30), Samson's mother (Judges 13), and Elizabeth (Luke 1) were all barren.
- Hannah represents and symbolizes the nation of Israel; spiritual barrenness and poverty. Everyone did what was right in their own sight (Judges 17:6, 21:25).

2. Hannah's Rival

- Her name is Peninnah and is Elkanah's second wife. Peninnah is described in verse 6 as Hannah's rival. Peninnah has children while Hannah does not.
- Peninnah is a woman who on the outside appears to be religious. She worships regularly and participates in fellowship meals. However, underneath the surface, she has a loathsome heart that adds insult to injury.

A mature and godly Christian is able to rightfully rejoice in his own blessing while simultaneously provide heartfelt sympathy with those who seek the same blessing. Peninnah was not this kind of person. She displays a wicked and insensitive heart.

3. Hannah's Husband

- Elkanah was a "certain man" from the "hill country" (verse 1). This is hardly a description of a person who is important in the eyes of the culture.
- He worshipped regularly with his two wives and yearly went to Shiloh where the tabernacle was (Joshua 18:1).
- Elkanah loves Hannah, but Hannah is barren. He then marries a surrogate wife, Peninnah. While this was sinful, it was culturally tolerated.
- We learn from Elkanah that:
 - Polygamy is sin and creates unnecessary conflict within God's design for marriage.
 - Elkanah attempts to demonstrate his love towards Hannah by giving her a larger portion and reassuring her that she is married to him.
 - When your wife is upset, offering her more food and reminding her of how "great" you are as a husband is insensitive and untimely.
 - Often times, during seasons of difficulty, presence alone will offer the comfort that the sufferer so desperately desires.
 - Elkanah points Hannah to her misplacement of true joy; children and a spouse. Elkanah should have pointed her to the LORD.
 - While Elkanah had good intentions, his timing and verbiage was inappropriate.

4. Hannah's Godly Character

- Hannah is portrayed as the most reverent woman in the OT. No other woman in the OT is described as: specifically stated to pray, going to the house of the LORD, and making and fulfilling vows. Her prayer is the longest of all women and most men in the OT. She is a godly woman.
- The LORD closed her womb (v.6). The LORD, who gave the divine command to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28, 9:7), yet closed Hannah's womb. Hannah worshipped the One who closed her womb.
- The season of barrenness was a trial intended to bring Hannah to the place where the LORD wanted her. It was a season of sanctification.
- The God who shut the womb is the only one who can truly comfort (Hebrews 4:16).
- Tests and trials in life reveals not only your spiritual position, but also your condition. Trials test and build up character that God desires in his children.
- Hannah does not just mentally assert the sovereignty and goodness of God; she believes it with her whole heart, which is why she continually worshiped the LORD.

We learn that God's tendency is to make our inability his starting point. True power in God's kingdom is not found in the position one holds in society, but humble posture before a good and gracious God.