

Scene 3: Back Home At Ramah

1 Samuel 1:19-28

Worshipping the Lord

In verse 19 we see the family of Elkanah worshipping the Lord the next morning: "They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah." I expect that Hannah's worship that morning had a different tone! This year her journey back home was no doubt in a different spirit from the earlier journey from Ramah to Shiloh.

Remembered by the Lord (v. 19b)

What happened then? Hannah had prayed in verse 11, "If you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and *remember* me..." We now read: "And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her" (v. 19b).

Just as the Lord had "remembered" Noah in the days of the flood, Abraham when he destroyed Sodom, Rachel when she conceived Joseph, and his covenant with Abraham in the days of Moses (Genesis 8:1; 19:29; 30:22; Exodus 2:24; 6:5; cf. Numbers 10:9), so he "remembered" Hannah. Whenever God "remembered" his people, it led to his action on their behalf. We will not be mistaken if we expect that his remembering Hannah will involve his remembering his people Israel.

And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the LORD." (v. 20)

In Hebrew "Samuel" could mean – "Name of God" – "Heard of God" – or possibly -- "Asked for." About this lad we are going to hear very much more.

Scene 4: At Shiloh Again... (vv. 21-28)

There is one final scene in this story of Hannah. Scene 4 will take us back to Shiloh again.

Vow Remembered (vv. 21-23)

The time came around for Elkanah to make the annual journey to Shiloh. "The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow" (v. 21).

Hannah's vow had not been forgotten, but now we see that Elkanah also had a vow. We are told nothing specific about this vow, except that he went up with his family to fulfill it. However, Hannah did not go:

(v. 22) But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the LORD and dwell there forever."

Hannah would not go up to Shiloh until she was in a position to fulfill *her* vow. Elkanah was fully supportive: "Elkanah her husband said to her, 'Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him; only, may the LORD establish his word'" (v. 23).

What did Elkanah mean by "may the LORD establish his word"? We might have expected him to say, "May the Lord help *you* to keep *your* word." After all, it is Hannah's vow to the Lord that is under consideration here. What could Elkanah possibly mean by "*his* [the LORD's] word"?

There is no explicit "word" of the Lord in this particular narrative. However, God's "word" is in many ways the theme of the whole story of which 1 Samuel 1 is part. God's "word" is the expression of his purpose, particularly in his promises to Israel. That was "the good word that the LORD spoke to the house of Israel" (literal translation from Joshua 21:45; cf. 23:14, 15). When we hear Elkanah say, "May the LORD establish his word," we realize, if we have not realized it before, that the Lord's answer to Hannah's prayer is part of his greater purposes for his people. The Lord has answered Hannah's

prayer. May he go on to bring his purposes to fulfillment! Elkanah was a man of remarkable insight. Perhaps he spoke more profoundly than he knew.

There was then a period, perhaps two or three years, during which Hannah cared for her son: "So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him" (v. 23b).

A Vow Kept (vv. 24-28b)

When the time eventually came, Hannah took the young boy with her to Shiloh:

(24)²⁴ *Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull and one ephah of flour and a jug of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh, although the child was young.*

And so with a thank offering of generous proportions Hannah set off to keep her word. The young lad was brought to Shiloh.

(25-28)²⁵ *Then they slaughtered the bull, and brought the boy to Eli.* ²⁶ *She said, "Oh, my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the LORD.* ²⁷ *"For this boy I prayed, and the LORD has given me my petition which I asked of Him.* ²⁸ *"So I have also dedicated him to the LORD; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the LORD."*

Worship (v. 28c)

For the time being our story concludes with the boy Samuel worshipping the Lord at Shiloh.

(28c) *And he worshiped the LORD there.*

What, then, are we to make of 1 Samuel 1? If this ancient story is the Word of God, what should we learn from God here? There are a number of possibilities.

We might, for example, notice the character of the excellent Elkanah. He seems to be presented in very positive terms. He is not one of the Bible's better-known figures, but here we see this faithful, godly man and husband honoring God and loving his distressed wife in domestically difficult circumstances. We could do worse than reflect on Elkanah's example. He clearly provides a *good* example (see particularly vv. 3-5, 8, 21, 23).

However, the chapter is much more about Hannah than it is about Elkanah. We may well profit, then, from considering what Hannah did with her distress. Prayer was not for Hannah a formality. It was real. She cast her cares on the Lord, knowing that he cared for her. And indeed he did. Again we see in Hannah a clearly good example.

Nevertheless I believe that we would be quite right to feel a little unsatisfied with both of those lines of thought. Not that there is anything *wrong* with the observations made so far. This chapter does present good examples in the conduct of both Elkanah and Hannah, but that does not seem to be the central message of this chapter.

We must be very careful when we just take the human characters in a Biblical narrative as *examples*. Of course, there are times when that is exactly what they are, and even chiefly what they are. It would be wrong to deny *any* exemplary understanding of persons in the Bible. But here there is clearly a problem. Are we to conclude on the basis of 1 Samuel 1 that if you are sad because you are a woman who cannot have children (or perhaps sad because of any other disappointment in life) you should pray earnestly to the Lord and the disappointment will turn to joy because you will get what you long for? Is that the message of 1 Samuel 1? If not, why not?

The answer is obvious enough. There must have been many other childless women in Israel. It is reasonable to assume that many of those prayed sincerely for a child. It is equally reasonable to assume that many of those were still not given a child. In other words, we are told this story of

Hannah not because it is *typical* of every troubled person in Israel who prayed, but precisely because her story is *unusual*. Of all the troubled women in Israel, the Lord chose to grant the prayer of this one. The unusualness of Hannah's story, then, *limits* the sense in which it can be exemplary.

Why was the prayer of Hannah granted? Was it because she was so sincere in her praying? No. Was it because she was the *most* miserable of all childless women? Of course not. Was it because she made such an *extraordinary* vow? Certainly not.

You see, although it is right to see Hannah as an example for us *up to a point*, taken too far the exemplary approach might mislead us into thinking one of those ideas is Biblical.

First Samuel 1 is not primarily about Hannah, any more than it is primarily about Elkanah. It is mainly about God. First Samuel begins by showing us that God cared for Hannah. We will see, as this story unfolds, that his care for Hannah was his care for Israel. What he did for Hannah would turn out to be for Israel. Samuel would turn out to be, in their own ways, part of God's answer to Israel's leadership troubles.

First Samuel 1 points us to a most unexpected starting point for the answer that God is going to provide for the leadership crisis. Who would have looked twice at miserable, sobbing Hannah for the answer to Israel's crisis? We expect to find answers from the powerful. Hannah was not powerful. Her family were "nobodies." The point of her story, however, is that God cares.

Does God care? Yes, he cared about the leadership of his people Israel and gave Hannah a son. Yes, he cares about the leadership of the world and of us. Hannah's son will be surpassed by Mary's son. God's care for us all finds its fullest expression in Jesus Christ. If you belong to him you can learn to "cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

The God of Knowledge

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Do you believe in God? That may seem a strange question to pose to a reader of a commentary on 1 Samuel. Who would read a book like this except someone who takes God seriously and has an honest interest in his Word? And yet I ask the question with complete seriousness because those of us who do indeed "believe in God" very easily forget the astonishing difference such belief must make to our understanding of everything.

Too often to believe in God is treated as though it were simply one part of a person's outlook on life, even perhaps a quite minor part. Some people are conservative, some progressive; some are outgoing, some more introverted; some are religious, some not so. However, such a domestication of belief in God is profoundly misguided. To believe in the God of the Bible is to see the whole world and all of life in radically different terms from the person who does not hold this belief. The person for whom believing in God is a small thing, just a part of their complex of attitudes, with no more drastic consequences than possible church attendance (or reading a commentary on 1 Samuel!), does not believe in the God of whom the Bible speaks. Not really.

The person who believes (who actually does believe, not who just says he believes) in God (the God who is there, not just some *idea* of God) will not only understand things differently—such a person will live differently. Values will be different, as will ambitions, joys, sorrows, loves, hates, motivations, confidence, fears. Why and how this is so is the theme of 1 Samuel 2:1-10.

One area in which our belief in God must make a profound difference is our attitude to leadership. Does your belief in God make a difference regarding the kind of leaders you follow and the kind of leader you are? Does God substantially change the confidence you place in leaders and what you expect from leaders? These are difficult questions, but very important if believing in God is real.

In 1 Samuel 2:1 -10 we hear the wonderful prayer of Hannah. One of the things we are going to see in the narrative of 1 Samuel is that the writer is not always committed to recording events in strict chronological sequence. This prayer may have been prayed, as it at first appears, at Shiloh, at the time when Samuel was dedicated to the Lord's service under Eli's tutelage. It is also possible that it was prayed earlier than it appears in the story, perhaps at the time of Samuel's birth. It is not out of the question that it could have been uttered at some later time, perhaps after Hannah had given birth to more children.

The precise moment it was uttered matters little. What is clear is that the birth of Samuel, in answer to her earlier prayer in chapter 1, was the occasion and reason for this prayer. It is remarkable that this event should have inspired a prayer that looks so far beyond the circumstances that gave rise to it. By its end Hannah's prayer becomes a prophecy, with implications for the whole world and all of history!

The prayer has three parts: an introduction (which I have headed "The Incomparable God," vv. 1, 2), the body of the prayer ("The Transforming God," vv. 3-8), and a conclusion ("The Victorious God," vv. 9, 10).

The Incomparable God (vv. 1, 2)

The opening lines of Hannah's prayer immediately reveal that this woman could not be accused of superficiality in her faith in God. She speaks first of her joy and delight in God, and second of his utter incomparability.

Joy and Delight (v. 1)

1 Samuel 2:1 (ESV)

*¹ And Hannah prayed and said,
"My heart exults in the LORD;
my horn [strength] is exalted in the LORD.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in your salvation.*

The last time Hannah "prayed," things had been rather different. Then she had been "deeply distressed" and "wept bitterly," not only because of her childlessness, but because of the taunts of her rival, Peninnah (1 Samuel 1:10).

Hannah now spoke of the difference God had made to her "heart," her "strength," and her "mouth." The language is extreme for the very good reason that the impact that God had on her life was overwhelming. However, there was more to it than that.

Listen to what she said in these opening lines, and then consider why she spoke so extravagantly.

A little earlier Elkanah had asked Hannah, "Why is your heart sad?"—more literally, "bad." She had described herself as "a woman troubled in spirit." She had poured out her "soul" before the Lord (1 Samuel 1:8, 15). Hannah's "bad heart," troubled spirit, and distressed soul had now been transformed. "My heart exults in the LORD," she said.

In Biblical thought the heart is more than the seat of emotions. The heart is the center of the person. Thoughts and plans, will and decision, as well as deep emotions, come from the heart. In Hannah's case the Lord was now the focus of her heart's confident joy.

"My strength" is a modern English attempt to clarify a vivid Biblical animal metaphor, literally, "my horn."

"The idea seems to be that the animal's horn is its glory and power, held high, perhaps in triumph after goring an enemy into submission." While we might appreciate the translators' attempt to make this image's meaning clear for us, I am sure you will agree that something is lost! This woman who had previously prayed out of her "great anxiety and vexation" speaks very differently now. "My horn is raised high by the LORD," she said.

" *My mouth derides my enemies* "-- is another domestication of an even more severe Biblical image. The animal imagery of the previous line seems to continue, and Hannah literally says, "My mouth is wide against my enemies"—that is, like the triumphant animal ready to devour its prey!

On the one hand it is right to recognize that Hannah's graphic language is poetic, and we need to take this into account as we hear its violence. It *is* a metaphor. On the other hand we should appreciate that the metaphor is so forceful because Hannah understood her experience to have been very dramatic indeed. Why, we will see in a moment.

The reason for the exulting of Hannah's heart, the lifting of her "horn," and the wideness of her mouth is given in the last line of verse 1: "because I rejoice in your salvation."

Salvation is a very important word in the Bible because the Lord is a God who saves. It is unfortunate when the word becomes empty religious jargon.

As we listen to the strong language with which Hannah's prayer began, we may well wonder whether it is not all just a little overstated. We understand that she had been a childless wife. Now she had a son. She had been the object of cruel mockery. Now her rival could laugh at her no more. She had been bitterly distressed. Now she was filled with joy. And we understand that all this was God's doing. He had answered her prayer. Nonetheless, we wonder whether Peninnah's taunts warrant the language "my enemies" and whether Hannah's happy change of circumstances should really be called God's "salvation." Her language makes her sound rather more like a victorious army than a new mother!

The incongruity between Hannah's extreme language and what was, after all, a common enough (though wonderful) experience, the birth of a child, is an important key to this remarkable prayer.

In her earlier prayer, in chapter 1, we noted that she drew on the vocabulary of Israel's history. The same is true of this prayer. Hannah sounds like a victorious army because she was echoing the language of Israel on occasions of great deliverance by God. In particular she seems to express the same sentiments as Moses and the people of Israel after they were rescued from the Egyptians:

*I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.
The LORD is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him. (Exodus 15:1, 2)*

When Hannah had prayed for a child, she had used language that reminded us of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Hannah had cried out to the God who had "seen" the "affliction" of his people in Egypt, asking him to now "look on" her "affliction." The words of her prayer helped us to see that her suffering was, in a sense, a representation of Israel's suffering. We began to see that Hannah's story

stands at the beginning of 1 Samuel because there is a connection, yet to be played out, between Hannah's story and Israel's story.

In the same way her language as she praised the God who *did* look on her affliction helps us see that God's goodness to her was in a sense a representation of God's goodness to Israel. The birth of Samuel stands at the beginning of 1 Samuel because there is a connection, yet to be played out, between Samuel and the story of God's salvation of his people Israel.

Hannah may, of course, have spoken more profoundly than she fully understood. That is a common feature of Biblical history that we will see many times in 1 Samuel. However, as we now listen to her words we will find a growing realization that the birth of Samuel, the occasion for this prayer, was part of something far, far bigger. Hannah's prayer was surely divinely inspired. By the end of the prayer she will be speaking as a prophet.

No One Like Him (v. 2)

Hannah's exuberant faith in God was the same as the faith of Moses and Israel at the time of the exodus. At the core of that faith was an appreciation of his utter uniqueness:

*There is none holy like the LORD;
there is none besides you;
there is no rock like our God. (v. 2)*

After the exodus Moses and the people had sung:

*Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? (Exodus 15:11)*

Quite simply, those, like Hannah, who know the God of the exodus know that there is no one, no thing, no power—there is *nothing* to compare to the Lord.

Hannah makes this point in three lines, the second of which sums up the general truth, "there is none besides you." The first and the third lines make the slightly more particular points that the Lord is unique in holiness and in being a "rock." "Holy" speaks of God's perfection, with moral overtones, while "rock" speaks of the protection and security to be found in him.

This God cannot be set alongside other options that might be the focus of our hopes, our confidence, and our dreams. Nowhere will you find goodness as perfect as the holiness of the Lord; nowhere will you find safety as sure as our God provides. Hannah knew, as the Israelites who came out of Egypt knew, the stupidity of allowing *anything* to rival the Lord, this holy God, our rock. He is the incomparable God! There is no one besides him, no one like him!

Do you think you believe in God like Hannah believed in God?

The Transforming God (vv. 3-8)

This introduction is followed by the body of her prayer, in which we will see the radically different view she had of everything in the world because of the faith in God expressed in verses 1, 2.

Knowledge That Answers Arrogance (v. 3)

First mentioned is human arrogance:

*Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the LORD is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed. (v. 3)*

"A God of knowledge" is a God who knows. This is a wonderful description of God. God is not an abstract or religious *idea*. He is related to us, and to his whole creation, by knowledge. He *knows* all. There are no secrets from him; there are no mysteries to him; there is no unknown to him. There is no possibility of deceiving him (cf. Luke 16:15). Human pride and arrogance is a form of pretending. Because the Lord is a God who knows, it must *stop!*

The proud and the arrogant are those who deny in their attitudes and actions, but particularly in their speaking, the uniqueness of the Lord. Self-centeredness, self-confidence, self-sufficiency is what they express. Because the Lord is a God of knowledge, such proud talk must cease.

All human actions should be seen in the light of the fact that they are weighed by the God of knowledge (cf. Romans 2:16). Look at Peninnah's hateful cruelty. Weighed by the God of knowledge, its true character is seen. Look at the things you have done today. Can you see them weighed by the God of knowledge? Particularly consider the human abilities, achievements, triumphs, and successes that lead to pride and self-confidence. When they are weighed by the God of knowledge, the arrogant mouth is silenced.

Power That Turns the World Upside Down (vv. 4-8c)

In verses 4 to 8 Hannah catalogs a series of things that generate human pride and shows how different they look when the incomparable God of knowledge is taken into account.

1 Samuel 2:4-8 (NRSV)

⁴ The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble gird on strength.

⁵ Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.

The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.

⁶ The LORD kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

⁷ The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.

⁸ He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor.

For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's,
and on them he has set the world.

"The bows of the mighty are broken" (v. 4a) Perhaps she was thinking about the Egyptians again. What fearful warriors they were! Within a few pages in 1 Samuel the Philistines will appear. The people of Israel will have reason to tremble. Interestingly the "bows" of the Philistines will appear in the last chapter of 1 Samuel and will be indirectly responsible for Saul's death and a terrible defeat of the Israelites (see 31:3). We must not underestimate "the bows of the mighty." They are very powerful indeed and can do much damage.

However, Hannah saw "the bows of the mighty" in the light of the "God of knowledge," by whom actions are weighed. "The bows of the mighty are *broken*," she said. Shattered. Smashed. Like the Egyptian chariots sinking beneath the waves of the sea (Exodus 15:4). The Lord *demolishes* human power. Do you see human power in that light?

The other side of this reality is: "... but the feeble gird on strength" (v. 4b).

In due course this book will tell us of a young lad with a few pebbles in his shepherd's pouch—"feeble" is what he looked like—who will bring down a Philistine giant (see 17:40-51). If you had seen the two facing each other, if you had heard the arrogance that came from the Philistine's mouth, you would not have held out much hope for the boy. Unless, that is, you saw things as Hannah did and knew that there really is no rock like our God. With him strength does not depend on human power. "The feeble gird [bind] on strength."

Human power and human weakness look completely different if you believe in God as Hannah believed in God.

Turn from human power to human plenty: "Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread" (v. 5a).

Much later in the story of 1 Samuel we will meet a very rich man who feasted like a king but refused to give food and drink to some strangers who asked him (see 25:1-12). We will see that his full stomach did not save him! People who have plenty can seem as though they could never be in need. Unless, that is, you see them with eyes like Hannah's, knowing that actions are weighed by the God of knowledge.

On the other hand: "... but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger" (v. 5b).

In the story of the very rich man, those strangers who were hungry were provided for by God's providential care (1 Samuel 25:18-35). The satisfaction of human need does not depend finally on human resources. Human security cannot be measured by human prosperity. "There is no rock like our God" (v. 2).

Once again I wonder whether you are finding that you believe in God as Hannah did?

The catalog of reversals in Hannah's faithful perception of the world now turns to her recent experience: "The barren has borne seven..." (v. 5c).

I am not at all sure that Hannah had borne seven children yet, but there was no reason why she could not—not if you take into account the Lord.

On the other hand: "... but she who has many children is forlorn" (v. 5d).

Just as Hannah's misery at her barrenness was not unchangeable, so Peninnah's happiness at her many children was not secure. Life is not like that. God can reverse every human circumstance completely.

Hannah pressed the logic of this faith to the limit:

*The LORD kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up. (v. 6)*

Hannah's grasp of reality was extraordinary. We occasionally hear it said that the Old Testament had no concept of resurrection from the dead. Hannah did! The Lord changes life to death, and death to life. When we think of life and refuse to think of death, or when we think of death and ignore the God who raises the dead, our understanding is a distortion of the reality.

A little less dramatically, but just as radically Hannah asserted:

*The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low and he exalts. (v. 7)*

Poverty and riches are in his power, just as are fame and disgrace. God determines these things. They are not under our control at all. Nor are they under the control of others, or of social and economic forces. The government does not determine them, nor does the stock market.

Furthermore:

*He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor. (v. 8a-c)*

Hannah had a peculiar view of the world, don't you think? She was not describing the world as we ordinarily experience it, nor the world as it seems to our normal observations. She was describing how things appear, the possibilities that present themselves, when you know that "there is none holy like the LORD" (v. 2).

The book of 1 Samuel is going to tell of a remarkable sequence of events in which these possibilities were realized. It is an important part of the whole Bible that tells the full story of the God who really does make this difference to everything.

Before we look at the end of verse 8, which clinches this part of Hannah's prayer, let me ask you once again, do you see life as Hannah did? It is a searching question if we consider it honestly. What is your attitude to the various forms of human power? Do you see wealth as a means of security? Do you fear being weak or poor? Do you mind being unimportant? What do you think about life and death? Do you think that you have the power to hold on to life and avoid death? Most people seem to live as though they do.

There is a natural, understandable, defensible human answer to each of these questions. And there is an answer that comes from actually believing in the God of knowledge. As we listen to Hannah's prayer we must ask, where is the Lord, the God of knowledge, in our real thinking about life?

The Creator (v. 8d-e)

At the end of verse 8 two lines state simply why believing in God must so radically transform your attitude to everything:

*For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's,
and on them he has set the world. (v. 8d-e)*

In other words, the Lord is the Creator who established the world and sustains all existence. This world does not run along on principles that have some kind of independence from God. It all belongs to God and is utterly dependent on him in every way.

The Victorious God (vv. 9, 10)

We might describe the body of Hannah's prayer, verses 3-8, as a Biblical worldview. This is what the world looks like when your heart exults in the Lord and you rejoice in his salvation. But the Biblical worldview is not static, and Hannah worked out the marvelous logic of her prayer in three final points.

The Winning Side (v. 9)

The first concluding point is this:

*He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,
for not by might shall a man prevail. (v. 9)*

The winners in the end will not be the strong, the powerful, the wealthy, the famous, the popular, the successful. He who has most toys in the end will *not* win! The Lord will bring through those who belong to him, "his faithful ones."

Those who are not "his faithful ones" are lumped together and called in verse 9 "the wicked." It does not matter what they do or what they become; without the Lord who set the world on its pillars they cannot prevail. For human might will not be the last word.

First Samuel is an account of how that happened in an important part of the whole Bible's story.

The Losing Side (v. 10a-b)

The second concluding point is a warning:

*The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces;
against them he will thunder in heaven. (v. 10a, b)*

It is not wise to set yourself against the Lord. The story 1 Samuel tells demonstrates this, and it will help us to see that it is still so.

The King (v. 10c-e)

All this has been leading up to the climax of Hannah's prayer, which now clearly becomes a prophecy:

*The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king
and exalt the power of his anointed. (v. 10c-e)*

The first line, though remarkable, is not unexpected after what we have heard from Hannah. This God, who is the Creator of all things and who knows all things and by whom deeds are weighed, will certainly judge the ends of the earth. Hannah's prayer now sees beyond even the people of Israel to the whole world.

It is astonishing that Hannah should speak now of God's "*king*." At the time, of course, there was no king in Israel. It is true that occasionally in the past there had been indications that Israel would one day have a king (see Genesis 17:6, 16; 35:11; Exodus 19:6; Numbers 24:7; Deuteronomy 17:14-20). There was an occasion when kingship had been attempted in Israel, but it was an unmitigated disaster (see Judges 9). However, Hannah's reference to God's *king* is completely unexpected. There is little point in speculating what thought processes led to this weighty word coming at the climax of Hannah's prayer. The prayer itself points to the true source of her insight—the God of knowledge!

Not only did she speak of God's "king," she called that king his "anointed." The Hebrew word is *messiah*; translated into Greek it becomes *christos*. Hannah could not have known who the Lord's messiah-king was to be. It is possible (but only possible) that she had her own son, Samuel, in mind. We can speculate that she may have interpreted his extraordinary birth as a sign of future greatness in God's purposes.

However, her recorded words do not identify the king. They simply tell us that the Lord will give him strength and raise his "horn" (ESV, "power"). The last line of the prayer uses the precise vocabulary we noted in verse 1. The Lord who raised Hannah's "horn" will do the same for his anointed king!

The story of the book of 1 Samuel could be described as the extended answer to the question, who is the Lord's anointed king? Hannah's prayer raises that question, with the implication that the answer to Israel's leadership crisis will be found in him.