

"By faith . . ."

Hannah

Pat Wilson

THE IMMEASURABLE greatness of the Most High God is shown by the fact that nothing is too small for His attention. In this the standards of the world are turned upside down.

This is demonstrated very clearly in 1 Samuel, which opens with the story of Hannah, a woman unable to have a child, who was married to Elkanah, a Levite of Ramathaim-zophim. Elkanah had two wives. The other was called Peninnah, and at this time she already had a number of sons and daughters. Maybe Elkanah had taken Peninnah as a second wife because of Hannah's inability to conceive. Whatever the reason, it placed Hannah in an unenviable position. Not only was Hannah grieved by her own barrenness; she also had to put up with jibes and innuendoes from Peninnah: "And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb" (1:6).

It is possible that Elkanah was not aware of the animosity that existed between the two wives. People who indulge in such behaviour are usually pretty good at hiding it from others. The most interesting thing about this situation is the fact that it was the Lord Who shut up Hannah's womb. The importance of this can be seen in the fact that it is stated twice, once in verse 5 and again in verse 6, thereby making it emphatic. In cases in the Word of God where people had difficulty in conceiving there was always a reason, and that reason was an important part of the plan and purpose of God, because the time and conditions had to be right for the birth.

Year by year the small family group went up to the house of the Lord at Shiloh, as indicated in verse 3. It was at this time that the provocation from Peninnah became worse. It is likely that she dwelt on the point that God had blessed *her* with children, implying that Hannah had somehow incurred the displeasure of God: "when she [Hannah] went up to the house of the LORD, so she [Peninnah] provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat" (v. 7).

Hannah in her distress was driven to make a vow that, if God would give her a son, she would give him back to God as a Nazarite dedicated to

His service. If Hannah had had children in the normal way of things she would never have done this. This was why God had shut up her womb. Through the tribulation and faith of one woman the greatest man since Moses was born, who, like his predecessor, was given as a small child to the service of the Most High God. Samuel became the last and greatest of the judges and the first of the prophets.

Giving her child to God when he was so small was a very courageous act of faith, for it meant leaving him with Eli, who had already proved himself an indifferent father. We can only guess at the heartache and anguish which Hannah must have suffered when she fulfilled her vow. At the time she had no way of knowing that God would bless her with more children, as He did (2:21).

One of the things which makes the whole matter so outstanding is the fact that Hannah in her prayer called upon the Lord of hosts (1:11). This is the first time that this particular covenant name is used. There are ten covenant names altogether, and there is tremendous significance in the places of Scripture where they are first found. The Lord of hosts (Yahweh Zebaoth) is the most powerful of the names, for it describes God with all His heavenly army. The Lord of hosts was called into action by one frail woman. The greatest and most powerful heard the smallest and most vulnerable.

There is no adjective in the English language that can possibly describe how amazing that is; the standards of the world are indeed turned upside down. The waves of the sea repeat themselves without ever repeating themselves, and the same is true of those things written in God's book. This is clearly stated in Ecclesiastes 1:9: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun".

It is always wise to remember in these last days that God lives outside the parameters of time. He is eternal, He never changes. He is the same today. There is no one too small for His attention and there is no situation too humble for Him to deal with, for all things which concern us concern the Lord of hosts.