

The prayers of Hannah and Mary

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WHAT WONDERFUL examples of godliness and humility Hannah and Mary are for us! And their prayers exhibit their characters. As Jesus said: “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things” (Mt. 12:34,35).

Hannah prays for a child

Hannah brought forth good things; her adversary Peninnah brought forth evil, for she taunted Hannah for her childlessness, not once, but repeatedly, as we read in 1 Samuel 1:6,7: “And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb . . . when she [Hannah] went up to the house of the LORD, so she [Peninnah] provoked her; therefore she [Hannah] wept, and did not eat”.

So we picture the godly Levite, Elkanah, with his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. We are told that he loved Hannah, and one speculates that he had taken a second wife to bear him children, as Hannah was barren. This is reminiscent of Sarah and Hagar: “when [Hagar] saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes” (Gen. 16:4). Thus there was discord in Elkanah’s family as there was in Abraham’s.

Elkanah could not understand Hannah’s distress and longing. “Am not I better to thee than ten sons?”, he asked (1 Sam. 1:8). So we read that Hannah, in the bitterness of her soul, poured out her troubles unto the Lord: “if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget Thine handmaid, but wilt give unto Thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head” (v. 11). Did she recall the miraculous promise of the birth of a Nazarite to another barren woman, the wife of Manoah, a son who was to begin the deliverance of Israel out of the hand of the Philistines (Judg. 13:5)? Hannah’s son was to slay the enemy of God’s people, Agag.

When Hannah had made her petition to her God, she went her way, away from Eli who had

blessed her, “and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad” (1 Sam. 1:18). How lovely and how fitting! Do we do the same? She did not reproach her Lord, nor reciprocate her adversary’s evil; she poured out her heart and then was relieved of the burden. She went away with an unburdened heart. What a good example for us to follow! Jesus said: “Ask, and it shall be given you” (Mt. 7:7); and James adds: “ask in faith, nothing wavering” (Jas. 1:6). Hannah showed that faith. “The LORD looketh on the heart”, God was to say to her son (1 Sam. 16:7).

As we know, Hannah’s petition was graciously answered by the Lord in the birth of a son, Samuel (‘God had heard’), as she named him. When the next yearly feast came round, Elkanah agreed that she need not accompany the family, but could stay until she had weaned her son. How interesting is his next comment: “only the LORD establish His word” (1:23)! Was he alluding to the promises to Abraham, through Isaac, or, going further back to Eden, to the “seed of the woman” who would bruise sin in the head? King David used similar words when he thanked God for His covenant with him: “And now, O LORD God, the word that Thou hast spoken concerning Thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as Thou hast said” (2 Sam. 7:25).

Hannah’s prayer of thanksgiving and praise

When Hannah prays her prayer of thanksgiving and praise to the Giver of all good things, she rejoices in God’s “salvation” (1 Sam. 2:1), the word from which ‘Joshua’ and ‘Jesus’ come. Was her hope that she might be the woman to bear the seed?

We see in her prayer Hannah’s knowledge of Scripture. She says in verse 3: “the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed”. Hannah rejoices in the Lord, she is exalted in Him and she feels avenged over her enemy. “There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside Thee: neither is there any rock like our God”, she says (v. 2). “Rock” here is *tsur*, used of the rock upon which Yahweh stood, which Moses struck and from which

Table 1 The Lord’s Prayer, Hannah’s prayer and Mary’s prayer		
The Lord’s Prayer Matthew 6:9-13	Hannah’s prayer 1 Samuel 2:1-10	Mary’s prayer Luke 1:46-55
Hallowed be Thy name (v. 9)	There is none holy as the LORD (v. 2)	My soul doth magnify the Lord . . . holy is His name (vv. 46,49)
Thy kingdom come (v. 10)	He raiseth up the poor . . . to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory (v. 8)	as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever (v. 55)
Thy will be done (v. 10)	the LORD establish His word (1:23)	
Give us this day our daily bread (v. 11)	they that were hungry ceased (v. 5)	He hath filled the hungry with good things (v. 53)
forgive . . . as we forgive (v. 12)	I rejoice in Thy salvation (v. 1)	His mercy is on them that fear Him (v. 50)
lead us not into temptation (v. 13)	He will keep the feet of His saints (v. 9)	
Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory (v. 13)	the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and He shall give strength unto His king (v. 10)	

flowed out living waters (Ex. 17:6), the rock to which Jesus alluded in his parable of the houses built on rock or sand (Mt. 7:24-27).

Hannah’s prayer is a prayer of joy, thanksgiving and the acknowledgement of God’s greatness. The proud and arrogant are silenced. “The bows of the mighty men are broken”, but “they that stumbled”, as she had, “are girded with strength” (v. 4).

Hannah believed in the resurrection of the dead, as verse 6 shows. How did she know this without the benefit of knowing that Elijah and Elisha would later raise the dead? Did she understand that Abraham had accounted that “God was able to raise [Isaac] up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure” (Heb. 11:19)?

“They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble” (1 Sam. 2:5). Hannah was to bear three sons and two daughters (v. 21). Was Jesus thinking of verse 8 when he spoke the parable of Lazarus and the rich man: “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dung-

hill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory”?

Clearly Hannah believed in the coming Kingdom of God upon the earth: “for the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S, and He hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of His saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail” (vv. 8,9). There will be a judgement to come: “The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall He thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and He shall give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed” (v. 10).

Finally on Hannah’s prayer, it is interesting to note the similarities to the Lord’s prayer, as shown in [Table 1](#) above.

In Hannah we see a wonderful woman of faith, many of whose words were used in subsequent psalms. She kept her vow (1 Sam. 1:11), as we must keep ours: “That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform” (Deut. 23:23). She prayed on the lines of the Lord’s prayer, to be later revealed. She was a godly woman who knew the acceptable approach to the Lord God—with reverence, with thanksgiving and in faith.

Mary's prayer Luke 1		Hannah's prayer 1 Samuel 2	
v. 46	My soul doth magnify the Lord	v. 1	My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD
v. 47	rejoiced in God my saviour	v. 1	I rejoice in Thy salvation
v. 48	His handmaiden	1:11	handmaid
v. 49	He . . . is mighty . . . and holy	v. 2	none holy as the LORD
v. 51	scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts	v. 3	talk no more proudly . . . [Jah] is a God of knowledge
v. 52	He hath put down the mighty	v. 7	He bringeth low, and lifteth up
v. 53	filled the hungry . . . the rich . . . sent empty away	v. 5	full . . . hired . . . for bread . . . hungry ceased

Mary's prayer

Mary was a humble girl, living in Nazareth, Galilee, a town not highly esteemed in Israel. Nathaniel asks disparagingly: "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (Jno. 1:46); and Nicodemus is later scorned by the Jews for defending Jesus, with the words: "Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (7:52).

Perhaps Mary was thinking about her forthcoming marriage to her builder fiancé, when suddenly the Angel Gabriel appeared to her, and said: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (Lk. 1:28). Mary was perplexed, and wondered what this greeting could mean. She had heard of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, who was described as "Blessed above women" (Judg. 5:24). Jael had slain the enemy by hammering a tent peg through his head; was she to perform a similar act?

The angel calmed Mary's fears and announced that she was to give birth to the long-awaited saviour first promised in Eden. She was to name the son Jesus, Saviour; he was to be the Son of God and reign over the house of Jacob for ever; of his Kingdom there would be no end. Mary wondered how this could be, as she was not yet married. What an indictment this righteous simplicity is on our generation! Gabriel explained that the conception would be by the power of the Highest, and then gave a sign of the truth of

these things; her relative, the aged Elisabeth, was six months pregnant.

Surely Mary was overwhelmed and afraid about her situation. What would Joseph think? What would the neighbours say? But she trusted God's word implicitly: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Lk. 1:38). What faith! What trust! What a truly remarkable example for us to follow! Elisabeth recognised Mary's faith: "blessed is she that believed"; and, filled with the Holy Spirit, repeated the remarkable words of the angel: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (vv. 45,42).

Then followed Mary's exultant prayer. She knew the Psalms well, for almost everything she says is to be found in the Book of Psalms, as the margin clearly indicates. There are also numerous allusions to Hannah's prayer in Mary's words, as shown in [Table 2](#).

Mary magnified the Lord, as King David did in his prayer of thanksgiving when he was promised his greater Son: "let Thy name be magnified" (2 Sam. 7:26). Like Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1) she rejoiced in God her saviour, and thought of herself as the humble handmaiden of God. We must approach God in the same spirit of humility, recognising that He is "the high and lofty One That inhabiteth eternity" (Isa. 57:15); He is in heaven, we are upon earth.

Mary acknowledges that "He That is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His

name” (Lk. 1:49). We must thank God for over-seeing our lives and doing things for our good. She acknowledges that God’s “mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation” (v. 50). In God’s manifestation of His glory, Moses was told that He is merciful to those who “love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations” (Deut. 7:9).

Remembering Hannah and Peninnah, Mary said: “He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts . . . exalted them of low degree . . . filled the hungry with good things”

(Lk. 1:51-53). We must remember not to take revenge upon our adversaries, but leave them to God.

Mary ended her prayer by recalling the promises made “to Abraham, and to his seed for ever” (v. 55), and we are encompassed by these words, as Paul makes clear in Galatians 3:29: “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise”. May our prayers be similarly humble and joyful approaches to our heavenly Father, using His inspired words as our example.

The prayers of Hezekiah

Jeremy Thomas

IT IS HIGHLY exceptional to find three records of anyone’s life in Scripture, yet this is precisely what we have in the case of Hezekiah. This “threefold cord” is preserved in the chronological accounts, 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, and in the historical section of Isaiah, a contemporary of Hezekiah (we shall see the importance of their relationship when prayer was needed). We are used to comparing parallel passages in Scripture to build up a more complete picture than a single account brings out, and so it is with Hezekiah’s prayers; each one reveals unique details of his prayer life, so only by acquainting ourselves with them all shall we have anything like a full appreciation of the things Hezekiah prayed about.

Hezekiah was a purposeful man; he reopened the doors of the temple at the very beginning of his reign (2 Chron. 29:3), perhaps even on the day of his accession (v. 17), and cleansing the Lord’s house in fact proved to be only a precursor to unprecedented Passover celebrations. Such action would have been inconceivable during the reign of Hezekiah’s father, the idolatrous King Ahaz, who had burnt his own son (Hezekiah’s brother) as an offering to pagan gods, and reorganised temple furnishings to accommodate Syrian religious rites within Judah’s. Eventually he gave up even this compromise, closing down the temple for the rest of his reign (28:24). There was no possibility of Hezekiah implementing reforms as heir apparent.

Yet the appalling situation he inherited was tackled in the opening days of his reign, involving numerous priests and Levites. Such a thing

could never have been accomplished without forethought and preparation, and Hezekiah must long have intended to see the worship of the Lord reinstated at the first opportunity. Though none of his prayers from before his accession are preserved for us, it is difficult to imagine Hezekiah setting about this remarkable enterprise without having sought God’s blessing and help; after all, his desire to emulate his ancestor David, the man after God’s own heart, is plain (29:25-30).

“But Hezekiah prayed for them”

2 Chronicles contains easily the most information about Hezekiah’s reforms, and here is the first of the three occasions on which Scripture tells us that he prayed. After the burnt offering for the nation, “the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshipped” (29:29).

Such had been the urgency of this Passover, many worshippers had not purified themselves, and the record does not disguise the fact that they “did . . . eat the passover otherwise than it was written” (v. 18). Thus:

- Passover was kept in the wrong month (v. 15)¹
- the priests and Levites were inadequately prepared (v. 15)

1. Strictly, Numbers 9:9-13 allowed for Passover observance in the second month only for those unclean through contact with the dead, or for those travelling.