**Hannah Keeps Her Promise**

1 Samuel 1:1-28

Key verse 1:27-28

*[27] I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. [28] So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.” And he worshiped the Lord there.*

In today’s passage, we see how Hannah kept the vow she made to God. Making a promise like Hannah made takes courage and faith, but keeping that vow takes more. When the cost of keeping our promises to God is high, we can find many ways to hold back. For Hannah, the cost of keeping her promise to God was higher than any of us is likely to experience, but she did not waver. Ultimately, because of Hannah’s faithfulness to keep her promise to God, her son, Samuel, was used by God powerfully. Clearly, then, we can learn a lot from Hannah.

Look at verses 21-23:

21 When the man Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord and to fulfill his vow, 22 Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, “After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the Lord, and he will live there always.” 23 “Do what seems best to you,” Elkanah her husband told her. “Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the Lord make good his word.” So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

The first thing we see about Hannah is her **absolute attitude**. After Hannah gave birth to Samuel, she did not go with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord. Most likely, the reason she did this was because she only wanted to bring Samuel to the priests when Samuel was ready to stay there. Of course, she could have gone with her baby to offer sacrifices and come back home again, but Hannah didn’t think that it was right. **She didn’t want to have even a hint of giving and taking back again.** Once she brought the boy to the priests to serve God, she would leave him there for good. She never had the experience of “almost” giving her son to God, and little Samuel never had the experience of going to the priests and then going back home with his mom. From Hannah we can learn not to flirt with fulfilling our promises to God.

Second, notice Hannah’s **determination** in this matter. She didn’t ask her husband for his opinion, and she wasn’t vague in what she had in mind. She said, “After the boy is weaned, **I will take him** and present him before the Lord, and **he will live there** always.” She had made up her mind about what she would do and when she would do it. This shows that her mind was firmly made and determined. She didn’t give herself any wiggle room in this matter.

Sometimes we like to give ourselves a lot of wiggle room. “I’ll serve God,” could be a good vow if it is fulfilled, but notice that it leaves out at least two important details: when and how. Until we decide to serve God in a specific way at a specific time, we cannot fulfill this promise.

A third thing we can think about is the **timing**. Why was Hannah going to wait until the boy was weaned? When a child is weaned, they no longer need their mother’s milk to survive. It is the youngest age at which a child can safely be separated from his mother. She set this time because she wanted to fulfill her vow as soon as reasonably possible. Again, this shows her absolute attitude and determination. S**he DIDN’T say,** “I’ll bring him to the Lord **when the time is right.”** When would that be? Would he be ready as a toddler? Maybe that would seem to be too young; after all, the priests were probably too busy to take care of a toddler. After graduating kindergarten, then? But that is still pretty young. Maybe after becoming a teenager? But the teenage years are a difficult time for such a big change. Wouldn’t it be better to wait until Samuel graduates from college? He could get a Biblical studies degree and then go to serve God. The fact is that when we are vague about timing, there are always reasons to wait just a little bit longer. But Hannah was not vague about when she would bring her son--she would do it at the earliest possible time; when little Samuel was weaned.

Look at verse 24:

24 After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh.

Here, we see that Hannah did exactly what she said she would do. This is important. It’s easy to say we will do something in the future, but when the time comes, it may be more difficult to follow through than we had imagined.

This was especially true for Hannah. She had just weaned little Samuel. She had gone through all the difficulties of raising him, including having to wake up at 2:30 a.m. to feed him, changing many diapers, and much more. She had also had time to develop a deep motherly bond for little Samuel. Every day, the baby grew more precious and lovely in his mother’s eyes. Little Samuel brought her joy when he smiled at her and when he held her finger. Little Samuel always looked for her and became distressed when his mother was out of sight. Even strangers who saw little Samuel smiled because he was so cute and lovely. For Hannah, the practical reality of being separated from her son must have been far more painful and difficult than she could have imagined when she first made the vow. And she knew that little Samuel would not understand at first why she was leaving him. He would cry and cry for his mother until his tears would no longer come out. Indeed, making a promise is not the hard part; keeping it is.

Now that the time came, how could Hannah give up her only son, the son she had asked God for out of the agony of her heart? Her only son whom she loved more than herself; her son whom she would lay down her life for?

At that moment, she could have found a million reasons to hold onto Samuel. She could have reasoned that reasoned that God had given her a son because He wanted her to have a son. It wouldn’t make sense, then, to give up her son. Or, she could have pleaded with God to let her keep her son. She could have said to herself, “Samuel is so young--too young; I’ll give him to God next year when Samuel’s ready.” But she didn’t do any of these things. She kept her promise to God.

Notice, also, the attitude she had in keeping her decision. Verse 24 says that she brought with her, “a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine.” The offering she brought shows that she never thought she was doing a favor for God or something special for God. This was the offering that people usually brought to restore their relationship with God and to have fellowship with God. If She could have thought to herself, “I’m bringing my only son to God, what more could I bring?” But she didn’t do that. She brought along a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine. These offerings show her attitude was humble before God. She didn’t substitute her son for any duty she had to God. It’s easy for us to think we are doing something special when we keep our vows to God and give up something precious. When we have this attitude, we may end up worse than we were before we made the offering if we think that we are doing something special for God.

Look at verses 25-28:

25 When they had slaughtered the bull, they brought the boy to Eli, 26 and she said to him, “As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. 27 I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. 28 So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.” And he worshiped the Lord there.

In these verses, we see that the core for Hannah’s actions was her faith in God: she remembered what God had done for her. She said to Eli, “I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord.” She didn’t say, “I made a promise to the Lord.” I think the difference is important. If we remember the promise we made to God but forget why we made the promise in the first place, we may not be able to keep the promise. It’s easy to forget why we make our promises. When we are poor and suffering, we may cry out to God for help; but then after becoming wealthy and comfortable, we forget how it was before. When we are lost in sin, we cry out to God; but later, when God has straightened out our lives and blessed us, we no longer feel the urgency and thankfulness we once felt. We may remember our promises to God but forget why we made them in the first place. Hannah did not do this. She remembered clearly the day she stood praying to the Lord out of the agony of her soul. She remembered how much God had done for her. Because she remembered this, she was deeply thankful to God and she was determined to keep her promise to God.

By remembering what God had done for her, she was also able to keep her promise in the long term. She said to Eli, “For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.” She wouldn’t be coming back a year or two later saying, “I changed my mind.”

If a person offers their life to God, saying, “Lord, I will live my life to serve you,” they should keep that promise for as long as they live. But after many years, it may be hard to remember and feel the same sense of determination and commitment that they had at first. After a long time, it can be easy to keep the outward form of a servant of God without having the deep conviction of heart that we had at first. Like Hannah, we need to remember the day we prayed to God and how we were and what things were like. We need to remember what God has done for us and refresh our commitment to the Lord.