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A Strange Way to Start Again

I Samuel 1

Intro: I Sam = book of transition. Israel moves from the era of the Judges, a time that marks her *failures* “in the land” – failure 2 establish the national life that **YHWH** wanted 4 them – 2 the time of kings & prophets in. Central 2 this difficult transition was Samuel. The Bible refers 2 Samuel as both the *last* of the *Judges* & the *1st* of the *Prophets*. Not that there weren’t prophets b/4 him, but Samuel is considered the *1st* of the order of the Prophets (*official*). He’s a significant figure in Israel’s history: he ends the period of Judges; heads the order of the prophets; establishes the *1st* educational movement in Israel; places Israel’s *1st* king on the throne (**Saul**) & anoints Israel’s greatest king (**David**). Samuel was a remarkable man, but as we will see today, this was b/c he had a remarkable mother named Hannah.

Now, we must realize that the *1st* few chapters actually takes place during the time of the Judges, when there was no king in Israel & every man did what was right in his own eyes. This is the environment that Samuel’s parents live in, that he arrives in. It was only some 10 yrs b/4 the events of ch1 that the **Angel of the Lord** had appeared 2 the wife of Manoah & predicted the birth of their son Samson. No doubt, word of the circumstances of Samson’s birth had come 2 Hannah’s ears b/c she makes reference 2 them as she pleads 2 the Lord 4 a child of her own. While Samuel is a young boy (10) serving in the tabernacle w/ Eli, Samson’s exploits against the Philistines will begin. It’s interesting that while the births of these 2 men are similar & their lives virtually concurrent, the results are so drastically different!

The key characters: Samuel, Saul & David; secondary: Elkanah, Hannah, Eli, Penninah, etc; but the main character is **YHWH**. In the *1st* 3 chapters, He’s mentioned **60Xs!** While all the drama’s going on in the foreground, God is the main player, invisibly working behind the scenes, His work clearly manifested in the physical world. We will see it plainly but the *virtue* of the other characters in this account is revealed in their ability 2 trust (**see by faith**) that God’s hand is at work not only in their own lives but in the life of the nation of Israel as a whole. God is about 2 change the history of a nation & the method of His working is critical 4 us 2 see b/c it’s how He still works in our lives today.

1- Elkanah- identified as an Ephraimite, not b/c he’s of the tribe of Ephraim but b/c he lives in the territory of Ephraim. If you compare this genealogy w/ **I Chron 6** you discover that he’s a Levite. Levites didn’t have their own inheritance of land, they lived thru-out Israel. He’s seen as a decent, respectable man in this account but he does have 1 failing:

2- 2 wives- this never works! Polygamy was a fact of life in the ancient world but the Bible never shows it in a favorable light: strife & conflict always mark polygamous families in Scripture. God never endorsed it but He tolerated it probably b/c the act came w/ its own built in punishment. Anywhere there’s more than 1 wife, there’s no real peace in the household. Tho Jewish law didn’t prohibit polygamy, God’s original plan was for 1 man 2/b married to 1 woman for 1 lifetime. Polygamy’s illegal now but if they overturn that, there are still laws against **trapping dumb animals!**

no children- a clue as 2 why he married twice. He must’ve married Hannah *1st* 4 love (vs5) but when she proved barren, he married Penninah 2 have a family. 4 a man in that culture, having descendents was a critical issue, even the Law said it was a necessity 4 carrying on a man’s name in Israel. So, here’s Elkanah’s dilemma: God said I need 2 have kids but my wife can’t have kids – what 2 do? Option 1 – marry another woman who isn’t barren! Is that the only option? No! God never expects us 2 break 1 spiritual principle in order 2 fulfill another, that’s ridiculous! But, what’s he supposed 2 do? Well as a Levite, a man of God, he could’ve tried petitioning **YHWH** about it, waiting on the Lord & trusting Him 2 work out His own plan 4 Elkanah’s & Hannah’s life. That’s what he *should’ve* done but that’s not what he did. It’s a good thing that that’s what Hannah ends up doing or this would be a very short book.

But, lest we judge him too harshly, how often are we faced w/ a similar decision & opt 4 the easy way out? “**God, I know You say I’m supposed 2 do this 1 thing but I can’t right now b/c I have 2 do this other thing that You say I’m responsible 4.**” Does that make sense? Does God allow difficulties into our lives that require us 2 decide whether we are going 2 obey Him or not? You bet He does! Does He expect us 2 violate 1 spiritual principle in order 2 uphold another? Never! When faced w/ an impossible decision, God expects us 2 pray about it & let Him work it out in His own time. I fear that, 2 often, we play fast & lose w/ scriptural principal out of expediency more than necessity & just like Elkanah, it is always ultimately 2 our own spiritual detriment & the spiritual detriment of those closest 2 us.

3- yearly- As a Levite, Elkanah would need 2 go 2 Shiloh at times 2 serve in the tabernacle but this appears 2/b a voluntary trip 4 worship & sacrifice. Remember, this was still the time of the Judges & paganism & immorality was rampant in Israel. In fact, we’re going 2 see that the sons of Eli, priests of the Lord, were horrible wretches. But, despite their despicable behavior, it didn’t prevent or discourage Elkanah from going 2 Shiloh 2 worship & sacrifice.

4-5- closed- In Israel, barrenness was considered a stigma; people believed something was wrong w/ you, that God was punishing you. She carried this around & it ate at her constantly. No doubt she spent a lot of time agonizing over this personally & w/ the Lord. As painful as this seems, we’re going 2 see that Hannah’s faith is actually formed in the fire of this affliction. But b/4 that can happen, she spends much time b/4 the Lord, grinding this out. “**Lord, are you angry w/ me? Have I displeased You? Everyone looks at me like I have 2 heads! Lord, I love You & serve You but why is this happening?**” We can assume this only b/c we’ve all been in a similar position of utter helplessness.

Barrenness was at the core of her heartache, being w/o a child 2 hold & call her own. Add 2 that the stigma (being looked down on by society) & the fact that Penninah had children = problem wasn't w/ Elkanah but w/ her. In reality, the "problem" was actually God's design. He closed her womb 4 a very specific reason: b/c her 1st son is going 2 change the course of a nation, he'll institute the Davidic dynasty, he'll make way 4 Messiah 2 come into the world.

6-7- rival- if you have 2 wives, this is how it is! Penninah, knowing that her husband favored Hannah, took special delight in needling her about it. Her whole purpose was 2 make Hannah miserable & she did! Every year's the same thing- Elkanah gave Hannah a double portion & when no1's looking, Penninah gave her the business 4 being barren! Now, being childless & bearing the stigma was 1 thing but having it rubbed in her face was intolerable! This was supposed 2/b a time of feasting & rejoicing but Hannah was so upset & she wept so much that she couldn't even eat. On top of all these problems, Hannah suffered from another real problem – her husband that didn't understand her...

8- why...weep? He doesn't get it (typical)! She's crying & not eating & he's got the nerve 2 ask her why! Bad move; he's clueless! "**Why? You never listen 2 me, you just don't understand!**" Hannah doesn't need logic at this moment, she needs sympathy – Elkanah just hasn't broken the code yet (female code). This is completely the wrong thing 2 say but it gets worse: "**Why aren't you eating?**" (b/c a man believes there's nothing so bad in life that BBQ can't fix). "**Why's your heart grieved?**" he just keeps digging that hole. Then the coup-de-gras, "**Am I not better...**" Literally, "**Why are you crying? You got me baby!**" No woman wants 2 hear this! At least he's just like the rest of us guys so there's some comfort in that. Clearly ladies, if you've ever had dealings w/ any man in any way, you'll notice a pattern. All joking aside, there's something important here that you ladies need 2 understand: God never gave you a husband 2 meet the **deepest** needs of your life b/c that job is reserved 4 the Lord Jesus Christ. There are certain things that God wants you ladies 2 pour out your hearts & souls 2 Him about. There are certain answers, certain blessings that only the Lord can bestow upon you & your husbands will never be able 2 do that, never. The woman at the well had 5 husbands & she was still miserable. Jesus told her, "**You're drinking from the wrong well.**" If she would just come 2 Him, He could meet the deepest needs of her life. Elkanah didn't get it – "Eating is fun & you got me!"

9-10- bitterness- note, Hannah wasn't bitter at the Lord, it was just the condition of her soul: bitter, worn out, helpless & powerless but not w/o hope! Tho in pain, she took her bitter soul 2 the only 1 Who could help. She didn't turn against God; on the contrary, she turned 2 God. She offered up a prayer & she made a solemn promise.

11- Host- appears 281Xs in Bible, 1st time in **vs3**, 1st time spoken is right here in Hannah's prayer. Phrase is used in several ways: Lord of - Israel's armies; of stars & planets; of the armies of innumerable angels. The idea is that **YHWH** is Lord over multiples of multiples of innumerable beings but yet, the picture we have here is that He is also a God who stoops down 2 listen 2 a single broken heart! 2 things we know about God: He is the Lord of Hosts & He does not change & today, w/ all the bad going on in the world, He still stoops down 2 listen 2 1 individual life, 1 broken heart, 1 fervent payer. Do you realize that as His children, we are able 2 have a private conference w/ the Lord of Hosts any time we want 2 & any time we need 2. Problem is we need 2 more often than we want 2.

maidservant- 3Xs she calls herself this, servant of the Lord who has refused 2 open her womb (her greatest grief) & yet, 3Xs she says, "Lord I serve you" look upon me in my affliction. She's not pointing the finger at Him, she's pleading w/ Him – her faith has been refined in this fire year after year & she's finally beginning 2 connect the dots. It could be that she's beginning 2 realize that there are far more important things 2/b considered than her happiness b/c in the middle of her prayer, she makes a promise: she promises that if **YHWH** will give her a son, she will give him back 2 the Lord. This is a remarkable vow! All Levites belong 2 the Lord but they didn't begin 2 serve until they were 25-30 yrs old. Hannah promises 2 give her son 2 the Lord 4 his entire life. Now, is she trying 2 bargain w/ God? I doubt it. Having a child would remove her stigma & stop Penninah's pestering but giving up that child is another story! It would probably be easier 2 go on being barren than 2 have a child for 3 yrs & then give him up forever!

But now, right here, Hannah's desire & God's plan have finally come into harmony. Hannah's prayer involved both submission & sacrifice. What she wants is lined up w/ what God wants: a man 2 serve Him his entire life, who will change the course of the nation. Now, God has Hannah's heart in the exact right place, perfectly aligned w/ His design & that's why God is going 2 answer her prayer. **James 5:16b** what? **John 14:13-14** in My name? **John 15:7!**

12-14- drunk- bad enough her husband doesn't understand her but now her own High Priest thinks she a lush (surrounded by insensitive men)! **John Bunyan**, "**Its better 2 have heart w/ no words than 2 have words w/ no heart.**"

15-16- soul- Eli wants her 2 pour out her wine but Hannah says she's been pouring out her bitter soul 2 **YHWH**. Eli must feel like a heel. He's so used 2 seeing sauced women at the tabernacle, when a pious woman finally shows up, he offends her by calling her a drunk. Have you ever asked a woman, "Hey, when are you due?" & then realized that she isn't pregnant, after they try 2 slit your throat open – that's how Eli must've felt here, but he recovers nicely...

17-18- grant- Eli didn't know what she was praying 4 but apparently the Holy Spirit compelled him 2 speak a prophetic blessing over Hannah – at least that's how she took it even if that's not how Eli meant it. Regardless, she returns 2 the feast & starts eating. She wasn't sad any longer! Had her circumstances changed? No! But her perception of **YHWH** had changed & by faith, that made all the difference in the world. She now had an expectation that God was going 2 change her circumstances & not just hers but that of Israel's as well!

This passage gives us some important issues 2 ponder: **1)** are you more like Elkanah –in the face of difficulty, taking the easy way out, trying 2 solve all of your problems the most expedient (selfish) way, not seeking, waiting on or trusting in the Lord or **2)** are you more like Hannah – willing 2 wrestle in anguish & bitterness of soul until you come to that place of submission & sacrifice. I will grant you that the 1st option actually sounds better but it never ends well. The 2nd option does sound rough but it's often the only way God can get us into a place where He can use us or even bless us. I don't mean 2 minimize the pain of grief & frustration but at least we can moderate our despair by realizing it may just be a prelude 2 another mighty work of God in our lives. Hannah's pain drove her 2 God, 2 the throne of grace, 2 the presence of the Lord of Hosts, to the fervent prayer that eventually produced Samuel.

Are you "grinding" in your heart over something & feel like the Lord's not responding 2 you, like He's mad at you or out to get you? Be advised that 2000 yrs ago, all that was settled on the cross. God's not "getting" you b/c He "got" Jesus while He was on the cross instead of you. Now, God does chasten His children b/c He loves them but never fall 4 the lie of Satan. Don't stand off & pout b/c God refuses 2 answer your particular prayer. It may just be that He is maneuvering you right into line w/ His plan, right into the place where you're finally willing 2 give your all 2 God & He in turn is finally able 2 give His all 2 you in regards 2 that particular situation. SeeK Him, trust Him, obey Him

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