

Hannah: A Portrait of God's Lovingkindness

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“Lovingkindness” is a very special Old Testament word. This one word encompassed all the blessings which God extended to His covenant people; blessings which flowed forth from His character. These blessings included but were not limited to God’s grace, mercy, compassion, patience, faithfulness, loyalty, and love. A recipient of God’s lovingkindness was blessed beyond the ability of words to express.

Moses promised Israel, "Then it shall come about, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you His covenant and His *lovingkindness* which He swore to your forefathers. ¹³"He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb... ¹⁴"You shall be blessed above all peoples; there will be no male or female barren among you... (Deut 7:12-14, emphasis mine - jhd). As long as Israel kept His commandments, God’s blessings were abundant to overflowing.

There is no better illustration of God’s lovingkindness than a woman from the hill country of Ephraim named Hannah. The Bible records, “Now there was a certain man... and his name was Elkanah ... ² He had two wives: the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.” (1 Sam. 1:1-2).

There is something bleak and foreboding about being barren. You might even euphemistically try to avoid using the word by saying, “we have no children” or, “the Lord has closed her womb.” In the end they mean the same thing but they don’t sound the same.

Hannah wanted a child with all that was within her. One can imagine that every time she heard the neighborhood girls laughing and playing; every time she heard a cry as one of the boys scrapped his elbow, her motherly instincts kicked into overdrive. But it was always someone else’s child, not her own, and that hurt.

Had the Lord withheld His blessings because of her sin? Some probably thought so. They might have even quoted to her Deuteronomy 7:12-14 to prove their case and call for her repentance.

To make matters worse, Elkanah had taken a second wife. Peninnah was giving her beloved what she couldn’t – children. Amazingly, Hannah handled the situation with grace and dignity. You can’t say the same, however, about Peninnah. Because of Elkanah’s favoritism toward Hannah, Peninnah made Hannah’s life miserable.

Hannah was a good woman; a faithful woman. A woman for whom retaliation toward her rival did not seem to be an option. Her worship to God was as regular as the calendar (1 Sam. 1:7). Her prayer was persistent (1 Sam. 1:12) and fervent as she “poured out” her soul to the Lord (1 Sam. 1:15) and in her humility she described herself as a lowly “maidservant” (1 Sam. 1:11). Hannah was a woman of faith who believed not

just in prayer but in God who answers prayer and fulfills promises. From His throne in heaven God heard and answered her petition. “It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel...” (1 Sam. 1:20).

Herein is the lovingkindness of God. Vindication before a rival. An answered prayer. The gift of son. The fulfillment of a promise. A life blessed by God’s grace and mercy. Consider these three things about God’s lovingkindness:

First, God’s lovingkindness is conditional. In giving the Ten Commandments God promised his lovingkindness “to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Exo. 20:6). David promised, “All the paths of the LORD are lovingkindness and truth to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies” (Psa. 25:10). God’s special blessings came to Hannah because of her faithfulness.

Second, God’s lovingkindness is unailing. In the NASB the Hebrew word translated *lovingkindness* (*chesed*) is twice translated *unchanging love*. “Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in *unchanging love*” (Micah 7:18 *emphasis mine*; cf. Micah 7:20). God is not capricious but dependable and loyal to His covenant people. Hannah plead to God that He “remember” her (1 Sam. 1:11) and He did. More accurately, God had never forgotten her.

Third, God’s lovingkindness is to be reciprocated. God expects those who have received His lovingkindness to, in return, freely give. Solomon said, “He who pursues righteousness and loyalty (lovingkindness - *chesed* - jhd) finds life, righteousness and honor” (Prov. 21:21). God expects our character to reflect His (1 Pet. 1:16; Lev. 11:44; 19:2). Hannah dedicated Samuel to the service of God. Modern women would do well to follow her example.

Hannah is a life-lesson for you and me in how to receive the very best blessings that heaven has to offer. Be faithful and loyal. Do not put your trust in the future but in Him who holds the future in His hands. And, follow carefully the instructions that God gave the twelve as He sent them on the limited commission, “freely you received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8).