

PROPHETS & JUDGES

IN THE PROMISED LAND

“If it were possible for created beings to attain to a full understanding of God and His works, then, having reached this point, there would be for them no further discovery of truth, no growth in knowledge, no further development of mind or heart. God would no longer be supreme; and man, having reached the limit of knowledge and attainment, would cease to advance. Let us thank God that it is not so. God is infinite.” {Steps to Christ, p. 109}

WEEK 8 - HANNAH & SAMUEL

I. The Birth of Samuel

1. What were Elkanah’s motivations and reasons for taking a second wife, and was that an OK thing to do? What was the result to Hannah?

2. How difficult of a trial was Peninnah to Hannah? What was Satan’s purpose in tempting Peninnah to act the way she did?

3. Hannah had a gentle, sensitive nature, and yet how did she respond when charged with being an impure, drunken woman?

4. Hannah promised to give Samuel to the Lord. As he grew, how did she feel toward her little son—did she love him? What enabled her to give him up?

5. What blessed you from Hannah's song of praise?

II. Early Life of Samuel

1. What kind of duties was Samuel given as a small child? What was his attitude toward his work?

2. What that gives humble, everyday duties a charm and makes them pleasant and honorable?

3. What is the result of regarding our small, humble, boring duties as important and doing them well?

4. How does the work of a mother as a homemaker compare with the influence of preachers and the power of kings?

5. What can we learn from the success of great men like Byron, Gibbon, and others?

6. Why does God give us minds, creativity, and intellect? What is the result of turning away from religion in our minds?

7. What is the reason so many young people are being swept away by Satan?

8. What can we learn from Napoleon, Hume, and Voltaire about the importance of the thoughts and feelings we cherish today as youth?

9. How may we become as precious in the Lord's sight as was Samuel?

The Birth of Samuel**October 27, 1881**

The reign of judges in Israel closes with Samuel, than whom few purer or more illustrious characters are presented in the sacred record. There are few, also whose life-history contains lessons of greater value to the thoughtful student. The father of Samuel was Elkanah, a Levite, who dwelt at Ramah, in Mount Ephraim. He was a person of wealth and influence, a kind husband, and a man who feared and revered God. Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, was a woman of piety and devotion. Humility, conscientiousness, and a firm reliance upon God, were ruling traits in her character. Of Hannah it might truly be said, in the words of the wise man: "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her." {1.1}

Elkanah's love for his chosen companion was deep and unchanging; yet a cloud shadowed their domestic happiness. The home was not made joyful by the voice of childhood. At length the strong desire to perpetuate his name led the husband, as it had led many others, to adopt a course which God did not sanction—that of introducing into the family a second wife, to be subordinate to the first. This act was prompted by a lack of faith in God, and was attended with evil results. The peace of the hitherto united and harmonious family was broken. Upon Hannah the blow fell with crushing weight. All happiness seemed forever swept away from her life. She bore her trials uncomplainingly, yet her grief was none the less keen and bitter. {1.2}

Peninnah, the new wife, was a woman of inferior mind, and of envious and jealous disposition. As years passed on, and sons and daughters were added to the household, she became proud and self-important, and treated her rival with contempt and insolence. {1.3}

Elkanah faithfully observed the ordinances of God. The worship at Shiloh was still maintained, yet it had become irregular, and in some respects incomplete. Hence, Elkanah had no regular employment at the tabernacle, to whose service, being a Levite, he was to be especially devoted. Notwithstanding this, his zeal in the service of God was unflinching. With his family he went up to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice at the appointed gatherings. {1.4}

Yet even amid the sacred festivities connected with the worship of God, the evil spirit that had cursed his home intruded. After the other sacrifices had been made, it was customary for the peace-offering to be presented. A specified portion of this was given to the priest, and then the offerer, after distributing to each member of his family a share of the remainder, united with them in a solemn yet joyous feast. Upon these occasions, Elkanah gave the mother of his children a portion for herself and for each of her sons and daughters, and then as a token of regard for Hannah, his first and best-loved wife, he gave her a double portion. This excited the envy and jealousy of the second wife, and she boldly asserted her claims to superiority as one highly favored of God; and she tauntingly pointed to the fact that Hannah had no children, as proof of the Lord's displeasure toward her. {1.5}

This scene was enacted again and again, not only at the yearly gatherings, but whenever circumstances furnished an opportunity for Peninnah to exalt herself at the expense of her rival. The course of this woman seemed to Hannah, a trial

almost beyond endurance. Satan employed her as his agent to harass, and if possible exasperate and destroy one of God's faithful children. At last, as her enemy's taunts were repeated at one of the yearly feasts, Hannah's courage and fortitude gave way. Unable longer to conceal her feelings, she wept without restraint. The expressions of joy on every hand seemed mockery to her. She could not partake of the feast. {1.6}

Her husband, knowing the cause of her grief, sought to comfort her with the assurance of his unchanged affection, and gently chides her for yielding thus to sorrow: "Why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?" But it was impossible for Elkanah fully to understand her feelings or to appreciate the cause. {1.7}

Hannah brought no reproach against her husband for his unwise marriage. The grief which she could share with no earthly friend, she carried to her Heavenly Father, and sought consolation from Him alone who hath said, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee." There is a mighty power in prayer. Our great adversary is constantly seeking to keep the troubled soul away from God. An appeal to Heaven by the humblest saint is more to be dreaded by Satan than the decrees of cabinets or the mandates of kings. {1.8}

Hannah's prayer was unheard by mortal ear, but entered the ear of the Lord of hosts. Earnestly she pleaded that God would take away her reproach, and grant her the boon most highly prized by women of that age—the blessing of motherhood. As she wrestled in prayer, her voice uttered no sound, but her lips moved and her countenance gave evidence of deep emotion. And now another trial awaited the humble suppliant. As the eye of Eli the high priest fell upon her, he hastily decided that she was intoxicated. Feasting revelry had well-nigh supplanted true godliness among the people of Israel. Instances of intemperance, even among women, were of frequent occurrence, and now Eli determined to administer what he considered a deserved rebuke. "How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee." {1.9}

Hannah had been communing with God. She believed that her prayer had been heard, and the peace of Christ filled her heart. Hers was a gentle, sensitive nature, yet she yielded neither to grief nor to indignation at the unjust charge of drunkenness in the house of God. With due reverence for the anointed of the Lord, she calmly repelled the accusation and stated the cause of her emotion. "No my Lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto." Convinced that his reproof had been unjust, Eli replied, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him." {1.10}

In her prayer, Hannah had made a vow that if her request were granted, she would dedicate her child to the service of God. This vow she made known to her husband, and he confirmed it in a solemn act of worship, before leaving Shiloh.

{1.11}

Hannah's prayer was answered, and she received the gift for which she had so

earnestly entreated. As she looked upon the pledge of divine favor she called the child Samuel—Asked of God. {1.12}

As soon as the little one was old enough to be separated from its mother, she fulfilled her solemn vow. She loved her child with all the devotion of a mother's heart; day by day her affections entwined about him more closely as she watched his expanding powers, and listened to the childish prattle; He was her only son, the especial gift of Heaven; but she had received him as a treasure consecrated to God, and she would not withhold from the Giver his own. Faith strengthened the mother's heart, and she yielded not to the pleadings of natural affection. {1.13}

Once more Hannah journeyed with her husband to Shiloh, taking the child to present him unto the Lord, and bearing also gifts for sacrifice and thank-offering. Reaching the tabernacle, she sought the presence of the high priest. He did not recognize her. There was indeed a striking contrast between the pallid, grief-stricken suppliant and the grateful, happy mother. Hannah related the circumstances of her previous interview, and then presented to the priest, in the name of God, her precious gift, saying: "For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he liveth, he shall be lent to the Lord." Eli was surprised and deeply impressed by the faith and devotion of this woman of Israel. Himself an over-indulgent father, he was awed and humbled as he beheld this mother's great sacrifice in parting with her first and only child, that she might devote him to the service of God. He felt reprov'd for his own selfish love, and in humiliation and reverence he bowed before the Lord and worshiped. {1.14}

God had granted Hannah the desire of her heart; she had been highly favored of Heaven, and she felt that she could do no less in token of her gratitude than to make a public acknowledgment of the divine mercy and loving-kindness. The spirit of inspiration came upon her, and although a retiring and timid woman, her voice was now heard in the assembly of the people, sounding forth the praise of God: {1.15}

"My heart rejoiceth in the Lord; mine horn is exalted in the Lord. My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies, because I rejoice in thy salvation." The horn is in some animals the weapon of attack and defense; by the use of this figure, Hannah would acknowledge that her deliverance had come from God. In her exultation, there is no vain triumph of self. She rejoices not in Samuel, not in her own prosperity, but in the Lord. The song continues: "There is none holy as the Lord; for there is none beside thee; neither is there any rock like our God." She extols the perfection of Deity. In the character of God, are wisdom, purity, truth, goodness, and mercy combined, immutable and complete. All human holiness is mingled with imperfection. All idols of the nations are vain and worthless. God is our only refuge and support; and those who trust in him will never be confounded. {1.16}

"Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed." While here referring to Peninnah's boastful and insolent conduct, Hannah seems also to speak to all the enemies of true godliness, who glory in themselves, and

insult and despise the children of faith. Pride and boasting cannot deceive God. He is acquainted with the hearts and the lives of all. By him actions are weighed. He distinguishes men's characters, and weighs their motives in the balance. When he sees that it will be for the good of man and for his own glory, he will interpose in behalf of his people. In due time he will reward the righteous and punish the wicked. {1.17}

"The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread, and they that were hungry ceased." How often, even in this life, do we see the ungodly brought to shame and confusion. Do they aspire to distinction and worldly honor? Are they proud of their valor and military skill? Their bows are broken, and they themselves overcome by a weak and despised company; for God hath girded the stumbling ones with strength. Do they trust in their riches, and indulge in luxury and extravagance while trampling upon the rights of the poor? They may themselves meet with reverses, and be reduced to the necessity of toiling for bread to satisfy their hunger, while many who have endured hardship and privation are blessed with plenty. {1.18}

"The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory, 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. 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." {1.19}

Hannah's words were prophetic, both of David, who should reign as king of Israel, and of Christ, the Messiah, the Lord's anointed. Thus in a sublime and sacred song, referring first to the proud boastings of an insolent and contentious woman, were ultimately set forth, the humiliation of the proud and exaltation of the humble, the destruction of the enemies of God, and the complete and final triumph of his faithful servants. {1.20}

Having given utterance to this triumphant burst of praise, Hannah quietly returned to her home at Ramah, leaving the child Samuel to minister in the house of God, under the care and instruction of Eli, the high priest. {1.21}

Early Life of Samuel

November 3, 1881

The fulfillment of Hannah's vow to dedicate her child to the Lord, was not deferred until he could be presented at the tabernacle. From the earliest dawn of intellect she trained his infant mind to love and reverence God, and to regard himself as the Lord's. By every familiar object surrounding him she sought to lead his thoughts up to the Creator. {2.1}

When separated from her child, the faithful mother's solicitude did not cease. He was the subject of her prayers. Every year she made him a little coat, and

when she came with her husband to the yearly sacrifice, she presented it to the child as a token of her love. With every stitch of that coat she had breathed a prayer that he might be pure, noble, and true. She did not ask that he might be great, but earnestly pleaded that he might be good. Her faith and devotion were rewarded. She saw her son, in the simplicity of childhood, walking in the love and fear of God. She saw him growing up to manhood in favor with God and man, humble, reverent, prompt in duty, and earnest in the service of his divine Master. And while the Lord accepted the precious offering from that mother's hand, he did not forget to repay the sacrifice. Hannah was blessed with other children, to educate and train for Heaven. {2.2}

Samuel's youth was passed in the tabernacle solemnly devoted to the worship of God; yet even here he was not free from evil influences or sinful example. The sons of Eli are described in the sacred word as "sons of Belial." They feared not God, nor honored their father; but Samuel did not seek their company nor follow their evil ways. It was his constant effort to make himself what God would have him to become. This is the privilege of every youth. God is pleased when even little children devote themselves to his service; they should not be discouraged in their efforts to become Christians. {2.3}

The youth will not become weak-minded or inefficient by consecrating themselves to the service of God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The youngest child that loves and fears God, is greater in his sight than the most talented and learned man who neglects the great salvation. The youth who consecrate their hearts and lives to God, have in so doing, placed themselves in connection with the Fountain of all wisdom and excellence. {2.4}

Early brought to minister in the tabernacle, Samuel had even then minor duties to perform in the service of God, according to his capacity. These were at first very humble, and not always pleasant, but they were performed to the best of his ability, and with a willing heart. His religion was carried into all the business of life. He regarded himself as God's servant, and his work as God's work. His efforts were accepted, because they were prompted by love to God and a sincere desire to do his will. Thus Samuel became a co-worker with the Lord of Heaven and earth. And God through him accomplished a great work for Israel. {2.5}

If children were taught to regard the humble round of every-day duties as the course marked out for them by the Lord, as a school in which they were to be trained to render faithful and efficient service, how much more pleasant and honorable would their work appear. To perform every duty as unto the Lord, throws a charm around the humblest employment, and links the workers on earth with the holy beings who do God's will in Heaven. And in our appointed place we should discharge our duties with as much faithfulness as do the angels in their higher sphere. Those who feel that they are God's servants will be men who can be trusted anywhere. Citizens of Heaven will make the best citizens of earth. A correct view of our duty to God leads to clear perceptions of our duty to our fellow men. {2.6}

Parents should bring up their children in the love and fear of God, remem-

bering that they are younger members of the Lord's great family entrusted to the parents to be educated and trained for Heaven, and to be required again at their hands. Let children be taught that every act of life is important. It is strengthening habit and forming character. If all the daily duties are performed in the fear of God, they will be done with fidelity, and the life-record will be such as can pass the test of the Judgment. {2.7}

Would that every mother could realize how great are her duties and her responsibilities, and how great will be the reward of faithfulness. The mother's daily influence upon her children is preparing them for everlasting life or eternal death. She exercises in her home a power more decisive than the minister in the desk, or even the king upon his throne. The day of God will reveal how much the world owes to godly mothers for men who have been unflinching advocates of truth and reform—men who have been bold to do and dare, who have stood unshaken amid trials and temptations; men who chose the high and holy interests of truth and the glory of God, before worldly honor or life itself. {2.8}

When the Judgment shall sit, and the books shall be opened; when the "well done" of the great Judge is pronounced, and the crown of immortal glory is placed upon the brow of the victor, many will raise their crowns in sight of the assembled universe, and pointing to their mother say, "She made me all I am through the grace of God. Her instruction, her prayers, have been blessed to my eternal salvation." {2.9}

Samuel became a great man in the fullest sense, as God estimates character. Many whom the world calls great, fall far below the divine standard. They lack the very elements of true and noble manhood. Men of giant intellect and brilliant genius, men before whom the world bows in willing homage, have prostituted these precious gifts of God to the service of the arch-deceiver. The name of Byron stands high in the literary world. God gave him great natural abilities; had his powers been rightly directed, he might have been a blessing to society. But his talents were not consecrated to God. The purity of Heaven did not permeate his life or breathe forth in his literary productions. Many of his works lead to immorality and irreligion. They reveal the true character of the man—corrupt in taste, depraved in heart. He rejected the service of God, and chose to ally himself to Satan. {2.10}

Gibbon, the renowned historian, was not a great man according to God's standard. He was endowed with great intellectual powers, that he might make known to his fellow-men the knowledge of God. But Satan prepared his snares for this man, and he became entangled in the meshes of skepticism. His works breathe insinuations against God and against the world's Redeemer. He improved every opportunity to destroy confidence in the Bible and the Christian religion. Eternity alone can reveal the amount of harm wrought by his writings. The world pronounces Gibbon a literary success. God pronounces him a failure.

{2.11}

A beneficent Creator endows men with intellectual powers, that, consecrated to his service, they may become co-workers with Christ and angels in the work of human redemption. Yet how many, like Byron and Gibbon, employ their tal-

ents to pervert the simplicity of truth, and bring contempt upon the Christian religion, as unworthy the attention of intelligent men. Those who are engaged in this work little know what they are doing. But in the day of Judgment how fearful will be their accountability. ^[2.12]

Intellectual power, when opposed to the principles of true religion, becomes a minister of vice. Its influence tends to deface the image of God in man, and to bring him down to the level of the brute creation. Whatever, tends to banish thoughts of God from the mind becomes a curse, not only to the possessor but to all within the sphere of his influence. Better would it be for the gifted skeptic, better for the world, to be deprived of the brilliant talents that are devoted to the service of Satan. The greater the gift perverted and abused, the greater will be the evil wrought and the greater the condemnation in the day of final reckoning. ^[2.13]

Despite the many sovereigns to whom men profess allegiance, all mankind are serving one of two masters—the Prince of light or the Prince of darkness. Samuel served the former, the sons of Eli the latter. The characters of these persons, standing out in such striking contrast, represent the two great parties into which the world has been divided since the fall of Adam—the servants of Christ and the servants of Satan. God has ordained that with families and nations or with individuals, virtue is the basis of happiness, vice the foundation of woe and misery. In all the history of nations, wherever righteousness has been cherished, union, peace, and prosperity result; where greed, selfishness, and irreligion reign, weakness, degeneracy, and corruption follow. ^[2.14]

A constant warfare is still waged between vice and virtue. Wherever we turn, the battle goes on unceasingly. Infidelity is rearing its head in vaunted triumph, and crime of all grades is crowding in on every side. Multitudes of the youth are swept away by the overwhelming tide of evil. In every earnest Christian heart the question rises, “Why, oh, why, in a land of Bibles and Christian teaching, can the adversary of souls exert over our youth a power so mighty, so unrestrained?” The reason is apparent. Parents are neglecting their solemn responsibility. They are not earnest, persevering, and faithful in the work of training their children for God, restraining their evil desires and enforcing obedience to parental authority, even in infancy. ^[2.15]

Young men should be trained to stand firm for the right amid the prevailing iniquity, to do all in their power to arrest the progress of vice, and to promote virtue, purity, and true manliness. The impressions made upon the mind and character in early life are deep and abiding. Injudicious training or evil associations will often exert upon the young mind an influence for evil that all after-effort is powerless to efface. The character of Napoleon Bonaparte was greatly influenced by his training in childhood. Unwise instructors inspired him with a love for conquest, forming mimic armies and placing him at their head as commander. Here was laid the foundation for his career of strife and bloodshed. Had the same care and effort been directed to making him a good man, imbuing his young heart with the spirit of the gospel, how widely different might have been his history. ^[2.16]

It is said that Hume the skeptic was in early life a conscientious believer in

the word of God. Being connected with a debating society, he was appointed to present the arguments in favor of infidelity. He studied with earnestness and perseverance, and his keen and active mind became imbued with the sophistry of skepticism. Ere long he came to believe its delusive teachings, and his whole after-life bore the dark impress of infidelity. {2.17}

When Voltaire was five years old, he committed to memory an infidel poem, and the pernicious influence was never effaced from his mind. He became one of Satan's most successful agents to lead men away from God. Thousands will rise up in the Judgment, and charge the ruin of their souls upon the infidel Voltaire.

{2.18}

By the thoughts and feelings cherished in early years, every youth is determining his own life history. Correct, virtuous, manly habits formed in youth will become a part of the character, and will usually mark the course of the individual through life. The youth may become vicious or virtuous, as they choose. They may as well be distinguished for true and noble deeds as for great crime and wickedness. {2.19}

Young men of today may become as precious in the sight of the Lord as was Samuel. They may have their names enrolled in the book of life, to be looked upon with pleasure by the Monarch of the universe and the angelic host. By faithfully maintaining their Christian integrity, the young may, like the noble Luther, exert a mighty influence in the work of reform. Such men are needed at this time. God has a position and a work for every one of them. {2.20}

If the young men in our cities would unite their efforts to discountenance ungodliness and crime, their influence would greatly advance the cause of reform. It is the privilege and the duty of every youth, as an angel of mercy, to minister to the wants and woes of mankind. There is no class that can achieve greater results for God and humanity than the young. {2.21}

Let none entertain the thought that the religion of the Bible is weak and unmanly, the effect of fanatical zeal or superstitious fear. Many of the young refrain from entering the service of Christ because they are unwilling to confess themselves Christians before the world. They are ashamed of Jesus, ashamed to acknowledge and obey his authority. Such persons view religion from the worldling's stand-point. On this rock thousands have been wrecked. {2.22}

God is the sovereign of the universe, and should we be ashamed to acknowledge our allegiance to him? The holy angels are engaged night and day in his service. The highest order of beings in all the universe bow before the throne of God with songs of grateful, joyous praise. Is there aught in such service that can detract from man's true dignity? Saith the Lord, "Them that honor me I will honor." The service of God is the highest, noblest work that can engage the powers of men or of angels. {2.23}

Answer Hints

Section 1: | 1) 1.1, 1.2 | 2) 1.6 | 3) 1.10 | 4) 1.13 | 5) 1.16–20 |

Section 2: | 1) 2.5 | 2) 2.6 | 3) 2.7 | 4) 2.8, 2.9 | 5) 2.10–2.12 | 6) 2.12, 2.13 | 7) 2.15, 2.16 |

8) 2.16–19 | 9) 2.20 |

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