



For this child I prayed

For this child I prayed ... So I dedicated him to the Lord.

1 Samuel 1:27, 28

It was in the period of the Judges, in the Old Testament. It has been described as the period of the five R's regarding Israel. *Relapse* into sin, *Retribution* (punishment), *Repentance*, *Release* and *Rest*.

At this time, towards the end of this period of the Judges, Eli was priest and judge. His sons, who assisted in the tabernacle worship and sacrifices, corrupted this worship of the Lord. Israel was in a sad condition of apostasy. No doubt there were also many godly people with heavy hearts gravely concerned about the future of the "church."

Hannah was one of them. She was one of the two wives of Elkanah. His other wife was Penninah whom he may have taken as second wife because Hannah could bear him no children. As a result, rivalry was strong in the home: Hannah was persecuted and deeply distressed. But her husband loved her. After some years, we don't know how long, we find her in the tabernacle (the church of that day), praying for a child. Hannah knew very well what the covenant promises were already given to Adam and Eve following their fall into sin. Godly women in the succeeding generations very much wanted to have children, in the hope that, not only the promised One would eventually be brought forth, but perhaps they might be part of the line from which He would be born.

In "church," the tabernacle, she cried her heart out. How she prayed for a son. Eli seeing her, thought her to be drunk. Is this perhaps an indication that more people came to the tabernacle while intoxicated? One almost gets this impression. But after Hannah informed Eli what she was doing and what her heart-felt desire was, he wished her God's choicest blessings. To her home she went, hoping that she, too, might receive a heritage (a child) of the Lord. A heritage after all is an inheritance. And one does not earn inheritances. They are gifts of love. If only the Lord would be gracious to her. It was her prayer that she might be a mother in Israel.

We see also that her real motherhood began long before the little Samuel was born. It always begins with the right attitude, where there is real faith. Godly parents like Hannah want children not merely because it is natural to have them (which is true), and not because having children is one of the purposes of marriage and sex (which is also true), but that they may be means in the hands of the Lord to bring forth His children, His precious ones, the elect. In this kind of home, children are not made to feel that they are misfits, or unwanted, or the inevitable consequences of married life. Hannah began to pray not when she learned that she was pregnant, or after the baby was there. She started praying long before this. She wanted to be a mother in Israel and *of* Israel.

"Mother of Israel" is a beautiful name. It is like Abraham's title, *"the father of believers"* (Romans 4:11, 16). This means not only that his believing descendants can look back and say that they are children of the believing Abraham, the patriarch. He is the father of believers, says Paul. A father is one who begets, brings forth. The idea likely is that the Lord uses human, earthly, godly parents to bring forth His children. By the grace of God godly parents (sinful as they are by nature) through *the power of the Word of the Spirit* beget children of God. What a sublime thought! Hannah wanted to be such a mother of Israel.

We marvel the more at this work of grace when we see a little of the spiritual beauty of motherhood. Mothers give life to babies. A person gives life to a person. It is in her very body that life begins and grows. At the time of maturity life gives life and a personality as the fruit of her body.

There's nothing like it in the world, a creation of God. No wonder that there is so much opposition to abortion in the church circles. Even in the covenant these mothers bring human life into the world that is sinful and depraved. But with that love which only a mother can have, they instruct these children in the fear of the Lord. And *so through the Word and the Spirit*, they become mothers of God's children, as Abraham and all godly fathers become fathers of believers. The mother and father first of all are given the responsibility and privilege to raise that child. The hearts of the parents, and their deep love teach and mold the heart and character of their own flesh and blood. Who could ever begin to be able to replace them?

Hannah dedicated her little boy Samuel to the Lord. That dedication must have been unusual. After she had weaned him (at perhaps three years of age) she brought him to Shiloh where the tabernacle was, and Eli was the high priest.

What a sacrifice for Hannah the mother! To "give up" that child of so many prayers and the object of so much love and leave all his training to others, and see him only once per year. Samuel grew up in the fear of the Lord, later to become a priest and judge in Israel.

The basic principles always remain the same. Christian parents dedicate their children to the Lord. That is a responsibility of Christian parenthood.

That dedication begins in the home. There mothers often have to assume the greatest role in the bringing up of the children. Homes are busy today. And it is so easy to neglect the things that should be first. Let no Christian mother ever apologize for her work by saying meekly that she is only a housewife and mother. Let her never feel inferior to women who have careers outside of the home. One of the most blessed and most important tasks in all the world is to be a Hannah in the church.

The heart and hand of the Hannahs in many ways determine the future of the church of Christ. The heart and place of the Hannah-like mothers really cannot be replaced by anybody else. No worker in a day care center can take the place of such a mother. How can the love, patience and deep concern of this kind of mother be supplied by someone else anticipating daily needs, tears and problems of those little ones?

The school is the extension of the home. In school that teacher has to assume in part at least the place of the mother. Surely she has to be a Christian teacher, dedicated to her work. This is a beautiful but awesome task.

The teacher makes the school. Several years ago our government made a survey, asking what was the most important factor in the school. The answer was that not the buildings, or the books or equipment, or even the curriculum, but the teacher was most important.

The Christian teacher, with her love for the Lord and His Word, with her Christian character and interest in the covenant children, is the heart of a Christian School. Therefore it is completely impossible that the teacher of such children, to be a good teacher, be an unbeliever, one with a humanistic, materialistic or even an evolutionistic view of life. Every parent should know to what kind of teacher he or she is entrusting his or her child for five days per week and six hours each day.

Christian education requires sacrifice. On the part of the parents, and if need be, on the part of the entire congregation of which the children are members. After all these children are in some sense "our" covenant children. The spirit of Hannah will carry us through. With firm determination she said, *"And so I dedicate him to the Lord."*

In today's world mothers and fathers often have to resist great pressures. There are also misleading peer pressures on the children and young people. Added to all that is the deceit of the devil by way of television, corrupt literature available in practically every drug store, and much rock music.

But the Word of God is always able to keep our children and save them. Through "Hannah"-like homes and "Hannah"-like schools and teachers. Never, lose sight of the fact that our God is a faithful covenant God, almighty in grace. And I believe that such parents can take literally the words of Solomon in Proverbs 22:6

"Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it."

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