

2 Samuel 2:1-10

'The Song of Hannah'

The hopes of the godly

I wonder what it is that has fuelled your prayers this week?

Think back on the things that you have prayed for or the prayers that regularly shape your personal prayer life.

Think about the things that you find yourself praying for over and over again.

What are they?

What is it that you are hoping for as you ask God for these things?

What is it that you are hoping God will do or that God will be?

Well, last week we invaded the life of a barren woman in ancient Israel.

We saw her hope beyond hope for a child.

We saw her take her prayers to God.

And we saw God listen to her passionate cry.

Well, today this woman is going to tell us what it was that lay underneath her prayer.

In 2 Samuel 2:1-10 Hannah takes her son up to the temple to offer him in lifelong dedication to God.

And as she does, she bursts into song.

And in her song, she lets us into the sorts of hopes and desires that undergirded her prayer and that were answered in God's response.

Now my view is that as we take a look at her song we will find our hearts and our minds echoing with Hannah.

We will find that the hopes that undergirded her prayer are the hopes that so often undergird our prayers.

So, let's turn to 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and see what we can learn from the song of Hannah.

The song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10)

An introduction to Hebrew poetry

I want to start by giving you a short introduction to Hebrew poetry.

You see the Song of Hannah is an Israelite hymn that is very similar to many of the hymns and poems of the book of Psalms.

Now Hebrew poetry has two features.

One feature is very similar to most poetry in all languages.

The other feature is a bit unusual and not something we are very used to.

The unusual feature of Hebrew poetry is something that is called parallelism.

Parallelism is when you have one line of poetry that is followed by a parallel line or series of lines.

The first line expresses a thought.

The second and subsequent lines express the same thought by saying it in another way or by offering a contrast to it.

We can see this in the Song of Hannah.

Take a look at verse 6.

⁶ *"The LORD brings death and makes alive;*

he brings down to the grave and raises up. [1 Samuel 2:6 - NIV]

The two lines of the verse are basically saying the same thing but in different words.
Now have a look at verse 4.

⁴ *“The bows of the warriors are broken,*

but those who stumbled are armed with strength. [1 Samuel 2:4 - NIV]

The first line tells us that the people in strong positions are weakened.

Whereas the second line tells us that the people in weak positions are strengthened.

The basic idea is that God overturns the normal and expected situations of people.

The next feature of Hebrew poetry that is more familiar to us is the use of metaphor or figurative speech.

Like all poetry, Hebrew poetry uses these things.

This means that we should be careful not to take things too literally.

So, when verse 1 talks about Hannah’s horn being lifted up, I don’t think we are to take this too literally.

And when she talks about the barren woman bearing seven children, I’m not sure that we are meant to take this literally either.

In Hebrew poetry, the number seven is often used to talk about fullness or perfection.

The combination of these two features is that we need to be careful with Hebrew poetry.

We need to avoid taking it too literally.

We need to try and look at the core things being said.

These are the things we need to concentrate on and hang on to.

Elements of Hannah's story

So, having said that, there are some clear echoes of Hannah’s story in this song, aren’t there?

In chapter 1 we heard that Hannah had a problem from which she sought deliverance.

The problem was her barrenness.

We also heard that Hannah’s barrenness made her the object of Peninnah’s boasting and persecution.

In other words, Hannah had a proud enemy.

These two items come up in verse 1 of the Psalm and also in verse 5.

Listen to what Hannah says.

In verse 1:

¹ *Then Hannah prayed and said:*

“My heart rejoices in the LORD;

in the LORD my horn is lifted high.

My mouth boasts over my enemies,

for I delight in your deliverance. [1 Samuel 2:1 - NIV]

And in verse 5:

She who was barren has borne seven children,

but she who has had many sons pines away. [1 Samuel 2:5 - NIV]

Hannah is clear.

In this Psalm she is rejoicing because God has met her two needs.

He has delivered her from her barrenness.

And he has stopped the mouth of Peninnah from boasting.

In other words, he has upturned the normal state of things.

He has inverted the normal situation.

A springboard for theological reflection and hope

But Hannah’s song isn’t just about Hannah.

You see, Hannah uses God's deliverance to reflect upon the very nature of God himself and of his actions towards his people in general.

Hannah does some deep reflecting.

And she uses her situation to reflect upon the deeper hopes and desires of all the people of God.

She does what so much good Israelite and Christian song does.

She draws upon a personal experience to talk about timeless theological truths.

We can see that in verse 1.

She talks about *my* heart, *my* horn, *my* mouth.

But the focus is on '*your*' deliverance.

In other words, her experience has enabled her to reflect on the nature of God.

So, let's have a brief look at what she has to say.

- God is...

The first thing she tells us is that God is holy.

We see that in verse 2 where she says:

² *"There is no one holy like the LORD;
there is no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God. [1 Samuel 2:2 - NIV]*

- God is...

Verse 2 also tells us that God is incomparable.

There is no God like Hannah's God.

He is beyond comparison.

- God loves...

The third thing that Hannah tells us about God is that he is a God who loves inverting human power structures.

This is repeated time and time again throughout the Song.

What God did with Hannah is not unique.

He did what was in his nature.

Look at verses 4 to 8.

⁴ *"The bows of the warriors are broken,
but those who stumbled are armed with strength.
⁵ Those who were full hire themselves out for food,
but those who were hungry hunger no more.
She who was barren has borne seven children,
but she who has had many sons pines away.
⁶ "The LORD brings death and makes alive;
he brings down to the grave and raises up.
⁷ The LORD sends poverty and wealth;
he humbles and he exalts.
⁸ He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
he seats them with princes
and has them inherit a throne of honor.
"For the foundations of the earth are the LORD's;
upon them he has set the world. [1 Samuel 2:4-8 - NIV]*

God is a God who is into turning things upside down.

The sin of Adam was pride.

And God hates pride.

He despises arrogance.

And so God delights in demolishing those who are prone to pride.

And the way he often chooses to do this is by inverting the natural power structures of human society.

He has done this throughout human history.

He will do it time and time again in the books of Samuel.

God is into inverting human and spiritual power structures.

- God is...

But let's get back to Hannah's song

For she goes on to tell us something more about God.

She also tells us that God is faithful.

Look at verse 9:

*⁹He will guard the feet of his saints,
but the wicked will be silenced in darkness. [1 Samuel 2:9 - NIV]*

God is faithful to his faithful people.

- God is...

However, he is not only faithful.

He is also able.

You see, in order to do the sorts of things that Hannah has talked about he needs to be able.

I think that this is the purpose of the second half of verse 8 where Hannah tells us that:

*"...the foundations of the earth are the LORD's;
upon them he has set the world. [1 Samuel 2:8 - NIV]*

You see, what Hannah is telling us is that the God she is talking about is the Creator.

He is the one who made the earth and put it in its place.

And if he has done this...

If he is the Creator of the earth...

Then he is sovereign over the earth.

He can do with it what he pleases.

He can act in it how he desires.

As the Creator, he is able.

If God is all of these things, then...

You can see what is being said, can't you.

If God is all of these things then some of the actions we see in the rest of the books of Samuel and in the rest of the Bible will not be unexpected.

I think that this is what is being said in verses 10 and 11 when Hannah goes on to reflect on the future of her nation.

She is telling us that if God is all of these things then it will not be a surprise when he chooses David, a shepherd boy, to be king of Israel.

It will not be unexpected when sends out this shepherd boy armed with nothing but a sling and some stones to conquer the boasting Goliath.

Or when he enables a weak and under-resourced Israelite army to defeat the militarily superior Philistine army.

Or when David has been deserted by his nation and kicked out of his throne by his handsome and arrogant son Absalom and prays to God to rescue him.

But if Hannah is right, then we should not stop with the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, should we?

You see, if Hannah is right, then we will not be surprised when a virgin will give birth to the Son of God.

Or when he sends his Son Jesus, an ordinary carpenter, against the greatest and proudest enemy of the people of God – the devil.

Nor will we be surprised when he overcomes the devil through the weak and ignominious death of his Son on a cross outside Jerusalem.

And nor will we be surprised when he causes us, the meek and humble, to inherit the earth at the end of time.

So, you can see where we have come, can't you?

It is grand beyond imagination, isn't it?

What started with a helpless, emotionally strained, distressed, persecuted, and barren woman ends in salvation.

It ends with the proclamation of deep and timeless theological truths.

It ends with heaven and a lamb that was slain standing and being worshipped by all heaven and earth.

It is no wonder that in Luke 1:46, Mary remembers the Song of Hannah and echoes it in her own song about the upcoming birth of Jesus.

For Hannah has captured the core of the hopes and aspirations of God's people in all of time.

And they will eventually be fulfilled in the plans and purposes of God in Jesus Christ and at the end of time.

Conclusion

So, with this in mind, let's draw the threads together and see what we can learn from this for our own situation.

A model for how song works

The first thing I want to do is to reflect on how music or song works.

You see, my own view is that Hannah probably took a common song that was sung in Shiloh and made some modifications to it to reflect her own situation.

In other words, she did what Mary did in Luke 1.

However, it doesn't matter whether I'm right or what the process is.

The point is clear.

Every one of us who loves and knows God is confronted in life with the pain and joy of being God's people.

And when we are, it is often hard to know how to respond.

But throughout the history of God's people, one way has been in music and song.

And these things are great vehicles for human expression.

And we've seen two great elements of Christian music and song in what happens with Hannah, haven't we?

You see, on the one hand, music or song opens up to us the wealth of godly experience and make it our own.

And on the other, it allows us to take our own experiences and reflect on great truths of God that spring out of, or are reflected in, our own experience.

This is why Jews and Christians have always sung.

And it is why these songs are often about personal experience.

This is one of the reasons why we sing here at CCC and why we spend time working on it.

I also think that it is one of the reasons we get so worked up about it from time to time.

You see, we want to be able to do these things through music.

And doing them is good and right.

So, my advice is that we should work hard at getting our music right.

And we should work hard at getting the theology of our music right.

But we should also make sure that our music can be what it was for Hannah and for those who sang the Psalms.

Music and song should be a place where we can open up to us the wealth of godly experience and make it our own.

And it should be the place where we can take take our own experiences and reflect on great truths of God that spring out of, or are reflected in, our own experience.

Music should be the place where mind and emotions and experience are tied together in a rich mix. Let's continue to work on this together here at CCC.

By the way, if I might give a small reflection upon the song of modern evangelicals and particularly modern Australian evangelicals, I think I would say that we are not so happy with one aspect of what Hannah does and what the Psalms do.

I think we are great at reflecting on timeless theological truths.

But I don't think we are great at talking about how our own experience of God reflects these great and timeless theological truths.

And the end result is that I think we don't allow people to identify with what we have learnt and learn it themselves.

I think our songs are often abstract and impersonal.

And I think the result is that they are often not as helpful to Christians as they could be.

The focus of these chapters

But let's move on to our next point.

Let's reflect on what we have seen last week and this week.

I want to ask you where the focus lies.

Does the focus lie on Hannah's story or on Hannah's song?

My view is that the focus lies with Hannah's song.

You see, in the story we see Hannah's hopes.

Her hopes for deliverance from barrenness.

And her hopes for deliverance from her enemies.

But this poem tells us what underlies those hopes.

You see, underneath these very tangible hopes are greater and deeper hopes.

Hopes for a God who hears.

For a God who helps the helpless.

For a God who loves his people.

For a God who can DO something.

For a God who opposes wickedness (personal, national, cosmic).

For a God who will rescue his people from such things.

And for a God who acts with purpose.

That is, for a God who is dependable and not fickle or capricious.

And what is it that Hannah tells us in her song?

She tells us that her hopes are met.

They are met in this incomparable God.

So, let me reflect a little on us in relation to what Hannah has discovered.

You see, all of us have hopes in relation to God.

We have things that we want God to give us.

We have things that are deeply affected by our personal situation.

But deep underneath the hopes of all godly people are hopes like Hannah's.

Hopes for a God who hears.

For a God who helps the helpless.

For a God who loves his people.

For a God who can DO something.
For a God who opposes wickedness (personal, national, cosmic).
For a God who will rescue his people from such things.
And for a God who acts with purpose.
That is, for a God who is dependable and not fickle or capricious.
Now we know from what we have read over these past two weeks that Hannah's immediate hopes were met in the birth of a child.
But her poem tells us that the child represented greater hopes.
Her greater hopes were met by the nature of God and in the purposes of God in history.
And we Christians know what Mary knew when she picked up Hannah's song.
We know that Hannah's hopes, and Mary's hopes, and our hopes, and the hopes of the world are met in Jesus Christ.
This is why Christians centre on Jesus.
This is why they focus on the cross and resurrection of Jesus.
Can you see what I'm saying?
What started with a helpless, emotionally strained, distressed, persecuted, and barren woman ends in salvation.
It ends with the proclamation of deep and timeless theological truths.
It ends with heaven and a lamb that was slain standing and being worshipped by all heaven and earth.
So, my closing question to you tonight is this?
Do you remember how Hannah faced the reality of life and decided that she would act?
Do you remember how one day she 'stood up'?
Do you remember how she called out to God and called upon him to be God?
Do you remember how she trusted God?
Her call upon God was founded upon good and solid timeless truths.
These truths are given the stamp of approval in Christ.
So, are you willing to take a stand with Hannah and call upon him to be this?
Are you willing to trust God to be the God he has proclaimed himself to be.
Are you willing to stand with the people of God and rejoice that he is this?