

Poetry Embedded in Narrative: Hannah's Developing Voice

I. Man's First Poetic Speech

זֹאת הַפֶּעַם עֵצָם מֵעַצְמוֹ "This one at last is bone of my bones
 וּבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂרִי and flesh of my flesh.
 לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה This one shall be called Woman,
 כִּי מֵאִישׁ לְקַחָהּ זֹאת for from man was taken *this one*."

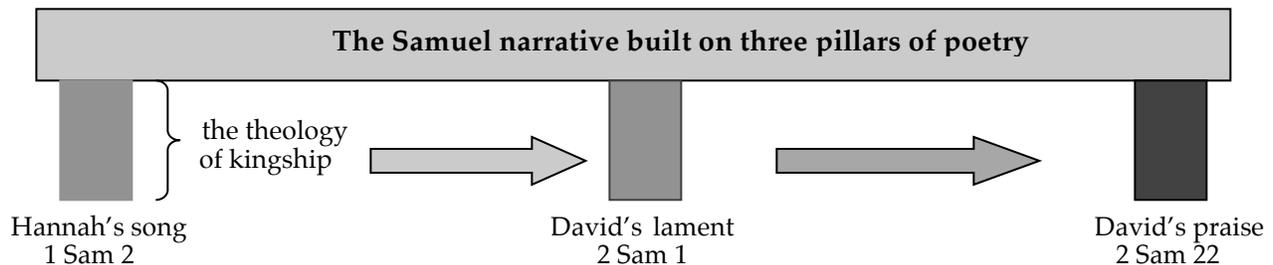
a this one	}	The naming of woman reflects perfect symmetry, balance, and reciprocity expressing the equality of the woman and ecstatic appreciation by the man ("this one" 3x).
b shall be called		
c woman		
x because		
c' from the man		
b' taken was		
a' this one		

II. Man's Second Poetic Speech

עֲדָה וּצִלְהָ שְׁמַעֵן קוֹלִי Adah and Zillah, hear my voice
 אִשָּׁה נָשִׁי לְמֶדְ הָאֹנָה אִמְרָתִי You *wives of Lamech*, give ear to my speech

In contrast to Adam's praise, Lamech's poem reflects a vastly different attitude toward women. Instead of one wife, he has two, and the B cola reflects their true identity, which is not their names given in the A cola, but consists in their relationship to him, "*wives of Lamech*." With these two opening poems the narrator of Genesis is setting out in sharp distinction two different attitudes toward women. In the first case, we have the Eden-like idyllic model of Adam, where women are celebrated for their equality and help to man (though also protected, expressed in the act of "naming"). While in the second, they are not even given a voice, but merely perform the perfunctory task of obedient witnesses of a violent male to justify his crimes. The opening poetry of the Bible is giving witness to the fact that how men value and treat women does much to determine their destiny as Lamech's genealogy painfully plays out in the creation of the "*city of man*" away from the presence of God.

III. Hannah's Voice: The Voice that Shapes History



Hannah's voice shapes the theology of the books of Samuel and beyond and also gives shape to Mary's voice at the birth of the Messiah (Luke 1:46-55).

The Sense of a Beginning (1 Sam 1-2) – Walter Brueggemann¹²

The framers of the canonical books of 1 and 2 Samuel have a lively, daring ‘sense of a beginning.’ Their subject is the new narrative of Israel’s new social possibility of monarchy...(which came about) because of the inscrutable, inexplicable initiative of Yahweh. This particular insistence, which shapes the account of 1 and 2 Samuel, requires a narrative beginning that bespeaks fragility, surprise, and fidelity...In a delicate and playful way, 1 Samuel 1 functions to articulate this beginning that is freighted with wonder, which in turn relativizes all conventional political claims.

the problem of barrenness

<i>Scene 1</i> Hannah’s vexation	<i>Scene 2</i> Hannah’s petition & vow
<i>Elkanah</i> as concerned husband	<i>Eli</i> as priestly presence
<i>Scene 3</i> resolution as birth	<i>Scene 4</i> yielding in thanksgiving

the resolution as birth

A. The Characters: Hannah is the key player in every scene.

B. Scene Markers: Each scene is marked by a verb at its outset, indicating movement and change of location:

- a The man used to go up (עלה *alah*) (v. 3).
- b Hannah rose (קום *qum*) (v.9).
- b’ They rose early (שכמם *shakam*) (v. 19).
- a’ She took him up (עלה *alah*) (v. 24).

C. Yahweh’s Voice: Each scene centers around a crucial statement by Yahweh.

- The LORD had closed her womb (vv. 5, 6).
- The God of Israel grant your petition (v.17).¹³
- They LORD remembered her (v. 19).
- The LORD has granted me my petition (v. 7).

D. The Marginal Male “Voice”

The decisiveness of Yahweh is matched by the fact that Elkanah and Eli, at least in their speaking, are marginal and weak characters. In both cases, the speech of Hannah’s male partner is diminished, nullified; they speak in each case only once and without awareness of the real situation. Elkanah does not understand Hannah’s vexation; Eli does not know the source of Hannah’s distress. In each case, the speech of the man disappears in his second scene. Hannah needs no human voices to assure her when Yahweh acts decisively.

¹² Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology, Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 219-229.

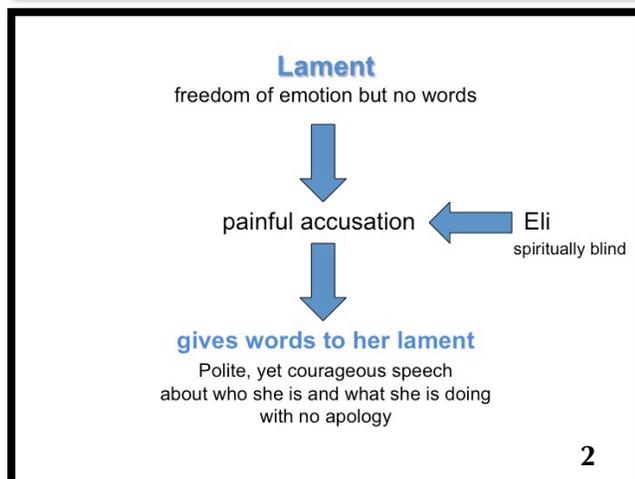
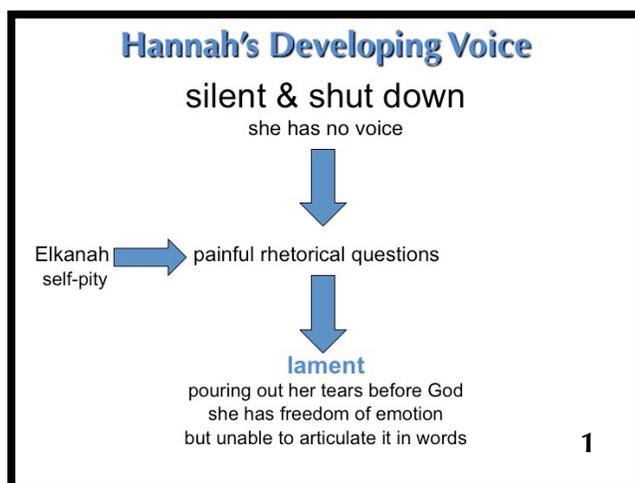
¹³ Eli speaks of the “the God of Israel.” He does not name the name of Yahweh. That name, however, is on Hannah’s lips in this scene three times, and the narrator twice reports that she prays “to the Lord” (vv. 10, 12).

E. Hannah's Developing "Voice"

The narrative thus traces the process by which Hannah gains her voice and her own decisive role in the history of Israel. Through these scenes, Hannah moves from silence to speech. In scene 1, she speaks not at all. She is irritated, vexed, weeping and unable to eat. She has no power to be present in the story. In scene 2, Hannah begins to speak. She speaks out of affliction. Her first speech is addressed to God out of her deep need (vv. 10-11). This is followed by a second articulation of need, to Eli (vv. 15-16). There is still no move beyond pitiful need. In the third scene, Hannah is the only one who speaks. Now she speaks freely, boldly, exultantly, as the one who has been heard and remembered. Yahweh's remembrance of her gives her speech, presence and power. In scene 4, Hannah speaks a long, buoyant affirmation to Eli. Now she is fully voiced, fully present in Israel's history, full of faith. Because of Yahweh Hannah is given both life and voice.

The narrative prepares Hannah and us for her full speech in 2:1-10, in which she subversively and dangerously rereads Israel's history in terms of Yahweh's awesome inversions and in which she powerfully voices Israel's long-term royal hope. The transformation of Hannah from silent affliction to buoyant speech anticipates and prefigures the transformation of Israel from futile marginality to buoyant possibility.

Hannah's prayer sets the theological stage for a king who remains humble and dependent on Yahweh through prayer, and gives us a foretaste of king David's greatest legacy, the book of Psalms.



Hannah's Praise: *The Basis for True Strength*¹⁴

^{2:1} 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 rejoice in your salvation.

² There is *no one holy* like the LORD;
 there is *no one besides you*;
 there is *no Rock* like our God.

³ Do not keep talking so proudly
 do not let arrogance come out of your mouth,
for the LORD is a God who knows,
 and by him deeds are weighed.

⁴ The bows of the warriors are shattered,
 but those who stumbled are armed with strength.

⁵ Those who were full hire themselves out for food,
 but those who were hungry are hungry 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 makes poor and rich;
 he brings low, he also exalts.

⁸ He raises the poor from the dust
 and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
 to make them sit with nobles
 and inherit a throne of honor.
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's;
 and on them he has set the world.

⁹ He will guard the feet of his faithful servants,
 but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.
For it is not by strength that one prevails;

¹⁰ those who oppose the LORD will be broken.

The Most High will thunder from heaven;
 the LORD will judge the ends of the earth.
 He will give strength to his king
 and exalt the *horn* of his anointed."

a True strength given to Hannah

inclusio: *horn* - a metaphor of Hannah's strength
 Hannah's voice / mouth wide open in joy

holy - explicated in vv. 3-5

unique - explicated in vv. 6-7

rock - explicated in vv. 8-10

b False strength is examined by God

exhortation in proverbial form

c The Lord humbles and exalts

God's omnipotent power seen in 6
 upheavals, reversals in six cola
people are present / *God* backstage, unseen

x The Lord's strength reverses destinies

with increasing speed— 8 dramatic
 reversals in 4 cola!
people absent / *God* fully seen

c' The Lord brings down and raises up

God is united with and focused on one
 party, the *poor*, taking them through an
 entire process

The dynamic movements in the first 4 cola
 give way to quiet rest of the final 2

b' False strength silenced by God

two promises in proverbial form

a' True strength given to Israel's future king

God's voice opened wide in judgment impacts
 all creation

horn a metaphor of the strength of Israel's king

¹⁴ My outline is adapted from Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology, an Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 627.

A Song that Writes History

A. The Standard for Israel's Future Kings

Hannah's poem set forth for Israel's future kings that the key to their success will be based on their "trust" in the LORD (Pss 2:12; 3:3-4; 4:5; 9:10; 13:5; 20:7; 25:1, 2; 52: 8 etc.) and the care they extend to the humble and poor in Israel.

B. The Key to the Theology of Samuel

Hannah's song gives voice to the theology in 1 and 2 Samuel and is reaffirmed by David's three poems at the seams of the book (2 Sam 1:17-27; 22:1-51; 23:1-7).

C. The Pattern for the Psalms

Hannah's journey from despair to petition to thanksgiving to praise becomes the pattern for king David's prayers in the Psalms (1 Chron 16:4) and depicts the cycles of our spiritual journey.

D. Modeling the Freedom to "pour out" our Pain before the Lord

Hannah's passionate demeanor of "pouring out" her soul before the Lord is lauded by David as the exemplary way to pray.

These things I remember
and I **pour out** my soul within me.
For I used to go along with the throng
and lead them in procession to the house of God,
With the voice of joy and thanksgiving,
a multitude keeping festival. (Ps 42:4)

Trust in Him at all times, O people;
Pour out your heart before Him;
God is a refuge for us. (Ps 62:8)

E. Its Recapitulation at the Birth of Christ

Hannah's song becomes the core of Mary's song in the gospel of Luke.

"My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me
blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things
for me— holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

Climbing with the Psalms: Give Me an Authentic Voice

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud
in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty."
(Luke 1:46-53)

F. Incarnate in the Person of Jesus

In your relationships with one another,
have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had:
Who, being in very nature God
did not consider equality with God
something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a human being,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue acknowledge
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5-11)

G. The Standard and Hope of all Christian Behavior

Humble yourselves before the Lord,
and he will lift you up. (Jas 4:10)

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility
toward one another, because, "God opposes the
proud but shows favor to the humble and
oppressed." Humble yourselves, therefore,
under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you
up in due time. (1 Pet 5:5b-6)

H. The Best Gift We Can Give to God and his People

God makes his presence supremely felt
whenever God's people take time to praise and
glorify Him.

You are the Holy One;
the One enthroned on the praises of Israel.

(Psalm 22:3)

"As rational beings, with faculties of judgment
and conviction, true Israel recognizes that their
existence depends upon *I AM* and so soberly
extol him as the dynamic One." (Bruce Waltke)