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1 Samuel 2:1-11

Fifth Message

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# ASCENDING THE PEAKS OF PRAISE

SERIES: THE CROSSING FATES

## Introduction

### A. The Necessity for Worship

As we gather on this Sunday after Thanksgiving, we are keenly aware that we are living in fearful days. In a moment of time, the U.S. financial crisis has sent shock waves of instability around the world. For decades we operated in a climate in which venture capitalists made fortunes overnight and more modest investors could expect to achieve a good rate of return on their investments for their retirement and their children's education. But now countless numbers have lost a significant portion of their accumulated wealth as big name financial firms are suddenly swept away and the big three automakers teeter on the edge of bankruptcy. Pressing issues that once dominated the national and local news now fade into the background as the pillars of the economy are rocked off their foundations and many find themselves unemployed. The stock market has completely lost its ability to think rationally, reacting to every new bit of economic news with greater mood swings than an adolescent on steroids. In the wake of all this instability, our leaders in Washington galvanize their efforts in an attempt to grasp solutions out of the air, but the air is extremely thin.

How ought we as believers respond to the crisis? Where do we get our bearings when our world has been turned upside-down? Do we behave like the world and allow ourselves to be driven by fear? Do we limit our prayers for divine help just to survive and eke out a reasonable existence? Do we set aside our vision for world mission and cut back our investments in the kingdom of heaven until the crisis subsides?

The example of Hannah's faith in the opening chapters of 1 Samuel defies the human response to cave in to fear and withdraw into our personal cocoons of comfort. God's hand in Hannah's life caused her to live with absolute abandon to God, financially and relationally. Now is not the time to retreat, but to climb the mountain and get a fresh vision of what God is up to. For at times like this, God is on the move, establishing his kingdom on earth in new and fresh ways. Therefore it is a time when we must be especially attentive to worship. As Eugene Peterson writes,

In a world in which God is the primary reality, worship is the primary activity. In worship, we cultivate attentiveness and responsiveness to God. *Cultivate*, because if we live by mere happenstance—looking at what is biggest, listening to what is loudest, doing what is easiest—we will live as if God were confined to the margins of our lives. But God is not marginal; God is foundational and central. The person who lives as if God sits on the bench at the edges of life, waiting to be called on in emergencies, is out of touch with reality and so lives badly.<sup>1</sup>

### B. The Pattern for Worship

As we turn to 1 Samuel we discover that although Hannah has but a cameo appearance in Scripture, her voice becomes the "gold standard" for Israel's worship. The chronicler records that after David set up the ark in the Jerusalem, "He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to *extol*, *thank*, and *praise* the LORD, the God of Israel" (1 Chron 16:4 TNIV). These three different expressions of worship trace the development of Hannah's voice in 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11. The first term, *hazkir*, comes from the root *zakar*, "to remember," and is perhaps best translated as "to invoke" (JPS). Scholars label these psalms as "petition" or "lament" psalms. We find the identical root in Hannah's lament when she petitioned God to "remember" her in her affliction by giving her a son (1:11). When God answered her prayer, the narrator says, "the LORD *remembered* her, so in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son" (1:19b-20). Before Hannah could cultivate a voice of thanksgiving or praise, she first had to learn how to articulate her lament and "pour out" her soul before God (1:15).

The book of Psalms follows the same pattern. Praise is the ultimate destination (Pss 146-150). But praise is not where David begins (Pss 59, 56, 142, 52). What first shapes his voice is not praise but pain; not joy but grief; not communion but abandonment; not love but betrayal. When David's psalms were compiled later, the editors took great care to preserve this order lest we forget the necessity of "pouring out" (Pss 42:4; 62:8; 142:2) our grief before God, especially when life seems to run contrary to his promises.

When reality is in constant tension with the promises of God we become disoriented. Old categories don't function, and we can feel dismayed, distraught, and sometimes even betrayed. Submerged into such stress, we usually respond in one of three ways. For some, challenging our old way of thinking is unthinkable, so we live in denial and continue to worship as if there were no tension. Others of us might make mention of the pain but move so quickly to praise that we refuse to embrace the pain. Finally, at some point the dissonance may have gone on so long that we can no longer hold it in and we vent years of pent up disillusionment. But such honesty is usually reserved for the privacy of the counselor's office or the safe counsel of a friend; it is seldom expressed publicly in worship.

Hannah taught David that there is a much better approach to processing pain. From her example David learned to articulate every tension in his soul, and if the pain ran deep, to hold nothing back and to "pour out" his pain before God (Ps 142:2). God's character gave David absolute freedom to voice his feelings of dismay, confusion, doubt, and betrayal, and then to petition God to set things right. He understood that injustice was not the expression of God's character on earth, and that it was his role to pray that God would act from heaven to correct it, just as our Lord taught us to pray, "Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." As Brueggemann suggests, "Where the cry is not voiced, heaven is not moved and history is not initiated."<sup>2</sup>

The importance of learning to lament properly can be seen in the fact that of the 150 psalms that make up the Book of Psalms, fifty are petition/lament psalms. Therefore if we are not willing to be honest before God, we can't even begin our ascent up the mountain to high peaks of praise.

After God "remembered" Hannah and gave her a son, she returned to Shiloh with incredible determination and generosity to fulfill her vow to God with a feast of thanksgiving. Following the sacrifice of a three-year-old bull, she presented her son to Eli with extraordinary self-confidence and joy.

I wonder what her husband initially thought of Hannah's generosity. Imagine the conversation Elkanah might have had with his golfing buddies at the country club back in Ramah. His foursome was probably made up of local "stock brokers," whose conversation was dominated by the downturn from a previous bull market during Samson's reign as judge. After several holes of listening to them complain about losses in their portfolios, Elkanah finally has had enough and exclaims, "What are you whining about? What if you were married to my wife? Last week, she took over our finances, emptied out a quarter of our food closet, and gave away my stock options in Shiloh (a three-year-old bull to be exact!) in order to thank God for our one and only son. Now generosity is one thing, but then she permanently enrolled our little boy, as young as he is, in that vile seminary run by Eli's licentious sons. And now I'm left with no heir to run the ranch."

Yes, such "giving" may appear foolish to the world, but Hannah's generosity was driven by a divine joy. As Peterson explains, "The moment Hannah gave away that for which she had prayed most deeply and which she treasured most closely is explosive with joy. Getting her child from the Lord was a happy day; giving him to the Lord, even happier."<sup>3</sup>

Where did such joy come from? Hannah teaches us that there is an indescribable delight in fulfilling our commitments to God. By publicly acknowledging what God had done for her and giving back the gift that he gave, she finds herself even more alive and committed to God than when he gave her the boy. God's

presence is more precious than any gift he can give us. David follows suit in the petition psalms by making a vow to publicly acknowledge God's faithfulness when God answers his prayer to deliver him (Pss 22:25; 56:12; 66:13). The king paid his vows with a psalm of thanksgiving, giving glory to God's covenantal faithfulness (Ps 4:2-3). When God put "a new song" in the king's mouth, it not only heightened his awareness of the presence of God in his life, it also strengthened his commitment to serve God more fully (Ps 116:16), and fortified the faith of believing Israel. As David writes in Psalm 40:3, "many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in him." Paying his vows to God before the congregation brought David such joy that it became a driving force in his life:

**Then I will ever sing in praise of your name  
and fulfill my vows day after day. (Ps 61:8)**

From lament and thanksgiving we now come to Hannah's praise, the concluding crescendo of her voice and the final destination of the book of Psalms. Today we will follow the trajectory of her voice in order to uncover the mysterious power of praise that makes us fully human. Nothing could be more important for the Church, for without authentic praise we flounder in the mud.

### C. The Trajectory of Praise<sup>4</sup>

Hannah's poem is composed of seven strophes<sup>5</sup> in a chiasmic structure. Rather than examining them in chronological order, we will examine them by their corresponding pairs, moving from the outer limits of the poem to its center.

- a Hannah's Rise to Power (**horn**) (vv 1-2)
- b Courage to Confront: Silence! (v 3)
  - c Six Radical Reversals – focus on the recipients (vv 4-5)
    - x Eight Radical Reversals – focus on the Lord (vv 6-7)
  - c' One Compassionate Reversal – the Lord's care for the poor (v 8)
- b' Confidence to Wait for the Silence (vv 9-10a)
- a' The Messiah's Rise to Power (**horn**) (v 10b,c)

## I. The Awesome Ascent (1 Sam 2:1-2; 10b,c)

A 1<sup>st</sup> Strophe: Hannah's Rise to Power (vv. 1-2)

- <sup>21c</sup>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.  
<sup>2</sup> There is no one holy like the LORD;  
there is no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.

The first thing to note is how Hannah's entire person is consumed by praise. Her song is not a secondhand singing of abstract theology, but an intensely personal and wholehearted praise. Her consummate joy is expressed from a full heart, a mouth open wide (to devour her enemies<sup>6</sup>) and the metaphor of a raised "horn," which is a triumphant symbol of strength. Alter explains that "the animal's horn is its glory and power, held high, perhaps in triumph after goring an enemy into submission."<sup>7</sup> The verb *rum*, "to be high, exalted, lift up," is the key verb of the poem, used four times (vv 1, 2, 8, 10). But for Hannah, her surprising exaltation and inexplicable new status was not due to any of her efforts, but the result of the Lord's omnipotent power. Hannah did not make this arduous ascent up the mount of praise in her own strength. To the contrary, she was "lifted high" "in the LORD." Hannah's incredible experience is akin to riding in a Swiss gondola. The powerful cables whisk you off your feet from the valley below, causing your heart to leap into your throat as you rapidly soar above steep cliffs to breathtaking heights.

Though her praise begins on a personal note, once she has arrived at the summit, she is entirely focused on God, whose expansive holiness captures the vision and love of her heart. Therefore it should not surprise us that the lyrics of her song contain no mention of the "gift," though it was central in her thanksgiving and payment of her vows. Authentic praise carries us to holy ground where we stand alone before an audience of One and glory in his character. Before her Lord, Hannah sings with full throated praise, "There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God!" When God has delivered you out of your brokenness, his greatest gifts – job, spouse, children, home, family, country – pale in comparison to knowing him

and being part of his salvation history. Regardless of how rival gods claim to grant rocklike stability, there is no rock like our rock!

A' 7<sup>th</sup> Strophe: The Messiah's Rise to Power (10b,c)

- <sup>10</sup> 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.  
[or May he give strength to his king  
and *may* he exalt the horn of his anointed.]<sup>8</sup>

The final strophe echoes the first. From the highest peak of praise, Hannah is able to see the furthest horizon of history. As she casts her gaze towards the western sky, she realizes that the significance of her life would not vaporize in a week's time, like our modern newsmakers, but would be set in stone to shape the sinews of Israel's future kings. And it is to this end she prays, and by so doing sets the divine process in motion. In just a few decades, Israel's sweet singer, David, would be anointed with a "horn" of oil and would set the seal on his life's story with the identical praise of finding his ultimate strength in the Lord (2 Sam 22:47-51).

The secret to true strength that Hannah exercised over her adversaries through brokenness and prayer was replicated and broadened by David on an international scale, as he was the focal point of God's reign on earth. David's ability to rise above his enemies was the result not of his prowess or skill, but because in a wilderness, enveloped in his own weakness, he learned to pray (Pss 63, 142). And as those prayers were canonized in the Book of Psalms, they became the school for spirituality for all of Israel's kings. It is difficult for us to comprehend that even God's own Son was taught to pray by the inspired poet, yet at his darkest hour it is David's voice we hear on the lips of Jesus from the cross:

**My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? (Ps 22:1)**  
**Into you hand I commit my spirit. (Ps 31:5)**

**He keeps all his bones;  
not one of them is broken. (Ps 34:20)**

**They put gall in my food  
and gave me vinegar for my thirst. (Ps 69:21)**

The poetic connections continue to repeat and intensify. Hannah's mouth, which was "wide open" to devour her enemies in the first strophe, finds its heavenly counterpoint in the final strophe. In verse, 10 God's voice "thunders" from heaven to bring universal justice to the ends of the earth through his anointed King (Ps 2:4-9). Thunderstorms were a common occurrence in Israel. As they gathered moisture and force over the Mediterranean, they could wreak tremendous devastation as they traversed the hill country and forests before dissipating in the eastern desert. Thunder served as a powerful tool in the Lord's hand to activate his creation when the waters that covered the earth fled at his rebuke, and "at the sound of your thunder they took flight" (Ps 104:7). At the Exodus, the Lord created a path through the sea to redeem his people when "the heavens resounded with thunder" and God's "thunder was heard in the whirlwind" (Ps 77:17-19). In like manner, the Lord would "thunder" against the Philistines, thereby throwing them "into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites" (1 Sam 7:10),<sup>9</sup> and David would capture the same metaphors as the best way to articulate his deliverance from Saul by the hand of the Lord.

**The LORD thundered from heaven;  
the voice of the Most High resounded.  
He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy,  
with great bolts of lightning he routed them.(Ps 18:13-14)**

The divine secret of strength that Hannah articulates in her poem sets the course of history for the rest of time. For the power of the omnipotent God that created the earth is the source of strength available to redeem those who call upon him.

## II. The Sounds of Silence (2 Sam 2:3, 9-10a)

B 2<sup>nd</sup> Strophe: Courage to Confront: Silence! (v. 3)

- <sup>3</sup> 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.

Understanding the secret to power has had a visible impact on Hannah's demeanor. In the opening scene, she covered in passive silence under Peninnah's incessant abusive and her husband's self-pity. But now she is a woman to be reckoned with, one who stands on her own two feet and no longer is intimidated by arrogant and powerful people. She possesses the courage to confront others with the truth. She articulates a rebuke that she is fully prepared to give to anyone (the "you" is plural) foolish enough to speak anything that smacks of arrogance or pride. The first half of the verse is purposely cumbersome, awkward, and bluntly emphatic, with its qualifying adjective doubled: "Stop speaking so much, haughty, haughty" (i.e. "very haughtily"); Everett Fox translates it as:

**Speak no more so high, so high (and mighty)  
letting your mouth run-free,<sup>9</sup>**

Fokkelman attempts to capture the significance of the syntax: "By placing the prohibitive verse straight after v 2 the poem maintains from the outset that pride cannot endure, being a ridiculous and stupid way to behave in the face of such an overwhelming power as the holy God. After the noisy verbosity of 3ab, a hubbub so intense it even violates the metrical theme, a certain amount of calm returns in 3c."<sup>11</sup>

Hannah substantiates her warning with an exhortation that will become the primary motive in the Book of Proverbs, "the fear of the Lord" (Prov 1:7). The covenant keeping God is fully acquainted with all of our ways (and motives, Prov 21:2), and is actively making accurate assessments of all that we do, seen and unseen. Because God is the ultimate judge, all we need do is speak the warning and leave the arrogant to sort out their ways before the living God who, as we will discover in the 6<sup>th</sup> strophe, will ultimately execute judgment based on his penetrating evaluation of our life.

#### B' 6<sup>th</sup> Strophe: Confidence to Wait for the Silence (vv. 9-10a)

<sup>9</sup> **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;**

<sup>10</sup> **those who oppose the LORD will be broken.**

Though the faithful must wait patiently for God to judge wickedness, their destiny is not threatened by the escalation of evil in the world. While God patiently forbears the sins of the wicked in the hope that some day they will repent (2 Pet 3:9), he also is extremely vigilant to protect his people in an increasingly hostile environment. And though God is longsuffering, there will be a day of reckoning. Evil will not go on endlessly. There is an end to God's patience. On that day, God will mete out an appropriate judgment that fits the crime. Those who speak haughtily in the face of a holy God will be doomed to darkness so dense they will not be heard. They will be walled in by silence. Such is Hannah's warning to Peninnah, Eli and his sons, Goliath, Saul, Nineveh, Babylon, Rome, and Wall Street.

Finally, we will examine the three strophes at the center of Hannah's praise.

### III. God's Radical Reversals (1 Sam 2:4-8)

If we were to ask Hannah where she found tangible evidence of God's holiness, uniqueness, and rock-like stability that she so passionately sang about, she would look at us with puzzlement and respond simply, "History. Don't you read history?" At the center of the poem, Hannah glories in God's omnipotent power which manifests itself on earth in terrifying, yet awesome reversals.

Most often we are prone to praise God for his good benefits that he graces mankind with – the fertility of the earth, the abundance of children and grandchildren, financial independence, freedom from world conflicts, and so on. But Hannah praises God for his holiness that is dual edged: judgment irrupts alongside salvation, humiliation beside exaltation, and famine with feasting. Just as the plagues upon the idols of Pharaoh's world brought terror to the Egyptians, but were signs to Israel that their redemption was drawing nigh, so Hannah fully expects that God will turn Israel upside-down to bring about spiritual renewal. The catastrophes that the rich and powerful dread and spend all their energy and resources avoiding are the very things that are supposed to fill us with hope, vitality, and courage.

#### C 3<sup>rd</sup> Strophe: Six Radical Reversals – Focus on the Recipients (vv. 4-5)

<sup>4</sup> **The bows of the warriors are shattered,  
but those who stumbled are armed with strength.**

<sup>5</sup> **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.**

With extreme skill, Hannah composes three strophes, each with a unique vantage point, which when taken together give us a composite view of the irruption of the kingdom of heaven upon the earth. In the first, six monumental social reversals are recorded. Like three pairs of escalators in a department store, three transport those on the upper floors down to the basement of disaster, while the other three carry those from the gloomy basement up to the palatial penthouse to fill their vacancies. The perspective is similar to that of a television news crew that focuses on the "losers" and "winners" of dramatic, life-changing events, while God's omnipotent hand that directed all the events remains unseen backstage. From a reporter's standpoint, these are things that just "happen" to you — fate that you can't control. One day you win the lottery, the next day you get cancer. Life just happens and you have to live with it.

On many levels that perspective is true, but not when God's rule is irrupting around the globe. At those holy junctures in history you can expect there will be catastrophic social upheavals guaranteed as God turns the world on its head.

As we reflect on the imagery we find allusions to Hannah's story. Peninnah was like a warrior whose cutting words were like sharp arrows that penetrated into Hannah's heart, deeply wounding her and causing her to stumble. But now Hannah stands in her place, graced with divine strength. She is now the invincible warrior. As to hunger, you will remember that for years at every festival, Peninnah gathered multiple portions of meat for herself and her children, while Hannah could not eat. Now Hannah is the one whose hunger has ceased (which implies much more than physical satisfaction), and Peninnah is out on the streets begging for bread. And finally, with regard to motherhood, barren Hannah was given the gift of fertility, and her role as a mother was entirely in the service of God's kingdom, symbolized by the number of her children (seven is symbolic of perfection; Hannah actually only had six children). In contrast, Peninnah "languishes." The term suggests that in her old age, Peninnah faints from lack of sustenance because all her children had died.

But though these images reflect Hannah's story, she crafts them in such a way that they become the launching pad for universal realities. If we will sing praise like Hannah, we will have a 20/20 lens to negotiate our way into the future. Reading on in Samuel then, it should not surprise us when Eli, the fat priest, is cast down, while God raises up a new priest who feeds others with the rich nourishment of God's word (4:1); or that Saul, who is a head taller than any in Israel and epitomizes human strength, should be critically wounded by an archer's arrow; or that Israel's most beloved king would rise up out of the wilderness, making his bed in caves lined with bat dung. Or looking further ahead for 1000 years, we should not expect to find God's Son training his disciples in ivory paneled synagogues or Herodian palaces, but in a wilderness where the poor grow faint with hunger. It was there that the nucleus of the new kingdom became waiters for more than one "virtual thanksgiving" feast and needed a case of Tupperware to gather up the leftovers!

#### X. 4<sup>th</sup> Strophe: Eight Shocking Reversals – Focus on the Lord (vv. 6-7)

<sup>6</sup> **The LORD brings death and makes alive;  
he brings down to the grave and raises up.**

<sup>7</sup> **The LORD makes poor and rich;  
he brings low, he also exalts.**

In the fourth strophe, the centerpiece of the poem, Hannah shifts our focus from earth to heaven, from human beings as the recipients of God's sovereign actions to the Lord himself, whose omnipotent hand controls our destiny. The force of his power is felt in the rapid-fire burst of reversals that escalate from six to eight in a mere four cola (poetic lines), reversals that frame the outermost limits to our life both horizontally (life and death) and vertically (brings low and exalts). If that doesn't bring us to our knees, the fact that death is the first deed mentioned strikes another ominous note in the poem. Fokkelman observes that,

It could signal the subversive and disturbing nature of revolution in this message. Is it just a coincidence that the center most word of the poem's 113 words is the participle *memit* ("kills") of all things? Hardly, for he further points out that same word pair, "life and death," also occurs at the exact center of David's poem for his beloved friend Jonathan, a "poem" which itself makes up the center of the books of Samuel and similarly consist of three stanzas.<sup>12</sup>

This is a God to be reckoned with, a God who can change our good fortunes in a moment of time. Hannah does not live in candy-coated piety; she is a wom-

an who is going to tell you the truth straight up, no matter who you are. Most of us probably would not be comfortable having her in our home this Christmas. But the truth she speaks comes with passion, because she has lived with death, hunger, and deprivation. Her womb was as good as dead. As a mother she was dead. And as a wife she might as well have been dead, since her husband took another wife to do for him what she couldn't do and then ridiculed her for it. But the God who created life out of emptiness made her dead womb alive. And now, like a scientist who extrapolates from what he or she sees at a micro level in the laboratory to a macro level in the universe, so Hannah extrapolates from the micro-laboratory of her womb to the macro-level of history and postulates that there must be a resurrection at the end of time.

But that's not all. Like a poetical Einstein, Hannah applies her discovery of life reversals at the end of time to current time. We don't have to wait until the end of history to participate in resurrection, because God interrupts linear time, using the same principle. In a moment of time he is able to disinherit the rich and powerful and transfer their assets to the humble of his choosing. And if you are especially attentive to history, you will observe with great delight how God chooses just the right moment in time to bring down the arrogant from their lofty perches, while simultaneously elevating to dizzying heights those who never had any expectation of honor.

But it is extremely important to note that though God is all-powerful, he never uses his power in an arbitrary way. Twice Hannah gives the Almighty the title, Lord (Yahweh), emphasizing that this is the God who keeps his covenantal promises to his people. Therefore these mind-boggling reversals are done with premeditated thought and determination to fulfill his promises to his people.

This is Hannah's exposition of what it means that God is "unique," for no other god or force or human can do this. As Moses writes in Deuteronomy,

**"See now that I myself am He!  
There is no god besides me.  
I put to death and I bring to life,  
I have wounded and I will heal,  
and no one can deliver out of my hand."** (Deut 32:39)

C' 5<sup>th</sup> Strophe: One Amazing Reversal – Lord and Poor Become One (v. 8)

**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.**

In this the final strophe of the middle stanza, the Lord's attention is narrowed to just one party, the poor, whose journey we follow from their humble beginnings to their glorious end. The breakneck speed of the earlier strophes slows down to a relaxed, pedestrian pace, as the poetic lines repeat. This lengthens time and space for our reflection on the careful attention and tender compassion that the Lord is giving the marginalized of the world. Like a hospice nurse who treats every patient as if he or she were his only one, the Lord carefully lifts the afflicted from their deathbed and carries them the long journey to the king's palace. When they arrive, he escorts them to their bedroom, just down the hall from the first lady. Finally, he takes them into the dining hall, where they are seated next to the king. He then takes a waiter's towel and serves them from his finest cuisine.

The final act of God's redeeming love is "a throne of honor he causes them to inherit." At this point the poem comes to "a state of rest," as do the newly instated heirs. Once God has completed the process there they are secure, for the throne upon which they have been placed rests on the unshakable pillars that the Lord has set his creation upon.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps these beautiful and exquisite poetic lines were Hannah's final attempt to describe metaphorically what her experience with the Lord felt like to her. If so, it is the finest tribute she could have given to the Lord. And as with the rest of the poem, she writes more than she knows, as her metaphors will take on literal flesh and blood in the life of Jonathan's son, a cripple named Mephibosheth, who ate at the king's table and reinstated the exiled king on his return home (2 Sam 19:11-13, 30).

The song of Hannah is so profound, and is such an intense fusion of meanings that, having become the climax and the culmination to the prelude, it functions as the matrix of the great composition in four sections and fifteen acts.<sup>14</sup>

**Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, but the boy ministered before the LORD under Eli the priest. (v. 11)**

Hannah has come a long way from the first scene, when she was marginalized by her family and shut down in depressive silence. Having learned the secret to true strength, she not only stands upright, she also has ascended to heights of praise that few achieve. No longer intimidated by controlling or powerful people, she courageously rebukes every form of pride as supreme foolishness. Her vision extends way beyond her womb, down the corridors of history, where she rejoices in the exaltation of Israel's future king(s), whose faith is modeled after her own. But more than anything else, she is enraptured by a vision of the kingdom of God, a kingdom that manifests itself on earth in revolutionary, radical reversals. This explains why Hannah's praise is focused solely on the holy character of the omnipotent God whom she serves. This may be the reason the narrator surprisingly leaves Hannah's name out of the return journey home to Ramah. So powerful is her voice, it remains forever fixed, singing at the sanctuary. Is it any wonder then that her song writes history? For the poet "has the last word, not to mention the silence after."<sup>15</sup>

1 Eugene H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Westminster Bible Companion 1st ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 21.

2 Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms & The Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 111.

3 Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 24.

4 J. P. Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire, Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Assen: Van Corcum, 1993), 74-78. I am indebted to Fokkelman for much of my understanding and appreciation of Hannah's poem.

5 A strophe is one of the building blocks of a poem normally made up of one to three verses. It comes from Greek and means "turn" or "twist." Each strophe has a certain amount of cohesion before the poet "turns" with a new idea or image. See J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry, An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 87-115.

6 Hannah's expression of a "mouth is wide open" is found 5x in the OT (1 Sam 2:1; Isa 5:14; 57:4; Ps 35:21; 81:10) often to describe "devouring" one's enemies. The most graphic description is found in Isaiah 51:14 where Sheol "has enlarged its throat and opened its mouth without measure," to swallow Jerusalem's splendor.

7 Robert Alter, *The David Story, A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 9.

8 In my recent correspondence with Fokkelman, he reminded me that the verb "exalt" is a jussive form, expressing a "wish," and that it governs the unmarked jussive ("give") in the previous line. As such, the final lines should be translated as a prayer – "May he give strength to his king, and may he exalt the horn of his anointed." Hannah's last words of praise comprise her prayer on behalf of the king. "Hannah's composition starts with the fact and the property of her own horn: it IS high (and she is grateful and happy). The situation of the king's horn, however, is quite different: it is not high by itself, it (and he) needs Hannah's prayer (and God's positive reaction to it!) before he gets power."

9 M. D. Futato, "ra'm," NIDOTTE 3:1150-52.

10 Everett Fox, *Give us A King! Samuel, Saul, and David, A New Translation of Samuel I and II* (New York: Schocken Books, 1999), 10.

11 Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 87.

12 Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 91.

13 Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 95.

14 Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 110.

15 This is John Felstiner's description of the figure Shulamite in Paul Celan's poem "Deathfugue" in John Felstiner, *Paul Celan, Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 41.

# Hannah's Voice Gives Shape to David's Psalms

"And he [David] appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the Lord, even to *petition/lament* and to *thank* and *praise* the Lord God of Israel." (I Chron 16:4)

1. **Lament** - giving grief a voice
2. **Thanksgiving** – to give public acknowledgement to the Lord for answered prayer
3. **Praise** - raving about the character of God as Creator and Redeemer

# How Do You Pray?

THE PROMISES  
OF GOD



REALITY

*Tension*



**Disorientation**

Old order is lost,  
normal categories don't function,  
we feel displaced, dismayed, distraught,  
sometimes even betrayed.

# The Common Reactions to Disorientation

1. Denial to preserve the old orientation
2. Make mention of the pain, but move quickly to praise to avoid embracing the pain
3. Vent our disillusionment to others privately, but never publicly as an act of worship

# David's Response to Disorientation

**Disorientation**



**PSALM OF LAMENT**

There is a freedom  
to boldly confront God  
with every tension in the soul:

dismay,  
doubt,  
threat,  
anger,  
and betrayal.