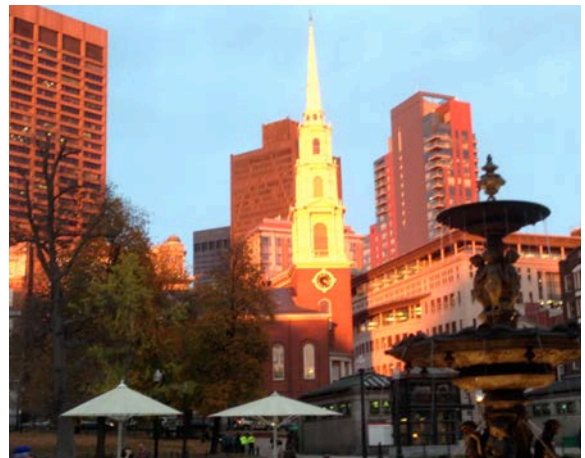




Session 2 1 Samuel 2:1-11

Caravaggio, "David with the Head of Goliath" c 1607
oil on wood, 35.6 in × 45.9 in, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

A Study Guide for Park Street Church Small Groups

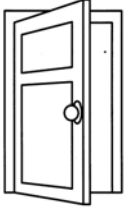


Study Guide for Session # 2



I. READ and PRAY over 1 Samuel 2:1-11

Stop and pray after each sentence.



II. INTRODUCTION

1) When we read the Psalms, we often wonder about the context in which each was composed. In the case of the Song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-11, which is described as a prayer, we are helped by knowing the context. What are the most specific references that Hannah makes to her situation in her song?

2) Why do you think that so much of Hannah's song has relatively little to do with the immediate issue of thanking God for the miraculous birth of her son and, instead, goes so far beyond that to consider the greatness of God and His saving ways?

Biblical scholars are virtually unanimous in agreeing that 1 Samuel 2:1-11 is a poem that was probably sung. Hebrew poetry is characterized three main features.

First, Hebrew poetry exhibits a degree of sound repetition (though this is not as prominent in Hebrew as it in English poetry): features like assonance, alliteration, consonance, and, to a lesser degree, rhyme. Unfortunately, none of these features can be preserved in translation.

Second, Hebrew poetry is characterized but the use of hyperbole, repetition, and vivid figures of speech.

Third, Hebrew poetry is frequently characterized by the use of approximate syllabic parallelism. Syllabic parallelism comes about as a result of what must have been the preferred kinds of ancient tunes to which poems were typically sung. In particular, Hebrew poems consist of a sequence of paired lines (called "bicola") or, less often, triplets of lines (called "tricola"), where each line within a bicolon or tricolon has approximately the same number of syllables as the other line(s). We can compare this to English hymns, which often exhibit a similar tendency to have lines with some

predictable number of syllables (see the back of many hymnals to see the syllable counts of each hymn). In Hebrew, as in English, one needs to make allowances for words that may have been compressed (like “heav’n”) or expanded (like “bless-ed”), as needed, to make the words fit the syllabic meter of the tune. So the actual number of syllables may differ by one or two, from what the tune might have ideally required. Though 30 of the 35 lines in Hannah’s song are 7 (±1) syllables long, and the remaining lines are close, once again, this feature cannot be translated into English. Careful readers may notice, however, that the number of English words in the translation of each line in a bicolon or tricolon is often similar.

Fourth, the most important characteristic of Hebrew poetry is the presence of semantic parallelism. This refers to the fact that Hebrew poems are typically comprised of pairs (bicola) and triplets (tricola) of lines where in each bicolon or tricolon there is parallelism in the meaning of each line. In particular, there are three kinds of semantic parallelism: synonymous parallelism (where the two or three lines say the same thing); antithetic parallelism (where the two or three lines say opposite things); and synthetic parallelism (where a following line adds to or builds on the previous line).

3) In Hannah’s prayer what is one example of a bicolon (a pair of lines) that has synonymous parallelism between both lines?

4) In Hannah’s prayer what is one example of a bicolon that has antithetic parallelism between both lines?



5) In Hannah’s prayer what is one example of a bicolon that has synthetic parallelism between both lines?

6) In Hannah’s prayer where is the one and only tricolon, and what kind of parallelism does it have?

7) Do you think that the one and only tricolon in Hannah's is meant to stand out? How does its content differ from anything else in the prayer, so that Hannah might rightly have wanted to give it special emphasis?



III. DIGGING DEEPER

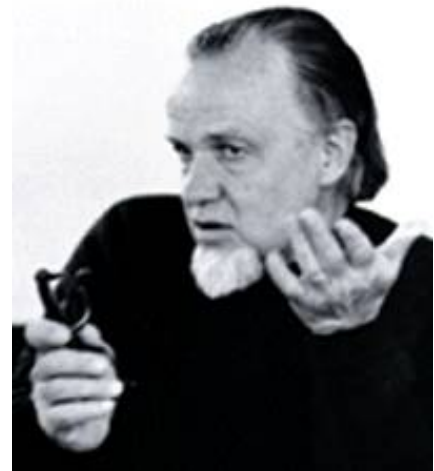
I want to make two major practical points based this seemingly academic information regarding Hebrew poetry.

8) How much time do you think that it took Hannah to compose her prayer/psalm?

9) Why is it appropriate to worship God with so much beauty and attention to detail, as is exhibited in Hannah's psalm?

10) How could you, this coming week, invest more time worshipping God in some similar way?

In 1974 Francis Schaeffer, published a sermon, "No Little People, No Little Places." Schaeffer was a very influential Christian apologist and philosopher in the 60's and 70's, who founded L'Abri fellowship in Switzerland. In that sermon Schaeffer observed how many of us are aware of various practical and spiritual problems in our church, at work, in our community, or in the world beyond that need to be addressed. But we imagine that our own abilities are too limited and our deficiencies too blatant for anything we do to matter very much. We feel like "little people," compared to the big people who could really make a difference. But when we read the Bible, we discover that with God there are no little people and no big people! There are



only people who are doing what they are doing out of love for God and in the power of the Holy Spirit, and there are other people who are doing what they are doing for their own reasons and in their own strength.

Similarly, many of us think that the circumstances in which we trying to live out our lives and serve God - our position at church, our job at work, our standing in the community - is too small, too insignificant to matter. If only we were in a bigger place, perhaps a higher position at a more prestigious company, then our impact for the kingdom would be much greater. When we read the Bible, however, we discover that with God there are no little places and no big places! There are only places where we do not belong and other places where we do belong, at least for a season, because God has called us to serve Him right where we are, with all that we are in His strength.

11) In what respects could Hannah have thought of her as a “little” person functioning in a “little” place, whereas Eli and his sons are “big” people functioning in a very “big” place?

12) Hannah stresses in her prayer/psalm that when God intervenes, whether in this life or in eternity, His work often brings about great reversals in our situation. In her case it was a rescue from infertility and the cruel verbal attacks of her rival, Peninnah, who evidently used Hannah’s infertility as proof that, even if Hannah was more favored their husband Elkanah, Peninnah was more favored by God. Which of the reversals mentioned by Hannah applies most to your life situation, and why?

13) The most striking thing about Hannah’s prayer is the way it helps us see that, even if Hannah was from a worldly perspective a “little” person functioning in a “little” place, from God’s perspective she was anything but that. Explain how this is so.

14) One important issue that has caused respectful differences of opinion in the church, as well as, regrettably, some rather acrimonious divisions, concerns the biblical right of



women to teach men in an authoritative manner (especially in the context of public worship, as opposed to, say, a university classroom). What relevance might Hannah's Prayer have for this debate?

15) In 1 Samuel 2:10, Hannah concludes her psalm/prayer with the remarkable affirmation, "He gives strength to his king, and exalts the horn of his anointed." Critical scholars have used these lines as proof that Hannah could not have prayed or spoken this psalm, that it must come from a later author or editor since Israel did not yet have a king at the time of Hannah. Who is this king, whose horn is exalted, about whom Hannah is speaking? What evidence is there for your view in Hannah's own psalm?

16) We may summarize the conclusion of Hannah's psalm/prayer as: "With God there are no little people, and there are no big people. There are people, and then there are people who are kings, reigning in life through the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17). Likewise, with God there are no little places, and there are no big places. There are only places that are just places, and then there are places (even prisons) that have become palaces, because Jesus Christ is reigning there. How does this apply to your situation?"



V: PRAYER¹



As we pray, keeping the Goal of Hannah's prayer and the End of all things in mind:

"Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great!" (Rev. 18:2)

"Woe! Woe, O great city,

O Babylon, city of power!" (Rev 18: 10)

"Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belongs to our God,

For true and just are his judgments!" (Rev. 19: 2)

"Praise our God, all you his servants,

You who fear him, both small and great!" (Rev. 19: 5)

And yet, there are "no little people"

In Revelation's radiant kingdom of prophets, priests and kings.

Only over-comers, saved by the blood,

Enthroned in grace, exalted in love,

Enthralled by the Lamb made King!

¹ Prayer from Stuart DeLorme.