

Broomfield



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The Sacrifice of Devotion, Part 1

Abraham's Sacrifice of Devotion

In Genesis 22 we read of the call that God placed on Abraham's life to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah. This was such a difficult calling. Never mind that Isaac was the child of promise. Never mind that Abraham and Sarah had waited more than thirty years for his birth. Never mind that God had commanded it. This was their son!

And yet, Abraham was called to bring Isaac to the place of God's appointment and slay him on an altar.

Why?

Isaac was Abraham's sacrifice of devotion.

Genesis 22:12, "And he [God] said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."

A Call for all God's Children

The sacrifice of devotion is a call that rests upon all God's children. Christ said:

Matthew 10:37-39, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

This verse indicates the kind of life to which we have been called in Christ. Salvation is not about a ticket to heaven. It is not about freedom from the threat of hell. It is not about fulfillment. Salvation is God's calling of a people out of this world to be His own possession — which is what the sacrifice of devotion is all about.

And thus, the question in life is not about how happy I am and do I like what God has given me today? The question is Am I God's?! Is my life the Lord's?! Have I lost my life for the sake of Christ?

This is what the sacrifice of devotion is all about! And this is what constitutes the opening message of Samuel. Look with me at the prologue that God gives us in this book, 1 Samuel 1:1-5.

1 Samuel 1:1 “Now there was a certain man of Ramathaimzophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite.”

This marks the beginning of the transition from the time of the Judges to the time of the Kings. Let's look at a couple of the particulars of this verse.

Ramathaimzophim: indicates both the city and the family from which Elkanah came. Ramah was a city in Ephraim and Zuph was the clan from which Elkanah descended. An Ephraimite does not mean that Elkanah was of the tribe of Ephraim — for 1 Chronicles 6:16-38 says that he was from the tribe of Levi and a Kohathite. Rather, this indicates simply that he lived in the land of the Ephraimites.¹ Keil and Delitzsch provide us with some background information:

"The Levites were reckoned as belonging to those tribes in the midst of which they lived, so that there were Judaeen Levites, Ephraimitish Levites, and so on."²

1 Samuel 1:2, “And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah³, and the name of the other Peninnah⁴: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.”

From this verse we conclude that Elkanah was a man of some means. While polygamy was widely practiced during this time, nevertheless it took quite a bit of money to support two families. In other words, not just anyone had multiple wives back then. The fact that Elkanah is mentioned as having two wives indicates to us that he certainly was not lacking in material wealth.

Secondly you also will notice in this verse that Hannah is mentioned before Peninnah. This most likely indicates that Hannah was Elkanah's first wife and clearly his most beloved.⁵

Finally, from this verse we note that Hannah was barren. This is reminiscent of Abraham and Jacob's family struggle.⁶ On account of Hannah's barrenness, Peninnah probably was chosen so that Elkanah might have legitimate descendants.

1 Samuel 1:3a, “And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh.”

It is unclear whether this was one of the three annual festivals stipulated in Exodus and Deuteronomy⁷ or whether this was simply a family pilgrimage. Yet this we do know, Elkanah's yearly trip was for the purpose of worshipping God as prescribed by Deuteronomy 12:5-7 and indicated in this verse. Notice the particulars.

¹ Compare Judges 17:7 this is just as other Levites were associated with the land in which they lived.

² Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on 1 Samuel, Volume 2, Page 18

³ The name Hannah means grace.

⁴ The name Peninnah means ruby.

⁵ Compare 1 Samuel 1:5

⁶ Compare Genesis 16:2-3 and Genesis 30:4-9

⁷ Compare Exodus 23:14-17; 34:23 and Deuteronomy 16:16

Shiloh was the center of the religion of Israel during the time of the Judges.⁸ The city was located eighteen and one-half miles northwest of Jerusalem. It housed the Ark of the Covenant.⁹ And thus it was the hub of Jewish worship at this time.

This is the first mention of the title the Lord of hosts in Scripture. Unlike many other titles of the Lord, this lays stress to His awesome character.¹⁰ The Lord is the commander of the hosts of heaven and earth — such a striking emphasis during a time of such lawlessness! Yet that was the One whom Elkanah endeavored to worship.

1 Samuel 1:3b, “And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there.”

This reference serves the dual purpose of introducing two key players in the coming chapters of this book — a foreshadowing of what was to come. And it is further setting the stage for Elkanah's sacrifice. It was offered in a setting of comprise and rebellion as indicated by 1 Samuel 2:12-17.

1 Samuel 1:4-5, “And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb.”

From this we learn the sacrifice of Elkanah included a peace offering. This is the only offering from which one was allowed to give "portions" to the rest of the family. As you know, according to the word of God, after the peace offering was presented to the Lord the priest received his share. The worshipper then brought the remains of his sacrifice to the prescribed area and enjoyed a fellowship meal with his family indicating that peace had been restored between his family and God.¹¹

Now in Deuteronomy 16:14 we read of the joyous time that accompanied the worship of God. We are talking about a people being reconciled to a great and mighty God. And yet as we'll see, our text is showing us that this was anything but a joyous time for Hannah. Hannah was barren.¹² And yet, Elkanah endeavored to make the best of a bad situation by showering his love upon Hannah in the form of a double portion from the peace offering.

Now brothers and sisters, it is very important to note that the closing of Hannah's womb is here ascribed to the kind-intention of God. We know this because Biblical narratives usually employ "LORD" (Yahweh) when they describe activities that are significant in Israel's covenantal relationship with God.¹³ This text attributes the closing of Hannah's womb not to El (God), El-Shadai (God Almighty), or El-Elyon (God Most High) as might be expected. The closing of Hannah's womb is attributed to Yahweh — indicating that the closing of Hannah's womb was the loving activity of a covenant-keeping God!

In other words, Hannah's situation was a divinely ordained sacrifice of devotion. She is where she is because God in His providence placed her there. And thus just like with Abraham, Hannah has a choice:

⁸ Compare Joshua 18:1; and Judges 18:31; 21:19-24

⁹ Compare 1 Samuel 3:3

¹⁰ Compare Isaiah 6:3

¹¹ Compare Leviticus 7:11-18

¹² Because of the promise that God made to work His covenantal promises through our children, child-bearing became one of the most important and privileged ministries in Israel. Consequently, to be a woman without a child was to incur the false-accusation that God did not love you.

¹³ Compare Genesis 12, 15, 17, 28; Exodus 24; 2 Samuel 7; Jeremiah 31, 33

Will she give herself to the Lord and let Him take care of the rest? Will she allow her life to be a sacrifice of devotion unto the Lord? Will she fear Yahweh! Or will she fight, kick, and scream until she gets her way?

This is what this passage is all about — the Sacrifice of Devotion. This issue rests on our lives as well. So that we might prove faithful to the ministry God has given to us, let's look at Hannah's Sacrifice of Devotion,

A Context of Hostility

Hannah's sacrifice of devotion was placed in a context of hostility.

1 Samuel 1:6-7a, "And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD."

Such is the context of many a service in the kingdom of God, open hostility. Because worship at this time was a very public event, it stands to reason that whatever weaknesses or strengths you might have in the kingdom of God would at this time be paraded before the eyes of all. Well, Peninnah made sure that her status as a child-bearer and Hannah's bareness would be openly seen. In fact, Peninnah was so focused on this that she is described here in three ways.

First she was Hannah's adversary or rival.¹⁴ The word used here is a strong word in the Hebrew which can be translated troubler or enemy. Its verbal form means to bind up or tie and was used of anything that was narrow or confining. The idea here is that a rival is someone who actively endeavors to thwart his opponent — to place them in a tight or narrow spot.

Secondly, Peninnah provoked¹⁵ Hannah. This means she excited or put Hannah into commotion. She placed her in a state of agitation which provokes some kind of action — which in this case was Hannah's tears of grief. This was a bitter (sore)¹⁶ provocation meaning it carries the idea of provoking to the utmost. In essence, Peninnah lived to make Hannah's life miserable. And so long as Hannah was grieving, Peninnah was most happy.

Thirdly Peninnah made Hannah fret¹⁷ or become irritated. Literally this means that Peninnah thundered against Hannah. Psalm 96:11 uses this term in describing the sea roaring or thundering. That Peninnah is said to have "irritated" Hannah implies that the net effect of Peninnah's ridicule was Hannah making loud complaints on account of Peninnah (which complaints we will learn in a moment were aimed at God).

Now note, this just wasn't a one-time event. Rather as the text indicates (verse 7a), that this was the constant theme of Hannah and Peninnah's relationship — month after month, year after year. And with this we conclude that the soil from which arises the sacrifice of devotion is the soil of open hostility.

You know, it is amazing to me how quickly I will say to God, "Lord use me!" And it is equally amazing how quickly I complain when the Lord provides the environment necessary to produce faithful service in His name. Scripture is replete with verses indicating that it is from the furnace of affliction that God

¹⁴ צרה tsarah

¹⁵ כעס ka'ac

¹⁶ כא'אכ כעס kah'-as

¹⁷ רעם ra'am

selects His servants.

1 Peter 1:6-7, “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

Hebrews 12:11, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

James 1:2-3, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”

Romans 5:2-5, “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

This was the environment from which this godly woman arose. This was the environment that produced Hannah’s deep faith. It was from this soil of adversity that Hannah’s sacrifice of devotion came.

And family of God, if you would seek to serve the Lord, you too will be persecuted — that is the schoolhouse of the soul!¹⁸

You say, “But I am so weak and faithless. I seriously doubt whether the trials through which I have been brought have equipped me to serve the Lord. For with each trial has come failure on my part in some way or another.”

Well guess what? So also was Hannah's testimony.

The Context of Deep Sorrow

The sacrifice of devotion also arises in the context of deep sorrow.

1 Samuel 1:7, “And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; **therefore she wept, and did not eat.**”

Peninnah was such a thorn to Hannah that what should have been a joyful occasion — the worship of God¹⁹ — became a heightened time of sorrow such that we read that Hannah, “wept and did not eat.”

Now don't misunderstand this statement the eating referenced in this passage is not that of Hannah's daily meals, rather her refusal to eat was in the context of the fellowship meal with God that occurred after a peace offering.²⁰ In other words, Hannah was so overcome with her situation that she allowed her

¹⁸ Compare 2 Timothy 3:12

¹⁹ Compare Deuteronomy 16:14

²⁰ Compare 1 Samuel 1:4-5

worship to be effected!

And so we see that when it came to Hannah's sacrifice of devotion, at first she didn't cope all that well! Rather than being reviled and not reviling or suffering and not uttering threats, or entrusting herself to Him who judges righteously as did Christ,²¹ Hannah took it out on God such that her worship was effected!

Has ministry in the kingdom of God brought you to this point in your walk with God?

I hope not — yet I must confess, it has in my life there have been times when my pea-brain has charged God with a foul on account of a bitter providence. Rather than trusting His character and taking refuge in His name²² I allowed my fallible understanding to lead me to the point of questioning the wisdom of God. And this was the case with Hannah. Matthew Henry wrote this:

"Yet it was her infirmity so far to give way to the sorrow of the world as to unfit herself for holy joy in God. Those that are of a fretful spirit, and are apt to lay provocations too much to heart, are enemies to themselves, and strip themselves very much of the comforts both of life and godliness." (Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume, 1961, p. 282)

By faith you must believe that God's plan are always “for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). By faith you must believe that on the Day of Judgment no one will lay the accusation against God because they have seen “the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread” (Psalm 37:25). Indeed, God is in the business of taking everything that this wicked and evil world can throw at us and transforming them into that which will grow us in grace and bring honor and glory to His name.

So when you fail — and you are going to fail — listen you are kicking against One who has loved you with an everlasting love. When you are at your wits end with God remember God loves you. When your soul has been "provoked" such that you find yourself "thundering" against God come to Christ in repentance.

But again this is the soil from which arises the sacrifice of devotion.

When we fail in our service to the Lord and our energies are directed against the One who has loved us to the utmost it is then that you discover how completely vile you really are and the true depths of your depravity because you actually could call into question the love of One who died for you! Place your hand over your mouth and with Job and say “therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (Job 42:3b).

Mourn again on account of your sinfulness and thus enjoy afresh and anew the Kingdom of God.²³

And so from this we gain insight into the vessels whom God uses in His kingdom. God doesn't use perfect Christians. God doesn't use the ever-faithful never-doubting self-reliant Christians. Rather, He uses dependant Christians.²⁴ And dependence only comes as we are forced to look at our sin in light of our Savior!

²¹ Compare 1 Peter 2:23

²² Compare Zephaniah 3:12 and Proverbs 18:10

²³ Compare Matthew 5:3

²⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 17:37, and Acts 16:30-31

A Context of Distraction

And so, the sacrifice of devotion arises in the context of open hostility and deep sorrow. Yet notice the text is not finished. There is yet one more element to be added by way of warning, it arises out of distraction.

1 Samuel 1:8, “Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?”

We must not be too hard on Elkanah here — for he truly is in an impossible situation. His wives are at odds and he is in the middle. And so, he does what many husbands in his situation would do he turns the focus on himself — suggesting that he was the greatest prize a woman could ever want.

As humorous, weak, or sad as that may seem, don't miss the danger involved here. Elkanah's good intention was just as dangerous to Hannah as Peninnah's ill-will. For rather than encouraging Hannah by pointing her to the Lord, Elkanah's advice, if heeded, would have directed Hannah's focus in the opposite direction. He in essence is saying, “Hannah! Look at your blessings. Forget about what you don't have; look what sits in front of you. Look at me!”

Brothers and sisters, do you know what we call this?

This is the "Theology of Weights and Measures." It is rooted in paganism and has as its assumption that coping in life is a matter of perspective. Look at your blessings rather than your difficulties. See what you have got rather than what you've lost. Remember the glass is half-full rather than the glass half-empty.

Never are we called in Scripture to cope in this way. For all the blessings in the world piled one upon another would be nothing less than a distraction if they draw our focus away from Christ. And that — by way of warning — is the final circumstance from which arises the sacrifice of devotion — a setting of distraction.

Let us beware of the advice of well-intentioned dragons! Poison mixed with sugar is just as deadly! The enemy of "great" is... "good."

Indeed! We must never allow a thing to dissuade us from our service in the Kingdom of God. Paul's labor among the Corinthians was so that they might have “undistracted devotion to the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:35a). And this must be our passion as well.

And yet, I wonder how many genuine desires for the Lord have been derailed because of a theology of convenience or the "Theology of weights and measures?

The world says look at what you've been given, consider your children, and reflect upon your past blessings! In light of all these things, how can you not give back to God?

Wait! Wait! Did I hear that right?

Look upon your children?

Consider past blessings?

What is this but idolatry?

Listen, when it comes to motivation in our service of the Lord, our focus must not be on anything on this earth, but on the Lord of Hosts.²⁵ And thus as you and I consider the calling that God has placed on our lives to be a sacrifice of devotion to Him let us be careful as to the well-intentioned advice we receive.

Did you realize that had Hannah settled for the love and affection of Elkanah and simply counted her blessings and not wrestled with God we never would have known it, but redemptive history would have been dramatically altered!

Brothers and sisters, spiritual giants do not grow on the wisdom of man. They are fed on the undying word of Christ which encourages us in and through all things to “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

This is what the sacrifice of devotion is all about! Deny self. Ignore distraction. Do not settle for good; BUT trusting in the Lord with all our heart!

How do you respond to this calling — to this yoke placed upon each and everyone of us?

Let's pray.

Lord crucified, O mark Thy holy cross
On motive, preference, all fond desires;
On that which self in any form inspires
Set Thou that sign of loss.

And when the touch of death is here and there
Laid on a thing most precious in our eyes,
Let us not wonder, let us recognize
The answer to this prayer.²⁶

²⁵ Compare Romans 12:1

²⁶ Quoted by Sinclair Ferguson, *Discovering*, Amy Carmichael page 25

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on August 8, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.