

Commentary on I Samuel 1:1-7

The Sadness of Being Barren

By: Rev. Phillip B. McKinney

I Samuel 1:1-2: "Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, 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: and he had two wives; the name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children."

Hannah means gracious, and Peninnah means coral—like something in the order of skeletons that are found on the coral reefs of tropical oceans—something that has been dead a long time and has gotten very hard. It almost seems that their names describe their nature.

Verse 3: "And this man went up out of his city early to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there."

Shiloh means Messiah, temple, and rest. It means the place of God. When Jacob was dying, he said to his son, Judah, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be," Genesis 49:10. He was talking about the Messiah; and when Jesus came, he templed or tabernacled among men. Jesus is the tabernacle, the Shiloh, where we come. He is where we go to worship now, and we worship Him in Spirit and Truth. Since He knows our hearts and the very intents of our minds, we dare not come to worship Him in any other way.

Verses 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."

When they went up to offer the yearly sacrifices, they left the breast and right shoulder for the priest, and the rest they took for themselves. I suppose you

could say it was something like our old time meetings, where there was all day preaching, singing, and dinner on the grounds. Everyone ate and praised God, and received portions that were left from the sacrifice. After the priest took the best portion, the rest was given out to the members of the family. Hannah received a worthy portion—worthy of her gracious attitude and manner of life.

Verse 6: "And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb."

Now here we begin to see a little something. The devil's job, of course, is to make you fret, even if God has and is working something out for your good. Some people say that his talking about his other wife provoked her, but here it stated very plainly that the adversary also provoked her sore and made her fret because the Lord had shut up her womb. So let us say, the devil caused her to fret. Now how many of you get to the place where the devil talks to you? He talks to you by entering into your thoughts. Something begins to vex you, and it begins to aggravate you. It begins to cause you to fret, be unhappy, dissatisfied, and vexed. The more the thing happens, the more it vexes you. No doubt the devil said, "You have no children—you are barren. In all your years of marriage to Elkanah you have not produced one single child."

The same is true today! The enemy asks you, "Where are the souls that you have produced for God? You're nothing! You can't even testify. You can't sing. You can't even pray a prayer in faith." Then, of course, the devil always has somebody like the other wife that is right there—the same as Leah was to Rachel or as Hagar was to Abraham's wife, Sarah—to make fun and kind of poke at you to keep the thing going. He will always try to send somebody to torment you and get you upset. We are going to find out how she found a way to solve her problem as we go along.

Verse 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."

Not only did the devil vex Hannah, but this woman, Peninnah, vexed her. I can imagine going up to the house of the Lord every year. This man and his two wives (which back then was permitted, but not now) along with Peninnah's bunch of children, all running along the edge of the road. I can remember when I was a child. My grandmother would take my father's younger brother and me to the store. We were both about the same age. We would run circles around her. It was only about a mile to the store, but we would probably cover five miles. We would

run over the hill through the woods, and then back down to the road to where my grandmother was. I can imagine the children playing all the way up to Shiloh, having a real good time. But also here is Hannah, walking along—sad—with no children for her husband.

There is something about being godly and being barren for a long time. It is sort of like being a slow runner that reserves all his strength for the finish line. Two examples are Sarah, who had been a long time without children, and Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, who had no children for many years. It almost seems like the barren are blessed in the end, more than those who have children. Sometimes, after a long period of time, God does a quick work in a short time. Samson did more in his last day on earth, than in all the rest of his life combined.

So if you have started off, and it seems like you can never say anything right, and it is so hard to get to the place where you want to get in God, just look around and see all the fast runners. They are all well out in the front, running free and easy, way ahead of you. The enemy vexes you, saying, "Why don't you give up? Why don't you just quit?" But know this one thing, "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, . . . but time and chance happeneth to [us] all," Ecclesiastes 9:11. God has a time or a season to bless you, so keep running the race and fighting the good fight of faith, "for in due season [you] shall reap if you faint not." I Timothy 6:12; Hebrews 12:1; Galatians 6:9.