**Series**: The Book of 1 Samuel

**Title**: Human Agony and the Answer of God

**Scripture**: 1 Samuel 1:1-20

**Description:** Can you believe that God would answer your petition? The testimony of Hannah gives us much needed insight for this case of Human Agony and the Answer of God

# Context

Please turn to 1 Samuel. *In the Hebrew scriptures*, 1 & 2 Samuel is 1 book, back to back with 1 & 2 Kings. Though Samuel features in the first 16 chapters the book is not about Samuel; Neither are they ultimately about King David, though Samuel and Kings refer to him nonstop; These books are about God **establishing a Kingdom** to make Israel His glory among the Nations- But in the end we're left devastated with the kingdom in pieces and citizens desperately waiting for the Covenant descendent of King David who will come to restore God's kingdom, deliver them from their enemies, establish peace on the Earth for ever.

Our Christian Bible place Ruth just before 1 Samuel in order of history, and we see even there, this anticipation of David (4:22)

# Read 1 Samuel 1:1-20

The temptation when hearing an account like this is to believe that *God will give us what we ask for, if we ask desperately enough and bargain rightly*. But we know, both through experience and biblical understanding that receiving from God is far more than about what we ask. [We don't know what to ask (Rom 8), we ask amiss (James 1)...]

What we ought to take away from this is far more helpful... far more relevant to us : **that *God answers whatever we ask according to His will*** (1John 5).

14 And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. [according to **his will**] ie asking what he asks for!

In fact, **the greatest personal benefit of true prayer, is personal surrender to God's will**, and **finding ourselves** in that blessed space of **trust and peace, even before we receive our request**

Now **Hannah** receives **Samuel**, and the account ends with the blessed Climax in (20), read:

20 in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and **she called his name Samuel**, for she said, "**I have asked for him from the LORD**."

"SAMUEL" - the name means: 'My request from the Lord' or, God's Answer to my Petition.

## Application

Can you believe that God would answer **your** petition? I can't say that word without thinking about websites like *Change.org* - which enable people to create their own petitions, and get others to support them. Every day thousands of petitions, on hundreds of online platforms are shared for the public to join - 'remove lockdown', 'arrest the president', 'ban abortion', 'protect the sea' - You could create one called 'Ban boring sermons'. And if you get enough signatures on your petition, you may even force parliament to **pay attention** to it! That's the benefit of a democracy.

Can **one** person have **the attention of** God? The Ruler of the Universe? We may ***often*** petition him, even ***agonisingly***... but mostly we doubt that we really have his attention.

Well Hannah's testimony gives us much needed insight, in the case of Human Agony and the Answer of God. It's such a relatable experience, which transcends time and culture.

# Proposition

I'd like to point out 4 facets of God's Answer to Hannah which should instruct our own faith in times of agony and petition to Him. 4 things we need to see and remember, if we'd find the peace she does.

**The Heritage (1-2), The Circumstances(3-8), The Occasion(9-18) and the Timing(19-20) of God's answer**

Pray

## The Heritage of God's Answer (1-2)

* **Read 1-2**
* There are no *anonymous people* in God's story.
* To the population she was anonymous, the wife of (1) *'a certain man'*
  + Actually **1/2 a wife**: one of two!
  + Actually **half 1/2 a wife**: no children! - *(when Elkanah says in v8 "Am I not worth more to you than 10 sons" - it could be that Peninah in fact had 10 sons!)*
  + At least, she was loved - perhaps then, **his first love; but not sufficient** for his family plans.
* But it's important to pay attention to this family's heritage - specifically provided in **v1**.
  + we've already seen **Ruth ch4** **anticipating** **David**...but here in (v1) there is **further connection** between Ruth, David and Samuel.
  + though Elkanah lives in Ephraim, his ancestors come from Ephrathah. Jeroham, Elihu, Tohu, Zuph... just like David's ancestors ... see Ruth 4:11: "*May Boaz act worthily in Ephratah and be renowned in (*The Hebrew name*)* **Bethlehem**" - the birth place of David, and the birth place of his Son Jesus Christ!
  + v1 tells us that **God's answer comes in a common Heritage** between Hannah and Ruth,... Samuel and David.
* It's so much easier to see God's "***working***" in hindsight. God only ***'gives'*** ***the answer*** in **1v19** *'the Lord remembered her'*; but He's already acting in **1v1**. Actually, already in **Ruth ch4**... Actually, in **v1** of **Genesis**: *In the Beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth*. "**Heritage" is inheriting what's gone before.** **Act 17:27** says that *God determines the times and boundaries of every nation, with the intention that* all people should "*petition Him*" (my words) *and thus grope and find Him, though He's not very far from each one*. And what this means is:

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* **Every human** has this **heritage**: **God's purpose**. No one is anonymous to Him. Maybe to the population you are, but You're not unknown to Him. No matter who **you're descended** from, He's determined the times and boundaries of your life - so that you, like Hannah, will be one who 'petitions Him'. Your **heritage** is **God's Great Story** - And this Story climaxes at about 30AD in the arrival of the King, Jesus Christ, who brought the greatest of all petitions to God, and He was heard! So there's great hope for every person who seeks Him
* But by the same token, He will not answer those who reject this heritage, who reject that God has a claim on their existence - who seek a Gift but reject the Giver! Zech 7:13 puts it this way:

Zec 7:13 "As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear," says the LORD of hosts

## The Circumstances of God's Answer (3-8)

* Read 3-8
* This is so helpful, because it neither hides nor ignores **the human condition** : to be a **human** *is to* **agonise**.
* In Ecc 5:15-17 we have an honest confession of a human living without God's answer

As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again.. naked as he came, And shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. 16 This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, And what **gain** is there to him who toils for the wind? 17 **Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness, in much vexation and sickness and anger**.

* It's an impossible situation for Hannah - you can't counsel her out of the circumstances: Almost certainly, Elkanah took a 2nd wife in order to have posterity; But his failure to follow God's design of one man and one woman wreaks havoc!
* **Read (6).** "*Her rival*"! That's what happens... How can you love and not be jealous! Covenant love gives itself fully and vulnerably, but this is a marriage of conveniences, and therefore impossible inconveniences
  + *'Each year'*, **provoking** as they prepare for the journey: "Hannah, you're lucky you don't have kids to arrange! Hezron, here's your portion from dad... Don't worry Hannah, I'm sure Elkanah *must* love you... Look : he gives you double portions, even though you give him nothing!
  + And I will assume, since she's human, she's not innocent in this - In v18 she says to Eli: *I've been speaking out of anxiety and vexation* - literally *useless words*, and *anger*
  + **Proverbs 14:30**

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the **bones rot**.

* + When Hannah comes close to worship (**7 - read a**).: The LORD expects you to come **into** His house and give to him, but (**6**) it's the Lord that **closes** you up and gives you nothing
* **And then Elkanah**: He's created this situation of 2 wives. And now what can he do? He can't discipline Peninah. He can only appeal in exasperation. (**8**) *What's the matter - you have me! Don't you love me!* But it's not about Elkanah, it's not logic. He just doesn't understand, does he?
  + [**ILLUS**: husband sleeping elsewhere to avoid hearing his wife cry herself to sleep for years since she wasn't falling pregnant]
* **So look at the Circumstances of God's answer**: in v6-8: *provoked, grieved, irritated (thundering!), weeping, loss of appetite.*
* **The circumstances** of God's answer are **always the human condition** **and its agony** = a world in decay, exasperated by our sinful decisions and sinful responses.

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* Now why is this ***helpful***? Because God's ear was toward her, **even when her circumstances said otherwise, and even when her words were useless and angry**!
* It's logical to assume that a **messed-up life** and **bad behaviour** have made God inaccessible to us - yet : SHE GOES TO THE TEMPLE AND FINDS HIS ANSWER. Hebrews 4:14-16 says

14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence **draw near** to the throne of grace(!), that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

* That little **temple-tent construction** where Eli sat was just a shadow of what God was preparing through Jesus Christ. What greater "time of need" is there than when we are messed up and trapped in sinful attitudes! **God answers** within the **vortex** of **our** **sin and weakness**.
* Does that encourage you?

## The Occasion of God's Answer (9-18)

* What's remarkable about her time at the temple, is that Hannah's entire disposition changes - her FACE changes - **without receiving** **Samuel**!
  + (9) *'after they had eaten'* - that is, excluding Hannah - the verse before Eli asks her why she doesn't eat. The food just sits cold on her plate. ***They*** eat, but ***Hannah***: "*rose*" and goes to the temple, not to offer... what can she offer?... but to ask - it's all she can do.
* Now contrast that to her exit (**18**) '*Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad*'.
* **Now what is the OCCASION of her peace - What occurred to change her face**? Is it Eli's words? I don't think so, because even before he misinterprets and interrupts her, she is **encountering the LORD, in prayer**
* In v11: "***And she vowed a vow and said***" = a sacred commitment. And it's critical for understanding this occasion, to see that **a vow** is not **bargaining**. In the Old Testament, people don't ***vow*** to serve God only if he gives them something - that's a transactional love like Elkanah ("*you give me a son, and I'll marry only you"*), but a covenantal love says ("I'll marry only you, regardless) ... Therefore when an OT saint offers a vow they're committing themselves without opportunity to change their mind. Now... when it's a conditional vow, like with Hannah, who says "*If you will give me a son*", it's conditional in the sense that she can only fulfil it **if God enables her** to fulfil the vow. It's like vouching an offering to God, but asking God for the portion to offer, just like she depended on ***Elkanah*** to give her something to sacrifice, she's now approaching the LORD for the same!! **By her vow she's actually putting her desire on the altar**. It's actually not about a child anymore, but about her LORD.
  + (11) "***O LORD of hosts"*** - ie, Great and Sovereign God who personally revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses, who commands angels and determines all things by the power of His will
  + ***"****If you will indeed look on the affliction of ...* ***Your servant, ... your servant, ...your servant*** - *look on, remember, don't forget*, ... I love what she says to Eli in (**15**) about this prayer: *I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.* She holds nothing back - she offers herself as the handmaid of the LORD: "***I fail*** as the wife of my husband, but I can be the handmaid of the LORD - Everything she has *runs out like water* at the mercy of what God wills -
    - [**GOSPEL:** You know you can't come to God without pouring yourself out! That's what it means to seek Him, and prayer isn't prayer unless it's in this posture. I just think of Christ in Luke 9 who said that whoever would follow after Him must deny themselves - **2Cor5:15** *he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised*]
    - God has vowed Himself to us through Christ! Without the opportunity to change. And He provided for that vow by His Own Portion - His Own Son.
  + "*If you will give your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD*... *no razor will touch his head"* [sign of consecration - dedicated to nothing but Kingdom of God] - So she surrenders her desire before the Lord - totally for His glory - All the pain and the sinful bitterness and self-pity she has given up to Him -
  + **.... She doesn't get an answer from the Lord!** Only that **if there will be an answer, the Lord will have to do it**! Little does she know that her thought of dedicating a son is already God's thought to install the first prophet of His Kingdom! But that's for Him to know and for her to find out.
* **FCF APP**: We may ask (as we often do when we actually receive what we ask for: *Would she have not given birth anyway, without this occasion of surrender?* That's the faithless-kind-of-question we often ask after God answers; Consider what would be without this occasion:
  + She would've had her son **in pride** and rubbed Penina's nose in it!
  + She wouldn't have dedicated Samuel to God's service!
  + **In other words, the real accomplishment was far more than "having a child" - what she wanted was far less than God was preparing.**

So what do we take from this?

* The occasion of God's Answer is surrendering to His will! The greatest personal benefit from true prayer, is the blessed place of peace from personal surrender to God's will!.... Isn't this what Paul himself testifies in Phil 4:6

The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

* It seems God most often **has to bring us to the end of ourselves before we can receive His Blessed Answer** - **He has to close our womb until we let Him fill it**. And many believers who've walked this path, have testified to me, and I to them, "*It was impossible, but I would have it no other way for what I've received from Him in these circumstances*." [P White - used to ask Him to take it away, now I'm grateful He didn't] [ILLUS: "*Waiting on God is, to me, a sacrament"* /means of grace -Given by God to do, by which we discover His grace; sacred privilege of His own] **Are you ready for the Occasion of God's Answer in your own life? Are you ready to surrender in the same posture and let the Lord give HAVE HIS WILL in you?**

And then finally - a very comforting facet to God's answer as we travail

## The Timing of God's answer (19-20)

* Samuel was conceived (**20**) "***in due time****"!* Not immediately.
* (**19**) Elkanah *'knew'* her. God *'remembered'* her. But only *in due time, she conceived.*
* You know, for the greatest part of our human condition, God's full answer to our agony will come only in due time. **Sometimes** God is going to provide wonderful testimonies like Hannah's in our life - and we can point them out; **But ultimately, God's Answer is Heaven**! **And that will come in due time**. Every other answer is short-lived.
* But in the mean time - the very **experience** can be ours of walking from that tabernacle of prayer like Hannah, **in peace and joy**, and with **appetite**.

# Gospel

Let's prepare for Communion together - the blessed communion of the saints who have understood our heritage, our human condition, and the occasion of God's Answer.

Can one person have **the attention of** God? The Ruler of the Universe? We have to remember that God hears us because **Christ has agonised** on our behalf, for our sin; That **Jesus has petitioned** on our behalf and **been heard** on our behalf; And that **He doesn't sit idly by** **like a** **fat priest** misinterpreting our search for God, but **He lovingly and** **faithfully intercedes for us**;