

## HANNAH: THE RECEIVER AND GIVER OF A GREAT GIFT

KEN MULZAC

Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies  
Silang, Cavite, Philippines

### *Introduction*

1 Samuel begins with the description of a man named Elkanah (“God is possessing”), whose home town was Ramathaim-Zophim.<sup>1</sup> A brief ancestral history is provided, which initially prompts the reader to expect that Elkanah will be the hero of the narrative. As the story line develops, however, Elkanah takes a supporting role. This secondary role begins with the introduction of Elkanah’s two wives. At that time, polygamy was an accepted practice, but as the story unfolds there is a subtle jab at the practice. The introduction of Elkanah’s wives, Peninnah and Hannah, provides the tension and focal point for the story by contrasting the issue of childbearing versus childlessness: “Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children” (1:2b). These juxtaposed realities point to the idea of rivalry and echo the contention between other pairs of biblical women such as Leah and Rachel (Gen 29:30, 30:2) and, to a lesser extent, Sarah and Hagar (Gen 21:1-14).

The narrator presents a second contrast between the upbringing of the child Samuel by Elkanah and Hannah and the rearing of Hophni and Phinehas by the priest Eli. The narrator begins by portraying Elkanah as devoutly religious and noting his yearly trips to Shiloh to worship God and to offer sacrifice (1:3a). Then he adds a curious insert: “And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there” (1:3b). This statement is strategic, for it was during this particular visit to Shiloh that a series of events was launched that changed the course of Israelite history—the divine attention was drawn to the infertile woman and her pleas for a child. It is her child who eventually replaced Hophni and Phinehas (2:34-35).

<sup>1</sup>The location of Ramathaim-Zophim is uncertain. It has been identified variously with Ramah, a town in Benjamite territory, associated with the modern Er-Ram, located five miles north of Jerusalem; or with modern-day Rentis, “about nine miles northeast of Lydda”; see J. L. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney, and William White Jr., eds., *All the People and Places of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 160.

### *Literary Analysis and Genre*

1 Samuel 1:1-28 is generally classified as a psalm of individual lament of affliction. As such, it describes or defines the person's inner being and the problem that causes pain and distress. The lament is burdened with the sorrow of mourning and grief. Individuals lament due to sickness (Pss 13:3; 38:5-6; 39:4-6), the plots of enemies (Pss 6:8; 64:1-6), loneliness and abandonment (Job 19:13-19; Ps. 38:11), or shame and humiliation (Pss 4:2; 69:19). Hannah falls into this last category. In her case, no one died but death was implied by the fact that she was "in bitterness of soul" (1:10). The idea of "bitterness" is derived from מַר, which "expresses the emotional response to a destructive, heart-crushing situation."<sup>2</sup> "Bitterness of soul" is used to describe the woman of 2 Kgs 4:27, whose only son died. Therefore in the case of Hannah, the lack of a child is comparable to the loss of a child.<sup>3</sup>

The Hebrew lament consisted of three characteristic elements.<sup>4</sup> First, it is directed toward God, who can effect a change in suffering. Sometimes the lament is presented in the form of a complaint or an accusation against him. While Hannah does not explicitly bring an accusation against God, she does imply that he kept her childless (1:5, 6), which subsequently caused her real distress.

Second, there is the presence of an enemy or adversary. In Hannah's case, Peninnah, "her rival, used to provoke her severely, to irritate her" (1:6).<sup>5</sup> The narrator uses the "the feminine form of the most common term for adversary in the laments" to describe Peninnah.<sup>6</sup>

Third, there is the one who is lamenting. Hannah wept, refused to eat, and was sorrowful (1:7, 10, 15)—a situation closely related to severe depression, prompting Elkanah to question: "Am I not more to you than ten sons?" (1:8).

The theological importance of the lament is that it gives voice and feeling to the fact of suffering. As Westermann claims: "The lament is the language of suffering; in it suffering is given the dignity of language: It will not stay silent!"<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Victor P. Hamilton, "Marar," *TWOT* (1980), 1:528.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth D. Mulzac, *Praying With Power: Moving Mountains* (Huntsville, AL: Beka Publications, 1997), 72.

<sup>4</sup>Claus Westermann, "The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament," *Interpretation* 28 (1974): 27.

<sup>5</sup>All translations of Scripture are from the NRSV.

<sup>6</sup>A. H. Van Zyl, "1 Sam 1:2-2:11: A Life-World Lament of Affliction," *JNSL* 12 (1984): 151.

<sup>7</sup>Westermann, 31.

*Structural Analysis*

1 Samuel 1:1-28 forms a chiasm.

A The Situation: Elkanah, Hannah, and Peninnah (vv. 1-3)

B Rivalry: Hannah and Peninnah (vv. 4-8)

C Hannah's Prayer to YHWH (vv. 9-11)

B' Rivalry: Hannah and Eli (vv. 12-18)

A' Situation Resolved: Elkanah, Hannah, and Eli (vv. 19-28)

Hannah, as the main character, is present in each scene. But underlying every movement is the presence of God. In A, God is manifest because Hannah has no children, a fact that is explicitly stated in B. Indeed, childlessness is the source of the rivalry. In C, Hannah placed everything squarely on God. Her situation, and the rivalry between herself and Peninnah, may be changed if God remembers. In B', Eli accused Hannah of drunkenness. She responded that she was pouring out her soul to God. Finally in A', the situation is resolved because God intervened.

The Situation: Elkanah, Hannah, and  
Peninnah (vv. 1-3)

After identifying Elkanah's ancestral heritage (1:1), the narrator develops the dilemma between Elkanah's two wives. While monogamy was the standard practice in the OT period, there is evidence of polygamy. David and Solomon both practiced it, in part for the forging of political alliances.<sup>8</sup> For others, a second wife may have been taken because the first wife was infertile. This may have been the reason Elkanah took Peninnah as a second wife.<sup>9</sup>

Children, according to Jewish custom, were regarded as gifts from God and it was through childbearing that a woman achieved a sense of purpose and identity in life. Since the covenant community "will have an abundance of children as a sign of God's favor (Gen 16:10; 17:2, 4-5, 20; Exod 1:7),"<sup>10</sup> then barrenness was considered to be an effect of divine disfavor that placed a woman outside of the covenant community. "Childlessness was looked upon as a curse and could frustrate a woman because of her consciousness of impotence, worthlessness and insignificance."<sup>11</sup>

1 Samuel 1:3 describes the family's annual pilgrimage to Shiloh to offer sacrifices, which may or may not have been one of the three appearances all males were required to make in celebration of a national

<sup>8</sup>R. W. Klein, *1Samuel*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1983), 7.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>J. Baab, "Child," *IDB*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:558.

<sup>11</sup>Van Zyl, 155.

festival.<sup>12</sup> Elkanah worshiped and sacrificed to *יהוה צבאות* (“the Lord of Hosts,” or “Lord Almighty”), which refers to “He who creates the (heavenly) armies”<sup>13</sup> and denotes the sovereignty and universal authority of God. Israel’s claim was that by this authority alone are “all spheres of life . . . under Yahweh’s control: cult, warfare, fertility and rain, jurisprudence and every other aspect of daily life.”<sup>14</sup>

1 Samuel 1:3 also provides a tacit connection with the book of Judges, specifically chapters 19-21 that relate the story of a Levite whose concubine was raped and murdered by men from the tribe of Benjamin. Angered by such brutality, the other tribes declared war and Benjamin was virtually annihilated, including their women. The other tribes refused under oath to give their women in marriage to Benjamite men. Thus, the future of the tribe was in jeopardy. In an attempt to resolve this dilemma, the Benjamites raided Jabesh-Gilead, taking 400 virgins. But these were too few in number. Therefore with the blessing of the other tribes, the Benjamites were allowed to kidnap women at the yearly Shiloh festival. David Sibley contends that “ironically, the tribal elders decide to solve the problem of Benjamin with the very act which precipitated the conflict, the kidnapping of a woman! The enforcers of law and justice are themselves lawless and unjust.”<sup>15</sup> Shiloh, a place of worship, became a place of brutality.

The situation of polygamy and rivalry described in 1 Sam 1:3 recalls the corruption and evil at Shiloh. Corruption at Shiloh is also suggested by the presence of Hophni and Phinehas,<sup>16</sup> who are guilty of serious misconduct and corruption of the cultus (2:22). It is in such a situation that Israel’s “women have neither voice nor choice.”<sup>17</sup> Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn comment correctly: “It is into this world of rationalized violence and silenced women, of fragmented nation and fractured promise, that the figure of Hannah comes (1 Samuel 1), ominously traveling with a husband from the hill country of Ephraim to

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Exod 23:15-17; 34:18-24; Deut 16:16. The three required national festivals that demanded the presence of all males were the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

<sup>13</sup>Klein, 7.

<sup>14</sup>Van Zyl, 156.

<sup>15</sup>David Sibley, “Kingship, Samuel and the Story of Hannah,” *Tradition* 23 (1986): 65.

<sup>16</sup>Klein, 7, declares that these are Egyptian names. Hophni, a rare name, means “tadpole.” Phinehas, which is more common, means “the Negro.”

<sup>17</sup>Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power and Promise: The Subject of the Bible’s First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 136.

a yearly festival in Shiloh (cf. Judg 19:1; 21:19-23).<sup>18</sup>

Thus, it is Shiloh that welcomed devotion but also recalled corruption. Corruption was also posed in Elkanah's polygamy. Marrying and supporting two wives indicated a level of wealth and also placed him opposite the men of Benjamin who abducted women. Thus,

Hannah's marriage to Elkanah is described against the brutal background of women being taken against their will. For Elkanah the marriage to two women is most likely a sign of great prestige, but for the two women, it is a source of great bitterness. . . . Whatever the reasons for the taking and possessing of two women, Hannah and Peninnah are pitted against one another in a desperate effort to claim their self-worth.<sup>19</sup>

#### Rivalry: Hannah and Peninnah (vv. 4-8)

The source of rivalry between Hannah and Peninnah stemmed from the actions of Elkanah. He gave Peninnah and her children the necessary portions, but the barren Hannah received a "double portion" (1:4-5). It is not surprising that such blatant favoritism aroused the jealousy of Peninnah. Elkanah imperceptively magnified Hannah's suffering even as he sought to console her.

The narrator highlights the rivalry between the two women by placing them in bold relief (1:4-5). Hannah lacks children, yet she receives Elkanah's generosity and affections. On the other hand, Peninnah is fertile, but receives nothing extra. This suggests that her "usefulness" in Elkanah's eyes was because she produced children. Beyond this, she was "useless." This situation immediately calls to mind Jacob, who loved the barren Rachel more than Leah, who was fertile (Gen. 29:30-31). Thus, Hannah's infertility and Elkanah's favoritism evoked Peninnah's persistent provocation (1:6-7). This unrelenting torment continued "year after year." Peninnah's implied accusation was that Hannah lacked value due to her barrenness. Recoiling from her own sense of "valuelessness," Peninnah projects the same to her rival: they both lack value and thus they cancel out one another.

The provocation had its intended effect of making Hannah fret (הִרְעִיבָהּ, "to stir up inwardly," "to lament, complain, or murmur," 1:6).<sup>20</sup> Hannah's state of mind was reflected in her weeping and in her refusal to eat. Even Elkanah's attempt at consolation (1:8) was useless. His question shows that he was simultaneously solicitous and imperceptive. While, on one hand, he assured her that motherhood is unrelated to the value of her personhood, on the other, he placed her value only in relation to himself

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Mulzac, 70; cf. P. Kyle McCarter, *Samuel*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 49.

("Am I not better to you than ten sons?" 1:8). This has the effect of a comic irony—Elkanah did not consider Hannah's value to be greater than that of sons, yet he urged Hannah to do precisely that in relation to him. Fewell and Gunn concur:

Not only is this man so short-sighted as to think that he, shared with another, is all this woman needs to be fulfilled in life, but he is also oblivious to what is going on in his household. He cannot see how this system of marriage is afflicting his wife. He cannot hear his wife's pain. He turns her sorrow into something about himself. Her desire, her need for value, is refocused on him and his worth.<sup>21</sup>

Elkanah did not understand Hannah. He appears as one who, despite his heritage, devotion to YHWH, and love for Hannah, was helpless—helpless to change Hannah's situation, her barrenness caused by YHWH, and "the destructive interaction between the wives." Hannah was deeply needy; her husband was helpless.<sup>22</sup> Hannah's only solution to the problem was prayer.

#### Hannah's Prayer to YHWH (vv. 9-11)

Upset by her rival, uncomforted by her husband who cannot plumb "the depths of her desire and despair,"<sup>23</sup> Hannah went to the tabernacle to pray. Her state of being is described as "bitterness of soul"<sup>24</sup> and "sore weeping" (1:10). This points, in one word, to grief. The external manifestation of tears proceeds from internal and underlying emotion. In short, "the emotional overtones are rooted in what is basically a physical phenomenon."<sup>25</sup> The emotional burden causes a physical wearing-out of the person. This is Hannah's story, her grief.<sup>26</sup> This is what motivates her to pray.<sup>27</sup> Her prayer (1:11) may be divided into several parts:

<sup>21</sup>Fewell and Gunn, 137.

<sup>22</sup>Walter Brueggemann, "1 Samuel 1: A Sense of Beginning," *ZAW* 102 (1990):35.

<sup>23</sup>Fewell and Gunn, 137.

<sup>24</sup>The concrete nature of the Hebrew language comes to the foreground in that it describes an unpleasant and difficult situation in terms of the sense of "taste."

<sup>25</sup>Terence Collins, "The Psychology of Tears in the Old Testament: Part I," *CBQ* 33 (1971): 20-21.

<sup>26</sup>The idea of bitterness is also found in Job 20:14, where the word *מְרוּחָה* ("bitterness") is used to describe a viper's venom. The book of Job uses this word frequently because it is a book filled with the venom of grief and pain; cf. Mulzac, 72.

<sup>27</sup>Often the laments contain a reason by which to motivate God to act on behalf of the supplicant. No such motivation is directly mentioned in Hannah's prayer. It seems fair to claim, however, that her grief acted as the motivating factor.

1. Address with adoration. The invocation of the name "Lord of Hosts" undergirds the conviction that YHWH is the commander-in-chief of Israel's armies and fights battles on Hannah's behalf. Hence, his saving acts in Israel's history were the ground of her faith. Because of his power and sovereignty, she can boldly address him, confidently aware of God's "reliability and accessibility."<sup>28</sup>

Hannah believes that she has the "right to expect some action from God,"<sup>29</sup> just as he had intervened on behalf of Israel when the nation was in crisis. "Whatever power, love and sympathy had been available in the past to the community or the individual is still available."<sup>30</sup>

Hannah's self-designation also pointed to her adoration of God: she was his handmaid or servant (אִמָּה). This concept is emphasized as Hannah repeats her loyalty to God three times. As God's handmaid she is submissive, thereby denoting "her complete confidence in Him, her unconditioned and unwavering faith in His supreme power and willingness to help."<sup>31</sup>

2. Complaint. Hannah expressed her complaint as the "affliction of your handmaid," or "your servant's misery." She did not blame or accuse God, but her misery, brought on by her barrenness (and the consequent taunting of Peninnah), denotes God as the causative agent: "the Lord had shut up her womb" (1:5, 6). The expression "shut up" (סָגַר) means "to stop," or "to dam up or shut off." This word describes the act of providing tight security by shutting doors or gates or by sealing up a hole or breach in the wall.<sup>32</sup> It was impossible for Hannah to conceive and bear children. Hence, her extreme "misery." This word envelops the concentration of all the sufferer's emotions: "isolation, humiliation, indignity, impotence, worthlessness, depression, resignation, disappointment, grief, self-depreciation, loss of self-confidence, loss of motivation, and even a loss of any interest in life and living as such because his or her life is thrown into the primordial chaos."<sup>33</sup>

3. Petition. The petition is couched in the expression, "If you will only look and remember and not forget your handmaid but give her a son." Hannah places herself in YHWH's hand as her Savior. This is a request for his intervention and activity. Several key words and ideas portray this state of trust:

<sup>28</sup>Walter Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life," *Interpretation* 28 (1974): 8.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>30</sup>Van Zyl, 156.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 157.

<sup>32</sup>Mulzac, 72.

<sup>33</sup>Van Zyl, 156.

a. Look. This does not point to a quick glance as one would give a stranger. Rather, it contains a sharpness of intentionality: "Gaze upon me; pay attention to me." It is as though God had been inattentive to her and now she expects his attention.

b. Remember and do not forget. The first is positive, while the second is negative. Hannah's "complete faith in Yahweh and her submission to His will" is found between these two poles<sup>34</sup> as she requests the favor of divine intervention. The verb זָכַר ("remember") is significant. Hannah challenges God to remember, not as an act of merely bringing something to his conscious attention (because nothing escapes his omniscience), but to act on her behalf. She looks and appeals to the history of those who have come before her;<sup>35</sup> thus Hannah is requesting appropriate divine action on her seemingly impossible situation.<sup>36</sup>

c. Give me a son. Hannah is specific in her petition. She appeals for a solution to her problem in a concrete way. Because YHWH closed her womb, he can also open it and deliver her from this plight.

d. Vow. This is an "act of devotion and love contracted either preceding or following divine blessing."<sup>37</sup> The purpose of a vow was not to attract divine attention, but to express faith in God's ability and willingness to intervene in the lamenter's behalf.

Stipulations of the vow generally called for worship of the Lord and the sacrifice of thank offerings and/or burnt offerings.<sup>38</sup> Hannah's vow, however, stipulated that she would return her son to God for all his life as a Nazarite.<sup>39</sup>

This is an ironic pledge—to desire a son, yet be willing to give him up to the strict contingencies of the Nazarite! As Fewell and Gunn question:

Is this vow but a symbol of her utter desperation? Is even a baby for a short length of time better than no baby at all? Is the status of motherhood, rather than the child himself, really what is at stake? Does she believe that if God will "open her womb" for the first child others are sure to follow?<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 158.

<sup>35</sup>In Gen. 8:1, God "remembered" Noah and his family in the ark and saved them; he acted on their behalf. In Gen. 30:33, God "remembered" Rachel and acted on her behalf by giving her a son. In 2 Kgs 20, Hezekiah, who was sick to the point of death, asked God to remember him. God acted on his behalf and healed him.

<sup>36</sup>Mulzac, 74; Klein, 8.

<sup>37</sup>Leonard J. Coppes, "Neder," *TWOT* (1980), 2: 558.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Pss 22:23, 26; 26:12; 61:6, 9; 50:14; 56:13; 66:13-15.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Num 6, where the Nazarite is compelled to maintain at least three stipulations: abstinence from alcoholic beverages, no contact with the dead, and no cutting of the hair.

<sup>40</sup>Fewell and Gunn, 138.

The vow of the Nazarite is one of separation and distinction. Silber notes: "Hannah through her non-participation in Shiloh, *has already set herself apart*; she now imposes a vow of separation upon her son" (emphasis supplied).<sup>41</sup>

#### Rivalry: Eli and Hannah (vv. 12-18)

As Hannah prayed silently, moving only her lips, Eli marked her as being drunk and rebuked her. Like Elkanah, Eli misunderstood and misjudged Hannah.<sup>42</sup> For the first time in the narrative, Hannah verbally expressed her distress. "Appealing to her emotional state ('sorrowful spirit') and dismissing the charge of inebriation,"<sup>43</sup> Hannah defended herself, saying that she "poured out her soul to the Lord." The imagery created by the word "poured out" is of the complete emptying of a container of its contents.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Hannah poured out the abundance of her complaint and grief (1:16b). Eli must not regard her as a worthless, drunken woman (בַּת־בָּלְעֵל) since she was "firmly determined to take up the matter with her God."<sup>45</sup> While she was straightforward about her distress and vexation of spirit, she did not tell Eli, as she had YHWH, what her need was.

Eli responded with a priestly blessing of peace (שְׁלֹמִים) and the assurance that the God of Israel would fulfill her petition.

Hannah's second response (1:18a) was a request for grace (חַן) or approval from the priest. The word חַן is from the same root from which the name "Hannah" is derived. Hence, she is the favored one who has trusted YHWH and received his gift. With the receipt of the blessing, Hannah changed. Previously, she had not been able to eat and was grief-stricken (1:9); now she ate and was joyous (1:18).

#### Situation Resolved: Elkanah, Hannah, and Eli (vv. 19-28)

1 Samuel 1:19-20 is a birth announcement: Elkanah and his family rose up, worshiped, and went home. Elkanah, who had been absent from the

<sup>41</sup>Silber, 69.

<sup>42</sup>Brueggemann, "1 Samuel 1," 36. It is ironic that Eli should rebuke a worshiper when his own sons are sinful and his rebuke of them is weak and goes unheeded (vv. 22-25).

<sup>43</sup>T. Muraoka contends that Hannah is "not minded to follow the worldly sages' counsel as given in Prov 31. 6. . . . "Give strong drink to the perishing and wine to those in mental distress." ("1 Sam 1. 15 Again," *Biblica* 77 [1996]: 98-99).

<sup>44</sup>Cf. Lam 2:19; Pss 43:3, 4; 62:8.

<sup>45</sup>Muraoka, 99.

narrative, is now necessarily present: he “knew” Hannah. It is expected that the next line would be “and she conceived.” However, the narrator says that “the Lord remembered her.” YHWH acted on her behalf by answering her prayer (1:11). The child is not the result of Elkanah’s action, but of YHWH’s intervention. God did not forget Hannah. “Yahweh is the key factor in the narrative. Hannah could speak complaint and petition only because she submitted to Yahweh. The son is born only because Yahweh remembered. Everything depends on asking Yahweh and being answered by Yahweh.”<sup>46</sup> This is evident from the name given to the child—Samuel, which means “heard of God” (1:20b).<sup>47</sup> The child is indeed a gift from God and not merely the result of human cohabitation.

The second part of the scene (1:21-28) is the fulfillment of Hannah’s vow. God acted and now she acts. Elkanah gave his approval of Hannah’s vow (cf. Num 30:6-8). After three years (at the time of the child’s weaning), Hannah fulfilled her vow by presenting the child to the priest. There are several important elements in this section:

1. Swiftmess of movement. In 1 Sam 1:20, Hannah conceived the child but was prepared to yield him up “forever” to the Lord at the age of three.

2. Elkanah’s change of heart. 1 Samuel 1:8 portrays Elkanah as shortsighted, helpless, and imperceptive, placing value on Hannah only in relation to himself. After the birth of the child, the narrator places him in a truly supportive role, allowing Hannah her own identity: “Do what seems good to you.” He even added a blessing: “May the word of the Lord be established.” Elkanah’s bewilderment in 1:8 has been transformed into affirmation (1:23).

3. Hannah’s gift. Being careful to offer the required sacrifices (1:24-25), Hannah then presented Samuel to Eli. Eli does not speak in this encounter. He does not need to. Unlike 1 Sam 1:17, where Hannah needed a blessing and a word of assurance, none is needed now: “the Lord has granted me my petition which I asked of Him” (1:27). She is prepared to fulfill her vow with a thankful heart: “As long as Samuel lives he shall be given to the Lord” (1:28).

### *God of Salvation*

When Hannah moved toward God, he removed her shame and humiliation. Human suffering, no matter what it is, is not something

<sup>46</sup>Brueggemann, “1 Samuel 1,” 36, n. 7.

<sup>47</sup>A. H. Van Zyl, “The Meaning of the Name Samuel,” *Die Outestamentiese Werkgemeenskap in Suid-Afrika* (1969): 128. Since Hannah alone names the child, she is noted as the significant parent; cf. J. T. Willis, “Cultic Elements in the Story of Samuel’s Birth and Dedication,” *ST* 26 (1972): 57-61.

which affects the sufferer alone and which he himself must overcome; suffering is something to be brought before God. The true function of the lament is supplication, the means by which suffering comes before the one who can remove it. Seen from this perspective, the lament becomes a movement toward God.<sup>48</sup>

It is only by an act of faith that the sufferer moves toward God in search of healing and blessing. It is God alone who can effect the change. The supplicant understands that since YHWH permitted or caused a disaster, only he can restore the well-being of the person.<sup>49</sup>

It was only when Hannah's faith in YHWH was expressed that she experienced a change: from sadness to joy, from not eating to eating, from nonparticipation in the worship to participation. This was virtually a new life, a reversal of fortunes. It was then with expectation that she looked forward to the birth of her son. The narrator loses no time in reporting that as soon as they returned home, YHWH remembered Hannah.

When Hannah brought the child to Eli to begin his service, her heart was full of thankfulness and adoration for God's remembrance (2:1-10). While her joy resulted from the birth of her son, she made no mention of him in the song. The theme of the poem is rejoicing in God's salvation (2:16). Three characteristics of God are emphasized: his holiness, incomparable nature ("there is no one beside you"), and trustworthiness ("he is a rock").<sup>50</sup> Because God is all this, he is able to reverse the fortunes of the reviled and oppressed; the barren become fruitful, the fertile is rendered incapacitated (1:5-10). Thus, God's universal right to rule is the tenor of Hannah's song of salvation. Her prayer was her consolation. She was bold to take her petition to God.

### *Conclusion*

Hannah's prayer is not merely the center of the passage, it calls on God to act on her behalf. It is an expression of confidence that only YHWH can change her barrenness into fertility and thus reverse her shame that drives her in petition to him. It is only divine intervention that changes the situation. And it is precisely this fact that provides the main point of the books of Samuel. It is God's action in remembering and not forgetting that brings Samuel on the scene to replace Hophni, Phinehas, and, ultimately, Eli.

<sup>48</sup>Westermann, 32.

<sup>49</sup>Brueggeman, "From Hurt to Joy," 12.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. Mulzac, 79, commenting on 2:2.