

1 & 2 Samuel
A study in spiritual authority

1:1 - 2:10

God's call on Samson was "to begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Jud. 13:5). Samson was the last of the judges before Eli and Samuel, and his lifestyle paints a picture of Israel's moral degeneration, depicted in the final story in Judges (ch. 19-21). God's judgment on Samson and his final triumph through it also hint of things to come as the people turn to from failure to submit to God's rule and demand "a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8:5).

What Samson began, God continued under Samuel. God used him to bring an end to the judges, when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 21:25), and usher in the rule of Israel through kings. The kings welded the 12 tribes into a nation, but they fell into the same cycle of disobedience as before, fulfilling the warning in Deut. 8:11-20. This cycle has continued throughout history: obedience, prosperity, complacency, disobedience, punishment or captivity, obedience. The way to break this cycle is threefold: (1) develop a healthy fear of God through loving His Word and Presence (2) stay close to the Body of Christ, the Church through submission and fellowship (3) expect that because we have this Treasure in earthen vessels and complacency and pride will hound us at our heels, we must learn to rejoice in weakness and tribulation as Paul did (2 Cor. 12:7-10, 1 Pet. 4:1-2).

The lessons learned through the lives of the kings both confirm previous lessons learned and bring us deeper understanding of God's ways, especially through the life of David, who became a prototype of the King of Kings, the Lord Jesus Christ. In David we'll see more clearly what God is really after in all of us. And in David we have one of the most powerful examples of God's preparation in us for spiritual warfare. Issues passed over in silence from the life of Moses—his 40 years between Pharaoh's court and the Exodus from Egypt—become visible in the life of David, both in Samuel's writings and in David's Psalms.

And most important, in David we peer from the Old Testament into the New through his amazing spiritual insights, jumping over a thousand years of history into the True Kingdom Age, when the Son of David begins His reign in the hearts of both Jews and Gentiles.

Major periods of transition in history begin often with someone under great stress or in great darkness who battles his or her way through to what I'll call a "representative victory." God positions them in such a way that their struggle and victory pave the way for others, sometimes an entire nation or generation. Such "representatives" were Enoch (against the tide of violence before the flood), Abraham (against barrenness and God's silence), Jacob (against his own weakness/strength), Joseph (persecution and desolation), Judah (his father's weakness and his own depravity), Moses (the hardness of those he was called to deliver), the judges (backslidden Israel), and on through kings and prophets.

Accompanying some of these representative/transitional men are women who struggled against barrenness (no children). Such were Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Samson's mother, Hannah, and Elizabeth, not to mention the *emotional* barrenness of Leah. In Hannah God gives us a wonder-ful picture of the foundation of *spiritual* fruitfulness. I see it as almost the "perfect formula." Not only was Hannah barren, but her husband's other wife was very fruitful with children. What made Hannah the perfect candidate is that this other wife, Peninnah, persecuted her continually because of her barrenness. The stage was set; the only thing left was Hannah's *response*.

Each of us faces a trial with either a reaction or a response. A reaction is comparable to a doctor tapping your knee with a little mallet to make your knee jerk. The nerve impulse does not go to the brain but to the spinal cord and back to the leg muscle, which "reacts" and jerks the knee. When we react, our flesh acts without thinking it through. The word *response* is related to the word "sponsor," which means to take *respons*-ibility for someone in some way. So response carries with it the idea of thinking it through with a sense of responsibility. Jacob said Reuben was "unstable as water." "Unstable" means "boiling up, frothy." Reuben's declaration to his father to "kill my two sons if I don't bring Benjamin back" is an example of character *froth*, an irresponsible *reaction*. Judah *responded* with his willingness to become Benjamin's *sponsor*, and finally Jacob felt comfortable to release Benjamin in Judah's care.

Now let's examine these barren women in the Old Testament. Sarai, rather than seek God for the correct response to God's silence, *reacted* instead, producing Ishmael. Rebekah, instead of listening to and trusting God, reacted in fear and caused Jacob to blunder into an act of haste that would cause herself to be deprived of him for the rest of her life and thrust him into almost a lifetime of heartbreak.

Rachel reacted in envy toward her sister Leah, angered Jacob, and through her impatience got her first child by her maid Bilhah. This son, Dan, produced a tribe which more than any other, except for Benjamin, illustrated the apostasy of Israel under the judges. The apostasy of both tribes close out the book of Judges with stories which make the Bible almost disgusting and embarrassing for "recommended reading." It's significant that Rachel named Benjamin Ben-Oni, Son of My Sorrow, as she was dying in childbirth, and Jacob renamed him Son of the Right Hand. It is significant because God used Jacob to "cancel" her "vow" (Numbers 30) and turn this curse into a blessing. Which is exactly what happened to the tribe of Benjamin through the patient *responsibility* David took toward this powerful tribe, a lesson to be seen when we get to the end of King Saul's reign (1 Chr. 12:2).

What about Samson's mother? Her only problem was the age of apostasy in which she lived. Perhaps if she'd had more understanding she might have taught her boy the spiritual meaning behind the Nazirite vow and developed his heart in preparation for his unusual calling. It's hard to say.

Whatever might have been her weakness or failure, Hannah's *response* to her own terrible situation of being harassed night and day by her husband's *other wife* stands in amazing contrast to her and all other barren women in the Old Testament. Yet she lived during the same age of apostasy as Samson's mother, when Eli the priest, Hannah's "pastor," abandoned his two sons to sexual immorality right there on the Tabernacle grounds and in front of young Samuel, who lived there with Eli's family.

Here is a woman with the rare combination of God-focus in the face of God's apparent abandonment. Like Jacob who wrestled with God in his hour of desperation; like Leah, who turned finally to God in her rejection by her husband and produced Judah; and like Judah whose mother's influence broke through in his terrible "moment of truth" (Gen. 38:35-36) and brought him to the "Choice Vine" (49:11), this dear woman, immersed in a culture which did whatever they pleased, laid hold of the mercies of God relentlessly until God heard her (Is. 30:18-19). And her boy grew up to become one of the spiritual giants of the Bible (Jer. 15:1, where Moses and Samuel are listed together as intercessors (Ps. 99:6; Jer. 15:1).

There's another lesson to be learned from Hannah's focus, which may also have influenced David. In her rejection all her desire was transferred from every earthly attachment and given wholly to God, symbolized in her giving Samuel to God. This is similar to Leah's resolve after three unsuccessful attempts to win the love of her husband (Gen. 29:35). And it became the key to David's winning the heart of God. For in his rejections he also turned his affections entirely toward God. This is seen most clearly in Psalm 22 and in Psalm 38:9-14, for example. It is the most precious and powerful concept in the Bible, the key to the life and ministry of Jesus (Jn. 5:19), and no doubt why the church of Philadelphia was given the "key of David" (Rev. 3:7). (More on that later.)

If Mary's "Magnificat" illustrates the height of surrender from the depths of humility, revealing the heart of one "highly favored" of the Lord, Hannah's eulogy to God stands in the very same light and spirit (Lu. 2:46-55, 1 Sam. 1:1-10). Truly "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). Hannah's faith answers to the kind of faith seen in the Syrophenician woman's persistence against the rejection, racial insult, and devastating humiliation Jesus gave her (Mt. 15:21-28, Mk. 7:24-30). He illustrated this principle in Luke 18:1-8, where a widow persists with her request even in the face of an "unjust judge" who does "not fear God nor regard man."

Imagine Jesus comparing His dear Father, full of compassion, to an *unjust*, heartless judge who doesn't care a thing about people, and who must be plagued by a helpless widow's *continual coming* before he finally gives in! What is God saying in the strange, cruel illustration? He is saying that our self-reliance and hardness of heart are so deeply rooted, that only those who persist and endure until that hardness is *broken* and our proud self-will crushed will get the kind of answers that go beyond the normal. (See Mt. 15:21-28; 17:17-21 and Lu. 17:5-10.) He is saying that even a helpless widow doesn't know the deception of her own heart (Rom. 3:9-18) and must persevere until it is broken and the Light shines in. And He is saying to us who feel useless or deprived in whatever way, "Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband" (Gal. 4:27, Is. 54:1). [So again, spiritual authority is more about the condition of our hearts than it is about the enemy without.]

Points to consider:

1. Spiritual warfare is what it takes to break the cycle of the complacency and carelessness that follows in the wake of God's blessing through our obedience. It takes something *supernatural* to break the *natural* bent of human pride and selfishness.
2. God uses people to break this destructive cycle, and the kind of person He uses is formed in an environment of futility, stress, rejection, and humiliation, in the face of His apparent abandonment and absence.
3. Those who *respond* to this darkness by persistent faith become instruments of God's power and grace to effect change and break the cycle of human failure.