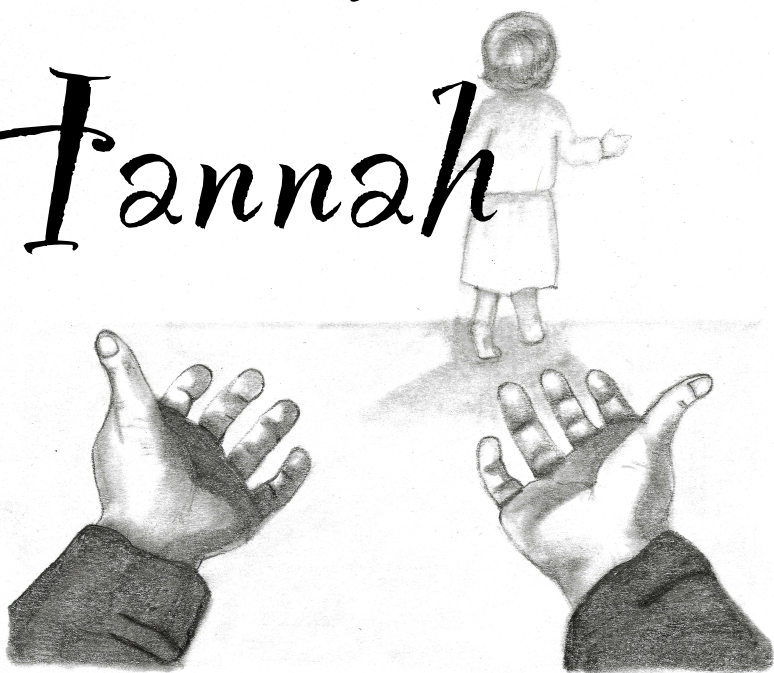


Understanding

Hannah



*For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me
my petition which I asked of him:*

*Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD;
as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD*

1 Samuel 1:27,28

Over forty years ago,
somewhere in the United States,
a baby boy was born
into a Christian family.

After attending a missions conference,
the new parents wrote
on the inside cover of a Bible
words similar to the following:

*“On this date,
we dedicate our son Michael
to the LORD’s work,
wherever that may be.”*

The years passed. Michael was a good son. He grew up, gave himself to the Lord, and married. He was a college graduate and established in a profitable career.

One day, he and his wife felt
the Lord calling them to the mission field
Humanly speaking,
it was an area of the world most hostile to gospel work.

Before the little family departed to the mission field,
Michael’s parents begged them not to go.

Understanding Hannah

*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:*

*And he had two wives;
the name of the one was Hannah,
and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had
children,
but Hannah had no children.*

1 Samuel 1:1-2

The familiar story of Hannah, and her asked-of-God son, Samuel, has been the subject of many a Mother's Day sermon. Her example of looking to the LORD to take away the pain of childlessness has been an inspiration to many women who have struggled with fertility.

While certain wives can actually relate to Hannah, having experienced the sadness of empty arms, just about *all of us* can at least empathize with Hannah's early years of marriage and the waiting. (Of course, none of us understand having a rival wife.)

But there is another obvious example from the story of Hannah which *none* of us know what to do with. It pains every one of us who reads it. *She literally gave her little son to the LORD.*

How are we to understand Hannah?

*And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD,
and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of
hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine
handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid,*

but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. 1 Samuel 1:10-11

Hannah made a vow. And we know how the rest of her unusual story went.

And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young. And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD.

For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him: Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.

This story leaves several unanswered questions for us who would seek to emulate Hannah's "godly" example, not the least of which is:

Was this merely an impulsive vow made by a desperate and envious woman?

If so, the emulation should stop here! Because, even though we wish to empathize with her, we know in our hearts that to make a rash bargain with God and to use a *child* as a bargaining tool is not noble. It's not virtuous.

But wait a minute: we already have examples of impulsive acts by childless women in the Bible, and Hannah's story is very different from them all.

First of all, Hannah went to God in prayer, unlike Rachel. Jealous of her rival wife and sister Leah (who was blessed with children), Rachel demanded of her husband,

"Give me children, or else I die." Genesis 30:1

Second, after years of barrenness, we have no evidence Hannah went to the desperate measures of Sarah or others who gave their maids to their husbands to bear children on their behalf. (*Genesis 29 -30*)

Matthew Henry comments on the motivation of Rachel's desperate thoughts and deeds:

"Had not Rachel's heart been influenced by evil passions, she would have thought her sister's children nearer to her, and more entitled to her care than Bilhah's. But children whom she had a right to rule, were more desirable to her than children she had more reason to love. As an early instance of her power over these children, she takes pleasure in giving them names that carry in them marks of rivalry with her sister. See what roots of bitterness envy and strife are, and what mischief they make among relations. At the persuasion of Leah, Jacob took Zilpah her handmaid to wife also. See the power of jealousy and rivalry, and admire the wisdom of the Divine appointment, which joins together one man and one woman only; for God hath called us to peace and purity."

Thankfully, Hannah's story is much different. So it seems simplistic to say that Hannah's *sole* motivation, or even that her *greatest* motivation, for desiring a son was just so she could say, "See, I'm a mother too!" There has to be more.

The proof for that is actually seen in Hannah's vow.

I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

As a mother, this vow seemed to cost Hannah much.

- ♥ She gave up most of Samuel's precious childhood years.
- ♥ She gave up the daily comfort of his presence when Peninnah tried to provoke her.
- ♥ She gave up the practical help and friendship he could provide to her as she grew older.
- ♥ She gave up the sense of pride she could have in his achievements of fortune or accomplishment as he grew into a man and made his way in the world.

All that seemed left to Hannah was considered dismally small:

Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. 1 Samuel 2:19

This is where Hannah's vow becomes rash and even an ugly thing to us-- if it was only motivated by her unquenchable desire for motherhood at any cost. Could you or I bear it?

During the life of Elisha the prophet, there was a childless woman of Shunem. In spite of her unwillingness to believe it was true, the prophet gave her the news that she was to have a son. (2 Kings 4:16, 17) Several short years later, her son suddenly fell ill and later died in her lap.

The happy memory of the unexpected blessing of a son was swallowed up in her grief, as she reminded the prophet, "*Did I desire a son of my lord?*" (2 Kings 4:27)

For the Shunamite woman, to endure the unrelenting pain of losing her treasured son so soon was barely worth the joy of his short life.

But in Hannah, we don't see much hesitation to lend her son to the LORD.

So, again, if Hannah's only reason for desiring a child was to experience physical motherhood for a time, however short, whatever the cost to her *or her child*, **who could commend that?**

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. James 4:3

But in understanding Hannah's story, there is evidence that it was something more. And so her story does furnish a godly example to all of us blessed with children. For Hannah's vow was also motivated by a heart that desired:

"The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed." 1 Samuel 2:10

The more we look at it, it seems like the biggest part of her asking for a son the first place was to lend him to the LORD.

More than what was bargained for

Yes, children are a blessing to be desired, and God is the source of all blessings.

Lo, children [are] an heritage of the LORD: [and] the fruit of the womb [is his] reward. Psalm 127:3

He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD. Psalm 113:9

And truly, Hannah was praying for a child, for a son.

...but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child...

For this child I prayed...

But it seems evident that for Hannah, her desire was for no ordinary son, for no ordinary purpose.

*And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit.
And wherefore one?*

That he might seek a godly seed.

Malachi 2:15

*“And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell
of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of
David also, and Samuel....” Hebrews 11:32*

Hannah's story is firmly planted in the times in which she lived. And they were very dark times. Like righteous Lot, she may have been

*... vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that
righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing,
vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful
deeds;) 2 Peter 2:7,8*

First of all, there were the things taking place in Hannah's own home. Peninnah was filled with jealousy of Hannah. This was a very sad situation. And Peninnah used the only ammo she had against Hannah: her childlessness.

Peninnah, though perhaps outwardly religious, was using her adversary's weakest point to provoke and hurt her during the annual sacrifice! What could be more heartless and unholy? On one of the most solemn occasions of the year for a devout Jew of that day, Peninnah exposed her own great pride and sin.

Though Hannah was sad to be childless, it was known that ,
“...the LORD had shut up her womb.” (1 Sam 1:6) However,

it is quite possible that she was grieved beyond reason of her childlessness. Perhaps Hannah heard the words of Peninnah, a mother in Israel, and realized:

*... out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.
Matthew 12:34*

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children... Deuteronomy 6:6

One of the most disheartening things is to witness a mother who is a wicked example for her children. We can only imagine the added pain it must bring to a childless woman who would gladly provide patience and love and instruction and seek to be a godly example to a neglected child if only it were *their* child!

Second, there was the larger context of Hannah's time, the details of which are interspersed in her story. We know from the book of Judges that she lived in dark days,

"In those days [there was] no king in Israel, [but] every man did [that which was] right in his own eyes." Judges 17:6

That statement is made throughout the book of Judges, along with "Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD..." Some of the most puzzling and grievous examples of wickedness are recorded in Judges... it almost reads like yesterday's newspaper.

It is interesting to look at Hannah's story and find a statement in the very third verse that otherwise would seem out of place.

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

How early we are introduced to Hophni and Phinehas! We will read later how the LORD intended to judge Eli's family for his lack of disciplining his wicked sons; Hophni and Phinehas would be killed. In fact, young Samuel would be one of the messengers to Eli. (1 Sam 3:1-18)

No doubt Eli's sons brought grief to the few faithful in Israel. For each year, as they came to bring offerings and sacrifices, they were greeted by the wicked priests.

*Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial;
they knew not the LORD.*

And the priest's custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; And he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither.

Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw.

And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force.

Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.

If there is one reaction common to the righteous when faced with wickedness in the midst of God's people, it is to grieve. In fact, such concern is an outward sign of zeal for the LORD. ***He seeks it and He rewards it.***

And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. Ezekiel 9:4

Blessed [are] they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Matthew 5:6

No, it is not a stretch to suppose that godly Hannah's bitterness of soul, her prayer and her vow, were brought about by *more* than just her own childlessness. She knew what was at stake. And put into this context, her vow seems not only understandable, but in many ways worthy of our emulation:

And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life

The secret of success

*and there shall no razor come upon his head.
1 Samuel 1:11*

From before his conception, Hannah purposed that her son would be set apart for the Lord. The phrase "no razor will come upon his head" refers to the vow of a Nazarite. This was a voluntary vow of consecration to the Lord.

It is interesting to note that the parents of Samson, who also were blessed with a son by God's special intervention, were commanded that he be a Nazarite. Samson was set apart for God's purpose, even though there was little in his life to commend him. His parents perhaps were content to comply with that as his main preparation for service to the LORD.

But Samuel's consecration was part of Hannah's willing commitment that her child be lent to the LORD all the days of his life.

The vow of a Nazarite would have made Samuel different among his countrymen from the start. And who wants their child to be different?

Yes, it is common for us mothers to want our children to achieve greatness in the eyes of God and to some degree, even in the eyes of men: education, wealth, even some degree of respect and fame. But the calling of God usually brings with it opportunities for humiliation, unappreciated service, self-denial, and unpopularity.

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

1 Peter 2:21

An excellent example of the potential for a mother's misguided desire for her children's success is seen in the mother of Zebedee's sons.

And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. Matthew 20:18-23

Now if the mother of Zebedee's sons had asked Jesus for something *in accordance with God's will – that they would have lives set apart and purposed to be expended for the kingdom of God-- Jesus would have granted it!* But it is apparent that she sought glory for her sons, and possibly for herself as well.

And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Matthew 20:24-28

Training our children for the LORD's service will look different from training them for the world's service. It did with Samuel, and it must with our children. And here is a very important lesson for us as Christian mothers, and especially as homeschooling mothers.

Children are a stewardship from the LORD, our Master, and Jesus' parable of the talents is one of the best lessons we can heed as stewards of our Master.

And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. Matthew 25:15-18

The talents discussed in this story belonged **to the Master**. They are of value to our Master. Jesus is pointing us to eternal things, not money. The servants, as stewards, were to bring an increase for the Master, not themselves.

Some have used this story to teach that we should be wise investors of money to gain more money for our Master. However, God doesn't need our money or earthly accomplishments. He is seeking for us to aim our talents, including our children, for eternal things. Otherwise, the Master's response would make no sense:

*His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: **enter thou into the joy of thy lord.***

What brings joy to the LORD? Here are a few things in which the Lord delights:

- ♥ Lovingkindness (Jer. 9:24)
- ♥ Judgment (Jer. 9:24)
- ♥ Righteousness (Jer. 9:24)
- ♥ The steps of a good man (Psalm 37:23)
- ♥ Mercy (Micah 7:18, Hosea 6:6)
- ♥ Obeying the voice of the Lord (I Samuel 15:22)
- ♥ Those who fear Him (Psalm 147:11)
- ♥ Those who hope in His mercy (Psalm 147:11)
- ♥ Wisdom (Proverbs 8:30)
- ♥ Upright men (Proverbs 11:20)
- ♥ Honest dealing (Proverbs 12:22)
- ♥ The prayer of the upright (Proverbs 15:8)
- ♥ Songs of praise (Psalm 69:30-31)
- ♥ The salvation of believers (I Corinthians 1:21)
- ♥ Reconciliation of all things through Christ (Colossians 1:19-20)

- | | |
|--|---|
| ♥ True good works (Hebrews 13:16) | ♥ Sanctification (I Thessalonians 4:3) |
| ♥ Sharing with one another (Hebrews 13:16) | ♥ Abstaining from fornication (I Thessalonians 4:3) |
| ♥ Gifts to God's servants (Philippians 4:18) | ♥ Giving thanks (I Thessalonians 5:18) |
| ♥ Obedience to parents (Colossians 3:20) | ♥ Good behavior (I Peter 2:15) |
| ♥ Building the house of God (Haggai 1:8) | ♥ Everlasting life (John 6:39-40) |
| ♥ Knowledge of God (Hosea 6:6) | ♥ Companionship with His people (John 17:24) |

In contrast, here are some things in which He does not delight:

- Sacrifices and burnt offerings (Isaiah 1:11, Psalm 51:16, Hebrews 10:6, 8)
- The strength of a horse (Psalm 147:10)
- The legs of a man (Psalm 147:10)
- Those who do evil (Malachi 2:17)
- The carnal mind which is of the flesh (Romans 8:8)
- Unbelief (Hebrews 11:6)

What did Hannah aim her son for? And what were Samuel's expectations for a life set apart for God?

We are told little, except for one precious statement after his mother reiterated her testimony and vow before Eli:

And he worshipped the LORD there. 1 Samuel 1:28

Something peculiar

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: 1 Peter 2:9

Like Hannah, we are to have purpose as we prepare our children. Purpose, but not that purpose which is common around us. Compared to other mothers of her day, Hannah chose a vastly different path for preparing her little one for the Lord's work. We must, too.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew 6:24-33

Here is what we are to seek first. It's first on the list! It must be our first priority, it must be in our hearts, and we must impress it (Deuteronomy 6:7,8) on the hearts of our children. It is peculiar, to be sure.

He hath shewed thee, O man, what [is] good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? Micah 6:8

Yes, this is an attitude. Yes, this is faith. But it's **outworking** will guide us dependably as we prepare our children. It will help us discern between the wheat and the chaff. And it must, of necessity and by definition, be *peculiar*...at least in the eyes of the world.

Like Hannah, our time with our children-- even if it's ten times as long as she had-- is limited. As Hannah led her little one to his new home, did she regret the way she spent her time with him? Did she regret useless pursuits? Did her decisions pay off in the end?

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. Ephesians 5:15-18

Let's be sure that Hannah faced many distractions and opportunities clamoring for her time and concern, just as we do in our time. No doubt the enemy attempted to discourage and alarm her, wanting her to second-guess her vow. *But knowing her child had a special purpose, knowing the will of the LORD, knowing what delights the LORD, all these conspired to protect her from the distractions and calm her fears.*

Like Hannah, we have the option of setting our children apart, dedicating them, through careful preparations, even

prohibitions of many things the world has to offer in the name of education, that they may recognize their purpose and listen to the LORD when He calls their name.

For this child I prayed

In understanding Hannah, we are assured that, yes, she is a good example to us as mothers. Yes, we are wise to do as Hannah and lend our children to the LORD. Our hearts are safe, as Hannah's was, in our confidence of God's desire to use them for His kingdom and glory. We can confidently reject any lies the enemy may offer to the contrary, and wholeheartedly use our talents to increase the joy of our Master, and ourselves.

Give of thy sons to bear the message glorious,
Give of thy wealth to speed them on their way.
Pour out thy soul for them in prayer victorious,
And all thou spendest Jesus will repay.

O Zion, Haste! -- Mary Thompson, 1868

As parents, we have opportunity through our priorities to focus our children's preparation for unreserved use for the LORD. As we purpose in our hearts to lend our children to the LORD, He will direct their paths, and we need not be an obstacle, either by discouragement or placing lesser ideals in their way.

In the 1800's, the father of a young woman received the following from a man who would become his son-in-law.

"I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean, to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and

distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with the crown of righteousness, brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Savior from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?"

Finally, it's interesting to notice the similarities of Hannah's request with that of King Solomon, whose request for wisdom pleased the LORD.

And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. 1 Kings 3:11-13

As we follow Hannah's example, we can be assured of a better promise.

And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life Matthew 19:29

So now we may understand Hannah a little more. And now it's time to understand ourselves a little more, too.

For if we never intended to lend our children to the LORD, for what greater purpose did we desire them?

Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. 1 Samuel 2:19

This is where Hannah's vow becomes a rash and even an ugly thing to us-- if it was only motivated by her unquenchable desire for motherhood at any cost. Could you or I bear it?

...if Hannah's only reason for desiring a child was to experience physical motherhood for a time, however short, whatever the cost to her *or her child*, ***who could commend that?***

www.inKLEINations.com

encouraging families to
"Seek ye first the kingdom of God..."
Matthew 6:33

Dave and Debbie Klein
61 Harneywold Drive
Saint Louis, MO 63136