

REAL PEOPLE, REAL GOD:

Hannah's & Mary's Prayers

We're pausing for a moment in our *Through the Bible Character Series* to take a brief look at the prayers of two Israelite women. Both pregnant, these ladies lived at different times in Israel's history, but had very similar prayers. In light of the Christmas season, we'll look at Mary's prayer, sometimes called the Magnificat, when she was pregnant with our Lord Jesus Christ. We'll also talk about Hannah, whose son ushers in the kings in Old Testament history. (We'll talk about Samuel in our next study when we resume our *Through the Bible Character Series*.)

Mary and Hannah show us striking differences not only in the time they were living, but in the events surrounding their pregnancies and deliveries.

Hannah's World

First, Hannah, found in 1 Samuel 1-2, was a barren older woman whose husband had another wife—a wife who had borne him many children. Like several women of Scripture, Hannah prays to the Lord, desperate for a child. But Hannah is different in that she promises to give that child back to the Lord.

Our REAL GOD answers, giving her a son, who she does indeed give to God for a lifetime of service in the Tabernacle. As she gives the child over to the Lord, she prays this prayer.

“My heart exults in the Lord; my horn [my strength] is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation. There is none holy like the Lord: for there is one besides you; there is no rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by his actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.” **1 Samuel 2:1-10**

Powerful Prayer

This prayer resounds with God's sovereignty! Hannah's REAL GOD is the God who is above ALL things! This prayer isn't just about her barrenness or her contentious relationship with her husband's second wife. She recognizes that this God she is praising is the God of the WHOLE UNIVERSE, and He has placed new life in HER womb!

The second thing that blows me away is that somehow, toward the end of her prayer, she says something amazingly prophetic.

“He will give strength to **His king** and exalt the horn of **His anointed.**” **1 Samuel 2:10**
(*emphasis added*)

Okay, ummmm...there is no king in Israel yet. And who does she mean by “His anointed?” The Hebrew word she uses for *anointed* is *mashiakh*, which we would translate as “*Messiah*.” So, not only is she prophesying a king in Israel, but she is—for the *first time* in Scripture—prophesying the coming *Messiah*! How cool is that?

Mary's World

So now let's talk about the *mother* of this *anointed Messiah King*. Mary, whose story can be found in Luke 1-2, finds herself in very different circumstances than Hannah. Mary was young, unmarried, and undoubtedly had no intention of bearing a child at this point in her life. But our REAL GOD, in His sovereignty and kindness to us all, ***gave Mary the child the the rest of creation longed for***. Mary didn't ask for it, but our REAL GOD knew that all of mankind needed it.

Not only is Mary's story very different, but it becomes apparent that her child will be different as well. When Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, who has miraculously conceived a child in her old age (the child we know later as John the Baptist), the babe in Elizabeth's womb jumps with joy at the sound of Mary's greeting! Elizabeth is overwhelmed by the Spirit and affirms that Mary is pregnant with the Messiah without ever being told. Mary's response? A prayer incredibly similar to Hannah's:

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the

hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” **Luke 1:46-55**

Powerful Prayer

Do you hear it? Again, God’s sovereignty saturates every phrase! Although she was not at all expecting or hoping for this pregnancy, Mary considers herself blessed by God, just as blessed as Hannah did. Both women recognized their REAL GOD was God over ALL who could bring the lowly up and the proud low.

Mary said it this way...

- He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts
- He has brought down the mighty from their thrones

Hannah said it this way...

- The bows of the mighty are broken
- The feeble bind on strength

Compare the two prayers for yourself to find more similarities. Isn’t it amazing that these two women, in vastly different life circumstances, can praise their God SO similarly?! I believe it’s because they’re praising the SAME God. Our REAL GOD is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Post-Christmas Challenge

The theme of God bringing the lowly up and making the proud low, reminded Lyndsey of a passage from Isaiah. (This passage is used in Handel’s Messiah, an oft-heard Christmas piece.) Isaiah is prophesying of one who will prepare the way for the Messiah, for the new Kingdom He will bring to earth.

“A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; **make straight in the desert** a highway for our God. Every **valley shall be lifted up**, and every **mountain and hill be made low**; the **uneven ground shall become level**, and the **rough places a plain**. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’” **Isaiah 40:3-5 (emphasis added)**

Christ’s birth ushered in a Kingdom of equality, or really...justice, things being made right. Every valley lifted up. Every mountain and hill made low. Christ came to die for all, and all are equal at the foot of the cross. Equally sinful, equally loved and died for. That’s the new kingdom we celebrate when we celebrate our Messiah.

I believe in the wake of the Christmas season, God intends us to remember exactly that—the ground is level at the foot of the Cross—and continue to live the way many of us live only during the months of November and December. Why is it I only feel moved to serve in a soup kitchen during Thanksgiving and Christmas? Why not all year round?

New Year Good News

Without doubt, these women's prayers assure us that God is in control. They don't groan about it or resign themselves to hand over the reins. No! They praise the REAL GOD who set the stars in place and yet is so intimate that He creates life in a woman's womb.

No matter how low you get, you can be lifted up *in a moment*. No matter how high you get, you can be brought low *in a moment*. God reigns. It's GOOD NEWS for a new year.

Today's Question:

- Is there something you're facing in the New Year that's hard for you to submit to God's sovereignty? Something you think you can control better than the Creator of all things?

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