

Hannah's Song of Praise

from *Commentary on the Old Testament*, by
C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch

Introduction

The prayer in which Hannah poured out the feelings of her heart, after the dedication of her son to the Lord, is a song of praise of a prophetic and Messianic character. After giving utterance in the introduction to the rejoicing and exulting of her soul at the salvation that had reached her (v. 1), she praises the Lord as the only holy One, the only rock of the righteous, who rules on earth with omniscience and righteousness, brings down the proud and lofty, kills and makes alive, maketh poor and maketh rich (vv. 2–8). She then closes with the confident assurance that He will keep His saints, and cast down the rebellious, and will judge the ends of the earth, and exalt the power of His king (vv. 9, 10).

This psalm is the mature fruit of the Spirit of God. The pious woman, who had gone with all the earnest longings of a mother's heart to pray to the Lord God of Israel for a son, that she might consecrate him to the lifelong service of the Lord, "discerned in her own individual experience the general laws of the divine economy, and its signification in relation to the whole history of the kingdom of God" (Auberlen, p. 564). The experience which she, bowed down and oppressed as she was, had had of the gracious government of the omniscient and holy covenant God, was a pledge to her of the gracious way in which the nation itself was led by God, and a sign by which she discerned how God not only delivered at all times the poor and wretched who trusted in Him out of their poverty and distress, and set them up, but would also lift up and glorify His whole nation, which was at that time so deeply bowed down and oppressed by its foes. Acquainted as she was with the destination of Israel to be a *kingdom*, from the promises which God had given to the patriarchs, and filled as she was with the longing that had been awakened in the nation for the realization of these promises, she could see in spirit, and through the inspiration of God,

the *king* whom the Lord was about to give to His people, and through whom He would raise it up to might and dominion.

The refusal of modern critics to admit the genuineness of this song is founded upon an *a priori* and utter denial of the supernatural saving revelations of God, and upon a consequent inability to discern the prophetic illumination of the pious Hannah, and a complete misinterpretation of the contents of her song of praise. The "proud and lofty," whom God humbles and casts down, are not the heathen or the national foes of Israel, and the "poor and wretched" whom He exalts and makes rich are not the Israelites as such; but the former are the *ungodly*, and the latter the *pious*, in Israel itself. And the description is so well sustained throughout, that it is only by the most arbitrary criticism that it can be interpreted as referring to definite historical events, such as the victory of David over Goliath (Thenius), or a victory of the Israelites over heathen nations (Ewald and others). Still less can any argument be drawn from the words of the song in support of its later origin, or its composition by David or one of the earliest of the kings of Israel. On the contrary, not only is its genuineness supported by the general consideration that the author of these books would never have ascribed a song to Hannah, if he had not found it in the sources he employed; but still more decisively by the circumstance that the songs of praise of Mary and Zechariah, in Luke 1:46ff. and 68ff., show, through the manner in which they rest upon this ode, in what way it was understood by the pious Israelites of every age, and how, like the pious Hannah, they recognised and praised in their own individual experience the government of the holy God in the midst of His kingdom.

1 Samuel 2:1. The first verse forms the introduction to the song. Holy joy in the Lord at the blessing which she had received impelled the favoured mother to the praise of God:

- 1 My heart is joyful in the Lord,
My horn is exalted in the Lord,

My mouth is opened wide over mine enemies:

For I rejoice in Thy salvation.

Of the four members of this verse, the first answers to the third, and the second to the fourth. The heart rejoices at the lifting up of her horn, the mouth opens wide to proclaim the salvation before which the enemies would be dumb. *"My horn is high"* does not mean 'I am proud' (Ewald), but "my power is great in the Lord." The horn is the symbol of strength, and is taken from oxen whose strength is in their horns (vid., Deut. 33:17; Ps. 75:5, etc.). The power was high or exalted by the salvation which the Lord had manifested to her. To Him all the glory was due, because He had proved himself to be the holy One, and a rock upon which a man could rest his confidence.

2 None is holy as the Lord; for there is none beside Thee;

And no rock is as our God.

3 Speak ye not much lofty, lofty;

Let (not) insolence go out of thy mouth!

For the Lord is an omniscient God,

And with Him deeds are weighed.

1 Samuel 2:2, 3. God manifests himself as holy in the government of the kingdom of His grace by His guidance of the righteous to salvation (see at Ex. 19:6). But holiness is simply the moral reflection of the glory of the one absolute God. This explains the reason given for His holiness, viz., "there is not one (a God) beside thee" (cf. 2 Samuel 22:32). As the holy and only One, God is the rock (vid., Deut. 32:4, 15; Ps. 18:3) in which the righteous can always trust. The wicked therefore should tremble before His holiness, and not talk in their pride of the *lofty* things which they have accomplished or intend to perform. גְּבוּרָה is defined more precisely in the following clause, which is also dependent upon אֱלֹהִים by the word עֲתָק, as insolent words spoken by the wicked against the righteous (see Ps. 31:19). For Jehovah hears such words; He is "a God of knowledge" (*Deus*

scientiarum), a God who sees and knows every single thing. The plural דְּעוֹת has an intensive

signification. לֹא נִתְכַּנְּנוּ עַל־לֹוֹת might be rendered "deeds are not weighed, or equal" (cf. Ezek. 18:25, 26; 33:17). But this would only apply to the actions of men; for the acts of God are always just, or weighed. But an assertion respecting the actions of men does not suit the context. Hence this clause is reckoned in the

Masora as one of the passages in which לֹא

stands for לוֹ (see at Ex. 21:8). "To Him (with Him) deeds are weighed:" that is to say, the acts of God are weighed, i.e., equal or just. This is the real meaning according to the passages in Ezekiel, and not "the actions of men are weighed by Him" (De Wette, Maurer, Ewald, etc.): for God weighs the minds and hearts of men (Prov. 16:2; 21:2; 24:12), not their actions. This expression never occurs. The weighed or righteous acts of God are described in vv. 4–8 in great and general traits, as displayed in the government of His kingdom through the marvellous changes which occur in the circumstances connected with the lives of the righteous and the wicked.

4 Bow-heroes are confounded,

And stumbling ones gird themselves with strength;

5 Full ones hire themselves out for bread,

And hungry ones cease to be.

Yea, the barren beareth seven (children),

And she that is rich in children pines away.

6 The Lord kills and makes alive;

Leads down into hell, and leads up.

7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich,

Humbles and also exalts.

8 He raises mean ones out of the dust,

He lifts up poor ones out of the dunghill,

To set them beside the noble;

And He apportioned to them the seat of glory:

For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,
And He sets the earth upon them.

1 Samuel 2:4–8. In v. 4, the predicate **הַתְּיָמִים** is construed with the *nomen rectum* **גְּבֻרִים**, not with the *nomen regens* **קִשְׁתֵּי**, because the former is the leading term (vid., Ges. § 148, 1, and Ewald, § 317, *d.*). The thought to be expressed is, not that the bow itself is to be broken, but that the heroes who carry the bow are to be confounded or broken inwardly. “*Bows of the heroes*” stands for heroes carrying bows. For this reason the verb is to be taken in the sense of confounded, not broken, especially as, apart from Isa. 51:56, **הִתְתַּת** is not used to denote the breaking of outward things, but the breaking of men.

1 Samuel 2:5. **שְׂבָעִים** are the rich and well to do; these would become so poor as to be obliged to hire themselves out for bread. **חָדַל**, to cease to be what they were before. The use of **עַד** as a conjunction, in the sense of “yea” or “in fact,” may be explained as an elliptical expression, signifying “it comes to this, that.” “*Seven children*” are mentioned as the full number of the divine blessing in children (see Ruth 4:15). “The mother of many children” pines away, because she has lost all her sons, and with them her support in her old age (see Jer. 15:9). This comes from the Lord, who kills, etc. (cf. Deut. 32:39). The words of v. 6 are figurative. God hurls down into death and the danger of death, and also rescues therefrom (see Ps. 30:3, 4). The first three clauses of v. 8 are repeated *verbatim* in Ps. 113:7, 8. *Dust* and the *dunghill* are figures used to denote the deepest degradation and ignominy. The antithesis to this is, sitting upon the chair or throne of glory, the seat occupied by noble princes. The Lord does all this, for He is the creator and upholder of the world. *The pillars*

(**מִצְּקֵי**, from **צִוּק = יִצַּק**) of the earth are the Lord's; i.e., they were created or set up by Him, and by Him they are sustained. Now as Jehovah, the God of Israel, the Holy One, governs the world with His almighty power, the righteous have nothing to fear. With this thought the last strophe of the song begins:

9 The feet of His saints He will keep,
And the wicked perish in darkness;
For by power no one becomes strong.
10 The Lord—those who contend against Him are confounded.
He thunders above him in the heavens;
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth,
That He may lend might to His king,
And exalt the horn of His anointed.

1 Samuel 2:9, 10. The Lord keeps the feet of the righteous, so that they do not tremble and stumble, i.e., so that the righteous do not fall into adversity and perish therein (vid., Ps. 56:14; 116:8; 121:3). But the wicked, who oppress and persecute the righteous, will perish in darkness, i.e., in adversity, when God withdraws the light of His grace, so that they fall into distress and calamity. For no man can be strong through his own power, so as to meet the storms of life. All who fight against the Lord are destroyed. To bring out the antithesis between man and God, “Jehovah” is written absolutely at the commencement of the sentence in v. 10: “*As for Jehovah, those who contend against Him are broken,*” both inwardly and outwardly (**הִתְתַּת**, as in v. 4). The word

עָלוּ, which follows, is not to be changed into

עָלִיָּהֶם. There is simply a rapid alternation of the numbers, such as we frequently meet with in excited language. “*Above him,*” i.e., above every one who contends against God, He thunders. Thunder is a premonitory sign of the approach of the Lord to judgment. In the thunder, man is made to feel in an alarming way the presence of the omnipotent God. In the

words, "*The Lord will judge the ends of the earth,*" i.e., the earth to its utmost extremities, or the whole world, Hannah's prayer rises up to a prophetic glance at the consummation of the kingdom of God. As certainly as the Lord God keeps the righteous at all times, and casts down the wicked, so certainly will He judge the whole world, to hurl down all His foes, and perfect His kingdom which He has founded in Israel. And as every kingdom culminates in its throne, or in the full might and government of a king, so the kingdom of God can only attain its full perfection in the king whom the Lord will give to His people, and endow with His might. *The king, or the anointed of the Lord,* of whom Hannah prophesies in the spirit, is not one single king of Israel, either David or Christ, but an ideal king, though not a mere personification of the throne about to be established, but the actual king whom Israel received in David and his race, which culminated in the Messiah. The exaltation of the horn of the anointed to Jehovah commenced with the victorious and splendid expansion of the power of David, was repeated with every victory over the enemies of God and His kingdom gained by the successive kings of David's house, goes on in the advancing spread of the kingdom of Christ, and will eventually attain to its eternal consummation in the judgment of the last day, through which all the enemies of Christ will be made His footstool.
