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## A Peculiar Vessel

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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### **"For Such a Time as This"**

1 Samuel 1.

The state of things today is very similar to that which existed at the beginning of the first book of Samuel. Three things in particular seem to stand out there as features of those days.

The first was a formality in the things of God through being pursued in the energy of the flesh; resulting in mixture and spiritual adultery, and spiritual weakness and ineffectiveness.

Another feature was the absence of spiritual revelation and perception - "There was no open vision". The "Spirit of wisdom and revelation" was inoperative amongst priests and people. Spiritual intelligence and apprehension was a minus quantity.

The third thing was the constant menace of the Philistines, which eventually issued in the departure of the glory from Israel and the absence of the testimony of the Sovereignty from the midst of the people of God. When we remember that the Philistines always represent the intrusion of the natural man ('uncircumcised', Col. 2:11,12) into the things of the Spirit, it is a very significant feature.

We leave it with those who have eyes to see to judge whether there is any similarity between then and now. What we have on our hearts is to note the method by which the Lord reacts to this situation.

The two things, then, which immediately come out are, firstly, that the Lord is not satisfied to have it so, yet He does not abandon the situation. Rather does He begin in a secret way to secure the instrument for recovery. The second thing is that there has to be a very deep and peculiar travail in the bringing forth of that instrument. Samuel represents such an instrument, and Hannah represents the travail which produces it.

What is clear in this first chapter is that this will not come about in the natural course of things. The *usual* way will not produce it. Indeed, it is declared that there was a deliberate act of God against that course (verse 6). Hannah's state was the Lord's doing. In other realms and for less important purposes - or shall we say, for more general purposes - the usual method may be followed. Samuel was not an after-thought. He was foreknown and foreordained and yet humanly he was an impossibility. Why had the Lord so acted in this matter? How do you relate and reconcile the two things, that Samuel was determined and yet made humanly impossible by the act of God? The first part of the answer is that the bringing of this instrument into being was to be by a fellowship in the Divine travail in relation to the testimony.

Hannah went through unusual and uncommon soul-agony in the matter. She is here represented as "in bitterness of soul" and she "wept sore" (verse 10). It was not just simply a personal interest or a selfish end in view. When at length Samuel was given she placed him at the disposal of the Lord as soon as she possibly could. Concerning Isaac it says that "when the child was weaned", but in the case of Samuel it says of Hannah that "she weaned him", as though she was not letting things go on, but bringing about a separation unto the Lord as soon as possible. She was concerned for the Lord's interests in a specially eager way. This is impressive when we take into consideration the cost of this child, and therefore the peculiar endearment to herself.

Let us get the full force of the truth here. *A thing which is to serve the Lord in a specially vital way is not born easily, and is not brought into being without some unusual suffering and travail. There is much bitterness of soul to be gone through, and many tears.*

For a time, a drawn-out time, it appears that there will be nothing. The heartache and sorrow seem to remain long in the place of barrenness. And yet there can be no philosophical acceptance or fatalistic capitulation. The Lord is a factor and there is a "hoping against hope", a wistful looking toward "the God who raiseth the dead, and calleth the things that are not as though they were."

Not one of the least painful aspects of the suffering is the taunting of Peninnah (verse 6). Now Peninnah was of the same household and a co-wife with Hannah. She was not a stranger or a foreigner. It was as such that she "provoked sorely to make her fret". Peninnah had plenty of children, there was none of this (divinely appointed) human impossibility. Things were more or less simple and easy with her.

So it is, when the Lord determines to secure for Himself that vessel of peculiar purpose, and cuts off all the many activities, works, and occupations which, while being in the same household of faith and in some relation to Himself, are largely by the energies of nature and the facility of man. When and where there are not those usual accompaniments and outworkings, those issues and results,

the evidences and proofs; then there is criticism, taunting, the pointing of the finger, and grievous imputations. The very acts of Divine sovereignty are given a twist to mean just the opposite of God's thought. So one system of things taunts the other. Well, so be it! It ever was. It ever will be. But wait! Samuel did come, and one Samuel meant more to God than all the children of Peninnah put together. And yet it is not a matter of comparative values. Samuel was for an hour of peculiar need. The suffering in connection with his coming into life was so deep as to solemnize beyond the suspicion of pride or comparison. All questions of self-realisation, vindication, or satisfaction had been tested in the fire, and the refined issue was the glory of God.

Samuel came, and, in the purpose that he served, the suffering and sorrow were made well worthwhile, and the wisdom of God's mysteriousness was established. God was justified and the channel used was satisfied. We can leave it there.

When the Lord wants something for an hour of peculiar need, the methods have to be out of the ordinary. To those concerned He has to say, 'Others can, you cannot'.

More and more deeply, we are entering into such an hour at this time. The general thing is not meeting the situation. The Lord must bring through something which will "come to the kingdom for such a time as *this*".

Who will pay the price?