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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

"The Song of Hannah"

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(The importance of the preacher's exegetical work is greater than the life-span of one sermon. It has more to do with the life-span of the preacher himself. Exegetical study maketh the exact theologian. His study builds his ministering.

It is therefore interesting to examine the relationship between a detailed exegetical study of a text and a sermon that is preached as part of its results. This issue provides such an opportunity. Ralph Klein offers a sermon that he preached in the chapel of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in the Advent season last year, together with his exegetical study of the text. The order of the service is also given to indicate the context in which the sermon was preached, following as it did the compilation of Scripture reading done responsively and the psalm-like words of praise which the hearers had spoken, as well as the singing of the paraphrase of the Magnificat. The exegetical article illustrates more than the development of a sermon. It serves also as a review of the steps of Biblical interpretation and as an example of the methodology employed in the basic courses in Biblical techniques required of all students at Concordia Seminary.

The sermon itself supplies helpful angles for those who are about to be caught up in the additional preaching tasks of the Advent season. It will be interesting to hear of the variation in Advent sermon series that will be developed out of the germinal thoughts included in this single message.

May He give strength to His King!)

GEORGE W. HOYER

EXEGETICAL STUDY OF THE SONG OF HANNAH (1 Samuel 2:1-10)

Translation of the Song of Hannah

1. My heart exults in Yahweh,
   my horn is high in my God.
   My mouth mocks my enemies;
   I rejoice in the victory You gave!

2. There is no one holy like Yahweh;
   there is no mountain like our God.

3. Don't abound in haughty boasting;
   let not arrogance ooze from your mouths.
   For Yahweh is a God who knows;
   by Him deeds are measured.

4. The bow of warriors is shattered,
   but those who faltered gird on strength.

5. The sated have hired themselves out for bread,
   while the starving grow fat again.
   The barren woman gave birth to seven,
   but the mother of many now languishes.

6. Yahweh kills and preserves life;
   He brings death and rescues from it.

7. Yahweh makes some poor and others rich,
   He humbles, He also exalts.

8. He raises from the dust the poor;
   from the dunghill He raises the needy,
   To seat them with princes
   and make them inherit a glorious throne.
   For to Yahweh belong the pillars of the earth;
   He has laid the world on them.

9. The feet of His devout He keeps,
   but the wicked are made silent in dark death;
   for not by his own strength does man survive.

10. Yahweh! — His enemies are shattered;
    the Most High thunders in heaven;
    Yahweh judges the entire earth.
    May He give strength to His king;
    may He raise the horn of His anointed monarch.

Textual Criticism

Regardless of when the Book of Samuel was first written down, more than 1,500 years separate that event from the 11th-century manuscript which has been reprinted in our standard Hebrew Bible. As Samuel was recopied dozens of times on leather, papyrus, and vellum, scribal mistakes and changes crept in. So textual criticism is necessary especially since the received copy of Samuel survives in perhaps the poorest condition of any Old Testament book. It is good to keep this in mind since one occasionally still hears claims for the accuracy of the Masoretic text (MT). In recent years this assertion is often supported by reference to the Dead Sea Scrolls. Actually the scrolls demonstrate a high degree of scribal activity in pre-Christian times, and the variety of text types at Qumran is now generally conceded.[1] Hasty generalizations on the basis of the great Isaiah scroll now must be corrected on the basis of widely divergent copies of Samuel, Jeremiah, Psalms, and even the Septuagint (LXX) found in the Judean wilderness. Fortunately we do have two major apertures into the darkness of the textual history of Samuel, one via the retroversion of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the second century B. C., and another via Hebrew fragments from Cave 4 at Qumran.[2] The following textual observations can be made on the Song of Hannah:

1. We follow the LXX and Old Latin in reading "my God" (1b) instead of "Yahweh," the reading in the MT and the Qumran scrolls. The choice is dictated primarily by the need for variety in the poetic parallelism, since both readings can claim nearly equal antiquity. The Masoretic reading presumably arose by assimilation to the divine name in 1a.

2. In 1d we omit the conjunction "for" since it is lacking in the LXX and apparently also in the Qumran text and since it represents a misunderstanding of the parallelism.

3. We omit a hemistich, "There is none beside you," which is located between 2a and 2b in the MT.[3] The divergent position of this phrase in the LXX is prima facie evidence of its secondary character while the use of the second person pronoun also seems out of place.

4. We retain the appellative "mountain" in 2b despite the variant "Righteous One" in the LXX. Just as the more recent reprintings of *The Lutheran Hymnal* have replaced the KJV's "prevent" by "come before," so ancient scribes were tempted to replace archaic words by more familiar ones. The Qumran text here conflates both "mountain" and "Righteous One."

5. Hemistich 3d in the MT is senseless be-

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[1] This position has been stated by Frank M. Cross Jr. a number of times. See his "The History of the Biblical Text in the Light of Discoveries in the Judean Desert," *Harvard Theological Review*, LVII (1964), 281—99.

[2] Edited provisionally by Cross. "A New Qumran Biblical Fragment Related to the Original Hebrew Underlying the Septuagint," *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research*, 132 (1953), 15—26.

[3] In the LXX the phrase reads, "There is no Holy One beside You," which probably indicates that it is only an ancient variant to 2a. S. Talmon has classified such readings as synonymous variants and has identified dozens of them in Hebrew manuscripts and the versions. Since ancient scribes tried to conserve authentic readings, they frequently conflated variant readings. This was a major causative factor in producing the expansionist form of the MT especially in the Latter Prophets. Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls has demonstrated that the LXX text of Jeremiah, which is one eighth shorter than the MT, is superior in most cases, whereas the MT has been filled out with additions from parallel contexts, expansions of divine names, conflation of synonymous variants, and the like. See J. Gerald Janzen, "Double Readings in the Text of Jeremiah," *Harvard Theological Review*, LX (1967), 433—47, and the bibliography on Talmon in his n. 5.

cause of an ancient scribal error. My translation presupposes only a hearing error: וְלֹא miswritten for וְלוֹ, although one could also follow the LXX, which requires a metathesis, וְאֵל, and reconjugation of the verb. The effect is much the same.

6. The LXX omits 8e-f and 9a-b, although this is obscured by the notations in *Biblia Hebraica.* Apparently a scribe's eyes skipped from the equivalent of "for" in 8e to "for" in 9c. Since the resultant text was incomprehensible, someone inserted a gloss in the LXX: "He gives to the vower his vow, and blesses the years (or sleep) of the righteous one." Strangely, the new Roman Catholic *CCD* translation includes this in the English text.

7. Again the LXX must be rejected when it includes a passage from Jer. 9:23-24 after 10a. In translation this gloss reads:

> The Lord is holy,
> Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom,
> Let not the strong man boast in his strength,
> And let not the rich man boast in his riches.
> But in this let the boaster boast,
> that he understands and knows the Lord,
> and does justice and righteousness in the middle of the earth.

Since the Greek translation in Samuel differs at a number of points (especially in line 7) from the Greek of Jeremiah, we must conclude that the Hebrew copy of Samuel used by the LXX translator had already been glossed and that he made an independent translation. Thus we have further evidence for the intensive reworking of *Hebrew* manuscripts even via LXX evidence!

It should be clear that one cannot choose mechanically the MT, the LXX, or the Qumran texts, but in each reading decisions must be made among the variants on the basis of standard textual critical canons.

Poetic Parallelism

Parallelism in Hebrew poetry served many functions. It facilitated the composition of poetry, and it increased the effectiveness of understanding, since imperfect knowledge of one line could be supplemented by hearing the parallel line. Finally, it produced pleasing aesthetic effects by the skillful juxtaposing of similar expressions.

Complete synonymous parallelism is best exemplified by 1a-b and 10d-e. Most English versions and even the layout of *Biblia Hebraica* have obscured the parallelism in the latter case. In both instances the parallelism is both semantic and grammatical with each hemistich demonstrating the same sequence of elements.

To avoid an inherent tendency toward monotony, Hebrew poets varied the order of semantic elements as in (5a-b) and (8 a-b). The chiasm in the latter example can be diagrammed as follows (the hyphens indicate single words in Hebrew):

he-raises from-the-dust the-poor a b c
from-the-dunghill he-raises the-needy b' a' c'

At other times the parallelism is not complete in that the second hemistich omits an element of the first. The lack of this element is supplied by a ballast element. This can be observed in 4, 5c-d, 6, and 7. In 6b there is no parallel word for Yahweh in a, but the verb is expanded into two words: (a) kills, (b) he-brings death. Still further variety is achieved by using antithetic parallelism as in 4, 5a-b, 5c-d, and 9a-b. Here the poet makes an assertion in one hemistich, but states the opposite in the "parallel" hemistich.

Form Analysis

It is the lasting contribution of Herman Gunkel that he recognized that the Psalms are not occasioned by an event in one person's life, but that they express more general concerns, and that they do this in a limited number of patterns or forms. The psalm ascribed to Hannah[4] displays the traits of both a hymn and a song of thanksgiving.

[4] Most commentators and Old Testament introductions deny that Hannah was the original author of this song. According to the Bible,

Hymns are those songs which extol the glory and greatness of Yahweh as it is revealed in nature and history, and particularly in Israel's history (Eissfeldt). God's actions are frequently expressed by participles, with the particle *ki* playing an important transitional role. The Song of Hannah contains eight participles in 6-8. In a sense the hymn form is not a prayer *to* God, but a testimony borne in the presence of God and a proclamation in the presence of the congregation. Note, for example, that Yahweh is always spoken of in the third person with the single exception of 1d.

A typical hymn consists of introduction, body, and conclusion. The introduction usually contains a summons to begin extolling Yahweh, and its verbs are imperative, jussive, or cohortative. "Praise Yahweh" or "Sing to Yahweh" are typical. Sometimes an individual would introduce a hymn with a description of his own rejoicing, although in these cases the distinction between hymn and song of thanksgiving [5] is not clear. Claus Westermann has in fact shown an essential connection between these types since psalms which *report* God's actions (thanksgivings) often go on to *describe* more generally the greatness and goodness of God (hymns). If the introduction to the Song of Hannah is closer to the thanksgiving-reporting type, which is a direct address to God, the reason for using the second person singular suffix (1d) becomes clear.

The body of this hymn begins with negative sentences referring to the incomparability of Yahweh (2) (see Deut. 33:26; Ps. 86:8). Alternately the body of some hymns begins with positive rhetorical expressions: "How majestic is Your name" (Ps. 8:2) or "How terrible are Your deeds" (Ps. 66:3). There are dozens of analogies in hymns to the Song of Hannah's listing of Yahweh's attributes in a nominal sentence introduced by *ki*. (3c-d)

In the admonition to others (3a-b) Gunkel identified a rare expression attested elsewhere in both positive (Ps. 76:11) and negative (Pss. 75 [6] and 146:3) forms.

Hannah had six (1 Sam. 2:21), not seven (5c), children. Many feel that the tone of the poem is national and that 4a would have been an inappropriate metaphor in Hannah's mouth. Perhaps the strongest argument is presented by 10d-e. How, scholars ask, could Hannah pray for blessings on the king long before the time when aged Samuel anointed Saul as first king? How could one then explain why Samuel was so opposed to the idea of kingship? Finally, the song is located at slightly different places in the MT and the LXX. Such variation is often taken as a sign of secondary material. S. R. Driver has convincingly shown that 1:28b MT is a variant of 2:11a LXX in his *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), pp. 22—23. It is understandable, on the other hand, why the song is ascribed to Hannah. She is a barren woman made fruitful by God (5d), and her difficulties with her husband's other wife Peninnah could be expressed by both 1 and 3. Some even feel that an editor wanted Hannah to express the sanctity of God's anointed, a theme that runs through the stories of Saul and David.

[5] This form has the following outline. Introduction: a worshiper announces his intention of giving thanks to God. Main Section: narration of worshiper's experience, the terrible distress in which he found himself, the prayer which he directed to Yahweh, and the deliverance which he experienced. Conclusion.

[6] Ps. 75 is a good example of how the use of conventional forms and formulaic language produced psalms remarkably similar to one another. The following quotations from Ps. 75 are parallel in form and content to the Song of Hannah as the line numbers from 1 Sam. 2 in parentheses indicate.

I will judge with equity (10c).

When the earth totters . . . it is I who keep steady its pillars (8e-f).

I say to the boastful, "Do not boast," and to the wicked, "Do not lift up your horn; do not lift up your horn on high, or speak with insolent neck" (3a-b).

It is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another (7).

I will rejoice forever (1d).

The body continues in 4-5 with implicit confessions of Yahweh's actions. Gunkel suggested that the sentences were expressed in the passive and without mentioning the agent (who is clearly God) to allow a heightening and intensification of confession in 6-8. Verses 4-8, which describe regular or repeated actions of Yahweh, constitute a typical transition from the attributes of Yahweh (3c-d) to past divine actions, in this case to Yahweh's first historical act, creation (8e-f). Formally Yahweh's ownership of the earth's pillars (8e) recalls Pss. 22:28 and 24:1. The explicit active and the implicit passive types of confession are combined in 9a-b.

Interpretation of verse 10 is hampered by the ambiguity of the Hebrew tenses. Three solutions seem possible: (a) all verbs denote the future, and the verse is eschatological; (b) all verbs denote repeated action in the present (see 8b, d); (c) the verbs in a-c denote repeated action in the present, but the verbs in d-e are taken as jussives, following the Masoretic pointing. It is difficult for us to tell whether this ambiguity was felt by the original audience. Option a, which seems to us least likely since the actions confessed in 10a-c are part of Yahweh's ongoing governance of the world in Israelite thought, was chosen by some later Jewish interpreters[7] and by some Christian exegetes as well.

All the horns of the wicked he will cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted (1b, 10e).

[7] The Targum's paraphrastic and midrashic translation begins: "And Hannah prayed in the spirit of prophecy and said." The Targum interprets this song as predicting Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Greece, the sons of Haman, and the final judgment. We include a translation of verses 4, 9, and 10 with the literal ties to the Biblical text indicated by italics.

Concerning the kingdom of Javan (Greece) she prophesied and said, *The bows of the mighty men* of Javan *shall be broken,* and the house of the Hasmoneans *who have been weak* shall have signs and mighty deeds done on them.

Hymns concluded in a variety of ways, quite frequently by repeating the introductory appeal. Here, however, the final thought is a wish for the king (see Ps. 89:19). Hans Joachim Kraus has shown from Akkadian parallels that prayers for the king are a regular part of the pleas in a psalm of supplication. The pattern holds good in the Bible. Psalm 61, an individual's supplication, climaxes in the words, "Prolong the life of the king . . . may he be enthroned before God forever" (6-7). Since the king's welfare means prosperity, fertility, and abundance for the nation (Psalm 72), psalmists sometimes linked king and people in parallel lines:

> Yahweh is the strength of His people,
> He is the saving refuge of His anointed (28:8).

This connection is also clear in a comparison of Ps. 29:11, "May Yahweh give strength to His people," with the wish of similar intent in the Song of Hannah (10d), "May Yahweh give strength to His king." By praying for God's blessing on the king the psalmist is also praying that God's blessings be channeled through the king to God's people, who have recently experienced deliverance. A rhetorical inclusion, "My *horn is high* (1b) . . . may He *raise the horn of* His anointed" (10e), binds the poem together and makes unlikely the interpretation of (10d-e) as a secondary part of the poem (*pace* Gunkel).

It remains to ask: Who is meant by "I"? Who are the enemies of the psalmist? Rudolf Smend saw the "I" as personification of the

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The bodies *of his righteous* servants *will he preserve* from Gehenna, *and the wicked* shall *be judged in darkness* in Gehenna, to show that there is *no man in whom is the strength* of innocence for the day of judgment. *Yahweh shall break in pieces his enemies* who arise to do evil to his people. *Out of heaven* shall he smite them with a *loud voice.* He shall execute vengeance upon God and the army of plundering peoples who come with him from the *ends of the earth,* and *shall give strength unto his king, and magnify the kingdom of his messiah.*

community; Harris Birkeland took it as the word of a king or military leader. Although that might fit elsewhere, the distich (10d-e) makes an identification of the "I" with the king impossible here. A prominent rank does seem assignable to the "I" of the much later Qumran psalms who can say of himself: "Through me you have illumined the faces of many." Gunkel and most moderns take the "I" as an individual whose cultic or other rank cannot be further defined. The difficulty with this interpretation has always been: Who are the enemies of the individual psalmist?

If the "I" is a private individual speaking for himself, several options are open. While Mowinckel identified the enemies as sorcerers or magic workers, most exegetes interpret the enemies as those who interpret the psalmist's illness as a sign of his God-forsakenness, or who by slander and persecution bring the individual into a legal crisis. In any case the metaphors employed are very rich: enemies may be compared to besieging armies, hunters and fishers, and even wild animals on the prowl. The Song of Hannah, of course, by mentioning only the proud talk and arrogance of the enemies leaves their identity unclear unless we take the military reversal portrayed in 4 as defining the situation referred to in 1. Since in the present context the "I" refers to Hannah, the enemies would be those like Peninnah who mocked Hannah's sterility and saw it as evidence of her impiety. But if the song once had a different context as 10d-e and the address to the enemies in the masculine plural seem to indicate, two alternatives are possible: (a) the psalmist speaks for himself or for the community after a national military victory, or (b) an individual is faced by a physical or legal crisis which his enemies use as an occasion to try to separate him from Yahweh. While dogmatism is uncalled for, we tentatively prefer option a, because the poet mentions "victory" (1d), military metaphors (4), and especially the annihilation of Yahweh's enemies in 10a.

Lexicography and Concept Exegesis

The translation provided above results in part from certain difficult lexicographical decisions and can be fully understood only as the content of the theological and other leading ideas is explicated. Strictly speaking, lexicography and the study of concepts and traditions are separate exegetical enterprises, but to present them separately in this analytical survey would lead to unnecessary repetition. Instead, therefore, we will point out the denotations and connotations of the words and ideas employed as we proceed through the pericope verse by verse.

(1b) The RSV's "strength" for "horn" obscures the intended comparison to an animal who carries his head high and is proudly conscious of his strength. Strength and military victory are standard connotations in this metaphor. Of Joseph it was said: "His horns are the horns of a wild ox; with them he shall push the peoples, all of them, to the ends of the earth" (Deut. 33:17). A psalmist praises God for deliverance from personal enemies with the words: "You have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox. . . . My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies, my ears have heard the doom of my assailants." (Ps. 92:10-11; cf. Luke 1:69)

(1c) Somehow any translation seems banal when we remember that the Hebrew connotes a rude, scornful opening of the mouth, sticking out the tongue, and sneering Ha! Ha! (Ps. 35:21; Is. 57:4)

(1d) The paraphrastic translation ("the victory You gave") identifies the specific content of Yahweh's saving act. The poet is not rejoicing in God's deliverance from death or sin, but in God's recent routing of His (military) enemies (cf. Pss. 9:14; 13:5; etc.). The RSV's "salvation" and the NEB's "Thou hast saved me" hide the poetic and theological vigor.

(2b) We follow W. F. Albright in rendering *sur* as mountain instead of the usual rock. This name, like 'Al or 'Eli (see under 10b), occurs in early texts (Deut. 32; Ps. 18; 2 Sam. 22; 1 Sam. 2) and archaistically in late books. Among ancient Amorite sentence names we find "My (divine) father is my mountain," and "My (divine) mountain is the moon." El Shadday, that is, El, the one of the mountains, is related semantically to this appellation. Stability, strength, and permanence are among its connotations. Compare "my saving Mountain" (2 Sam. 22:47 MT and Ps. 89:26), "Mountain of refuge" (Is. 17:10), and "everlasting Mountain" (Is. 26:4). The appellative, like the term "Cloud Rider" (Ps. 68:4), is a (polemical) adaptation from Israel's neighbors.

(3d) In exhorting the enemies not to speak arrogantly, the Hebrew poet reminds his accusers that Yahweh really knows the true facts of his case. No matter if the enemies interpreted sickness or sterility as a sign of the poet's wickedness, or if they brought the poet to trial on trumped-up charges, or if they gloated over a hoped-for military victory, Yahweh knows their true intentions and weighs them on His just scales. "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes," we read in Prov. 21:2, "but Yahweh weighs the heart" (see Prov. 16:2 and 24:12). Some have made the attractive alternate suggestion that Yahweh's knowing and weighing might better be understood as foreknowing or predetermining. According to this view, the arrogant enemies should realize that their plans cannot succeed since God determines the outcome of history.

(4a) To say that Yahweh breaks the bow of the mighty is to count on His military aid. Characteristically Israel expected Yahweh to show His faithfulness by breaking the bow of Elam (Jer. 49:35) and of Gog (Ezek. 39:3). But she also learned that He could even break Israel's bow (Hosea 1:5), simply because He was the God of the Exodus. Sometimes when she dreamed of the future (Ps. 46:9), and especially of the Messianic age (Zech. 9:10), she proclaimed that He would one day crush the bows of all!

(4b) Since God girds with strength those who falter, it is no wonder that kings confess: "You girded me with strength for battle; You made my assailants sink under me" (2 Sam. 22:40 and Ps. 18:39). It was Yahweh who installed his unwilling "messiah" Cyrus: "I gird you though you do not know Me." A psalmist exults when his enemies have been put down: "You have girded me with gladness." (30:11)

(5b) While the RSV's "those who were hungry have ceased to hunger" is correct in substance, the Hebrew in fact contains no infinitive "to hunger." In addition, D. Winton Thomas and Philip Calderone have discovered that the Hebrew verb translated "ceased" really comes from another Semitic root (attested in Arabic) meaning "grow fat."[8] Our translation takes the final particle *'ad* as an incorrect pointing of the adverb *'od*, again.

While the blessings of 5b are afforded Hannah and Israel, later nominal Israelites were to experience the judgment of 5a:

> Young children beg for food,
> but no one gives to them.
> Those who once fed delicately
> perish in the streets;
> those nurtured in purple
> now grovel on dunghills. (Lam. 4:4-5)

(5c-d) Yahweh gives fertility to barren women who feel reproach at childlessness (1 Sam. 1:6). This theme is a Biblical favorite, not only because it speaks to a common human problem, but especially since this aid was crucial to many women in salva-

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[8] See D. Winton Thomas, "Some Observations on the Hebrew Root חדל," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, IV (1957), 8—16, and Philip Calderone, "HDL-II in Poetic Texts," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 23 (1961), 451—60.

tion history — Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel the wife of Manoah, Hannah, Elizabeth. Formal analysis of various birth accounts discloses a number of repeated characteristics:

— The barren woman is her husband's favorite although he has another "wife" by whom he has had children (Sarah, Rachel, Hannah).

— The fruitful wife lords it over the barren one (Hagar, Leah, Peninnah).

— The barren woman is often old (Sarah, Rebekah, Elizabeth).

— The birth comes in answer to prayer (Abraham, Isaac, Rachel, Hannah, Zechariah).

— The announcement comes by a messenger-angel (Sarah, wife of Manoah, Elizabeth, cf. Hannah).

— God's kindness is expressed by the word "He remembered her" (Rachel, Hannah).

— The child born is always a son (Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Joseph, Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist).

— The mother dedicates him (sometimes as a Nazirite) to God (Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist).

Yahweh the Reverser can also make barren a woman rich with children (5d). This image is applied to Jerusalem in Jer. 15:9. "She who bore seven has languished."[9] As we saw in our discussion of 4a, Yahweh's manner of vindicating Israel against her enemies can also be His means of afflicting her. According to Jeremiah, Jerusalem cannot merely equate herself with Hannah and hope for perennial fertility regardless of her disobedience because God treats a proud, insensitive Israel just like Hannah's adversaries.

(6) Keeping in mind the general Old Testament thoughts on resurrection, we have suggested a polarity in our translation between (a) God kills and (b) God rescues people on the verge of death. Helmer Ringgren points out that the Akkadian *muballit mītē* (literally, "giver of life to the dead") is used of gods who heal the sick, since sickness is a kind of potential death.[10] We believe that killing and healing of the desperately sick are antithetical also in the following Biblical passages: Deut 32:29, "I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal." Wisdom 16:13, "For you have power over life and death; you lead men down to the gates of Hades and back again."[11]

Our suggested interpretation is clinched by Ps. 30:4, which uses the same verbs (חיה in the Piel and עלה in the Hiphil) in a context where they can only mean preservation from death: "You have brought me up from Sheol (see 6b "rescues from it") [and] kept me alive apart from those going down to the pit" (see 6a "preserves life"). As the psalmist confesses, "To Yahweh, the Lord, belongs escape from death." (68:20)

Verse 7 talks vividly of God acting in judgment and grace. By breaking bows He can defeat Israel; He can provide children or remove them; social and economic status is also His to add or subtract. In the words of Ps. 75:7: "It is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another." Verse 8 focuses only on the positive aspects of God's reversal of position. From the dunghills or town dumps, which provide sleeping quarters for beggars by night and a place to ask alms by day, the poor are raised to luxurious thrones. In other contexts where the expression "glorious

[9] The number seven is a standard cliche for fertility (cf. Ruth 4:15). Note that the passage in Jeremiah links the subject of 5c in the Song of Hannah with the verb of 5d.

[10] Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), p. 245.

[11] While the Song of Hannah explicitly confesses only God's preservation from death, God's power over Sheol and death explicitly includes resurrection in such passages as Is. 26 and Dan. 12.

throne" (8d) is used in the Bible, it refers to the high administrative office of Eliakim (Is. 22:23) or, even more remarkably, it denotes the ark, God's glorious seat in the temple (Jer. 14:21 and 17:12). In the Isaianic literature the reverse of this metaphor is used with telling effect: "Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne" (47:1). The harlot Babylon is demoted from throne to dust while Hannah praises God for raising the needy from dust to throne.

(8e-f) If the Exodus most clearly revealed God as the great Reverser, the Song of Hannah also sets forth Yahweh's creation of the world as testimony to His strength and character. To the Canaanites and Babylonians creation was a battle that took place in primordial time, an event that established a perilous order which had to be renewed cultically in annual celebrations. While the Israelites often used similar metaphorical vocabulary, their theological interpretation was radically different. Yahweh's creation initiated a history in which would follow the saving acts of exodus, conquest, and return from Babylon. Furthermore, just as creation could be used in late times to reassure the exiles who had been shaken to the core that Yahweh was stronger than the "gods" and that He could effect another exodus, so already in the Song of Hannah His creation validates His effective concern for the downcast.

Note well how creation is expressed. Yahweh sets the (flat) world on pillars which belong to Him. This is by no means an isolated picture. "When the earth totters," God announces in Ps. 75:3, "I keep steady its pillars." Job admits that God's power includes the ability to shake the earth out of its place and make its pillars tremble (9:6; cf. Ps. 104:5). Apparently the subterranean regions were thought to consist of seas and rivers punctuated by the foundation pillars (Ps. 24:2; Job 38:4, 6).[12] However difficult it is to square this poetic cosmology with our own, God's role as Creator, Owner, and therefore Righter of wrongs comes through with great clarity.

(9a) It is generally agreed that the KJV's "mercy" and the RSV's "steadfast love" are inadequate renderings of *chesed* in many cases. According to A. R. Johnson, *chesed* expresses the loyalty between Yahweh and Israel, especially in covenant contexts, and His compassion. He appropriately suggests translating *chasid* as "devoted," "devotee," or "devout," instead of the more usual "pious."[13]

(9a-b) We need say nothing new about Yahweh's keeping the feet of the devout, except to note that this faithfulness is either prayed for (Ps. 86:2) or confessed (Pss. 31:23; 97:10; Prov. 2:8) in a number of passages. Repeatedly it is asserted: "Yahweh rescues my feet from stumbling" (Pss. 56:13; 116:8; cf. 121:3). As for the wicked, recent lexicographical studies by Mitchell Dahood and his students have clarified their silent end in "darkness." Darkness is synonymous with death and Sheol in Job's despairing, "I go whence I shall not return, to the land of gloom and deep darkness . . . where light is as darkness" (10:21 f.) or, "The wicked man does not believe that he will return out of darkness, and he is destined for the sword" (15:22) or, "If I look for Sheol as my house, if I spread my couch in darkness" (17:13). In fact, the wish, "Let the wicked be silenced

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[12] The Israelites also thought of the sources of weather differently from a modern meteorologist. God has storehouses for snow and hail (Job 38:22), chambers for winds (Job 37:9; Ps. 135:7; Jer. 10:13; 51:16), while rain falls through sluice gates or windows of heaven. (Gen. 7:11; Job 38:25)

[13] Aubrey R. Johnson, "Hesed and Hāsîd," *Interpretationes ad Vetus Testamentum* (Mowinckel Festschrift) (Oslo: Fabritius and Sønner, 1955), pp. 100—12.

in Sheol" (Ps. 31:17), shows clearly the identity of Sheol and darkness.

(9c) The wicked die because their strength is only apparent. The arrogant king of Assyria was merely an axe vaunting itself over him who hews with it when he ascribed his victory to the strength of his own hand (Is. 10:13). During wilderness days Israel prevailed over Amalek solely by Yahweh's power symbolized by the raised hand of Moses (Ex. 17:11). In postexilic times Zechariah assures Zerubbabel that neither might nor power, but God's on-rushing Spirit makes the reconstruction of the temple a realizable goal (4:6). This Spirit and its attendant assurance of victory accompany God's devout; against this Spirit no man stands a chance.

(10a-c) Israel heard God's voice in the roll of thunder in the contexts of theophany and especially of holy war. At the thunder of Yahweh the Philistines were routed (1 Sam. 7:10). This union of theophany and warfare also typifies judgment contexts, thus explaining the basic unity of 10a-b-c.

Yahweh's judgment meant at once salvation for the loyal, but exclusion for the apostates and destruction for ungodly enemies (Weiser). Both motifs are well expressed in Ps. 31:23: "Yahweh preserves the faithful, but abundantly requites him who acts haughtily" (see Ps. 145:20). Thus negative and positive aspects of God's judgment are appropriately affirmed in the Song of Hannah in both 9a-b on the one hand and 10 on the other. The worldwide extent of His judging is already in force. God has established His throne and now judges the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity (Ps. 9:8). His victories over His enemies are part of the historical past and are actualized in the cultic present, not without an orientation towards the future.

(10b) In our translation "Most High" we follow the suggestion of H. S. Nyberg, W. F. Albright, and Mitchell Dahood who have found this word elsewhere in the Bible and in the Ugaritic texts. Vocalized *'Ali* or *'Eli*, it is a genuinely archaic feature in the Song of Hannah. The KJV's "upon them" and the RSV's "against them" are valiant attempts to interpret the Hebrew which actually reads "against him." In this case modern epigraphic studies have eliminated the need for such forced translations or emendation.

(10e) Was this hemistich "Messianic" in its original setting? Much depends of course on one's definition of terms, and a Christian may well find Christological analogies here as we will show more fully below. But both the synonymous parallelism and the unanimous Old Testament usage dictate the translation "anointed" rather than "Messiah."[14] Here the word is only a synonym for the common noun king.

Later Use of the Song of Hannah

This is not the place to explore in detail the Jewish interpretations in Targum, Talmud, or Josippon, since they shed little light on the original meaning of the passage.[15] In the New Testament the Song of Hannah forms the model in many ways, both in form and content, for the Magnificat. The quotations from the Magnificat below are followed by the apposite verse numbers in the Song of Hannah.

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[14] Strangely enough, the Hebrew word משיח is never clearly used as a technical term for the coming messianic figure in canonical texts. This vocable usually denotes the contemporary Judean king. Specifically the word "anointed" is also used of Saul, David, Solomon, Zedekiah, and even of Eliab, David's brother, and Cyrus, the Persian king.

[15] For the Targum, see n. 7. The Talmud discusses Hannah in connection with the New Year festival, since she, Sarah, and Rachel were all allegedly visited by God at that time. The Rabbis further argued that her choice of horn instead of cruse in 1b implicitly signified the superiority of the anointing of David and Solomon (anointed with a horn) over that of Saul and Jehu (anointed with a cruse). Josippon identifies as Hannah the woman in 2 Macc. 7.

Luke 1:46-47 My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God
my Savior. (1)

1:52 He has put down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of low degree. (7-8)

1:53 He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent empty away. (5, 7a)

When Mary sings, "He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden" in 1:48, we may well have an allusion to Hannah's prayer for a child: "O Lord of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thy maidservant and remember me, and not forget Thy maidservant." (1 Sam. 1:11). To these basic themes of Hannah have been added a whole collage of Old Testament quotations and allusions, as Nestle's marginal notes to the Magnificat and the commentators point out.

The Song of Hannah itself has also been used liturgically in the church. Together with other hymns which were not part of the Psalter, it was classified as an ode or canticle. The use of odes began in the East, perhaps as a continuation of Jewish custom, and is known as early as the fourth century in the Western church. In most manuscripts of the Septuagint the Psalms are followed by a collection of odes. Codex Alexandrinus, for example, contains 14: Ex. 15:1-19; Deut. 32:1-43; 1 Sam. 2:1-10; Is. 26:9-20; Jonah 2:3-10; Hab. 3:1-19; Is. 38:10-20; the Prayer of Manasseh; Dan. 3:26-45; Dan. 3: 52-88; the Magnificat, Nunc Dimittis and Benedictus from the New Testament; and a morning hymn. Both the Eastern and Western churches have employed the Song of Hannah at Lauds. *The Lutheran Hymnal* includes the Song of Hannah in its collection of nine canticles, although it omits all of verse 5.

Homiletical Suggestions

The hymn provides rich resources for praising God, who rescues the lowly in their hopeless condition. Not only is He incomparable and steadfast, but, relying on His saving power, we can be sure of the failure of all our adversaries and adversities.

It is our God Yahweh who acts in judgment and grace, who can reverse earthly station in His just rule. In ancient Egypt the instability of the social order was viewed with horror as a sign of the breakdown of the order rigidly fixed by the gods.[16] The Song of Hannah explicitly states that God established the existing social order, but this order does not derive sacredness from its divine origin. Instead, God can change the order as He blesses and judges; He can even withdraw blessings from those He has once favored. God transcends the status quo. His great act of emancipation in the Exodus is characteristic of Him, and this concern for the poor and distressed is to characterize those who call themselves by His name.

Advent would seem to be an ideal season for preaching on the Song of Hannah. Yahweh judges and will judge — this was the belief not only of those who waited for God in the Old Testament, but it is our belief and hope as well. Hannah's prayer for God's earthly king can become our petition for God to bring the day of His Christ. That power which Hannah looked for in the Davidic line we see revealed with extraordinary multiplication in that last Davidide to whom all authority in heaven and earth was given.

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16 See Henri Frankfort, *Before Philosophy* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 242 ff.

Concordia Seminary Chapel

Order of Service

December 19, 1969

The Song of Those Who Waited

℣: My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in the Lord.
My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in Thy salvation. 1 Sam. 2:1

℟: O Lord of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget Thy maidservant, but wilt give to Thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head. 1 Sam. 1:11; Luke 1:48

℣: Happy am I! For the women will call me happy. Gen. 30:13

℟: He is your praise; He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrible things which your eyes have seen. Deut. 10:21

℣: He sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever. Holy and terrible is His name! Ps. 111:9

℟: The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children. Ps. 103:17

℣: Thou didst crush Rahab like a carcass, Thou didst scatter Thy enemies with Thy mighty arm. Ps. 89:10

℟: He leads priests away stripped and overthrows the mighty. Job 12:19

℣: He sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety. Job 5:11

℟: The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low, He also exalts. 1 Sam. 2:7

℣: For He satisfies him who is thirsty, and the hungry He fills with good things. Ps. 107:9

℟: But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, My friend. Is. 41:8

℣: He has remembered His steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God. Ps. 98:3

℟: Thou wilt show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as Thou hast sworn to our fathers from the days of old. Micah 7:20

℣: Great triumphs He gives to His king, and shows steadfast love to His anointed, to David and his descendants forever. 2 Sam. 22:51

℟: Gloria Patri

The Magnificat — Hymn 275

The Sermon

The Collects

The Benediction

The Sermon Based on the Song of Hannah

The "Song of Those Who Waited" does not exist as such. It is a collection of Old Testament sayings by Leah, by Moses, by the author of Job, by several psalmists, by Isaiah and Micah, and by Hannah. The reason these passages are important is not only that they reflect the incomparable nature of God in His power and love, but they are the material from which Mary drew in singing the Magnificat, of which we have just sung a paraphrase. (*TLH,* 275)

This morning we are going to discuss another song of similar style, the Song of Hannah in the second chapter of First Samuel. It is really a song of thanksgiving said by the people for victory in war in which they pray for God's strength for His king. But it fits so well in Hannah's mouth that we read it with no feeling of tension.

Her song begins, "My mouth mocks my enemies." That goes down hard with me. It goes down hard to think of laughing at the way our enemies fall. As I pondered what might be meaningful in this text for a Christian today, I began by saying, "Who are these enemies?" You can look in the secondary literature of the Old Testament and see that they are identified as national enemies or personal enemies or magicians or whoever — nobody really knows. But yet they all have one function in common: these enemies are trying to separate the worshiper from his God. "My mouth mocks my enemies," when their attempts to divert me from that sure support fail.

"I have an imcomparable God" — that is what Hannah said. "There is no one holy like Yahweh; there is no mountain like our God." Then she looked at her enemies and said, "Don't abound in haughty boasting; let not arrogance ooze from your mouth." Why not? Because of the incomparableness of God. He knows everything. He even judges the world. All you who mock what we do in this room, in this school, in the church, don't let arrogance drip from your lips. Know our all-knowing God, know that He judges the earth. He takes the mighty and breaks their arrows while weaklings like you and me suddenly flex our muscles. Those grown fat or oppressive begin to starve while the weak and the hungry get sleek with fat at His hands. He makes the poor rich and the rich poor.

Hannah says, "God does everything — that is the God I confess — He kills, He brings to life." Don't skip that sentence. See the power it contains. "He can make poor, He can make rich." But where do we see His power most clearly? When He takes the needy, the one who sits on the ash heap with all the maggots, the one who sits there laden with his sin, and makes him sit in the country club, in the first-class cabin, in the heavenly places with Christ. That is the imcomparable power of God that Hannah speaks of. Strong? STRONG! He *has* got the whole world in His hands: "For to Yahweh belong the pillars of the earth." This flat old earth sits like a disk on pillars — pillars which God made and owns. *He* put the world on top of them.

"The Most High thunders in heaven." Can't you *hear* His power? He judges the very ends of the earth. What are the implications of the power of Him who reverses many human situations? "The feet of His devout He keeps." That is why we can live together here in community at all, why we dare call one another brothers and sisters. That is why we don't have to put up bars on all the windows — that is why we don't have to live with laws and prescriptions and rules — that is why we can forgive one another and trust one another, because we trust in that God who guides the footsteps of His pious ones. That is why we of this faculty can entrust to you men who come to us for only three years the office of the holy ministry because we know that God guides the footsteps of His pious ones. That is why I wish you a safe joyous trip home today. I

won't sit here biting my nails and worrying about who is going to crack up his car. He will guide the footsteps and the tires and the jet blasts of His faithful ones. That is the implication of God's incomparable power.

But one last petition is added by Hannah —"May He give strength to His king." There you have that hermeneutical problem. God's Old Testament people were thinking about David or another king through whom national defense would be maintained, through whom the unity of the people of God would be established. But we have a different perspective. We have the perspective of Christ's advent and the hope of His second coming. "May He give strength to His king." That word "king" is ambiguous for us. By it we also pray for that fulfillment which Paul talks about in Colossians (1:19-20). "For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross."

May He give strength to *that* King.

And our response? Our response to this incomparable God, incomparable in power and love, is to thank and praise. Just as the holy writer put such a song in Hannah's mouth, I shall now lay it on yours. I would ask you to join with me in praising God as I read to you the Song of Hannah. (See above, p. 674.)

St. Louis, Mo.