



LAUGHTER AND TEARS: SARAH AND HANNAH

WEEK 2
03.11.18

FOCUS VERSE

Psalm 30:5

For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

LESSON TEXT

Genesis 18:1–2, 9–14

1 And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;

2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,

.....

9 And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.

10 And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.

11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

13 And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?

14 Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

I Samuel 1:1–2, 9–11, 15–17

1 Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, 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:

2 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.

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9 So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD.

10 And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.

11 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.

.....

15 And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.

16 Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

17 Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.



FOCUS THOUGHT

God is with us
through laughter
and tears.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Artificial Tears

Many diseases have no medical cure although they can be treated to lessen the symptoms. The lack of moisture and tears leave the eyes dry, irritated, and unprotected, especially in windy weather. They hurt and burn and suffer damage, causing poor vision and eventual degrees of blindness. Doctors can implant little “plugs” under the eyelids to help produce moisture and tears. Tears are essential for eyes to be healthy, for vision to be normal, and for life to be naturally pleasant.

Emotional and spiritual trauma many times also seem to have no cure. But laughter is a good medicine (Proverbs 17:22), and tears work to release the pain of sorrow. For most situations, laughter, tears, guidance from the

Word, and prayer will work to restore normal life to those who have experienced trauma, difficulty, or sadness. Peter wrote: “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Jesus, the Great Physician, has a great cure for brokenness and troubled hearts: He said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28–30). The beauty of this prescription that Jesus, the Great Physician, gave is that it is not artificial. It is a cure that really works.

OUTLINE

I. SARAH WAS BARREN

- A. Sarah Was Abraham’s Wife
- B. Sarah Laughed When She Heard She Would Have a Son

II. HANNAH WAS BARREN

- A. Hannah Was Elkanah’s Wife
- B. Peninnah Ridiculed Hannah
- C. Hannah Wept Because She Was Childless

III. SARAH BROUGHT FORTH ISAAC

- A. God Promised to Establish His Covenant with Isaac
- B. Isaac Became the Father of Jacob

IV. HANNAH BROUGHT FORTH SAMUEL

- A. Samuel Was Dedicated to a Life of Service to God
- B. Samuel Was the Last Judge and the First Prophet of Israel

but they had one thing in common: both Sarah and Hannah were barren.

Both Sarah and Hannah had devoted, loving husbands who hurt with them because of their barrenness. But more important, both women touched the heart of God in their pain and sorrow, and God gave them miracle sons who became great leaders in Israel.

To Sarah was born Isaac, who became the father of Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel. From Jacob’s sons came the twelve tribes of Israel, which eventually became the nation of Israel.

To Hannah was born Samuel, the first prophet and stabilizer of the newly formed nation of Israel. He was the spiritual counsel for the first two kings of Israel and the voice of God to the people.

The normal expressions of laughter and tears, from normal people like Sarah and Hannah, are often transposed into miracles when God is invited into the barren places of their lives. He takes the painful, barren places of their lives and turns them into fruitful fields for His glory. The sons born to Sarah and Hannah brought different kinds of tears and laughter—that of rejoicing over what the Lord did for them. For with God, the psalmist

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Sarah and Hannah were a thousand years apart in biblical history. They lived in different periods of time and were years apart in age,

said, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5). With God, morning follows night. With God, it is possible to laugh so hard that you cry over His goodness and blessing.

Sarah and Hannah are more alike than different. They shared a common pain, sought help from a common source and concluded their lives with a common blessing, the miracle births of sons. Their devotion of faithfulness and godliness was equally profound, giving inspiration to all who followed them, exemplifying the qualities of godly character and the faithfulness of the Lord they served. And possibly the greater satisfaction to their blessing is that their sons became guiding lights of God’s ways to all generations to come, even to today’s world.

Sorrow and joy come to all. Tears and laughter are human efforts to mask pain and cope with limiting impossibilities that control life. But tears and laughter are also God’s gifts to express our extreme joy. It is the inclusion of God that makes the difference in the ordinary expressions of tears and laughter. In the presence of God, laughter and tears are equally received, rightly discerned, and extremely productive. When the Lord turns the negative circumstances of our lives around and fills our mouths with laughter, it is as if we were dreaming, wrote the psalmist in Psalm 126:1–2.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. SARAH WAS BARREN

Sarah’s desire to have children was as real as that of any woman. The culture of the times shamed women who had no children and praised those with many. So great was Sarah’s pain that she suggested a plan to her husband, Abraham, that would remove the shame in the eyes of the people. Ishmael was the result of Sarah’s arrangement for her and Abraham to have a child by Hagar, her maid.

Sarah’s suffering was physical, mental, and emotional. The birth of Ishmael was an attempt to curb the suffering, but the womb was still barren. The only cure was a child of her own. The years had passed and Ishmael was quickly becoming a young man. To survive, perhaps Sarah learned to cover her tears with laughter.

A. Sarah Was Abraham’s Wife

God had chosen Abraham to become the father of the faithful, to become the source of a great nation to represent God to all the peoples of the world. It was a high honor and filled with many promises of God to Abraham. Sarah’s expectations could be nothing but high as she thought of her future life with Abraham.

Years passed between the time God first spoke to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees and the time when he came with all his household to the plain of Mamre in Hebron. The journey had taken them over the Arabian Desert down through Canaan into Egypt and back to Canaan. Trauma, danger, and trials filled their path, but the blessing of the Lord in wealth and a house of servants remained upon them, preserving them for God’s plan for a chosen people. (See Genesis 11–17.)

After settling in Hebron, the Lord appeared to Abraham again. (See Genesis 17.) This was not the first time the Lord had appeared to him. (See Genesis 12:1; 13:14; 15:1; 17:1.) Abraham knew who the Lord was when He appeared to him, but he did not know the reason for the appearance. Years passed between the Lord’s appearances to Abraham even though he walked faithfully before the Lord with all his house.

Most of our lives are spent doing what the Lord has directed us to do, with no unusual visitations of God’s presence. But we must always be ready to entertain the Lord on those occasions when we sense His presence in unusual ways. His presence is always accompanied with a blessing of encouragement, enlightenment, or healing, often accompanied with fresh confirmation or new direction for our lives.

This appearing of the Lord to Abraham was significantly different. He appeared to reestablish His covenant with Abraham and his seed as an everlasting covenant (Genesis 17:2, 7). God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, for he was to be the father of many nations (Genesis 17:4–5). Circumcision was to be the sign of the covenant. And Abraham was not to call his wife Sarai any longer, but Sarah was to be her name for she was to have a son and become the mother of nations. Kings were to come forth from Abraham and Sarah’s son.

“And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old bear?” (Genesis 17:15–17).

Abraham fell on his face and laughed at the thought of a man who was one hundred years becoming the father a child. It was even more incredible to think Sarah could have a son at the age of ninety. God had promised Abraham a child in Genesis 12:2 and Genesis 15:4, but Sarah had not yet conceived. Ishmael was born of Hagar when Abraham was eighty-six years old (Genesis 16:16). At this time of God’s visitation, Ishmael was thirteen years old. No doubt all these events quickly passed through Abraham’s mind when the Lord spoke to him of Sarah bearing a son.

Abraham immediately pondered how this could be. It seemed physically impossible. And they had already brought Ishmael into the world as a way of accomplishing what God had long before promised to Abraham. Therefore, Abraham presented to God the idea that Ishmael should live before him as his seed. But God said that Sarah would indeed bear a son and his name was to be Isaac.

“And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year” (Genesis 17:19–21).

The promises of God are sure (I Corinthians 1:20). They will come to pass in God’s own

time, according to His will, and for His glory. People sometimes try to help God accomplish His purpose, but human instrumentality is insufficient to accomplish the divine will of God. It leads to disappointment, heartache, and suffering, as it did for Sarah, who regretted her decision to offer Hagar to Abraham to bring forth a child. (See Genesis 16:5.)

B. Sarah Laughed When She Heard She Would Have a Son

In Genesis 18, the purpose of the Lord’s visit to Abraham was twofold: (1) to visit Abraham to pronounce a time for the blessing upon Abraham’s house and (2) to let Abraham know of the coming judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness.

Abraham did all within his power to entertain the Lord so He would stay as long as possible. (See Genesis 18:3–8.) As Abraham and his visitors sat under the tree and ate the meal he had provided for them, he was asked, “Where is your wife?” Sarah needed to personally hear in the presence of two witnesses what the Lord had earlier spoken to Abraham concerning the covenant and the birth of Isaac.

When Abraham responded that Sarah was in the tent, the Lord said, “I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son” (Genesis 18:10). Sarah, standing in the door of the tent, heard the Lord speak. She considered what the Lord said in light of her age and Abraham’s age and the fact that she was beyond her child-bearing years. “Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” (Genesis 18:12).

The Lord again confirmed the promise, saying to Abraham, “Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child which am old? Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son” (Genesis 18:13–14). Sarah, being afraid, denied that she laughed, but the Lord said, “Nay; but thou didst laugh.” Again it was a confirmation to Sarah and to Abraham of the Lord’s intent to bring forth a promised child named Isaac.

With that covenant promise reaffirmed, the

three arose and looked toward Sodom (Genesis 18:16). As Abraham walked with them, the Lord told him of the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham began to bargain with God to save Sodom from destruction, ending with the request to save the city if ten righteous people lived there.

The eyes of the Lord are ever upon the righteous and the unrighteous. His rewards and judgments are within His own frame of reference in timing and execution.

II. HANNAH WAS BARREN

Hannah lived during the time of the judges. Like Sarah, she was barren. But her childless state was the Lord's doing for He had shut up her womb (1 Samuel 1:5). Many women are childless because of natural causes. Hannah was childless for a divine cause. But during those frustrating years of want, she did not realize it was the Lord's doing. It was not until she grew older and Samuel became the prophet of the Lord that she understood the providence of God. Those who suffer under the providential hand of the Lord have special rewards of compensation in the end. Consider Job. He did not understand what was happening to him during his trial, but he retained his integrity and trusted God through it, and God honored him (Job 42:10–13).

A. Hannah Was Elkanah's Wife

Hannah was one of two wives of Elkanah. The family lived in the heart of the Promised Land, Mount Ephraim. Elkanah was of the tribe of Ephraim, the son of Joseph. Mount Ephraim was near Shiloh, just a few miles to the south toward Jerusalem. Shiloh was the spiritual center of Israel during the time of the judges. Elkanah and his family went to worship at Shiloh for the feast days. The house of God and Eli the priest were there.

It seemed that Hannah had everything a woman could want. Her home was Mount Ephraim, and her husband was a righteous man of honor and heritage who loved the Lord and loved her. Elkanah showed partiality to her over his other wife, Peninnah, with a double portion at the time of offerings (1 Samuel 1:4). Hannah was blessed with the material things of life, but she was unhappy because she had no children. Elkanah did what he

could to make her happy. He loved her and tried to be better to her than ten sons, but still she longed to have a child.

B. Peninnah Ridiculed Hannah

Because Hannah is listed first as Elkanah's wife, it is probable that she is the younger of the two. Neither was old, but Elkanah favored Hannah. The difference was that Peninnah had sons and daughters but Hannah had none. They lived together, worshiped together, shared everything in life, even the care of the children and the husband to make a home. But all was not well. Hannah had bitterness of soul, but Peninnah had bitterness of spirit.

All that Hannah had, even the love of Elkanah, was not strong enough to drown the continual provocative barbs of Peninnah and the mingled voices of all her children ringing in her ears. As Rachel wept for her children and would not be comforted (Matthew 2:18), so Hannah was not to be comforted in her childless state.

Peninnah provoked Hannah and became her adversary. Maybe it was because Elkanah obviously loved Hannah more. Maybe she was more pleasant, more attractive, more spiritual, or the children liked her better than their own mom. Whatever the reason, there was no escape for Hannah. She was barren and Peninnah took advantage of her barrenness to provoke her to tears.

To make matters worse, Peninnah provoked her more when they went to the house of God to worship than she did at home. This was no doubt the time when it was obvious that Elkanah showed his partiality to her over Peninnah. Peninnah was blessed with children, but most likely she was jealous or envious. Solomon, in his wisdom, wrote about the cruelty of jealousy.

*"Set me as a seal upon thine heart,
as a seal upon thine arm: for love is
strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the
grave: the coals thereof are coals of
fire, which hath a most vehement flame"
(Song of Solomon 8:6).*

What should have been a place of peace and rejoicing became a place of difficulty for Hannah because of Peninnah's provocations.

However, when the family went to Shiloh, Hannah took advantage of the sanctuary of the house of God and turned her heart to the Lord in prayer. Only the Lord had the answer to her sorrow. Prayer is often the key to deliverance when overwhelming circumstances become an individual's lot. Some things only prayer and fasting can fix. When all human efforts of loved ones fail to comfort, the Lord is still there to hear and answer prayer, especially prayer accompanied with weeping.

C. Hannah Wept Because She Was Childless

Hannah suffered much before Samuel was born. She suffered from the inability as a wife to give her husband a child in light of cultural expectations and the provocation of a jealous adversary. There was no escape for Hannah. Things only got worse with time. Her suffering increased year by year.

One year when the family went on their annual visit to Shiloh to sacrifice to the Lord, Hannah left the others for a time and went to the house of the Lord alone. She prayed and wept before the Lord with bitterness of soul. (See I Samuel 1:8–10.) Weeping and praying are normal expressions. But bitterness of soul pushes beyond the normal to desperation. Eli the priest thought she was drunk. However, when Hannah explained her situation, Eli had compassion on her and said, "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou has asked of him" (I Samuel 1:17).

Hannah prayed with tears, but when the answer came, she prayed with rejoicing and a song of praise. (See I Samuel 1:9–11; 2:1–10.) It is common for initial prayers to be mixed with tears and subsequent prayers to be mixed with laughter.

III. SARAH BROUGHT FORTH ISAAC

Sarah shared all the promises God made to Abraham. She walked every step of the way with him, leaving her home and family, looking for a city whose builder and maker was God (Hebrews 11:10). She endured every hardship with Abraham and believed every promise God made to him, including the promises of descendants innumerable. Yet, she remained barren. Faithfulness alone is not a guarantee of fruitfulness.

A. God Promised to Establish His Covenant with Isaac

Chills must have run up and down Abraham's spine when he realized that Sarah had laughed (Genesis 18:12). He had laughed also (Genesis 17:17), for this was not the first time the Lord had spoken to Abraham concerning his children and his wife. (See Genesis 12:7; 13:16; 15:4; 17:7.) The Lord not only told Abraham that Sarah would bear him a son, but that his name should be Isaac and he would be born within the year (Genesis 18:14).

The power of the covenant was its length. It was everlasting. The everlasting covenant that God first made with Abraham, He established with Isaac and Jacob also (Genesis 17:19). Israel shall always be a chosen people of the Lord. David's throne was established forever. God declared it so. The covenant was for a thousand generations.

"O ye seed of Israel his servant, ye children of Jacob, his chosen ones. He is the Lord our God; his judgments are in all the earth. Be ye mindful always of his covenant; the word which he commanded to a thousand generations; even of the covenant which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac; and hath confirmed the same to Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant" (I Chronicles 16:13–17).

B. Isaac Became the Father of Jacob

Biblical names often have attached meanings. The name God gave Abraham for his son that was to be born to Sarah was Isaac, which means "laughter." Abraham and Sarah both laughed at the possibility of having a son in their old age (Genesis 17:17; 18:12). It seemed impossible. But when Isaac was born and circumcised on the eighth day, Sarah said that God hath made her to laugh and all to laugh with her. The nature and meaning of Sarah's laughter completely changed when God made her to laugh.

And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that

*Sarah should have given children suck?
for I have born him a son in his old age”
(Genesis 21:6–7).*

The laughter God gives is not temporary. Sarah laughed again and again as Isaac grew. Although Sarah died and was buried in Hebron before Jacob was born, she had the promise that God would establish the everlasting covenant with Isaac’s seed as He had with Abraham and Isaac. Jacob was born when Isaac was sixty years old. When Jacob left Beersheba to go to Haran to find a bride, the Lord spoke to him in a dream and promised to be with him and to bless him. Through his children all the families of the earth were to be blessed. (See Genesis 28:10–22.)

When God called to Moses from the burning bush, He identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That identity carried into the ministry of Jesus Christ and into the preaching of the New Testament church. (See Exodus 3:6, 15–16; Matthew 22:32; Mark 12:21; Acts 3:13, 7:32.) The covenant was an everlasting covenant of God with the house of Abraham.

IV. HANNAH BROUGHT FORTH SAMUEL

A. Samuel Was Dedicated to a Life of Service to God

God heard Hannah’s prayer and knew the heart and character of Hannah and Elkanah. He also knew the greater purpose of His will for her son and heard the vow she made. Vows are powerful prayers. They usually are made in response to difficult circumstances.

Hannah’s prayer was not selfish. She asked not only for a child to vindicate herself, but she also asked for a male child and vowed to give him to the Lord for His service. God heard her prayer and honored it through the voice of Eli: “Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him” (I Samuel 1:17). Hannah went on her way rejoicing. There were no more tears of sorrow, only tears of joy.

Before the family left Shiloh the next morning, they worshiped (I Samuel 1:19). Consider the full cycle of Hannah’s answered prayer: First was weeping and praying for a son,

followed by the word (Eli’s voice), rejoicing, and worship. It concluded with God remembering her, the birth of Samuel, and keeping her vow. (See I Samuel 1:9–21.)

After Samuel was weaned, Elkanah and Hannah took him to Shiloh and presented him to Eli in keeping with her vow. They also brought with them an offering of three bullocks, an ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, plus garments for Samuel. They presented Samuel to the Lord’s service and worshiped. Hannah followed that worship with a prayer that parallels Mary’s song of thanksgiving before the birth of Jesus. (See I Samuel 2:1–10; Luke 1:46–55.)

Because Hannah kept her vow and provided for Samuel yearly, Eli pronounced a blessing upon Elkanah and Hannah, and five more children were added to their family. Gifts to the Lord are returned to the givers in greater abundance than that which was offered.

B. Samuel Was the Last Judge and the First Prophet of Israel

Samuel was a son of divine purpose. He was born at the close of the era of the judges in the land of Canaan to make way for the nation of Israel. The sons of Jacob that formed the twelve tribes had been ruled by strong men and women since the conquest of the land some five hundred years earlier. The people were ready for a kingdom and cried for a king. Thus, the nation of Israel was formed. Kings were chosen and anointed by prophets to serve the people. Samuel was the key person in this transition from separate tribes to a united nation of people.

Samuel was both a judge and prophet. He is a type of servant of God, the voice of God to the people. His was a voice of righteous judgment and blessing. He was born of mourning, dedicated to a life of service, reared in an atmosphere of the house of the Lord, the priesthood, the Law, and worship. He was sustained by the loving gifts of his mother. Samuel was a gift from his mother back to God for service, which is a type of church ministry today. Even as a boy, Samuel had the favor of the Lord and the people (I Samuel 2:26), and he continued to grow in stature and in favor of the Lord and the people. (See I Samuel 3:19–20.)

Samuel was the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. Samuel anointed the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David, and set the pace for the future prophets of Israel in their relationship with Israel's kings. The will of God was best accomplished when the kings listened to the voice of the prophets. As long as Samuel was alive, Israel had peace with her neighbors (1 Samuel 7:13–15).

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

God is not limited by our frailties, but He is moved by both our tears and laughter. It is important that our hearts be turned to Him in times of crisis and that we believe He is faithful to keep His promises. Sarah counted God faithful who had promised and received the reward of that confidence. Hannah believed the man of God and returned home to receive the promise of his prophetic word.

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss the pain people experience who are not meeting the expectations of social and cultural norms of their day.
- Discuss how we weep or laugh and trust God at the same time.
- Share how God has brought experiences into your life, or people into your life, in preparation for a kingdom purpose.
- How can we best understand and minister to those who have no spouse or children?
- What are some survival suggestions for those who are waiting on God to perform a miracle in their lives?
- Discuss the honor of God's confidence entrusted in someone to bring to birth and maturity an Isaac, a Moses, or a Samuel.
- Discuss how God uses human instrumentality to meet our needs and answer our prayers.

The Christian walk is a walk of faith. It is not always clear why we experience misfortunes in life, why we struggle against seemingly impossible situations, or why bad things happen to good people. It is especially difficult when God does not answer our prayers quickly with help, healing, or deliverance. But we know that God is faithful. As mature Christians we understand the writings of the apostle Paul when he referenced his bonds and the furtherance of the gospel in Philippians 1:12–14.

In difficult times of tears and laughter, biblical characters like Sarah and Hannah become our inspiration. In prayer, fasting, weeping, searching the Scriptures, and spiritual counsel we find solutions to our troubling circumstances. It is the will and way of the Lord that our lives be fruitful and that our tears and laughter are those of rejoicing beyond our greatest expectations. ■