

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## Great Things For The Humble

by Dan Trygg

“Then Hannah prayed and said, ‘My heart exults in Yahweh; my horn is exalted in Yahweh, my mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation.’<sup>2</sup> There is no one holy like Yahweh, indeed, there is no one besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.’”

1 Samuel 2:1-2

“And Mary said: ‘My soul magnifies the Lord,<sup>47</sup> and my spirit has exceedingly-rejoiced in God my Savior.<sup>48</sup> For He has looked upon the lowliness of His bondservant; for behold, from this time on all the generations will consider me fortunate,<sup>49</sup> because the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name.<sup>50</sup> And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him.<sup>51</sup> He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their heart.<sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble.’”

Luke 1:46-52

**It is interesting to compare the song-prayers of Hannah and Mary in the Bible.** There are some very similar themes, some of which would not have come to mind for most people. At least, *I* wouldn't necessarily have thought in terms of universal truths or principles, as these two women did.

**In Hannah's case, *she had already seen the fulfillment of the prayer she had offered to God some three years before.*** She had been a barren woman, which, in that culture, was more than a tragedy, ...it was almost a *blot* or *stain* on the woman's life. Bearing children was highly valued in that culture. It guaranteed the continuance of the family name and inheritance. For a woman, it was also the basis of her future security. It was hoped that she would have a son, who would care for her in her old age. A woman who bore many children was highly prized by her husband, and was guaranteed a secure future. Even though Hannah *was loved* by her husband, Elkanah, *she felt like she was a failure*, and a disappointment to him. To make matters worse, Elkanah had married a second wife, Peninnah. She had numerous children, and took every opportunity to point out Hannah's defect. Even though Elkanah went out of his way to show his preference for her, *Hannah was often depressed and sad to the point of tears*, and would not eat. Finally, she went to the house of God at Shiloh, and poured out her heart to Yahweh. She made a vow that, if God gave her a son, she would dedicate him to serve God at the sanctuary. Eli the priest blessed her, and *she believed God would answer her petition.* She went away, and *was no longer sad*, ...a sign of her faith.

Soon, she conceived, ...and eventually had a son, whom she named “Samuel”, which sounds like the Hebrew phrase, “asked of God” and a similar sounding phrase “heard by God”. *His name was a constant reminder of her prayer and God's answer.* She did not return to Shiloh, until the boy was old enough to be weaned, which was typically at three years of age in that culture. When she returned to the sanctuary, she reminded Eli of their encounter, when she had been so burdened in prayer. She told him that she had prayed for “this boy”, ...and Yahweh had granted her request. She then said, “So I have dedicated him to Yahweh, as long as he lives...” **The setting for Hannah's song is her completion of her vow to give Samuel over to serve Yahweh all the days of his life. Her petition had been heard and answered. She was celebrating God, His salvation, and the vindication of her cause.**

**Mary's song-prayer is closer to the beginning of her faith journey.** The angel, Gabriel, had appeared to her in her home town of Nazareth in Galilee. He announced to her that God had chosen her to bear a son, who would become great, and would be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will set him over the kingdom of his father, David, and his kingdom would never end. Mary asked, “*How will this be*, since I am a virgin?” Gabriel told her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and the power of the Most High would overshadow her, so that the child to be born will be called the Son of God. Then, he pointed out that Mary's elderly barren relative, Elizabeth, was with child, and would be having a son in her old age. She was six months along, already. **“For not any word (rhēma) of God will be impossible.”** In response to this declaration, **Mary affirmed the message of the angel, “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; may it come to be to me according to your word (rhēma).”**

**After the angel left, Mary decided to see for herself the miracle-pregnancy of her relative.** From Nazareth to “the hill country of Judah” was a journey of 80-100 miles. The record says, “she went *with haste*”. The word for “haste” can also mean “zeal, eagerness”. She went *hurriedly* because she was *eager* to see if the news was true. ***If Elizabeth was pregnant, then she would know that the angel's message to her would also come to pass.*** When she arrived, she came right into the house, and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard her greeting, the baby leapt in her womb, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. She cried out, with a great shout, “Having-been-blessed are you among women, and having-been-blessed is the fruit of your womb! How has it happened to me that the mother of my Lord might come to me? For you see, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leapt for joy inside

me! And happy is the one trusting that there will be a fulfillment to the things having been spoken to her by the Lord” (Lk. 1:45). Thus, **the setting for Mary’s song was the confirmation of God’s *rhēma*-word to her about her pregnancy, induced by the Holy Spirit.** The fulfillment of the word had not *tangibly* happened yet, but it was *clearly established* to Mary’s heart. She was convinced that God was setting in motion the plan described by the angel. ***Her song was celebrating God, His sovereign work in the world, and His choice to use her in His plan.***

As I said, there are some definite parallels between Hannah’s song, and Mary’s. In fact, **Bible scholars have found allusions to no fewer than fifteen OT scriptures in the ten verses of Mary’s song** (cf. I Sam. 2:1; Psa. 34:2; 35:9; I Sam. 1:11; Hab. 3:18; Gen. 29:32; 30:13; Deut. 10:21; Psa. 111:9; Zeph. 3:17; Psa. 103:17; Psa. 89:8-11; I Sam. 2:7,8; Psa. 107:9; Psa. 98:3; Isa. 41:8,9). This means that **she was saturated in the scriptures, ...familiar enough that the language of these scripture passages is reflected in her own thoughts and speech patterns.** From this, **we get a glimpse into the devotion and attentiveness of Mary’s heart, as well as insight into the home in which she was raised.** For a young woman to speak so fluidly and easily with scriptural familiarity undoubtedly means that her family was *practicing* the admonition of the *Shema*, the statement of faith and central prayer of Jewish believers from the time of Moses, on (Deut. 6:4-9). Like all observant Jews, Mary and her family would have *recited* these words twice each day, but **Mary’s family took to heart the part that says, “...and you shall teach them diligently to your sons, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up”** (vs. 7). They *extended* this admonition not only to the words of the *Shema*, but *to the entire scriptures*, reading and referencing them repeatedly. **They also included the women of the home in this practice**, as is evident by Mary’s grasp and familiarity with many portions of the Law, Prophets and Writings. **As a family, they obviously loved God, and treasured His word.** If there was a reason why God was choosing Mary, this practical, everyday devotion to the Lord and His word that she learned and *practiced* at home, would have been so important for the nurturing and training of His Son, in preparation for *His* mission and ministry.

**Looking at the two song-prayers, they both begin with praise and delight in God. They both rejoice in the salvation of God.** The language is so similar that the connection is striking! Hannah goes off in the direction of rejoicing that God had exalted or “*raised high*” her “horn” (her power or strength). She is thinking of her triumph over her rival, Peninnah. God had vindicated her, and lifted her up in the face of her adversary, by giving her the child she had prayed for. By contrast, Mary focuses on *her lowliness* and how *God* has had regard for her. This was *His* idea, not hers. She had not even imagined such a thing! Yet, the child she now was convinced was growing in her womb was totally from His initiation. He *had* done great things for her, but it is *His mercy on those who reverence Him* that she recounts. **Their thoughts come together again, as they contemplate His holiness.** Hannah says, “There is none holy like Yahweh”, and Mary cries out, “and holy is His name.” From there, **they glory in God’s mighty power, and how He scatters the proud, brings down the powerful, and sends the rich away empty-handed.** By contrast, **He exalts the humble, helps to establish the weak, and fills the hungry with good things.** They both agree that *God helps those who are His.* The Greek version of I Sam. 2:9 says, “...giving a vow/promise to the one praying, and He blessed the years of the righteous; because not by human-ability is a man powerful.” Mary states, “He has taken the part of Israel His servant, mindful of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers...” (Lk. 1:54,55). **God is a covenant-keeping God, One who is mindful of His promises.** In Hannah’s song, God was going to give strength to a king of His choosing, and He would lift up the power of His anointed-one. For Mary, the angel’s proclamation that she would bear the greatest King of Israel, one whose kingdom would never end, was the fulfillment of God’s word of promise to Abraham and his Seed (the Greek word is singular in form). **His mercy-that-acts is upon generation after generation of those who reverence Him** (Lk. 1:50). That is a promise we can “take to the bank”. *This is the God we serve. He has compassion on those who reverence Him, and He acts on their behalf when they call upon Him* (cf. Psa. 107).

I mentioned that Hannah and Mary expressed some universal themes that go beyond what many of us identify in prayer. I have received many answers to prayer, and usually I am excited and grateful to God for His involvement in my life to bring about the provision or blessing He gives. I have to admit, however, that **I don’t often stop to identify the universal truths about who God is, or how He acts, as I should.** I don’t stop to ponder His nature or acknowledge the characteristics of how He works, and put them into clear expression of praise and thanksgiving, like these two women did. **I am so focused on the immediate blessing, that I do not sufficiently recount the larger picture of His activity in history.** I do not extrapolate from the particular blessing to His general character, even though I know the specific act of His provision or grace is consistent with what I know to be true of Him. *These two women could school me in the art of expressing praise to God.* **It is good to be reminded, too, that God often turns the world upside-down.** He can humble the proud, bring down the powerful, and strip the rich of their wealth. He also can promote the humble, lift up the powerless, and provide fullness to those who have been empty. True security and blessing are found in Him, the promise-keeping God of hope. He will reward those who put their hope in Him.