

PREPARING YOUTHS FOR BIBLICAL STUDIES:
THE STORY OF HANNAH AND HER SON REVISITED

BY

OJO M.Y AND ADESANYA I.O

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES,

EKITI STATE UNIVERSITY, ADO-EKITI, NIGERIA.

ABSTRACT

The Bible contains a lot of materials for youths especially on behavioral and emotional issues, this work discussed the response of youths to Biblical studies which is noted to be at the decline rate and relate to Hannah who was able to influence her son Samuel to work for God. Hannah wanted the best for her child hence she prepared him for what she thought was best.

The role of the teachers of religious studies was discussed to see how far they too can go in encouraging younger ones in the study of religious studies just like Hannah did with her son, the work explained further on how Bible reading and studying can boost the moral and the esteem of the youth and also serve as a catalyst for better interpretation and understanding of the world view. Relevant text was taken from the Bible and relevant textbooks and the target of study was limited to Ekiti state University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. The work made use of both historical and sociological, Recommendations and conclusion are made.

Key Words: Youths, Religion, Biblical studies, Moral

INTRODUCTION

Preparing youths in Nigerian Universities especially Religious Studies for specialization in Biblical studies is a step in right direction if properly addressed. However in recent time experience had shown that religious studies students prefer other areas of specialization other than Biblical Studies. Areas such as Ethics,

Sociology of Religion, Philosophy of Religion, Language and Feminist Theology are of much interest to them.. The shrinking population of students of Religious Studies is the most corrosive problem a school could face. As a matter of fact, scholars in the field need to be aware of the fact that they are not just there to produce a graduate but a disciple that will succeed them as Hannah prepared her son for the work of the ministry, but this seems not to have yielded the desired results hence this calls for a very serious concern and urgent actions.

Meanwhile regardless of our fear and what our final decisions on this will be, it is important that this issue is t ensuring that needed action is taken. This is because every leader has a measure of social influence and status, hence it will be of great importance if the so called leaders in our educational institutions particularly Religious Studies uses this status and social power for self promotion or empowering others. In the Old Testament, the life of Hannah provides substantive narratives into the development of a godly parent. Therefore the purpose of this study is to examine the life of Hannah as it relates to how she grown Samuel for the service of God.

A brief overview of the life of Hannah, her commitment in dedicating her son to God demonstrated her dependence upon the love of God. Attachment theory which is known to be a social cognitive perspective applied to leadership formation will be discussed in this work.

HANNAH'S LIFE

The Biblical text in 1Sam. 1; 2: 1, 21 offers brief biographical data related to Hannah's early life. The Hebrew name Hannah has a beautiful and attractive meaning of gracious which could also be taken as God has favoured me. She was

one of the two wives of Elkanah, a Levite of Ramathaim-Zophim who belonged to one of the honorable families of that priestly portion of Jacob's progeny the Kohathites. Although he is being referred to as godly man but this notwithstanding he still followed the common custom of polygamy by marrying another wife Peninnah who bore him several children. As it was the burning desire of every Hebrew parent to have children, Hannah may have urged her husband to have another wife as Sarah did to Abraham. Peninnah was said to have been very cruel and grieved Hannah with her tongue, but Elkannah preferred Hannah and bestowed richer gifts upon her than upon the other woman.

From the record we have of Hannah, she appears to have been a woman with an unblemished character, piety reigned in her heart and she maintained constant communion with the religious ordinances of her nation. While Hannah had a house she did not have a home, the ideal of every Jewish was to be the head of the home but she had no child. Comforting her yearning heart Elkannah said '*Am I not better to thee than ten children?*'. As the year went by, her agony became more intense and her barrenness was a greater burden because of the heartlessness of her rival who frequently tantalized Hannah for being childless, but true to her name she manifested the grace of self control amid the cruel attitude of Peninnah (Herbert 1971).

Childless Hannah was not prayer less, in God's house she besought the creator for a son and in return she vowed to give the son back to God for the service of God. First of all, her prayer was of a peculiar kind, it was a supplication without external speech. Her lips move but there was no sound. Her prayer was internal and she spoke thus to herself, she created the impression that she was drunk with wine.

The old priest Eli, not meaning to be unkind when he saw Hannah's lips moving and her whole being caught up in the fervency of her supplication and yet heard no words being expressed, somewhat felt that Hannah was drunk and upbraided her for coming into God's house in such condition. Hannah protested her innocence, and then poured out her soul to Eli who assured her that her prayers had been answered. "Go in peace and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him". God granted her wish, and she called his name Samuel, which means "*asked of the Lord*". Hannah apparently tells her husband about her vow later during the pregnancy, and Elkanah agreed because the scripture says that Hannah tells him she will not part with her son until he is weaned. Elkanah agrees "*as long as God's word is fulfilled*". This refers to a Leviticus provision that God does not answer the prayer, then one does not fulfill one's vow. By Elkanah's inaction, Hannah's vow de facto becomes his obligation also. That Hannah does not render her son at one month old is the subject of her discussion with Elkanah (Herbert 1971).

Although Samuel was not born to the priesthood, his mother had sacredly pledged him to the Lord and that pledge must be kept no matter what it might cost her in loneliness. By the time the child was weaned, usually around three years old, it was likely to survive to adulthood, so Hannah serves the soundness of her promise by bringing a viable child to serve in the sanctuary. The quality of one's sacrifice reflected the quality of one's faith. Only perfect animals were used in sacrifice; Hannah's sacrifice her son, also will be of a quality pleasing to God. So, once in a year she visited him and what a human touch we have in that she made a little coat for him to wear. Then her saintless and sacrifice were rewarded for she bore Elkanah five more children. As for Samuel, he grew up to reflect his revered

mother's godliness. True to his mother's prevailing intercession, he became a man of prayer and intercession all his days and beyond all men had power with and from God (Herbert 1971).

Interest in Biblical Studies: What Happened?

To start with, Biblical studies as defined by oxford handbook of Biblical studies is a set of various, and in some cases independent disciplines for the study of the collection of ancient texts generally known as the Bible. The Bible for its theory and methods draws on disciplines ranging from archaeology, literary criticism, history and social sciences. The study of original language in which the Bible was written is usually considered imperative for serious Biblical interpretations. Most of the Jewish Bible, the Tanakh, which is the basis of the Christian Old Testament, was written in Biblical Hebrew, though a few chapters were written in koine Greek with possible Aramaic undertones, as was the first translation of the Jewish Bible known as Septuagint or Greek Old Testament. Therefore Hebrew, Greek and sometimes Aramaic continue to be taught in most Universities with strong programs in Biblical studies. Many secular as well as religious Universities and Colleges offer courses in Biblical studies, usually in the department of religious studies.

While it is expedient to know that some higher institutions and particularly theological schools had particularly embraced Biblical studies, many private Universities in Nigeria are still not. Of great concern are three main areas; the level of interest in Biblical studies and factors that contributed to less interest, what efforts are being made to mentor the youths to show interest in Biblical studies using the approach of Hannah, implications of growth and decline. These areas will be given brief review in this paper. The issue of interest in Biblical studies is a little

bit complicated but we can sum its over-arching pattern as simply growth and decline. According to Barbara G. Wheeler et.al “growth occurred when evangelical groups were expanding and becoming a majority within the theological school community”. Using Ekiti State University as a case study, over the past two decades, specialization in Biblical studies is becoming less prominent; meanwhile, all the modest enrollment gain over two decades has been in other M.A degree programs. Even the steepest decline has been in the category of Old Testament studies while they prefer New Testament studies. With the interest notwithstanding, rarely do we get up to two or more candidates. Ph.D degree has even lost greater percentage as we may not even have a single candidate for Biblical studies in two or more sessions. Accelerating even faster is the decline in female interest in Biblical studies and these are groups that constitute ninety percent of the population at the first degree level. On factors that contributed to less interest in Biblical studies, the reasons adduced by those interviewed within the institution are as follows: (Wheeler 2013)

- Many students do not like that area of specialization because it requires a thorough understanding of the language of the Bible, Hebrew and Greek. Since they are not everyday language, they saw it as being difficult to grasp and comprehend.
- The prospects of the area in labor market are being given serious consideration as most employees prefer result oriented courses in terms of economic gain.
- Difficulty finding a mentor; particularly at the beginning of the course, the youths need the guidance of a seasoned role model. Volumes have been written and spoken on the necessity of mentoring. We have all seen

examples in which the lack of an appropriate mentor has had significant negative consequences.

- Much of the Bible passages to some of the students are too ambiguous.

Applying Hannah's pattern of training Samuel in preparing youths for Biblical studies

Finding the right person for any job is equally as important in today's organizations as it was for Hannah's ministry efforts. The organizational leadership research field has termed the process of matching the right person to the right job as person-job fit. Equally Carless described person-job fit as "the match between individual knowledge skills and abilities and demands of the job". In other words, when an individual perceives a match between him or herself and job, he or she is more likely to experience job satisfaction, motivation and commitment.

The above actually was the case with Hannah and her son Samuel; the former developed a secure attachment style with God in childhood that informed her responses to leadership challenges later in childhood. An overview of attachment theory offers the background for substantiating this assertion.

Attachment theory, a social cognitive approach, provides one implicit leadership perspective that has received recent attention in the leadership literature. Attachment theory was first proposed by British psychologist John Bowlby to explain individual differences in how infants relate to primary caregivers (mainly parents) and regulate distress. Bowlby asserted that to grow into adulthood in a mentally healthy way, "the infant and young child should experience a warm,

intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment". Bowlby argued that children create expectations based on the emotional availability and nurture of early caregivers. These expectations then become working models that are generalized to new relationships and provide organizing schemas for cognition, emotions and behaviors later in life. (Bowlby).

The same attachment method one could say was employed by Hannah in training and preparing Samuel for the lord. Although Samuel was not born to the priesthood, his mother had sacredly pledge him to the Lord and that pledge must be kept no matter what it might cost her in loneliness. So when weaned, Samuel was taken to the 'house of the lord' to abide forever. Then once in a year, she made sure she visited him yearly and what a human touch we have in that she made a little coat for him to wear. A responsibility that is expected of a mother but is done by her to motivate Samuel to have much greater interest in the priesthood. However, Samuel true to the meaning of his name, and in likeness to his mother prevailing intercession, he became a man of prayer and intercession all his days-and beyond all men and power with and from God.

Thus, it could be said that Hannah's principle and style may be appropriate in getting youths interested in Biblical studies. In Nigeria, there are always been cry by members over moral attitude that is at its lowest ebb. The only solution to this will be religious training that can appeal to the minds of individual, but no parent wants her ward to study religion. It is very evident learning religious studies. Some of the efforts that could be geared towards this direction and in way similar to that of Hannah will likely be:

- Given scholarship to hardworking and best students both at the undergraduates and post graduate level.
- Donation of books on religion to both the library and departmental library because the usual complaint from students is that there are no relevant books in the library.
- Seeking for international body's assistance for students to travel out for further studies and learning of both Greek and Hebrew in Greek and Hebrew speaking countries just like the French students do.
- Creating a conducive atmosphere for learning environment.
- Motivation in terms of creating jobs opportunities for best candidate.

With the above mind, specifically students who have the opportunity of travelling out will have such experience linger on in their memory and parents of such will be equally encouraged.

However earlier experiences have shown that these are serious lacking in most Nigerian universities. University motivation is limited to few courses like Engineering, Law, Medicine, Management sciences, and Agricultural sciences to mention a few. Religious studies students hardly receive such support in terms of grants and sponsorship. For instance, awards usually given for the best students in Biblical studies for the past year in my university is not up to two thousand. This is quite unfair this is because motivation if strictly adhered to according to John Angerer. (Angerer 2003)

Provide an environment with a manageable workload, offering some degree of choice and control for workers, giving rewards for and recognizing good work, developing a sense of belonging and community among all organizational

members, and ensuring that respect and justice prevail in the workplace and the study environment. If this is done, the person concerned will find his or her work to be rewarding and valuable. The result of this will be a committed, motivated messenger of the cause of studies.

Motivation is useful and necessary at every stage of instruction and necessary at the beginning during or at the end of the course of study. The effectiveness of this would go a long way in preparing youths for interest in Biblical studies. Therefore youths' motivations and interest can be aroused with what they can see, touch and experience. When the interest of a child is well developed, it remains with him or her throughout life. This is why it is important to introduce an enabling and conducive environment for learning. Hannah did not want any form of disturbance for her son and so because of that she quickly took him to the house of the priest Eli not only to avoid distraction but to ensure close attachment with the priest to enhance qualitative learning. The closeness of Samuel to the priest enhances his closeness to the Lord and no wonder he was called in to the priesthood at a tender and younger age. (Rogerson 2006)

However on the part of teachers in Biblical studies, teaching must be made simple rather than complex, objective rather than subjective.

Implications of preparing youths for Biblical studies

- Given the current misinterpretations and misrepresentation of Biblical texts among the so – called unlearned and un-trained pastors in most of our churches, more specialization in Biblical studies will reduce this to minimal level.

- Biblical studies if given close attention will increase an insight into the structure of Bible, enabling the students and youths alike to learn key concepts, conceptual schemes and their relationship to each other. Learning the various system, structures, and forms of the Bible will boost youths understanding of some ambiguous passages of the Bible.
- The importance of growing intellectually and of keeping abreast of knowledge, especially in the fields of our specialization, will seriously enhance the effectiveness of our teaching. However, we must remember that in the field of Biblical studies truth is being sought for in a wholly objective manner and this will be declared by youths who are well equipped for such. (Person 2005)
- As we study the Old Testament, it is clear that preaching reached its zenith. But transcending even this, was the authority which will penetrate the teaching “For youths who are well equipped will definitely teach as one having authority and not as the novice. Equally speculative theories about the Bible, God, the nature of man, the reality of sin will not be given and this means truth will be asserted in a most positive manner. Furthermore, this will be done with a passion and love that understood the needs and longings of the aching hearts of men, and which sought to lift them out of the morass of sin and failure. Whether it be in preaching, healing, counseling or any other ministry in this, men could sense the compassion of God.
- With this background, let us face the problem of preaching today in a distraught world which is on the brink of moral and spiritual destruction. The young student going forth into the Christian ministry soon senses his inadequacy for the task. This is equivalent by the very complexity of the job.

Thorough as his vocational training may have been, there is the realization that now he is faced with a responsibility which demands resources which were not altogether acquired in the classroom. Especially is this true in his preaching, for every occasion becomes a crisis in the lives of men and women who listen to the minister of the Gospel. Yet, in spite of this, the young graduates of Biblical studies by his training become vocal and give a thorough exposition of the passages of the Bible.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Higher positive values represent more rapid growth, lower negative values represent more rapid decline. Efforts of lectures in the Biblical studies in preparing youths for specialization in their discipline and to stimulate interest among youths will continue to increase in younger student's enrolments. This is because every leader has a measure of social influence and status per se, but whether a leader uses this status and social power for self-promotion or empowering others.

At the same time, schools can act to sustain the enrollments they have and perhaps to increase quality as well. For instance, enrollments of students in their 20s have increased at a faster rate than most other age cohorts. This may be due in part to changing values: there is evidence that recent graduates are more altruistic than they were 20 years ago.

Theological schools have made efforts to recruit this cohort, and some have succeeded in attracting a critical mass of younger students. Their experience seems to be evidence that well-planned and well executed recruitment may work. At the same time, the recent decline in this age category bears close

attention. Schools whose plans call for greatly expanded enrollments should revise those patterns, or at least create alternative strategies in case their enrollment hopes are not realized. For instance the Department is planning to review the name of the Department to Department of Religious and Peace Studies in order to attract students. At the same time, schools can act to sustain the enrollments they have and perhaps to increase quality as well.

Lastly career developments assistance which includes sponsoring, coaching, advising on career moves and ensuring visibility and access to important social networks, resources and assignments should be made available for the teachers as means of encouragements.

REFERENCES

Angerer John, "Job Burnout", *Journal of Employment Counseling* 48, no 3, 2003

Barbara G. Wheeler and Anthony T. Ruger, "Sobering Figures point to overall enrollment Decline, New research from the Auburn Center for study of Theological Education, [www.intrust.org/INTRUST Spring 2013](http://www.intrust.org/INTRUST_Spring_2013).

Bowlby John, "Maternal Care and Mental Health, "World Health Organization Monograph (Serial No. 2), 13

Carless Sally, Person- "Job Fit versus Person- Organization fit as predictors of organizational attraction and job acceptance intentions: A longitudinal study", *Journal of occupational and organizational psychology* 78, no. 3, 2005.

Herbert Lockyer, *The women of the Bible*, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1971.

W J, Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu, *The oxford Handbook of Biblical studies*, ISBN, May 18, 2006.