

Swedenborgian Sunday School Notes for the Revised Common Lectionary

1 Samuel 1:1–20 • The Birth of Samuel

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1 Samuel 1:1–20 The birth of Samuel
Mark 13:1–8 Birth pains of new life

Overview

All of us, both adults and children, have times when we are sad and discouraged—when life is a struggle. Both readings deal with the pain and struggle that comes before a new birth. (Mark 13:8 should read “birth pains” instead of “sorrows.”) Our goal is to assure the children that when life seems awful, there will be better times. Rather than giving in, if we persist in looking to the Lord—and to people we trust—for help and support, our pain can be transformed into the joy of new growth as human beings.

Key Points

- It is natural and normal for us to have times when we are depressed, lonely, and discouraged.
- Often these difficult times come just before a new spiritual breakthrough.
- If we persist in praying and listening to the Lord, we will experience new spiritual births.

Example for Teaching Children

Do you ever have times when you are sad or lonely, or when your life seems like one big struggle? (*Give the children time to express themselves.*) We all have times like that. (*If you wish, briefly describe one of your own difficult passages, at the children’s level.*)

Our story today comes from the first book of Samuel, one of the books of the Old Testament. It tells about the birth of Samuel, who would become the first great leader of the whole nation of Israel after a dark and difficult period in their early history. This was the period of the “Judges,” when enemies attacked the different tribes of Israel, and regional leaders were raised up by the Lord to defend the Israelites. Samson is the most famous of these “Judges.”

In today’s story, a woman named Hannah was very sad. She kept getting taunted and teased because she did not have any children—which, in those days, was considered a disgrace. She was so sad that she started crying, and wouldn’t eat anything.

But Hannah also did something else—something that can help us when we are sad or struggling. She prayed. She poured out all her thoughts and feelings to the Lord, asking for help in her pain and suffering.

And praying to the Lord helped her to feel better. She still didn’t have a baby, but just feeling that the Lord understood her sadness helped her not to feel so sad.

Sometimes when we are sad or struggling, we are tempted to give in. Maybe some friends are pushing us to do something we know is wrong—like stealing or smoking—and calling us names because we won’t do it. Sometimes we feel we can’t hold out anymore.

But the Lord is telling us in our Bible story that if we will stick it out, and turn to the Lord and to people we trust (perhaps our parents or a teacher) for help and support, we will be very glad that we didn’t give in. Just as Hannah had a baby who became a great spiritual leader, we will have a “new birth” inside of us: we will grow into a stronger and happier person.

Basic Correspondences

childless = lacking, but wanting, goodness & truth
birth = spiritual rebirth
Samuel = the Lord speaking to us

Thoughts from Swedenborg

Being “childless” refers to people who are lacking in goodness because they do not have the truth, but who long to know the truth so that their lives may be directed by what is good. *Arcana Coelestia* #9325.7

“Opening the womb” means . . . gaining the ability to receive the true and good things of religion. “Going out of the womb” means being reborn or regenerated.

Arcana Coelestia #4918

There is a continual correspondence between the material and spiritual events in our lives. Because of this, our spiritual process mirrors our conception, gestation, birth, and upbringing. This is why physical births in the Bible mean spiritual births, which are births of goodness and truth.

True Christian Religion #583

“She labored and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth” [Rev. 12:2] means a lack of receptivity and resistance on the part of religious people who are materialistic and sense-oriented. This is clear from the meaning of “laboring and crying out” and “being in pain as she was about to give birth” when this refers to the newborn principle of truth from heavenly love. *Apocalypse Explained* #711