

**“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
July 1, 2016**

1 Samuel 1:1–2:21. God answers Hannah’s prayer.

James 1:1–8. God does not bring evil testing into the believer’s life for the purpose of good/growth. He is not evil, the Author of evil, and does not need evil to bless or grow believers—as atheists and ignorant believers aver.

Psalms 119:1–16. The need for spiritual virtue for true spiritual growth in the Word and in God.

COMMENTS:

1 Samuel 1:1–2:21. God often manifests His essential goodness through the ugliness of human trials, making something beautiful out of human ugliness and failure. We see this principle in the lives of Elkanah and Hannah. Elkanah was prone to make errors. His mistake, in the first place, was to marry two women (1:1–4); his second blunder was to ignore his wives’ squabbles (6). On top of that, he repeatedly imposed his own form of justice by giving Hannah double what he offered Peninnah, his other wife (5). In this story, however, the goodness of God redeems the evil acts of believers. Despite Elkanah’s generosity to her, Hannah was deeply disturbed: Nothing Elkanah offered could compensate for her barrenness (8–10). In this period, women who had not borne children were often considered second rate, as demonstrated by Peninnah’s persecution of Hannah. In her distress, Hannah prayed to God at the Temple, seeking God’s redemption from this evil. Eli the priest recognized the sincerity of her plea and blessed her (15–18). God also recognized Hannah’s sincerity, and He answered her call by giving her a son, Samuel, who would grow up to be a great prophet (19–28). Hannah’s son offered her hope; in response, she delivered a beautiful piece of poetry to honor Yahweh’s goodness (2:1–11). This poem was so significant that Mary would later echo it in her own song of praise in Luke 1:46–56. Through Hannah’s story, we see that God’s work among His people that have far reaching consequences. In scenes like this—where God not only makes good out of a bad situation, but also sets up a providential event in the history of His people—we see much of the framework for the Christian life. Hannah’s story shows us that when we pray to God seeking Him in grace and in Total Truth (first- and second-order volitions in accord), He answers. And in the midst of our dire circumstances, He answers the call of not one, but many people. Here, in the pain, we learn what it means to know our Lord and Savior; such a believer loves and lives for God with great alacrity.

James 1:1–8. As we have noted in our study of virtue in relation to James, the believers of James were not innocent, virtuous believers who were being tested by God to grow their faith. Most of their trials were related to the lack of integrity and James tells us that God does not test believers—so believers need to stop accusing God of needing to bring evil into the lives of believers to get them to grow spiritually; such a view is more like Satan than the true God who does not test believers and who brings only good (1:13, 17). God permits testing that we experience in our broken and sinful world, but most of the testing is testing precisely because of believers are carnal to begin with because of their immature intellect, will, and emotions, which brings bad thinking, bad wishing, and bad emotions/feelings. We have noted the various problems in James like impatience in difficulties, 1–4; talking but not living the truth, 2:14ff; no control of the tongue, 3:1ff; fighting and coveting, 4:1ff, and involved in gross materialism (5:1ff). As I have noted repeatedly, there is no solution for the believer to the trials of this broken, sinful world apart from changing the way he thinks, he wills, and feels. It requires virtue to think rightly, wish rightly, and feel rightly, both natural and supernatural virtue. And not even God Himself can make a *free* intellect/will to think rightly, desire rightly, and feel rightly, unless and until that person really wants it, a want that far exceeds a mere velleity or some conduit, modern mechanistic, formulaic type of “spirituality.” Moreover, there is no amount of doctrine in and of itself than can overcome a bad will, which is the product of previous actualization of evil in the appetites, both in the sense or intellectual appetites.

Psalms 119:1–16. The emphasis in this, the longest psalm, is on the vital ministry of the Word of God in the inner spiritual life of God’s children. It describes how the Word enables us to grow in holiness and handle the persecutions and pressures that always accompany an obedient walk of faith. The psalm is an acrostic with eight lines in each section, and the successive sections follow the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each of the eight lines of 1–8 begins with the Hebrew letter Aleph, the lines in 9–16 begin with Beth, in 17–24 with Gimel, and so on. It really is a beautiful work of literature. The basic theme of Psalm 119 is the practical use of the Word of God in the life of the believer. When you consider that the writer probably did not have a complete Old Testament, let alone a complete Bible, this emphasis is both remarkable and important. Christian believers today own complete Bibles, yet how many of them say that they love God’s Word and get up at night or early in the morning to read it and meditate on it (55, 62, 147–148)? How many Christian believers ignore the Old Testament Scriptures or read the Old Testament in a careless and cursory manner for some functional or devotion use? Yet here was a man who rejoiced in the Old Testament Scriptures—which was the only Word of God he had—and considered God’s Word his food (103) and his greatest wealth! (14, 72, 127, 162). His love for the Word of God puts today’s believers to shame. If the psalmist with his limited knowledge and resources could live a godly and victorious life feeding on the Old Testament, how much more ought Christians today live for the Lord. After all, we have the entire Bible before us and two millennia of church history behind us! Of course learning the Bible in and of itself does not make one virtuous: intellectual determinism false. The key is actualizing the Word of God in the life. The issue is walking in virtue. Note the great emphasis on virtue/ethics in the first sixteen verses: “undefiled,” “seek Him with whole heart,” “do no iniquity,” “keep His precepts diligently.” “uprightness of heart,” “cleanse his way,” “I might not sin against You,” etc. There is no virtue apart from actualizing the righteous principles of the Word of God and avoiding the contamination of evil that so debases our intellects and appetites, which then causes us to think of some evil as good and vice versa and love some evil as a good and vice versa, all of which

damages our capacity to really love for the Lord and His Word because God will be viewed, consciously or unconsciously, as a threat to an evil-good.

Romans 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Pastor Don