

Turning Barrenness into Fruitfulness

By Bill Scheidler

Introduction

In this message we will be talking about some of the things that God says about barrenness and how to turn barrenness into fruitfulness. We are not directly speaking to natural barrenness but about seasons of barrenness in our lives. Like natural barrenness, we often go through these seasons without any logical explanation. But God has a plan if we will be open to Him. God's plan is to take us from barrenness to fruitfulness.

God's word has some very specific promises when it comes to the area of barrenness.

Exodus 23:25-26

So you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.

Deuteronomy 7:13-14

And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land of which He swore to your fathers to give you. You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall not be a male or female barren among you or among your livestock.

Isaiah 54:1-10

"Sing, O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman," says the LORD. 2 "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. 3 For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited. 4 Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. 5 For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth. 6 For the LORD has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused," says your God. 7 "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. 8 With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you," says the LORD, your Redeemer. 9 For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. 10 For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has mercy on you.

Barrenness is a major theme in the Bible

This may sound a little surprising, but it is interesting how many of God's chosen vessels were barren at the start.

There were notable women through whom God was going to bring forth the promised seed who had to overcome barrenness.

Women like Sarah, the wife of Abraham; Rebekah, the wife of Isaac; and Rachael, the wife of Jacob—the three mothers in Israel.

God calls all of us in a barren state and even takes us through cycles of barrenness in our life before He brings forth His ultimate plan for our lives.

When you are in a state of barrenness you have certain feelings that are alluded to in the Isaiah passage that we read (Is. 54:4, 6). You feel...

- Ashamed
- Disgraced
- Forsaken or deserted
- Grieved in spirit (not comforted)
- Refused or rejected

Among the eastern cultures, barrenness was often considered to be a family's greatest misfortune.

God wants to turn our barrenness into fruitfulness.

However, before He does that He wants to use barrenness to deal with us. When it has worked what it is to work, when it has produced what it is to produce...God will turn our barrenness into fruitfulness. He will make the barren woman to keep house (Ps. 113:9).

He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD! --RSVA

Biblical Examples of Barrenness

God has given us several examples of barren situations to serve as teachers to us concerning God and His dealings with us.

There are six principles that God wants to see operating in our lives in times of barrenness that are illustrated by six barren women in the Bible—Sarah, Rebekah, Rachael, Samson's mother, Hannah (Samuel's mother) and Elizabeth. These principles are the basis for our moving from barrenness to fruitfulness.

1. Sarah—The Principle of Faith

Genesis 11:30

But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Sarah was barren and had no child, but the truth is she had many promises of fruitfulness (Gen. 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:1-7, 15-16; 18:10).

Genesis 17:15-16

Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.”

Abraham and Sarah received their first word when they were relatively young. And, of course, like any normal person, they wanted results immediately. Unfortunately, it doesn't usually happen that way. Often we must go through a time of contradiction when our faith in the word is tested. We have the promises, but we do not see the results.

During this time we must go through some of the same stages that Abraham and Sarah went through.

- We must die to our own schemes (Eliezar).
- We must cease from our striving and manipulation (Hagar & Ishmael)
- We must wait for that which is brought forth by the Lord.
- We must maintain faith and patience (Heb. 6:12-15).

Hebrews 6:11-15

*And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through **faith and patience** inherit the promises. For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, “Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.” And so, **after he had patiently endured**, he obtained the promise.*

There was an appointed time for Sarah to bring forth (Gen. 18:10, 14; 21:2). When both Abraham and Sarah finally got to the place of unwavering faith, God fulfilled every promise (Rom. 4:17-21) and in the end He got all of the glory.

2. Rebekah—The Principle of Prayer

Genesis 25:21a

Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren...

In Rebekah we have another key figure who has inherited many promises of fruitfulness but finds herself in a state of barrenness. In this case, Isaac got before God and “pleaded with the Lord.”

This word that is translated “pleaded with” literally means “to intercede, to burn incense in worship.” It is related to two other words which mean “volume of smoke” and “abundance or copiousness.”

The implication here is that Isaac did not just ask once. He did not just ask casually. Isaac took on the posture of Elijah and others of “persistent, prevailing, effectual, fervent prayer.”

He asked and He kept on asking; he sought and he kept on seeking; He knocked and he kept on knocking.

When their deliverance came, it came in the form of double fruitfulness and the birth of twin boys.

3. Rachael—The Principle of Pure Motivation

Genesis 29:31

When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.

Rachel was a much loved and favored woman, but God needed to work some things out of her so that her ability to bear children would not become a source of pride for her.

Her barrenness only revealed certain things that were in her heart. Some of the things mentioned in the following chapter include the following:

- Envy (Gen. 30:1)
- Idolatry (Gen. 30:1) (putting having children above God)
- Blaming Others (Gen.30:1-2)
- Bitterness toward God
- Contention and Strife (Gen. 30:8)

When Rachael was ready and her heart was right, God moved mightily in her behalf (Gen. 30:22-24).

Genesis 30:22-24

Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. 23 And she conceived and bore a son, and said, “God has taken away my reproach.” 24 So she called his name Joseph, and said, “The LORD shall add to me another son.”

4. Samson’s Mother—The Principle of Consecration

Judges 13:2-5

Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. 3 And the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, “Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. 4 Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. 5 For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”

Because of the condition of the people of God, He was going to raise up a deliverer to rescue them. To do so, He would use another barren woman, the wife of Manoah, who would become the mother of Samson.

But for Samson's mother could be used in this way, she had to be prepared properly. She had to be separated or consecrated to God so that her offering (son) would also be separated to the Lord. We can only reproduce after our own kind. This woman became separated in her lifestyle for the sake of her future offspring or fruit (Judg. 13:8, 12).

We will be looking at Hannah in a moment, but in her we see a similar thing. She also separated herself and vowed a vow that all of the offspring that came forth would be wholly dedicated to the Lord.

The result of this dedication of Manoah's wife was that she was blessed with a child through whom the Spirit of God was able to move (Judg. 13:24-25).

Judges 13:24-25

So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

5. Hannah—The Principle of Contentment

I Samuel 1:1-2

Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim Zophim, of the mountains of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham...he had two wives: the name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

God was about to do a new thing in Israel. He was about to start a new order of prophetic ministry in the nation to be the moral conscience for God's people. God was going to use Hannah to bring forth the first such prophet, but she was barren.

Hannah was a much loved woman, but barren (vs. 5). In this condition she was continually mocked by her rival and felt reproached and miserable (vs. 6-7). Even though her husband tried to encourage her with praise and gifts (chocolate), she could not accept any substitute for children (vs. 8).

Because of her plight, she became hard and bitter in her spirit. Some of her feelings included"

- Bitterness of soul (vs. 10)
- Anguish (vs. 10)
- Affliction (vs. 11)
- A sorrowful spirit (lit. a hard spirit, vs. 15)

Her spiritual condition became a reflection of her natural condition. She became barren in her spirit.

When a change took place in her spirit, it precipitated a change in her natural condition (vs. 16-18).

I Samuel 1:16-19

Regard not your handmaid as a wicked woman; for out of my great complaint and bitter provocation I have been speaking. 17 Then Eli said, Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him. 18 Hannah said, Let your handmaid find grace in your sight. So [she] went her way and ate, her countenance no longer sad. 19 The family rose early the next morning, worshiped before the Lord, and returned to their home in Ramah. Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her. –Amp

6. Elizabeth—The Principle of Timing

Luke 1:5-7

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

Elizabeth was doing everything right and yet there was no fruitfulness. As time went by she got older and older. Every new birthday brought with it the thoughts that what she desired was never going to happen.

“It’s too late, God has passed me by.”

“I am too old for God to use in this way.”

“Nothing can happen now.”

We know that nothing is impossible with God. We know that the whole Israelite nation came forth from a woman who was very old and as good as dead. God is not limited by natural conditions. The angel would encourage Mary by what happened with Elizabeth (Luke 1:36-37).

Luke 1:36-37

“Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.”

Both of these great miracles were wrapped up in God’s fullness of time (Gal. 4:4). John the Baptist would be born according to God’s timetable not Elizabeth’s timetable. All of the prayer in the world could not change this. But as Elizabeth remained faithful and kept herself in the right place before God, the day came when everything changed and she would bring forth her miracle and the birth of the most significant man in history apart from Jesus Himself (Luke 7:28).

Conclusion

God delights in bringing the barren to a place of fruitfulness.

Isaiah 54:1-5

“Sing, O childless woman! Break forth into loud and joyful song, O Jerusalem, even though you never gave birth to a child. For the woman who could bear no children now has more than all the other women,” says the LORD. 2 “Enlarge your house; build an addition; spread out your home! 3 For you will soon be bursting at the seams. Your descendants will take over other nations and live in their cities. 4 Fear not; you will no longer live in shame. The shame of your youth and the sorrows of widowhood will be remembered no more, 5 for your Creator will be your husband. The LORD Almighty is his name! He is your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, the God of all the earth.”

Remind them of the six women.

Pray for those who feel they need to be released from barrenness.