

**“Hannah, A Woman of Faith and Prayer”
1 Samuel, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2:1-11; 18-21**

“My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation.” 1 Samuel 2:1

The story of Hannah begins at a time when Israel was at a spiritual low. It was near the end of the period of Judges, and for many Israelites, the love of God had waxed cold. They were witnessing evil and corruption among their people, even among their own priesthood. (1 Samuel 2:12-17) With this kind of weak leadership, they became disenchanted with the word of God and showed little respect for God’s prophets. This was not the case with Elkanah, however, Hannah’s husband. He was part of the remnant that still made the yearly pilgrimage to Shiloh, where the tabernacle was located, for worship and sacrifice, according to the law of Moses. And that’s where our story of Hannah begins.

1 Samuel, Chapter 1:1-7. The yearly trip to Shiloh should have been a happy event for Hannah. Even though the law did not mandate it, Elkanah took his family with him to worship the Lord and offer sacrifices. This included Hannah, the wife he loved, and Peninnah, the wife that he had probably taken to bear children for him, since Hannah was childless. In their culture, this was perfectly acceptable, but it is important to note that these were man-made rules, and it did not mean that God was okay with polygamy. In any event, this was Hannah’s life, and her heart was broken over the fact that she had not been able to bear children. On the other hand, her rival Peninnah had been blessed with many and was quick to taunt and mock Hannah because of her unfortunate barrenness. This cruelty on the part of Peninnah could have also been fueled by the fact that Elkanah, in giving out portions of the sacrifice set aside for his family to partake of, would give Hannah a double portion, maybe to make up for her being barren. This act of favoritism probably incensed Peninnah all the more. There was no doubt that Hannah already felt bad enough, without the added provocation of Peninnah, but Peninnah’s jealousy for her was apparent, and this tactic of parading her children in front of her was just too much for Hannah. As we’ve seen in other biblical accounts, the inability to conceive was seen as a curse for a woman. She was deemed not worthy of God’s favor, which is ironic, since the name “Hannah” means “favored of God.” It was sometimes believed that perhaps due to some terrible flaw in her character or sin in her life, a woman was childless. And so, year after year, Hannah was subjected to Peninnah’s cruelty. Not surprisingly, she fell into depression and despair, so much so, that she couldn’t even eat.

V. 8. As much as Elkanah loved Hannah, he could not understand why she couldn’t feel fulfilled without children. He had not put pressure on her, he had not treated her with any disdain; why couldn’t she just be happy with the way things were? After all, she had him! Peninnah had given him all the children he wanted. He had his heirs; his name would live on. He just did not get it! *“Am I not better to you than ten sons?”*

When this same situation happened in the lives of Isaac and Rebekah, the bible tells us in Genesis 25:21, that *“Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived.”* We don’t see that happen in the lives of Elkanah and Hannah. Elkanah lacked that faith to go to the Lord and plead for Hannah. Hannah, however, sought the answer to her distress in the Lord.

Vv. 9-18. The bible says Hannah was in “*bitterness of soul*” when she prayed to the Lord. All the days, months and years of praying and not having her prayer answered had taken their toll. Even though she had allowed bitterness to set in, Hannah remained steadfast in her prayer. On this particular day at the door of the temple, her soul cried out to the Lord in anguish and tears. Even though no words came out of her mouth, she prayed with the fervency of one desperate for the hand of God to move in her life. This time, however, she went a step further. Not only did she pray for that male child, but she made a vow that if God were to favor her with that child, she would give him right back to the Lord for a life of servitude to Him. And here’s one more thing she did ... she vowed that the child would be raised as a Nazirite. Nazirites were a special religious order that served the Lord and vowed to keep themselves pure and undefiled. They never drank wine, never cut their hair and never went near a dead body. In raising her son this way, Hannah was demonstrating that she wanted to give God the very best she could. It was not just a son she was giving, but a pure, undefiled, perfect son, much like the perfect gift God gave us in Jesus, our perfect sacrificial lamb.

When Eli the priest saw her praying as she was, in tears and with only her lips moving, he thought she might have been drunk, but Hannah quickly explains herself. She defends herself in a most respectful way, referring to Eli as “*my lord*”. When Eli blesses her, Hannah chooses to believe at that moment that she has been heard, and her prayer has been granted. We’re told that she went her way, ate and she was no longer sad. 1 Peter 5:7-7 tells us, “*Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*” Hannah embraced this principle, and it gave her the peace she so needed.

Vv. 19-23. Finally, Hannah has her son! Oh, what a gracious, wonderful and faithful God we serve. “*I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live.*” (Psalm 116:1-2) This had to be what Hannah was feeling. Her heart was so full of gratitude! She names the child “Samuel”, which means, “asked of God.”

When it came time for the next yearly sacrifice, Hannah opts to stay home with the child, and tells Elkanah that she will keep him until he is weaned (around three years old). She remembers her vow and plans to take him to Eli the priest when he is weaned. Because of his love for Hannah, Elkanah agrees to her plan for the child. Under the Mosaic law, a husband could override any vow that his wife may have made, and was not obligated to go through with it. Even though he could have done so, Elkanah trusted and esteemed Hannah and allowed her to complete her vow to the Lord.

Vv. 24-28. The sacrificing of the three bulls signified the completion of a special vow, under God’s law. Hannah and Elkanah had brought their young son to Eli in order for him to serve the Lord all the days of his life, just as she had promised. Little Samuel would not experience the childhood of other young boys, and he would not have the benefit of a mother’s love and nurturing. We cannot help but wonder about the state of Hannah’s heart at this point. To walk away from your three year old child and leave him in the hands of an elderly priest is probably not something many mothers would be able to do. Yet, Hannah did so joyfully and without reservation. She was committed to her vow ... not out of obligation, but out of love for her God, Who had favored her. She identifies herself to Eli as the woman whom Eli had seen praying at the door of the temple and tells him that she has lent Samuel to the Lord for as long as he lives. Samuel would grow to become the last judge of Israel, be regarded as a great prophet of the Lord, and usher in the period of the age of kings in Israel by anointing the first two kings of the nation of Israel, Saul and David.

1 Samuel, Chapter 2:1-2. These first two verses of Hannah's prayer speak of her joy and delight in the Lord, as well as deliverance. "*Horn*" represents power and strength, which Hannah had gained from the Lord, and she refers to God as her "*rock*", meaning that He was always there, always reliable, steadfast and eternal.

Vv. 3-5. Hannah is giving notice to others in these verses about God's strength and justice. There is also the warning to those who boast, perhaps like Peninnah. She also makes a reference to the way God humbles the haughty, saying "*the barren has borne seven, and she who has many children has become feeble.*"

Vv. 6-10. These are the most poetic verses of Hannah's prayer as she uses contrasts to point out how God deals with His people. Let's read them.

Notice how she ends on a prophetic note, "*He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed.*" While the "*king*" refers to those who would reign over Israel, "*anointed*" refers to the Messiah.

V. 11. The child Samuel is left with Eli to minister to the Lord.

Vv. 18-21. Every year Hannah would make the trip to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice with Elkanah, and every year she would take Samuel a little robe that she had made for him. Each time, Eli would offer a blessing to them. In time, God allowed Hannah to conceive again, and she was blessed with three more sons and two daughters.

"He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love." Song 2:4

Three Lessons to be Learned from Hannah's Life:

- She does not retaliate when provoked.
In spite of the ridicule and mocking she received from Peninnah, Hannah does not become angry. Instead, she cried out to the Lord. What a lesson for us! Our initial reaction to this kind of bullying is to 'hit back', either in word or in deed. As children of God, we must learn to put our faith in God and trust Him to fight our battles for us.
- She prays fervently, in faith.
Hannah understood the power of prayer. She did not give up; she goes right on putting her petition before the Lord. She prays privately; the prayer is just between God and her.
- Hannah gave the Lord what mattered most to her.
Even though she had waited so long for this child, Hannah took delight in keeping her vow to the Lord. It was an act of surrender. We cannot help but remember the story of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham was willing to surrender what He loved most out of obedience and love for God. Hannah, too, was surrendering this child, so dear to her heart and for whom she had waited so long, and she was did so with a heart of obedience, love and thankfulness.

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God, my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed." Luke 1:46-48

