



Hannah

HER NAME MEANS

“Graciousness” or “Favor”

HER CHARACTER: Provoked by another woman’s malice, she refused to respond in kind. Instead, she poured out her hurt and sorrow to God, allowing him to vindicate her.

HER SORROW: To be taunted and misunderstood.

HER JOY: To proclaim God’s power and goodness, his habit of raising the lowly and humbling the proud.

KEY SCRIPTURES: 1 Samuel 1:1–2:11; 2:19–21

Monday

HER STORY

*I*t was only fifteen miles, but every year the journey from Ramah, to worship at the tabernacle in Shiloh, seemed longer. At home, Hannah found ways to avoid her husband’s second wife, but once in Shiloh there was no escaping her taunts. Hannah felt like a leaky tent in a driving rain, unable to defend herself against the harsh weather of the other woman’s heart.

Even Elkanah’s arm around her provided no shelter. “Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don’t you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons? Yes, she has given me children, but it’s you I love. Ignore her taunts.”

How could Hannah make him understand that even the best of men could not erase a woman’s longing for children? His attempt to comfort her only sharpened the pain, heightening her sense of isolation.

Once inside the tabernacle Hannah stood for a long time, weeping and praying. Her lips moved without making a sound as her heart poured out its grief to God: "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

The priest Eli was used to people coming to Shiloh to celebrate the feasts, eating and drinking more than they should. Watching Hannah from his chair by the doorpost of the temple, he wondered why her shoulders were shaking, her lips moving without making a sound. She must be drunk, he concluded. So he interrupted her silent prayer with a rebuke: "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine."

"Not so, my lord," Hannah defended herself. "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

Satisfied by her explanation, Eli blessed her, saying, "May the God of Israel grant your request."

Early the next morning, Hannah and Elkanah returned to their home in Ramah, where Hannah at last conceived. Soon she held against her shoulder the tiny child she had yearned for, the son she had dedicated to God. After Samuel was weaned, she took him to Eli at Shiloh. Like Jochebed placing the child Moses into the waters of the Nile as though into God's own hands, she surrendered her child to the priest's care. Eventually Hannah's boy became a prophet and Israel's last judge. His hands anointed both Saul and David as Israel's first kings.

Like Sarah and Rachel, Hannah grieved over the children she couldn't have. But unlike them, she took her anguish directly to God. Misunderstood by both her husband and her priest, she could easily have turned her sorrow on herself or others, becoming bitter, hopeless, or vindictive. But instead of merely pitying herself or responding in kind, she poured out her soul to God. And God graciously answered her prayer.

Each year Hannah went up to Shiloh and presented Samuel with a little robe she had sewn. And each year, the priest Eli blessed her husband, Elkanah, saying, “May the LORD give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the LORD.” And so Hannah became the mother of three more sons and two daughters. Hannah’s great prayer, echoed more than a thousand years later by Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:46–55), expresses her praise: “My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance.... The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap” (1 Samuel 2:1, 7–8).

INFERTILITY

*P*raying through her tears, so overwrought that Eli thought she was drunk, Hannah expresses for women throughout the ages the agonizing experience of infertility. The deep, unsatisfied longing for children, the pain of watching others bear one child after another, the anguish of watching a mother kiss her baby's face—Hannah experienced it all.

The Israelites saw children as a particular blessing from the Lord, recognizing his power to open or close a woman's womb. Women who couldn't bear children were considered subfemale, unable to fulfill their divine purpose on earth. When a woman was unable to fulfill this "duty," her emotional pain was tremendous. And more than likely, barren women also felt they were denied the possibility of being the one chosen to bear the Messiah.

Infertility brought with it not only a debilitating personal sorrow but also the reproach of a woman's husband, the disapproval of a woman's family, and the rejection of society. Husbands looked to their wives to produce many sons to help in supporting the family. A woman's extended family, both her own and her husband's, looked to her to continue the family line and saw her as one who had not fulfilled her responsibility when she didn't produce children. And the social circles of young women of childbearing years by their very nature included many other young women, women who were often producing one child after another. Their fertility mocked the infertility of the barren woman every time she went to the market or to the well or to a community social event.

Scripture tells the stories of a number of women who were barren. Sarah laughed when told she would finally have a son. Rachel clutched Jacob and begged him to give her sons, as if he could open her womb. Hannah's pain made her seek help from the only One truly capable of providing it.

If Hannah had never had a child, she would still have gone down in Scripture's narrative as a woman of faith. Hannah is not a woman of faith because she bore a child; she is a woman of faith because she sought God when she was in her deepest distress, because she realized that only he could answer her questions and that only he could provide the consolation and purpose in life she so desperately sought.

HER LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

Read 1 Samuel 1:1-2:21

1. What response does Hannah's childlessness cause in each of the people involved: In Hannah herself? In Peninnah? In Elkanah? _____

2. What caused the change in Hannah recorded in 1 Samuel 1:18? Was she assured of getting what she wanted? If so, how? If not, why was she comforted? _____

3. When have you been profoundly disappointed? How did you react to disappointment or failures in your life? _____

4. Describe what it might have been like for Hannah to fulfill her vow to God. What does her action tell you about her? _____

5. What does Hannah's song of praise to the Lord (1 Samuel 2:1-10) have to do with the events of the story? What does she say about God, and why is it relevant to her life? _____

6. What impact do the reactions of those around you have on you? _____

7. Hannah stood in a very public place and poured out her pain to the Lord. Notice Eli's reaction. Do you think she was unaware of the reaction others might have or do you think she just didn't care? _____

8. When has God answered your prayers after a time of disappointment or difficulty?
When have your prayers gone unanswered? How did God provide in those troublesome times? _____

9. How did God answer Hannah's prayers? What is the significance of the name Samuel? _____

10. The verse record Hannah's fulfillment to her vow, recorded in verse 11. What would have made Hannah's vow difficult? What would have made it necessary? _____

11. How did God reward Hannah for her faithfulness? _____

12. Hannah dedicated her son Samuel to the Lord by giving him up to the Lord and to the work in the temple. Are your children dedicated to the Lord? If so, what are you doing to help them grow up with him? _____

When God met Hannah at the temple in Shiloh, he not only answered her prayer for a child, he answered her prayer for comfort in her misery. He gave her consolation in her disappointment and strength to face her situation. Scripture does not say that she went away sure she would bear a child, but it does make it clear that she went away comforted: “Her face was no longer downcast” (1 Samuel 1:18). What even the love and care of her husband Elkanah could not provide, God could provide.

God is willing to meet us just as he met Hannah. Whatever our distress, whatever hard situations we face, he is willing—more than that, he is eager—to meet our needs and give us his grace and comfort. No other person—not our husband, not our closest friends, not our parents, not our children—can render the relief, support, and encouragement that our God has waiting for us.

Promises in Scripture

*My comfort in my suffering is this:
Your promise preserves my life.*

—PSALM 119:50

We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

—ROMANS 5:2–5

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

—ROMANS 8:28

HER LEGACY OF PRAYER

In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life."

— 1 SAMUEL 1:10–11

- REFLECT ON:** 1 Samuel 2:1–10.
- PRAISE GOD:** That he knows our hearts.
- OFFER THANKS:** For already answering so many of your prayers.
- CONFESS:** Your tendency to pour out your heart to everyone but God, making him a last, rather than first, resort.
- ASK GOD:** To give you the grace to trust his strength.

Lift Your Heart

One way to build your confidence in God is to form a habit of remembrance. It's so easy to forget everything he's already done by being preoccupied with what you want him to do right here, right now. But by forgetting his blessings, you form a habit of ingratitude. By frequently thanking God for what he's done, you build a habit of gratitude, which will also deepen your trust in God's compassion, mercy, faithfulness, and power.

Find a blank notebook or a lovely scrapbook that can become your Remembrance Book. In it, write down ways in which God has answered your prayers. Keep letters, photos of loved ones, or newspaper clippings—anything that reminds you of answered prayers. Let your Remembrance Book be a tangible way to keep God's faithfulness in the forefront of your heart.

Father, thank you for all the prayers you've answered during my lifetime. You've answered small prayers and big prayers, evening prayers and morning prayers, quiet prayers and loud prayers, anxious prayers and peaceful prayers. May my own prayers be shaped according to your faithfulness, becoming less selfish and frantic and more calm and trusting with each day that passes. In Jesus' name. Amen.