

Hannah, the Faithful Supplicant

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 49:13–17

Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 1:1–28; 2:1–11, 18–21; 3:1–18

Today's Scripture: 1 Samuel 1:9–20, 25b

I. Anguished Prayer

1 Samuel 1:9–16

⁹ Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the LORD's house. ¹⁰ In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. ¹¹ And she made a vow, saying, "LORD Almighty, if you will only look on 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."

¹² As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³ Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴ and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."

¹⁵ "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "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. ¹⁶ Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

9. Hannah and her family have traveled to *Shiloh* for an annual sacrifice. They are in the habit of traveling to this sanc-

tuary because of a local festival or a personal desire to make sacrificial offerings to God. *The Lord's house* mentioned here is not Solomon's temple, which won't be built for several years, but rather the tabernacle. *Eli the priest* presides over the temporary home for the ark of the covenant.

The eating and drinking described in this verse refer to the sacrifice Hannah's family has traveled to make. Unlike burnt offerings, which are entirely consumed and for God alone, other kinds of sacrifices are shared and eaten. Therefore, the family eats a portion of the sacrifice together in the presence of God. Thanksgiving and peace offerings must be eaten quickly.

10. Hannah's discontented *weeping* is the result of her distress at being childless. Therefore, she seeks a remedy from God, the source of life and breath. The underlying Hebrew for *weeping bitterly* is a repetitive, "weeping, she was weeping." This repetition of the verb emphasizes the seriousness of her grief. Hannah's husband has children with his other wife (1 Samuel 1:2). So, God's intervention is a personal request for Hannah. The family line continues without her bearing a child, but she desires fruitfulness for herself.

11a. The designation *Lord Almighty* recognizes God's absolute power: he stands above countless angels equipped to do his bidding. By contrast, the repeated use of

servant admits powerlessness and subservience before the Almighty. Before God, Hannah offers her faithfulness by making a *vow*. Vows appear elsewhere in the Bible for expressions of deep commitment (Genesis 28:20; Numbers 21:2; 30:3–4; Deuteronomy 23:21; etc.).

In this case, readers may sympathize with Hannah, whose motivation is straightforward and personal. Hannah's vow is not made in haste or without a plan to fulfill what is spoken. It is a last-ditch attempt to see her problem solved. Hannah requests that God *not forget* her. She desires the token of God's attention to be the gift of a male child.

11b. Hannah pledges her future son to God's holy service, which may be why she specifically requests a male. Her words resemble the ordinances in Exodus 13:2, 12–15; and 34:19–20, acknowledging that a firstborn belongs to God. Hannah promises a lifelong commitment to God's purposes for her child.

The additional promise never to shave his hair is an indication of a special priestly office connected with the more temporary Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:5; Judges 13:5). Hannah volunteers her hypothetical child, setting him apart as one consecrated from birth.

12–13. Hannah continues *praying in her heart*, or, in other words, in silence. Eli notices the movement of *her lips*, but he hears no sounds. It is important to note that ancient people usually prayed aloud.

The text does not say why Hannah makes a silent prayer and vow, except perhaps because the contents of her prayer are so personal. To fulfill the vow, she would later have to report it to her family and confirm it with Elkanah. But the wordless moving of her mouth prompts a predictable misunderstanding from the priest. He recently observed her family celebrating a sacrificial dinner, and there-

fore, he assumes Hannah consumed too much wine and is now acting inappropriately in God's sanctuary. Instead of asking questions or looking for more details, Eli jumps to a hasty conclusion.

14. Eli bases his accusation on limited information. Therefore, he comes across as insensitive to the prayers of God's people.

15. Hannah firmly denies the accusation, explaining that she has *not been drinking wine or beer*. Her lack of participation in the sacrificial meal shows she was not drowning her sorrows in food and drink. Fellowship with God might feel hollow compared to her offering of tears. Her response indicates that she knows *pouring* various liquids—like water or wine—is a sacrificial act. Hannah has poured out her *soul*, meaning every part of her. She may consider her spilled tears a part of her offering.

16. The phrase *wicked woman* updates earlier translations that say, “daughter of Belial” (*KJV*). Hannah is no such wicked person. Her prayers are earnest, and her vow pours from an abundance of *anguish* and *grief*. Her supplication to God and persistence attest to a pure, guileless soul who submits to God's most excellent plan.

II. Kindled Hope

1 Samuel 1:17–20

¹⁷ Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”

¹⁸ She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

¹⁹ Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. ²⁰ So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to

a son. She named him Samuel, saying, “Because I asked the LORD for him.”

17. Whether out of sincerity or embarrassment at being so wrong, Eli’s response is a straightforward blessing. He is instrumental in the birth of his replacement. So, like the Aaronic priesthood, Eli blesses Hannah in the name of the Lord, *the God of Israel*. Specifically, he asks that she receive an answer to her petition. Either Eli guesses her request, or his ignorance does not matter. Eli has no power to grant what she asked, but he adds himself to the petition on Hannah’s behalf, asking God to pay close attention to her prayers.

18. Variations of the phrase *find favor in your eyes* occur two dozen times in the Old Testament. The phrase appears in contexts where humans seek right standing with God or with one another (examples: Numbers 11:15; 1 Samuel 20:29). Hannah is pleased to have Eli’s favor, but she is even more concerned that Eli’s blessing will come to pass—that God will respond. Although Eli possesses no power to bring about the blessing he voiced, he is a priest of God, and Hannah treats him with great respect.

Hannah’s decision to eat at this point indicates that her outlook has shifted. Since Hannah has hope that God has heard her petitions, she can eat and return to the regular rhythms of her life.

19. The family’s home is in *Ramah*, which is the shortened title of “Ramathaim . . . the hill country of Ephraim” (1 Samuel 1:1). The straight-line distance between there and Shiloh is about 18 miles. To make this difficult trek, one must get underway *early* in the *morning*. Before the family departs, they offer worship to God, which is another confirmation of their devotion.

The phrase *the Lord remembered her* does not mean that God had forgotten something, as humans might. It means

that God attended to the words of her request and brought about the long-awaited result. In this case, it means that the couple’s intimacy results in the conception of a child.

20. Like many important births in the Bible, Samuel’s miraculous *birth* demonstrates that God’s hand is on the boy’s life. Hannah receives a son despite her previous hopelessness.

Many names in Scripture signal something important about the person. The name of Hannah’s son is no different. She has a particular meaning in mind. *Samuel* is a combination of two words: the two final letters *el* are a Hebrew word for “God” (*the Lord* in Hannah’s explanation), and the first part of the name sounds like the Hebrew word for “ask.” Hannah intended Samuel’s name to remind everyone that he exists because Hannah *asked the Lord for him*.

III. Fulfilled Vow

1 Samuel 1:25b

^{25b} **they brought the boy to Eli,**

25b. Bringing Samuel to live in the sanctuary at Shiloh seems peculiar since Elkanah—and, by extension, his son Samuel—dwell in Ephraim. But Hannah and Elkanah dedicate Samuel to the Lord in a particular way, one that requires his service in apprenticeship to the priest who blessed his birth.

Hannah upholds her end of the promise and fulfills her vow. Her faithfulness results in further blessings. She visits Samuel yearly (1 Samuel 2:19), *Eli* continues to bless her and Elkanah (2:20), and she bears five additional children (2:21). Her extraordinary child becomes the embodiment of his mother’s faith. Samuel becomes a transitional figure in the history of ancient Israel, the end of the line of judges and the first of the prophets.

Involvement Learning

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Into the Lesson

List reasons in support of or against this statement:

Vows don't mean much anymore.

Our text today narrates one of the best-known vows in all of Scripture. Let's discover what it meant for one young woman to make a vow.

Into the Word

Read 1 Samuel 1:9–20, 25b. Where did Eli sit, and why?

Why was Hannah's anguish so severe?

Why would Hannah not let a razor touch her son's head?

What do Eli's responses to Hannah say about him?

Why did Eli's words comfort her?

What part did Eli play in allowing Hannah to fulfill her vow?

What do we conclude about Hannah because of her petition and vow?

Key Text

So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him."
—1 Samuel 1:20

Into Life

Write down one or two specific gifts God has given you.

Write a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his gifts.

Thought to Remember

God listens and gives good gifts.