

Hannah - A Woman of Prayer

Historical Background

The first book of Samuel covers a period from the birth of Samuel, last of the judges, to the death of Saul, the first of the kings of Israel. This is a period of about 115 years; from about 1100BC to 1010BC.

The author is unknown except it is believed that a part of the book was written by Samuel. Not all of the book could have been written by him because it records his death (I Samuel 25:1). Also, I Chronicles 29:29 lists who another author of this book could have been.

In the beginning of the first book of Samuel we find a woman named Hannah, who is only mentioned in the first two chapters.

Family Background

We do not know who her parents were or what city she was from. Her early life is not recorded only her family life after her marriage.

Chapter 1

Verses 1-2 - Hannah's husband, Elkanah, was a Levite and belonged to a priestly tribe, the Kohathites (1 Chron. 6:33-38). He was a priest who followed the common custom of polygamy. His wife, Peninnah, could have children but his wife, Hannah, was barren.

Levites - God provided in the Law that the Levites would not have an assigned territory but live throughout the land in each of the tribes.

Barren - There were many barren women throughout the Scriptures who later conceived children who became great men:

<u>Woman</u>	<u>Child</u>
Sarah	Isaac
Rebekah	Esau/Jacob
Rachel	Joseph and Benjamin
Manoah's wife	Samson
Ruth	Obed
Elizabeth	John the Baptist

Verse 3 - as was the yearly custom, Elkanah went to sacrifice in Shiloh.

Shiloh - was a small Old Testament village about 20 miles north of Jerusalem. It was important because it served as the religious center for the Hebrew people during the period of judges before the kingdom was united under the leadership of David.

Sacrifice - was a sacrifice based upon the system of sacrifice that was set up for their worship in the Temple. (see Richard Booker's book, *The Miracle of the Scarlet Thread*).

Verses 4-5 - Elkanah gave his wife, Peninnah, and her sons and daughters their portion of the sacrifice. But to Hannah, the one whom he loved most, he gave more - or possibly the best portion.

Verse 6 - Elkanah loved Hannah but Hannah was barren. One of the only rights that a woman had at this time was the right to bear children - it was considered God's blessing - the more children, the more you were blessed by God. So many times, when a woman was barren - she was not blessed by God and the blame went to God - for shutting up her womb. Apparently, Peninnah could see how much more Elkanah loved Hannah, and so she began to make remarks toward her. She possibly viewed Hannah as a rival that lived in her house.

Verse 7 - The cruel remarks were not just a one time occurrence. Every time that Elkanah went to offer a yearly sacrifice, Peninnah made cruel remarks to Hannah. It is not recorded that Hannah sought revenge or that any kind of conflict happened - only that these remarks hurt Hannah and she wept and did not eat.

Verse 8 - At this particular time, the remarks which were made by Peninnah caused Hannah to weep and Elkanah noticed. He knew that Hannah, like all women of this time, grieved because she had no children. But apparently, he did not know about the cruel remarks because, even though he saw her weeping, the questions he asked her indicate he assumes that she is grieved because of being barren.

Verses 9-10 - Hannah was the fourth woman in the Bible who was barren and grieved because of it.

Sarah - (Abraham) laughed when she was told of having a son

Rebekah - (Isaac) her husband prayed for her

Rachel - (Jacob) in her grief, demanded of Jacob "Give me children or else I die."

Hannah - (Elkanah) took her problem to God.

Hannah was very prayerful and went to the Temple. The priest, Eli, was sitting at his seat by the Temple door. In the ancient Mid-East it was the custom for certain officials to place a stool or a seat in a courtyard or near the gate of the city where they could sit in judgment. They would sit in these judgment seats and hear cases or complaints. These seats had no backs, which may be why Eli was sitting near a post.

Verse 11 - The prayer that Hannah offered to God is recorded in this verse. In her prayer, she made a vow/covenant with the Lord, If thou wilt remember me...give me a man child...then I will give him back. "no razor...upon his head..." what is she promising God? Not only to give him back to the Lord but to dedicate him to God.

This type of vow is called The Nazarite vow. The Nazarite vow was an oath taken to abstain from certain worldly influences and to consecrate oneself to God. Among the Jews, the vow was an option for most persons; it could be taken for a short period of time or for life.

Nazarites expressed their dedication to God by:

1. Abstaining from all intoxicating drinks and grape products
2. Refusing to cut their hair
3. Avoiding contact with the dead
4. Refusing to eat food regarded as unclean (Numbers 6:3-7)

When the specified period of time was completed, the Nazarite could appear before the priest for a ceremony of release. Nazarites who broke their vows could be restored only by observing specific restoration rites (Numbers 6). Some of the persons that took this vow in the Old Testament include Samson and Samuel. In the New Testament because of his self-denying life-style, John the Baptist was believed to have been a Nazarite. To be a Nazarite, one had to have a disciplined life and a strong commitment to God.

Notice: Hannah made this promise of dedication to God before she was pregnant.

Verse 12 - As Hannah prayed to the Lord, Eli watched her and watched her lips. Her prayer was apparently silent - Eli could hear no words.

Verse 13 - The Jews were a very festive people - and because Eli heard nothing, he assumed that she was drunk.

Verse 14 - Eli did not ask if she had been drinking, but just assumed because of the celebration all around that she had been.

Verse 15 - Hannah replied that she was a woman of a sorrowful spirit because of her circumstances (barren/being reminded by the other wife). But notice in her response to Eli, Hannah took her sorrow to God. She chose not to allow her circumstances to make her a bitter person but turned to God.

Verse 16 - The "daughter of Belial" means "worthless," has an evil affiliation.

Verse 17 - Eli's response was typical of a priest, "Go in peace" - the Lord will grant your request.

Verse 18 - Now Hannah felt better - her burden was lifted. She ate, and her countenance changed.

Verse 19 - When the Lord answered her prayers in the Scriptures, the term "the Lord remembered her" is used.

Verse 20 - A miracle has occurred to a barren woman named Hannah. She had a son and named him Samuel, "asked of the Lord."

Verses 21-22 - The time came to go for the yearly sacrifice at the Temple. The last time Hannah was there she poured her heart out to the Lord but this time she requested that Elkanah go without her.

Verse 23 - To her request, Elkanah agreed.

Verse 24 - It is recorded in other Jewish writings that Hannah nurtured Samuel and weaned him until about three years old (2 Maccabees 7:27). But when the time came Hannah took gifts: three bullocks, 1 ephah of flour (about 65 bushels) and a bottle of wine.

Verse 25 - As part of her thanksgiving and worship to God, the bullock was sacrificed by Eli (as a priest that was his ordinance to perform).

Verses 26-28 - Hannah, a woman of great faith and love, spoke to Eli.

1. She identified herself
2. Reminded him of her prayer and told of God's answer
3. She repeated her part of the covenant – to lend Samuel to the Lord for as long as he should live

Chapter 2

Verses 1-10 - Hannah's entire prayer is recorded

The horn symbolized like a rock - power, strength, protection. There are many scholars who believe that the term "horn" used by Hannah in her prayer was a reference to the coming of the Messiah and some believe that because of this Hannah could have been a prophetess.

Verse 11 - Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. He left Samuel to be taught by Eli and minister to the Lord.

Verses 18-19 - Samuel grew and ministered before the Lord. During his younger years (it's not recorded how long a period of time) while Samuel was living in the Temple, Hannah visited him. She made a coat that she took for him each year.

Verse 20 - Eli, the priest, blessed Elkanah and Hannah.

Verse 21 - Because Hannah had been faithful and had "lent" or given Samuel which was "her best and her first" the Lord blessed her with more children (3 sons and 2 daughters).

The story of Hannah, as found in the Scriptures, now ends. She is not mentioned again in the Old Testament or in the New Testament.

The lessons we can learn by studying the life of Hannah:

1. God sometimes withholds blessings until we are submissive to His will.
2. We can handle all things with God - even cruel and thoughtless remarks.
3. God answers prayers.
4. When we covenant with the Lord, and we honor our part, God will send His blessings.
5. In everything, we should rejoice.