

Hannah's Prayer for a Son

A barren woman pours out her heart to God in desperate prayer, vowing to dedicate her child to God's service. God hears, and Samuel is born.

1 Samuel 1:1-28 • 1 Samuel 2:1-11

CHARACTERS: Hannah, Elkanah, Peninnah, Eli, Samuel

THEMES: Prayer, Faithfulness, Dedication, God's faithfulness, Answered prayer

IN THE HILL country of Ephraim lived a man named Elkanah. He had two wives: Peninnah, who had children, and Hannah, who had none. Year after year, the family traveled to Shiloh to worship at the tabernacle. And year after year, Peninnah taunted Hannah for her barrenness until Hannah wept and could not eat.

Elkanah tried to comfort her. 'Hannah, why are you weeping? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?' But his words could not ease the ache of her empty arms or the shame of her condition in a culture that measured a woman's worth by her children.

One year at Shiloh, Hannah went to the tabernacle in deep anguish. There, in the presence of God, she wept bitterly and prayed. Not a casual prayer, but a desperate outpouring of her soul. Her lips moved but no sound came forth—so fervent was her prayer that Eli the priest thought she was drunk.

'Not so, my lord,' Hannah explained. 'I am a woman deeply troubled. I have been 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.'

In her prayer, Hannah had made a vow: '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.'

This was no small promise. Hannah was asking for a son—but pledging to give him back, dedicating him as a Nazirite to serve in God's house. She wanted a child not merely for her own comfort, but to offer him completely to God's purposes.

Eli blessed her: 'Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.'

Something changed in Hannah. 'She went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.' Before the answer came, faith had already brought peace.

In time, Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, meaning 'heard by God,' for she said, 'I asked the Lord for him.' The barren woman's prayer had reached heaven.

But Hannah did not forget her vow. When Samuel was weaned—perhaps three years old—she took him to Shiloh. With the boy beside her, she found Eli: 'As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.'

Can you imagine the sacrifice? The child she had longed for, wept for, prayed for—she brought him back and left him at the tabernacle. She would see him only once a year when the family came to worship.

But Hannah's heart overflowed not with grief but with praise. Her prayer of thanksgiving rings through Scripture: 'My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you. The Lord brings death and makes alive; he

brings down to the grave and raises up. The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.'

Hannah had learned what few know: the secret of surrender brings the greatest joy. Each year she came to Shiloh bringing a little robe she had made for Samuel. And God blessed her abundantly—she bore three more sons and two daughters. The woman who gave her first and best to God received back far more than she had sacrificed.

Young Samuel stayed in Shiloh, ministering before the Lord under Eli's care. The boy who was born from desperate prayer would become Israel's greatest prophet, the one who would anoint kings and turn a nation back to God. His life began with a mother's faithful prayer and a promise kept.

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