

# 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

## 1 Samuel 1:9–20, 25b

<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. <sup>11</sup> 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."

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

<sup>15</sup> "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. <sup>16</sup> Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

<sup>17</sup> Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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."

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<sup>25b</sup> they brought the boy to Eli,

## 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

# Introduction

## A. Experiencing God's Mercy

We enjoy telling and retelling stories of dogged persistence. Consider Thomas Edison's countless attempts at creating a functioning light bulb, or Walt Disney's commercial failures that gave rise to an entertainment empire. Such stories inspire us to keep trying, even in the face of adversity.

But not all stories of persistence are so grandiose; many are personal. A husband and wife were desperate to have a child, but like many couples, struggled to make that hope a reality. Despite every medical intervention, it appeared their chances were slim. Fears and uncertainty clouded their prayers, and they even felt ashamed for wanting *so badly* what God had not made possible.

My friends' story has a happy ending. After nearly giving up, God granted them a healthy baby girl! Her infant cries were music to their ears. Afterward, one said, "We didn't know if we were praying for the right thing. But we knew that God would show us mercy in one way or another."

## B. Lesson Context

The events of today's text occurred late in the period of the Judges, perhaps around 1100 BC. In 1 Samuel 1:1–8, Elkanah is introduced with two wives: Peninnah and Hannah. Elkanah may have been an important individual of the priestly Levitical tribe (1 Chronicles 6:23). Although Elkanah loved Hannah very much, she was unable to bear children (1 Samuel 1:8). Peninnah mocked Hannah, perhaps jealous that Elkanah gave her a greater share of their family's annual sacrifice (1:5–6). Even though Hannah was childless, Elkanah gave her a "double portion," the amount typically given to a firstborn son and heir (1:5; see Deuteronomy 21:15–17).

Scripture often frames the ability to conceive children as a capacity under the sole discretion of God (Genesis 29:31; 30:22; 1 Samuel 1:6). This is a perfectly reasonable perspective in an age before medical interventions. Just like the fertility of crops and the success of a harvest, the blessing of bearing children was attributed to God (Psalm 127:3–5). But this left many ancient women in a

# The Testimony of Faithful Witnesses

## Unit 1: Faithful Witnesses Model God's Fidelity

Lessons 1–4

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe Hannah's faithfulness in keeping her promise.
2. Explain how vows show the speaker's sincerity and witness to God's generosity.
3. Compose a specific expression of thanksgiving for God's gifts.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Experiencing God's Mercy
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Anguished Prayer (1 Samuel 1:9–16)

- A. Eli's Presence (v. 9)
- B. Hannah's Plea (vv. 10–11)  
*Desperate Prayers*
- C. Eli's Assumption (vv. 12–14)
- D. Hannah's Grief (vv. 15–16)

#### II. Kindled Hope (1 Samuel 1:17–20)

- A. Eli Blesses (v. 17)
- B. Hannah Revives (v. 18)  
*Answer on the Way*
- C. The Lord Remembers (vv. 19–20)

#### III. Fulfilled Vow (1 Samuel 1:25b)

#### Conclusion

- A. Playing Our Parts
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

difficult social position. The anxiety and sorrow of infertility became a special place of God's intervention, often signaling the coming of a remarkable child: Isaac (Genesis 21:1–2); Jacob and Esau (25:21); Joseph (30:23–24); Samson (Judges 13:2–3); and, even later, John the Baptist (Luke 1:13, 24–25). As we examine Hannah's story, we see God's attention turned toward her. The child of her penitent prayers will be a leader for a leaderless generation.

## I. Anguished Prayer

(1 Samuel 1:9–16)

### A. Eli's Presence (v. 9)

**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.**

Hannah and her family have traveled to *Shiloh* for an annual sacrifice. They are in the habit of traveling to this sanctuary because of a local festival (Judges 21:19) 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 (Joshua 18:1; Psalm 78:60; compare 2 Samuel 7:6). *Eli the priest* presides over the temporary home for the ark of the covenant (1 Samuel 3:3).

The Bible does not say how Shiloh became the first central location for the Israelites to gather for worship and sacrifice (Joshua 18:1). But the city is mentioned more than 30 times in the Old Testament (Joshua 18:8–10; 22:12; Judges 18:31; etc.) Its eventual destruction is a consequence of disobedience (Jeremiah 7:12, 14; 26:6, 9). God's later abandonment of Shiloh is a prelude to a more permanent sanctuary, a temple in Jerusalem (Psalm 132:13–16).

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 (Leviticus 1:9), 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 (Leviticus 7:15–16).

### B. Hannah's Plea (vv. 10–11)

**10. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly.**

Hannah's discontented *weeping* is the result of her distress at being childless (see Lesson Context). Therefore, she seeks a remedy from God, the source of life and breath (Acts 17:25). 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.

#### What Do You Think?

What does it mean to be in "deep anguish"? Have you ever felt like this?


#### Digging Deeper

Why might God allow us to experience grief, bitterness, and anguish? Consider Psalm 34:18; Matthew 5:4; and 2 Corinthians 1:3–4.

**11a. 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,**

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 (see Genesis 28:20; Numbers 21:2; 30:3–4; Deuteronomy 23:21; Judges 11:30; Ecclesiastes 5:4–5). Vow formulas are standard in ancient Near Eastern prayers, not just in Israel. Vows consist of promises to a deity in return for a benefit. A vow becomes a way to seek favor or negotiate with forces beyond human control. The Bible records mixed results in attempts like this to bargain with God (Genesis 28:20–22; compare Judges 11:30–40).

In this case, readers may sympathize with



## HOW HAS GOD BLESSED YOUR FAITHFULNESS?

Visual for Lesson 2. Display this visual as a focal point for prayer. Ask students to take one minute to quietly contemplate the question.

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. "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."**

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. God nowhere says that Hannah's son shall become a Nazirite as he does with Samson's mother (13:2–5). Instead, Hannah seems to draw from the sacred traditions of the Nazirite vow to reinforce her dedication to God and define the purpose of this child's life. Now, if God allows Hannah to give birth, her son will be destined to be an agent of God's righteous purposes. The logic is that by granting a child, God

would receive this person back into his service. The gift that God gives is one he also directs.

### Desperate Prayers

I remember times when I was so desperate for divine intervention that I wept bitterly through my prayers. One time, many years ago, we were hoping to buy a home. We rented for a while but then desired to have a place to put down solid roots. Before long, our agent found us the perfect house! It had a fenced-in backyard and plenty of space for our family. There was even a doggy door for our family pet.

After we viewed the home, I remember returning to our rental and weeping as I prayed that God would help us purchase that home. I just *knew* it would be a place where our family could thrive. God heard our prayers and worked out every detail! We spent many happy years in that home.

Have you ever cried out to God, asking him with tears to move on your behalf? Whether we get the answer we desire or not, we may rest assured that God hears our desperation and extends compassion!

—B. R.

### C. Eli's Assumption (vv. 12–14)

**12–13. As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk**

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. In fact, this is the only time that silent prayer is explicitly mentioned in Scripture (contrast with the Spirit's "wordless groans" in Romans 8:26).

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 (see Numbers 30:10–13). But the wordless moving of her mouth prompts a predictable misunderstanding from the priest. He recently observed her family celebrating a sacrificial dinner, and therefore, 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. and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."**

Eli bases his accusation on limited information (for a similar mistaken confusion in the New Testament, see Acts 2:13–15). Therefore, he comes across as insensitive to the prayers of God's people. 1 Samuel 3 further proves Eli's lack of spiritual discernment when he cannot hear God—unlike Hannah's future son.

Eli's insensitivity is also the result of deliberate blindness. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are widely known for scandalously stealing from the Lord's sacrifices (1 Samuel 2:12–17). Eli rebukes his sons privately but does not remove them (2:22–25). Ironically, Eli himself will receive the Lord's rebuke and judgment from the mouth of Hannah's son-to-be (3:11–18; compare 2:27–36; 4:11–18).

### What Do You Think?

Has anyone ever misinterpreted your method of worship before the Lord?

### Digging Deeper

How might Hannah's example help you navigate such a situation in the future?

### D. Hannah's Grief (vv. 15–16)

**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."**

Hannah firmly denies the accusation, explaining that she has *not been drinking wine or beer*. Her lack of appetite is previously noted in 1 Samuel 1:7, for she was taunted into sorrow by her rival, Peninnah. 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 (see 1 Samuel 7:6; Isaiah 57:6). Hannah has poured out her

*soul*, meaning every part of her. She may consider her spilled tears a part of her offering.

**16. "Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."**

The phrase *wicked woman* updates earlier translations that say, "daughter of Belial" (*KJV*). Belial is a transliteration of a word that occurs 27 times in the Old Testament. "Beliar" (Greek spelling) or "Belial" also appears in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 6:15). In some contexts, this word is treated as the name of a demonic figure—akin to Satan—but the word also reflects a personification of wickedness. It can be translated as "wicked" (example: Deuteronomy 15:9), "vile" (Psalm 41:8), etc. Again, an ironic twist comes in 1 Samuel 2:12, where the description "scoundrels" describes Eli's two sons (older translations make the connection solidly, calling them "sons of Belial"). The evil that Hannah denies already resides in Eli's household.

Hannah is no such wicked person. Her prayers are earnest, and her vow pours from an abundance of *anguish* and *grief*. Her genuine 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)

### A. Eli Blesses (v. 17)

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

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. Numbers 6:23–27 sets a precedent for priestly blessings. 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.

## What Do You Think?

Eli blesses Hannah from his position as a priest. Who has the authority to bless in modern Christianity? Explain your answer.

## Digging Deeper

Why might we need the blessing of someone else in the process of our petitions?

### B. Hannah Revives (v. 18)

**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.**

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. She is no longer focused on the jealous antagonism of her counterpart, Peninnah. Since Hannah has hope that God has heard her petitions, she can eat and return to the regular rhythms of her life.

### Answer on the Way

Recently, my husband and I were waiting for a check to arrive. We didn’t know exactly when it would be sent, so we checked the mailbox daily—to no avail. We felt frustrated and defeated. Finally, we contacted the sender to ask about the check, and they informed us that it was going out in the mail the following day. It hadn’t left their office yet! Once we knew the check was in the mail, we no longer worried about it. We trusted that it would arrive soon.

Sometimes, we look for answers to prayer like checking the mailbox. With frustration and angst,

we seek immediate answers. But having faith in God requires that we trust him and his timing. We may rest assured that the answer—“yes” or “no”—is coming. If we trust him, we may release worry; he’s got the outcome handled. Are you trusting that the answers you seek are on the way? Are you living in the reality of provision or “staring at the mailbox” in frustration? —B. R.

### C. The Lord Remembers (vv. 19–20)

**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.**

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 (compare Genesis 8:1; 9:15; Exodus 2:24; etc.). In this case, it means that the couple’s intimacy results in the conception of a child.

**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.”**

Like many important births in the Bible, Samuel’s miraculous *birth* demonstrates that God’s hand is on the boy’s life. Although previously barren like Sarah and Rachel (see Lesson Context), 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,

Bringing Samuel to live in the sanctuary at Shiloh seems peculiar since Elkanah—and, by extension, his son Samuel—dwell in Ephraim (1 Samuel 1:1). 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). She disappears from the narrative after 1 Samuel 2:10, but her extraordinary child does not! He 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 (Acts 3:24; 13:20; Hebrews 11:32).

#### What Do You Think?

Compare (1) the dedication of Samuel to holy service by Hannah and Elkanah with (2) Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:1–12).

#### Digging Deeper

What does it take for someone to follow through with such loyalty and commitment?

## Conclusion

### A. Playing Our Parts

Hannah faithfully approached God with her grief, desire, and need. Because she did, God allowed her to play a role in the grand narrative of God's design. Hannah's fidelity to her vow put her son in the right place at the right time to lead Israel as a priest, judge, and prophet.

God does not always answer prayers like he did for Hannah. Sometimes his answer is "no."

Hannah herself shows that God has no obligation to grant our desires. However, when our prayers align with his plans and come from a place of righteous motives, God will often welcome our participation in his sovereign work.

Hannah models faithfulness in prayer, bravery in the face of false accusations, and dedication to her word. She asks God for her heart's desire and then willingly returns that gift to God. Every mother knows the strength required to follow through with such a vow! May we all learn to have such faithfulness, submission, trust, and generosity in our relationships with God.

#### What Do You Think?

How does Hannah's faithfulness inspire you toward greater faith?

#### Digging Deeper

What steps do you sense God asking you to take toward deeper prayer, faith, loyalty, or courage?

### B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, God of impossible things, thank you for your miraculous provisions. May we relish them with delight while they are ours and release them back to you when required. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

God listens and gives good gifts.

## How to Say It

Belial	<i>Bee-li-ul.</i>
Beliar	<i>Beh-lee-ar.</i>
Eli	<i>Ee-lye.</i>
Elkanah	<i>El-kuh-nuh</i> or <i>El-kay-nuh.</i>
Ephraim	<i>Ee-fray-im.</i>
Hophni	<i>Hoff-nye.</i>
Nazirite	<i>Naz-ih-rite.</i>
Peninnah	<i>Peh-nin-uh.</i>
Phinehas	<i>Fin-ee-us.</i>
Ramah	<i>Ray-muh.</i>
Ramathaim	<i>Ray-muh-thay-im.</i>