

“Women of the Bible: Hannah”

*I asked the LORD to give me this boy, and he has granted my request.
Now I am giving him to the LORD, and he will belong to the LORD his whole life (1 Samuel 1:27-28).
1 Samuel 1:25-2:2 ¹*

I've set aside our “normal programming” to share with you a remarkable document that I found on my desk this morning. Amazingly, it appears to be a message from the very person about whom I intended to speak today! See what you make of it

“Good morning, Dave. My name is Hannah, which in your language means ‘grace.’ God has allowed me to send this message to you from the Other Side in order to stretch and deepen some of the things you had intended to say today.

“I was born in the village of Ramah in the year 1130 B.C., the fifth child and only daughter of my father. Although no trace of my village remains in your time, Ramah was about twenty miles north of Jerusalem, not far from what today is the West Bank city of Ramallah. In the time of Jesus, my village was known as Arimathea, and was the hometown of the Joseph in whose tomb Jesus was (temporarily) buried.

“When I was a little girl, my country was in turmoil—as it's been pretty much ever since. It had been more than two hundred years since Joshua led our people into Canaan—two hundred years of sporadic wars of conquest and fitful seasons of peace.

“During these two centuries, my people fell into a repeated cycle of sinfulness and rebellion against God. Each time, God sent a Judge to call us back to repentance—more than a dozen in all—but our repentance never seemed to last very long. Some of these Judges may be unfamiliar to you: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, for example.² But you'll probably recognize the names of Deborah, Gideon, and Samson.

“Eli was Judge of Israel when I was born. Eli was also the priest in charge of the Tabernacle, which Joshua had established in the town of Shiloh long before. Eli was an enormous man, and Daddy said he was a good man, but he wasn't much of a leader. Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who took over the service of the Tabernacle when I was sixteen.

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on July 31, 2016. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is from the *New Living Translation* (Tyndale, 1996).

² Others included Tola, Jair, and Jephthah; but there were other minor Judges also.

“Even a teen-age girl could tell that Hophni and Phinehas were wicked men. They took advantage of people who came to worship. They abused the privileges of their office, and it was said that they had even seduced young women at the very entrance to the Tabernacle! Daddy said Eli knew about all this, but he didn’t do anything about it.

“Daddy warned me about such wicked men, but he encouraged me to pay attention to a young man named Elkanah. Elkanah was several years older than I. He was a Kohathite, descended from that portion of the Tribe of Levi that had charge of the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle. It was clear that Daddy liked Elkanah—he was cute!—and when I was eighteen, Daddy set things up for us to be married.

“Elkanah and I were very happy . . . until he also married Peninnah, another girl from our village. The First Book of Moses says that a man should leave ‘his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two are united into one’ (Genesis 2:24). I wanted to shout to Elkanah, ‘Did you get that? The TWO are united into ONE? What about ONE don’t you understand?!’

“Well, even though that’s what the Law said, many men in my day took more than one wife, anyway. And I can tell you that while it may be possible for two to be united into one, it’s not possible for three to be united into one!

“But it got worse. It wasn’t too long before Peninnah had a son . . . and then a daughter . . . and then another son; but even though Elkanah had married me first, God had given me no children. I was jealous of Peninnah because of her children, even though I knew in my heart that Elkanah loved me best. Peninnah knew that I was his favorite, too, and she got back at me by making fun of my barrenness. Time after time after time, Peninnah’s taunting reduced me to angry and bitter tears.

“The customs of our time allowed a man to divorce his wife if she didn’t produce sons for him—this was thousands of years before you learned how such things actually work—and a woman who produced no children at all was in great danger of being put out. Elkanah really did love me, though, and he tried to be understanding: ‘What’s the matter, Hannah?’ he would ask. ‘Why won’t you eat? Why be so sad just because you have no children? You have

me— isn't that better than having ten sons?' I was certainly glad that Elkanah loved me . . . but my heart and my arms longed for little ones!

"Once a year, Elkanah took the whole family to the Tabernacle at Shiloh to offer sacrifices to God. When we went to Shiloh in the sixth year of our marriage, I left camp after supper one night and went over to the Tabernacle to pray to the LORD. Peninnah had been up to her mean ways again, and my heart was in unspeakable anguish. I cried bitterly as I prayed, 'O LORD Almighty, if you will look down upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the LORD, his hair will never be cut.'

"I had seen Eli sitting at the entrance of the Tabernacle as I came in, but I was so upset that I didn't pay much attention to him during my prayer. As I prayed and cried and cried and prayed, I formed words with my mouth but didn't say anything out loud. Eli watched me for a while and decided that I must be drunk. He came over and spoke harshly to me: "Must you come here drunk? Throw away your wine!"

"Oh no, sir!" I replied. 'I'm not drunk! But I am very sad, and I was pouring out my heart to the LORD. Please don't think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow.'

"In that case,' he said, 'cheer up! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him!'

"I felt in my heart that the Priest's words were the very words of God in answer to my prayer, and I went back to our camp with a happy heart. And it wasn't too long after we got home to Ramah that I discovered that I was pregnant! Pregnant women frequently 'glow' in their joy, but I doubt that any woman ever glowed more than I did! And can you imagine my joy when I discovered that God had given me a son?! I named him 'Samuel,' which means 'heard by God.'

"I knew, of course, that I had promised Samuel back to God, but I couldn't take him back to the Tabernacle until he was weaned, which would be nearly three years. Samuel and I grew very, very close, and I was SO happy!

“Samuel was almost four when the next journey to Shiloh came after his weaning. I knew I had to keep my promise to God, but packing for that trip was SO hard! And little Samuel had no way of understanding what was happening. As bad as I felt for myself, I felt even worse for him.

“After our sacrifice, Elkanah and I took little Samuel to Eli. ‘Sir, do you remember me?’ I asked. ‘I am the woman who stood here several years ago praying to the LORD. I asked the LORD to give me this child, and he has given me my request. Now I am giving him to the LORD, and he will belong to the LORD his whole life.’ And then I prayed to God, ‘My heart rejoices in the LORD! Oh, how the LORD has blessed me! Now I have an answer for my enemies, as I delight in your deliverance. No one is holy like the LORD! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God!’

“You have a praise song today that comes from my prayer. It uses my words, “there is no Rock like our God;³ and there’s another prayer in the Bible that is much like my prayer. It’s sometimes called the Magnificat, and it’s the prayer that Mary the mother of Jesus prayed to thank God for her Very Special Son (Luke 1:46-55).

“There’s no way to tell you how hard it was to return home to Ramah without Samuel. I cried for weeks, and I’m sure Samuel did, too. But a promise is a promise. My little boy became the LORD’s helper even as he helped Eli the priest, and God was gracious to me and gave me three more sons and two daughters!

“Every year when we went to Shiloh for sacrifice, I made a special coat for Samuel. Although those coats weren’t ‘coats of many colors’ like the coat our ancestor Jacob made for his son, Joseph, they were coats filled with just as much love (Genesis 37:3).

“Time went by, as time will do, and my Samuel served the LORD by assisting Eli. Now in those days messages from the LORD were very rare, and visions were quite uncommon.

³ The song is not particularly well known, but you can hear it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwivjK6jZGk>

One night Eli, who was almost blind by now, had gone to bed. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the Tabernacle near the Ark of God. Suddenly the LORD called out, "Samuel!"

"Yes?" Samuel replied. "What is it?" He got up and ran to Eli. "Here I am. Did you call me?"

"I didn't call you," Eli replied. "Go back to bed." So he did.

Then the LORD called out again, "Samuel!" Again Samuel got up and went to Eli.

"Here I am. Did you call me?"

"I didn't call you, my son," Eli said. "Go back to bed."

Samuel did not yet know the LORD because he had never had a message from the LORD before. So the LORD called a third time, and once more Samuel got up and went to Eli. "Here I am. Did you call me?"

Then Eli realized it was the LORD who was calling the boy. So he said to Samuel, "Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, 'Speak, LORD, your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went back to bed.

And the LORD came and called as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel replied, "Speak, LORD, your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:1-10).

"That remarkable experience marked the beginning of Samuel's call from God to become the last of the Judges who called Israel back to God. You may know that many things in our ancestor Joseph's life foreshadowed what God would do through Messiah Jesus, and there were many parallels between my Samuel and Jesus as well. Listen to this description of my Samuel in those early days: 'As young Samuel grew taller, he also continued to gain favor with the LORD and with the people' (1 Samuel 2:26); and now this: "So Jesus grew both in height and in wisdom, and he was loved by God and by all who knew him" (Luke 2:52). It's almost the same statement!

"God blessed me so wonderfully by allowing me to be Samuel's mother! When he became a man, my Samuel followed Eli as Judge of Israel (1 Samuel 7:2-6). The LORD was with him, and everything [he] said was wise and helpful. All the people of Israel from one end of the land to the other knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD. The LORD continued

to appear at Shiloh and gave messages to Samuel there at the Tabernacle. And Samuel's words went out to all the people of Israel' (1 Samuel 3:19-21).

Samuel called our people back to righteous living, and God used him to anoint Israel's first king, Saul, and her greatest king, David, in whose line Messiah Jesus would eventually be born. There are even two books in the Bible named for my boy!

"Well, I really must bring this to a close, because I know you can't talk to your people all day. Here are seven things I want you and your people to remember from the story of my life:

1. There are seasons of barrenness in most of our lives when it seems as though nothing is happening and our lives are useless and ineffective. I'm writing to tell you to trust God's timing in your life. God uses present circumstances to prepare your character for what he wants to do through you in the future. Stressing about those circumstances hinders God's ability to use them in your life. Trust Him.
2. The practice of favoritism in families, whether it has to do with wives, with children, or with anything else, is always—always—destructive.
3. Eli scolded his wicked sons, but he didn't do anything about what they were doing (1 Samuel 2:22-25). Are there situations in your life, your family, or your work that you allow to continue even though you know they are wrong? What does God want you to do?
4. When you take a burden to the LORD, as I did at the Tabernacle, don't take it home with you again. Trust God's promises to you. Our God is trustworthy! (1 Samuel 1:18).
5. If you make a promise to God, be careful to keep that promise. The Bible says "it is not a sin to refrain from making a vow. But once you have voluntarily made a vow, be careful to do as you have said, for you have made a vow to the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 23:22). King David even told us to "keep an oath even when it hurts. Do not change your mind" (Psalm 15:4).

6. My friends, if your children or your grandchildren are going to be able to become what God intends for them to become, you're going to have to release them into God's care and guidance, even if that takes them away from you, as it did my little Samuel. God loves them more than you do, and your possessive love can get in God's way. Trust Him.
7. Our God is indeed a Rock. Trust Him!

Do you hear the refrain in these seven things?

Trust God! Our God is trustworthy! Build your life on the Rock!

Hannah