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Hannah’s prayer

First Samuel 1: 9-11

Hannah’s prayer DIG: How many names does God have? What are the six things we should remember about Hannah’s prayer? Why did Hannah offer her first child to God? What was her motive? What did Hannah intend for her son by her vow? What was different about her vow? How was Hannah a good example of dealing with suffering and pain?

REFLECT: When in trouble, pray. Can you discern the purpose for your suffering? If not, pray and ask God to reveal it to you. Difficult situations will bring us close to our Creator. How have you been “set apart” for service to the Lord? How does Hannah’s prayer help us when we pray? How was Hannah a humble servant? How can you emulate that attitude?

ADONAI is a God who hears.

God only has one name, **YHVH**, but many attributes. And one of the ways in which the Bible teaches us about **God** is through the various attributes given to **Him** in the TaNaKh. The most basic attribute for **God** is **Elohim**, or **El** in its shortened form, which refers to **God** as *the great Creator*. When **God** looked with pity on **Hagar**, Sarah’s slave girl and the mother of **Abraham’s** son Ishmael, **she** named **Him El-Roi**, a *God of seeing* (**Genesis 16:13**). After **God** provided a ram as an offering in the place of **his son Isaac**, **Abraham** named that place, **ADONAI Yir’eh**, or **The LORD Will Provide** (**22:14a**). Yet, one of the most majestic attributes of **God** makes its first appearance in the story of **Hannah** and the birth of **Samuel**. We read in **First Samuel 1:3** that **Elkanah** sacrificed to **ADONAI-Tzva’ot**, or **the LORD of heaven’s** angelic **armies** and describes **His** omnipotent power (see **Joshua 5:13-15; Second Kings 19:31; Psalm 24:10; Second Corinthians 6:18**). And given **her** dire predicament, **ADONAI-Tzva’ot** was exactly the **God** **she** needed.



When we left **Hannah** (to see link click [Ai - The Barren Wife](#)), **she** was weeping in bitterness at **the Tabernacle** because of **her** inability to bear a son and because of the vicious mocking of **her** rival co-wife, **Peninnah**. **Her husband** tried to comfort **her**, but came up woefully short (**1:8**). But **after Elkanah, Pinannah and her children had finished eating, Hannah got up** and went to **the House of God**. Now **'Eli the priest was sitting on his seat of honor** (Hebrew: *kisseh*, meaning *his throne, or the place where a judge would sit*) **by the doorpost of the Tabernacle of ADONAI** (see [Ae - The Tabernacle at Shiloh](#)). However, **Hannah** was not seeking **'Eli, she was seeking ADONAI in prayer**.¹⁹ Despite being in **deep depression, she prayed to ADONAI and cried out in anguish (1:9-10)**. It was as if **YHVH** was waiting for **her** to **pray**. **She prayed, and God** heard. Out of the 37 verses about **Hannah** in the Bible, 23 describe **her** in **prayer**. In his commentary on **First Samuel**, Richard Phillips reminds us that there are **six things we need to remember about Hannah's prayer**.

First, Hannah's prayer is a model for us, starting with the simple fact that **she turned to God in her time of need**. This may seem surprising, given that it was **ADONAI** who had **closed her womb**, as **Hannah** knew full well. Many people will turn away from **God** when feeling **His** hand of affliction, or else simply resign themselves to their fate. Believers sometimes advise friends in such a situation simply to move on and give thanks to **God** for the trial. We should be thankful to **God** for everything, even trials, but that does not mean we would be resigned to our situation! **Yeshua's** half-brother **James** gives better advice: **Is anyone of you suffering? Let him pray (James 5:13)**. Of all the things **Hannah** might have done - becoming angry or bitter, fretting in tears, or becoming angry at **ADONAI** -

she did the very best thing. **She** simply went to **the LORD** in **prayer** for **her** need.

Second, having turned to **God** in **prayer**, **Hannah prayed knowing ADONAI's character**. Then she took a **vow** (see the commentary on [Numbers Fn - The Vows of a Married Woman](#)), saying: **O ADONAI-Tzva'ot (1:11a)**. Hannah honored **the LORD** by ascribing to **Him** all the power **she** needed, the might and power of **God's** heavenly army of angels. Then **she** asked **Ha'Shem** to **look upon Your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget Your servant but will give Your servant a son (1:11b)**. This was not a random request, but rather one that mirrors what **she** had learned of **YHVH** through the greatest of **His** saving deeds up to that time: **the Exodus**. Whether or not **Hannah** had access to the writings of **Moshe**, **she** knew the story well enough. **Ha'Shem** told **Moses**, "**I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings**" (**Exodus 3:7 and 4:31; Deuteronomy 26:7**). This showed **God's** deliverance in **the Exodus** was an answer to **prayer**. Now, on a new day of **Isra'el's** need, and of **her** own, **Hannah** called out to **the LORD** in a **prayer** of faith. **Hannah** begged **ADONAI** to do for **her** what **He** had done for **Isra'el** in the days of **Moshe**; **she** was asking **God** to do what **God** had shown to be **His** characteristic behavior toward **His** people.²⁰

Third, **Hannah prayed knowing who she was**. **She** referred to **herself** as **God's** humble **servant (1:11b)**. **She** didn't demand that **YHVH** do anything, nor was there any evidence that **she** complained about **her** sorrowful state of affairs in life. **Hannah** didn't demand **her** rights, but merely came with a humble request. Moreover, **she** knew what kind of a world **she** lived in. **She** knew it wasn't heaven, but a fallen, sinful place in which everyone would have their own share of personal imperfections and afflictions. It is also important to notice that **Hannah** didn't ask **God** to take revenge on **Peninnah**. **She** knew that **she** was coming to **God** for mercy, and it would be poor practice to ask **Ha'Shem's** justice towards others while seeking mercy for **herself**. **Hannah** identified **herself** as a humble **servant** of **the LORD** and brought **her** requests to **Him** in humble faith.

Fourth, **Hannah knew what she wanted and was not afraid to ask for it**. It is true that our **prayers** should consist of more than a list of things we want to receive from **God**. We need to worship **YHVH** in **prayer**, to give thanks for our many blessings, and to confess our sins to **Him**. Those things honor our heavenly **Father** when we do so. Consequently, we need to come to **God** knowing what we are asking, and then asking for it humbly and clearly. **James** states a principle that,

sadly, explains so much of our spiritual poverty: **You do not have, because you do not ask (James 4:2)**. Notice **Hannah’s prayer** did not rely on any ritual formula or words, or any technique of **prayer**. **She** simply knew **the Lord**, believed in **His** promise to care for **His people**, and **prayed** to **Him** for what **she** needed. This is the benefit of knowing **ADONAI-Tzva’ot**, including **His** attributes, **His** promises, and **His** saving deeds. **Hannah** was able to **pray** confidently, because **she** knew **the God** to whom **she** **prayed**.

Fifth, Hannah prayed with confidence because she prayed according to God’s will. **Hannah** knew **her** motives were aligned with **God’s** will. **James** chides us not only for not asking in **prayers**, but also for having the wrong motives when we do ask: **And even when you ask, you don’t receive because your motives are all wrong, you only want what gives you pleasure (James 4:3)**. So, **Hannah** **prayed** with an eye on **God’s** will.

This was especially true when **Hannah** made **her vow**. **She** said: **O ADONAI-Tzva’ot, if You will look upon Your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget Your servant but will give Your servant a son, then I will give him to ADONAI for as long as he lives; and no razor will ever be used on his head (1:11)**. In other words, **she** took **the Nazarite vow** for **her** future **son** (see **Numbers Ba - The Nazirite Vow**). This **vow** was unusual in two ways. First, a person normally took **a Nazarite vow** on oneself, not as a proxy for someone else. And secondly, **the Nazarite vow** was typically limited to a certain period of time. But here, **Hannah** pledged **her** future **son** was to be **a Nazirite for life**. Of course, the most famous **Nazirite** was **Samson** (see the commentary on **Judges Bt - The Twelfth Cycle: Samson**), the mighty warrior who slew so many Philistines and was the last judge of **Isra’el** before **Samuel**.²¹ But to this simple country **woman**, desperate for **a son**, it seemed to **her** like the appropriate way of demonstrating **her** gratitude.²²

Was **Hannah** trying to bargain with **God**? Was **she** saying, “**God**, you give me this and I will give you that?” If so, then **Hannah** wasn’t **praying** in **God’s** will. That is the way the pagans approach their gods, seeking to appease them with offers and bribes. But **Hannah’s prayer** was nothing of the sort. Yes, **she** wanted to have **a child**. But beyond that desire, the purposes of **ADONAI** filled **her** soul; this put **her** own desires subordinate to anything **she** was personally feeling. If **the LORD** should give **her a son**, **he** wouldn’t be **hers**, but **God’s**!²³

We should consider the sacrifice involved in **Hannah’s vow**. Bearing **a son** would

have removed **her** disgrace and perhaps ended **her** rival’s persecution, but giving up **her son** was quite another matter. Perhaps it would have been easier for **her** to go on living in bitterness than to have **a son** for only three years (the normal length of weaning) and have to give **him** up forever. I wonder if **God** had given **Hannah** an inner conviction that **her son** would play an important part in the future of the nation.²⁴ **She** was also forfeiting the status that **a son** would bring **her** in society. So **her prayer** was no bargain in which **she** offered something to **God** in return for what **she** wanted. Rather, what **she** wanted was to offer **her son** to **the LORD**. **She** wanted to play **her** role in **God’s** plan of salvation, and **she** was zealous to play a most meaningful role: to bear **a** lifelong **Nazirite** who would faithfully serve **ADONAI**. In this, **she** set an example for believing parents today in that our main desire for our children should be that they would be faithfully committed to **the Lord** and useful to **His** Kingdom.

The sixth and last thing to note about Hannah’s prayer is that she frequently opened her heart to ADONAI. As **she** explained to ‘Eli, **“I have been pouring out my soul before ADONAI” (1:15).** If we ever think that the righteous of the TaNaKh couldn’t personally communicate with **YHVH**, we should remember **Hannah’s prayer**. **She** didn’t come with a formula to manipulate **the LORD** or an offer to bribe **Ha’Shem**, but with a mind that knew **God** and a heart that **poured out** in pain and godly desire. For us, on the one hand, we need to realize that emotional passion does not make our prayers any better or more effective, as if we have to push our hearts onto our heavenly **Father**. **Yeshua** taught: **When you pray, do not keep on babbling like the pagans do, for they think they will be heard because of their many words (Mt 6:7).** On the other hand, passions that are in our hearts – our frustration, our grief, even our doubt and anger – can, and should be brought to **God** in **prayer**. With such anguish in **her** heart, **Hannah prayed** long and hard for the help of **God**. As **David** said of **his** many **prayers**, **“I pour out my complaints before Him and tell Him all my troubles (Psalm 142:2).**²⁵

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, praise **You** and thank **You** that **You** are a wonderful and loving **Father** who enjoys a relationship of love with me, including time spent talking and listening to each other. **You** are always there when I need to speak to **You**. Sometimes I just want to walk with **You** holding **Your** hand and feeling **Your** closeness. Occasionally there are problems that need to be laid at **Your** feet. Every time I pray it holds an opportunity to praise and to thank **You** for even in trials, **Your Sovereign** hand is working to bring good in my life (**First Peter 1:6-7**).*



When David was fleeing for his life he prayed often, trusting in **God** to save him. **But know that ADONAI has set apart the godly for His own. ADONAI will hear when I call to Him... Offer righteous sacrifices and put your trust in Adonai. (Psalms 4:3 and 5). Trust in Him at all times, you people. Pour out your heart in His presence. God is our refuge. Selah (Psalms 62:8).** Thank **You** for never being too busy for me. In **Yeshua's** holy **Name** and the power of **His** Resurrection. Amen