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Hannah and ‘Eli
First Samuel 1: 12-18

Hannah and ‘Eli DIG: What is the irony in ‘Eli’s accusation? Why did ‘Eli think Hannah was drunk? What does this reveal about ‘Eli’s character? About Hannah’s grief? Why does Hannah’s sadness disappear so quickly? How did ‘Eli illustrate Isra’el’s problems? How was Hannah like the faithful Abraham?

REFLECT: How can you recognize a strong leader? How do you deal with a weak leader? Hannah was criticized as she poured out her heart to ADONAI. Have you ever been criticized or misunderstood when giving your very best to the Lord? How do you handle your sorrows and disappointments?

Instead of drowning her troubles with strong drink,
Hannah bathed her sorrows in prayerful tears.



She prayed for a long time before ADONAI, with no hesitation in presenting

her desperate situation to **the LORD**. But **she** was so distraught that **she** seemed not to have noticed the presence of ‘**Eli** who **was watching her mouth** because **prayer** in the ancient world was almost always audible **(1:12).** All the while that **Hannah prayed**, **the high priest** of **Isra’el** sat in **his** chair, watching. Here is the kind of ironic role-reversal so common in Scripture. We would expect **‘Eli**, a man in the highest spiritual position of **ADONAI’s** holy nation, to be the upholder of true spiritually and the one who would break through to **God’s** grace. Yet **he** was virtually the one furthest from these things. Meanwhile, the **humble** wife of a country Levite – one who was treated by others as being cursed by **God** because of **her** barren womb, a woman as socially scorned as could be imagined in that day – was the one whose heart is close to **YHVH**. **Hannah**, not **the high priest**, embodied the spiritual principle: **God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (First Peter 5:5).**[26]

‘Eli displayed **his** lack of spiritual discernment in **his** rebuke to **Hannah** as **she prayed**. **Hannah was speaking in her heart – her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard – so ‘Eli thought she was drunk. ‘Eli,** thinking that **she** was **drunk, said to her, “How long are you going to stay drunk?** as many people did use the feasts as an excuse to **drink** to excess. So **he** said: **Stop drinking your wine” (1:13-14)!** When you give your best to **the Lord**, it’s not unusual to be criticized by people who ought to encourage you. **Moses** was criticized by **his** brother and sister **(Numbers 12:1-16)**, **David** by **his** wife **(Second Samuel 6:12-23)**, and **Mary** of Bethany by an apostle **(John 12:1-8)**, yet all were commended by **the LORD**. In the first four chapters of **First Samuel**, **‘Eli** comes across as a poor example of the righteous of the TaNaKh, let alone **a high priest**. **He** was probably self-indulgent **(4:18)** and definitely tolerant of the sins of **his** two sons **(2:22-36)**.[27] If **Isra’el** had a leader who couldn’t tell the difference between a godly woman’s heartfelt **prayer** and drunken rumbling, no wonder **Isra’el** had a leadership crisis![28]

But Hannah defended **herself, answering, “No, my lord, I am a deeply troubled woman. I have not drunk either wine or other strong liquor; rather, I’ve been pouring out my soul before ADONAI. She** was actually correcting **the high priest** of **Isra’el**. In **1:9**, **‘Eli** was **sitting on** *the kisseh*, *the judgment seat,* being judged himself by a godly woman! Our God surely does have a sense of humor. **Hannah** continued: **Don’t think of your servant as a worthless woman; because I have been speaking from the depth of my distress and anger” (1:15-16).** In addition to explaining **Hannah’s** intense,

emotional behavior, **her** words make it clear that there were other **women** who deserved **the high priest’s** rebuke. **Her** statement that **she** was not some kind of **worthless** (Hebrew: *beliyya’al*) **woman** is literally referring to *a daughter of Belial*, that is, *a woman of destructiveness*. These are the same words that **the Ruach Ha’Kodesh** uses in **2:12** where we read that **the sons of ‘Eli were worthless** (Hebrew: *beliyya’al*) **men who didn’t know YHVH.** In fact, **Paul** uses the same word in **Second Corinthians** when **he** says: **What harmony can there be between the Messiah and Belial** (see **Second Corinthians, to see link click Bi – Do Not be Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers**)**?**[29] Instead, **her** apparent murmuring was a **prayer** of great intensity born of a struggling soul. The other kind of **woman** may have foolishly drowned **her** sorrows with strong drink, but **Hannah** bathed **hers** in **prayerful** tears.[30]

We don’t read that **‘Eli** apologized to **Hannah**, but once **he** saw the genuineness of **her** need and the sincerity of **her** faith, **he** did the best to reassure **her**. **Then ‘Eli declared, “Go in peace. May the God of Isra’el grant what you have asked of Him” (1:17).** This was **his** acceptance of **her** explanation and, though the recorded conversation does not refer to the content of **her prayer**, **‘Eli** added **his** priestly **prayer** for its fulfillment. This is the only place in the TaNaKh where **a priest** blesses an individual.

While this was probably only a good will gesture on **‘Eli’s** part; something like, “**God** bless you,” **Hannah** took it quite seriously. **She replied, “May your servant find favor in your sight.” So the woman went on her way, and she ate,** breaking **her** self-imposed fast**, and her face was no longer sad (1:18).** There is a visible contrast between the **Hannah**, who, distraught and unable to eat, went to **pray**, and the **Hannah** who returned to join **her** husband and the family. Though outwardly, **her** circumstances had not changed, **she** was now joyous and resolute, full of assurance that **her prayer** would be answered.[31] **She** was like **Abraham**, who believed the promise of **God** that **he** would receive **a son**.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for delighting in hearing and answering my prayers. **Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! (Psalm 37:4-7).***

*Thank **You** that your steadfast love surrounds all that **You** do. **Your** love is always ready to listen and to encourage me **(Psalm 26:7-8). Your love, ADONAI, is in the heavens, Your faithfulness up to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God. Your judgments are like the great deep. You preserve man and beast, ADONAI. How precious is Your love, O God! The children of men find refuge in the shadow of Your wings (Psalm 36:5-7).** In **Messiah Yeshua’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*