



## HANNAH'S STORY | 1 SAMUEL 1, 2:1-21

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*Before reading this story, read the Scripture passage. Keep in mind that this is a loose retelling and liberties have been taken to capture our imaginations and help us understand the context of the story and the power of the gospel.*

As I wait patiently outside of the temple in Shiloh for my husband to make a sacrifice, I am flooded with emotions—feelings that are hard to process because they are a culmination of disappointment, grief, sorrow, but hope at the same time. I look at the tabernacle, thinking that this day should be a joyful celebration—one where the opportunity to make a fellowship offering honoring the Lord and thanking him for his mercies should be something I look forward to doing with my husband. Except this day isn't joyful. Over time, it has become a painful reminder of my own disappointment and shame. Like clockwork, every time we are required to go to the tabernacle, I am reminded that I am not enough.

I wait outside of the tabernacle near my husband's second wife, Peninniah, and her two children who laugh and run around while Peninniah looks on with pride and adoration. I study their interactions with longing. One of the children looks over to me and smiles. It's as if the child knows I am grieving. Grieving a loss of something I have never had but have desired for so long. I smile back at the child. In that moment, I feel an immense void so strong that I can barely breathe. I quickly turn my head away so Peninniah can't see the tears fall down my face.

It is all my fault that my husband, Elkinah, had to take another wife. We learned long ago that I couldn't have any children. We knew we needed to carry on the line of Elkinah's family, so he married Peninniah. As I replay all of this in my head, I let out a deep breath as the tears continue to roll down my cheek. "What is wrong with me? Why am I broken? Why can this woman have children and I can't?"

Coming out of my daze, I see Elkinah walking out from the temple to give Peninniah and their children their portion of meat. As I watch them interact, Peninniah looks over at me with a sly smirk on her face—one that says "I am capable and you are not." Another blow to the gut where I feel like I am not enough.

Elkinah then walks up to me, and he can see the grief on my face. He gives me a small smile as he hands me a double portion of that meat, perhaps hoping it will help my pain. I love my husband dearly and appreciate his gesture of giving me an extra gift, especially on the day we visit the tabernacle. I recognize the simple gesture as God's way of meeting me in my shame and sadness at that moment. I feel a wave of comfort come over me in the pain of that moment.

Year after year, it all became such a cycle of shame. I feel exhausted from the waiting, hurt, and weariness of desiring children. I have spent so many years yearning for a child, doing everything I can to make it happen. Elkinah sees the despair in my eyes. Kneeling beside me, he asks, "Why are you crying Hannah?" He just doesn't understand the grief I am experiencing and he never will. I feel so alone and defeated. I know I have full faith in the Lord and want to trust him, but I cannot escape the pain.

The only thing I can do is pray, so I make my way to the entrance of the temple, the closest I can get to the holy place, to God. People are all around the entrance of the cloth tent, men traveling in and out while others stand around outside. I lower myself to the dusty ground onto my knees, not caring who sees me. "O Lord of Heaven's Armies, if you will look 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."

Suddenly, I hear someone shouting at me. It is Eli the priest, "Must you come here drunk?" he demands. "Throw away your wine!" I open my tearful eyes and respectfully say, "Oh no, sir! I haven't been drinking wine or anything

stronger, But I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the Lord. Don't think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow." I bow my head and wait for Eli's reply. His voice softens. "In that case, go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him." A wave of relief washes over me, "Oh, thank you sir!" The Lord surely met me in that moment. Whether he gives me a child or not, I can put my trust and hope in him.

As I walk back to where Elkanah is eating, I feel an immense peace flood my soul. I look up at the sky, take a deep breath, and experience a calmness that I haven't felt in years. God met me in my deepest despair and has given me so much hope when I needed it most. I know without a doubt that approaching the throne of God in my darkest moment has helped me find peace in my grief. At that moment, I'm not angry anymore with Penninah for the way she treats me. I feel no resentment towards Elkinah for not understanding how I was feeling. I lay everything down at the feet of my Father. I am cherished and loved by him. He knows what is best for my life. I made the choice to surrender that all to him today, and I feel free to live my life without putting my hope in the promise of a child but in the hope of who God says he is. As we begin our trip home, I have a new joy and hope for what's to come.