

Hannah, - a woman at prayer (1 Sam. 1:1-20)

Contained in the Bible are accounts of God's dealings with men and women. Far from sitting in an illustrious Heaven, detached from His creation, He is intricately involved in its affairs.

One of the issues we often have to deal with though is the question ... Where is God when I need Him? Indeed, it was how Job felt, **Job 23:8** Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: **9** On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him ...

Over 3,000 years old, a woman knelt at an altar with the heaviest burden. ... Before we consider her, let's briefly look at her background.

She lived during the twilight years of the period of the Judges. The Judges were men (and a woman, - Deborah) God used to rule His people. God was the King of Israel, for Israel was a theocracy This was a further feature which set them apart from the other nations for the Hebrews did not have a king like their neighbours.

During the times of Hannah, a man called Tola of the tribe of Issachar was the Judge. It was during a time of relative peace (Jdgs. 10:1). Her husband was Elkanah, a Levite, but unfortunately he was also the husband of another woman for he had two wives, - Hannah (who was childless) and Peninnah (who had many children).

Elkanah was a good man who loved God and was a dutiful husband and father. He *was*, however, a polygamist and that proved to be the source of his family problems ... but it indicates the spiritual decadence in the land that a 'religious' *leader*, - a Levite, - was 'content and happy' to flaunt and ignore God's clear commandment in Gen. 2:24 and that the people saw no problems with it! Gen. 2:24, of course, is God's only definition for marriage, **Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.**, - one man and one woman. However, Elkanah had two wives.

Yet, even out of disobedience, God was preparing to bring about a mighty work in the land. Often God works *in spite of* disobedience and He 'turns it round' for His purposes ... and this is where He started, in the home of Hannah. ... We shall consider it like this ... **Hannah's problem (vv.1-8), Hannah's prayer (vv. 9-16), Hannah's peace (vv.17-20).**

HANNAH'S PROBLEM (VV.1-8)

Hannah's first problem was that her husband had married another woman, - Hannah was probably the first wife since she is mentioned before Penninah. So, this problem was not of Hannah's making, - it was because of Elkanah's disobedience to God's Word.

The dilemma the Holy Spirit highlights, however, is one of childlessness, - Hannah could not have children, and in a day when bearing children meant so much this was a tremendous burden for her to carry. Indeed, I wonder if it had often crossed her mind that the reason her husband had married another woman was because she could not give him children ... and she saw herself as a 'failure'. ... It could not have done her confidence any good! ... And to make matters worse the children of Penninah were up and running around and Penninah was making Hannah's life a misery with her constant taunts, ⁶ *And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb.*

The worst time of the year came when they all made their annual family trip to worship at the tabernacle at Shiloh, - Penninah with all her children ... and Hannah! ... With Peninnah's constant and hurtful gibes, the whole experience ripped at Hannah's heart. Yes, and when Elkanah showed it was obvious he loved Hannah more than he loved Penninah, Penninah became even more jealous and when they went up to the house of the LORD, Penninah kept on provoking her ... and it was breaking Hannah's heart, ⁷ *And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat.*

Now, Elkanah did not know what to do ... He did not know how to cope with his two women, his two wives. Of course, the problem was his fault for he should not have *had* two wives ... but, nevertheless, he tried to offer Hannah sympathy, ⁸ *Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? ... Should he not have known, without having to ask?! ... and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons? ...* He would have been better saying nothing, because Hannah was so unhappy, she kept quiet.

Because he had compromised his relationship with Hannah by marrying this other woman he was totally unable to cope with the problem he had landed Hannah with. ... ⁹ *So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they*

had drunk. ... She got away out of it ... away from Elkanah, and Penninah. ... And she went to the Lord.

Her problem was not of her own making, - it was something which came upon her over which she had no control. It was Elkanah who was at fault for marrying a second wife, and it was the second wife's fault for agreeing to be married. ... Hannah was truly the innocent party. ... **Hannah's problem.**

HANNAH'S PRAYER (VV. 9-16)

Here we find a beautiful truth upon which every true child of God must rely; it is simply this, *the Sovereignty of God*. ... When the whole world around seems to be falling apart, God continues to be in control ... When you see nothing but darkness, and hear nothing but thunderous noises, God remains your Saviour, and He will never allow anything to overwhelm you, or tear you away from His arms, **I Cor. 10:13** God is faithful, who will not suffer [*allow*] you to be tempted [*tested*] above that ye are able; but will with the temptation [*testing*] also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

Hannah was a beautiful woman of character who possessed a thorough grasp of the sovereignty of God in her life for when **I Sam. 1:10** she was in bitterness of soul, [*she*] prayed unto the Lord ... Her heart was still breaking, the tears were still flowing for she wept sore, but she prayed unto the LORD because the Lord was her hope. ... There was no good turning to Elkanah, nor to Penninah, nor Eli, Hophni or Phineas ... all 'normal' channels yielded no satisfaction. In her despair, she turned she turned to the Lord.

Look at how she prayed, **11 O LORD** of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. ... She acknowledged it was God's will she was childless and it was to Him she must approach. ... Some people would tell you, "There it is, accept it! Move on, leave it! It's just the way it has to be" ... But what would have happened if Hannah had not persisted in prayer? ... Samuel would not have been born ... and how *that* would have affected the history of Israel!

Her barrenness cast her on the Lord more and more as the only One Who had the power to correct the processes in her womb and give her a child! Only the Lord could do it. ... And she 'prayed her heart out' knowing God could answer, and give her a son.

Let's look a little deeper ... She was being *crushed* by Penninah's taunts, but she took them without lashing back ... and, also, when she prayed to the Lord she didn't call down judgement on Penninah, but she made a personal plea for the Lord to intervene and heal her from her infertility. ... It was simply between her and the Lord.

There was no doubting, and no bitterness. She didn't blame anyone, - least of all, the Lord. She didn't cry, "Lord, why did you let this happen to me?" Instead, she simply poured out her soul to God in prayer.

How was she able to do that? Hannah, like all who truly love the Lord, knew Him and she knew her own heart; she knew that the Lord's purpose for her was ultimately for her good and she could bring her troubles to Him for His help and healing.

Indeed, this is the story of an ordinary young woman who showed *exemplary Godliness* and also *whole-hearted commitment* as we see in her promise to dedicate her son to the service in God's house (v.11). "God, You give me a son and I shall give him back to You".

She wasn't bargaining with the Lord ... far from it! Through her prayer you can see the state of her heart and how it is seeking after God and His glory. Something she wanted so much ... she was so willing to return to the Lord. Here He was bringing this childless woman to His altar as the next link in His plan of redemption for His people in Israel.

Samuel was being promised to continue in 'the career' of his Levite father ... but even more than that, - and even more than just taking on an ordinary Nazarite identity (you can read more about this Nazarite vow in Lev. 6:1-21), - Hannah, - in her prayer, - was trusting God that He would take this son who had yet to be born and that He would use him throughout the whole of his life to His Glory, and in service to the nation of Israel. ... *Such a powerful personal prayer from this mother-to-be!* ... It wasn't a fancy articulate prayer ... it was simply the prayer of a woman serious for help from God. ... Her prayer to the Lord of Hosts (v.11) was a *simple* prayer from a *sorrowing* woman to a *Sovereign* God.

Hannah's problem, Hannah's prayer ...

HANNAH'S PEACE (VV.17-20)

The blessing from Eli, - **17** *Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him,* - began the coming of the peace of God into her soul. [Incidentally, this is the only instance in Scripture of a priest blessing an individual.] ... When the prayer was released from her heart she left it with the Lord ... just as the chorus says,

*Leave it there, leave it there,
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.
If you trust and never doubt, He will surely bring you out.
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.*

She turned, and looked at Eli, and she uttered the formal expression as others would have spoken to a priest, **18** *Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight.* ... But there was more in it than just an empty salutation; she was believing it's all up to God now ... she had handed her predicament over to Him.

Then she returned home, ... back to Elkanah and Penninah **18** *So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.* It's beautiful, isn't it! Peninah would have kept on at her nasty comments and jibes, but Hannah had left her problem with the Lord.

Her son hadn't yet even been conceived, far less born but God had given her the assurance He had heard her prayer. ... Indeed, our God hears the prayers of His people. ... And Hannah's life was changed forever. Israel's future was intact for her son would become a pivotal character in its story. God's plan moved forward. The whole family went back home and, in due course, Hannah gave birth to a son, and she **20** *called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD.*

Here is the birth of a son and it all focuses upon the Lord. He receives the honour, and the glory is His for He had taken a childless woman and made her into a happy mother. ... Look at how beautifully the Holy Spirit puts it, **v.19** *the LORD remembered her.* The Lord *remembered* Hannah ... and Hannah *forgot* the sorrow which blighted her earlier life.

The Lord never forgets His believing people. But what *would* have happened if Hannah hadn't come to Him the way she did? She would have ended up an old, old woman, - away before her time, - and Penninah would have kept on goading her and she would have gone childless to the grave. ... But instead Hannah cast her cares upon the Lord and He sustained her ... never to let the righteous fall (cf. Ps. 55:22).

CONCLUSION

Perhaps there is something that is casting its shadow over your life. You can't understand why God has allowed it. ... Well, look again at this woman's example, - what she did and how she did it! **Her problem ... Her prayer ... Her peace.** ... It is as the chorus describes, ...

All your anxiety, all your care,
Bring to the mercy seat, leave it there;
Never a burden He cannot bear,
Never a Friend like Jesus.