

2026 TALK, 18.1.26, 1 SAMUEL 1&2 (VARIOUS)

THE HOLY SPIRIT & THE WOMEN OF THE O.T. – (2) HANNAH

HANNAH'S 'MISERY', WAITING ON THE LORD

Let me begin by telling you a story about another woman. A story I have just read in this Lent book, 'The Whole Easter Story – why the cross is good news for all creation'. This book opens wonderfully, with a testimony of how someone came to faith in Jesus. (READ p.19 & EXPLAIN 'A ROCHA').

Like the story of Federica, Hannah's story is so personal & profound. There's part of me that hesitates, as a man, to preach on Hannah. Her experience of anguish about being childless. This is holy ground... The writer of this book has no hesitation about beginning with Hannah's story. He could have glossed over her story in a sentence or two. Instead, he chooses to go into great detail about Hannah's trouble. And he follows a pattern we see with the stories of Miriam & Deborah (and later Mary in the NT) of women of faith, who struggle in prayer & overcome. And **then** proclaim their faith in songs of victory.

So Samuel, a Book about Israel's most memorable leader in its early period of inhabiting the promised land, begins with the misery of this one woman. Like other married women before her & since, she feels & **is** taunted by other women who seem to have no problem conceiving. Peninnah, her husband's other wife, has no qualms about gloating over Hannah's situation. And there is no mistaking just how Hannah feels about all this. She talks of her 'deep anguish'; her 'misery'. She tells Eli, the priest at Shiloh, exactly how she feels: She is 'deeply troubled' & is very honest about her 'grief'. There's a number of things we can take from this first part of her story: ...

1) Firstly, it seems Hannah spent many hours, days, months (**years** even) calling out to God. She persisted in prayer. She waited upon the LORD. She 'poured out her soul' to the LORD, in praying for a son. She wasn't going to take 'no' for an answer. During this time of struggling in prayer, she had come to the point of reaching a bargain with God... (Now, at this point I have to say, this is dangerous territory... And I, personally, wonder whether God would have granted her request, even if she hadn't promised to 'give her son to the LORD'. I don't think God had been waiting for her to say this, before granting her request. But the fact remains, God knew that she was willing to offer her son, because of her desperation to be a mother). ... I wonder, is this **our** experience

of prayer...? No doubt, there are things in all our lives we are 'deeply troubled' by... Let's learn from Hannah's experience & 'pour out our hearts to God'...

2) Secondly, there's no need for us to be 'too British' when we pray. When it comes to praying, we can leave the 'stiff, upper lip' behind. God wants us to be honest & to 'say it exactly how it is'... God doesn't want us to pull any punches when it comes to praying. Just as Hannah did, naming what we are feeling, is part of the Holy Spirit's therapy for us. God is our best Counsellor. Alleluia?!

3) Thirdly, God brings Hannah to a point of crisis. We can see that she has not only been praying, but fasting too. Everyone else has been feasting & drinking around her. But Hannah doesn't take anything to her lips, until she feels she has been heard. She comes with her husband to Shiloh, the original 'house of the LORD', before the Temple was built in Jerusalem. She comes specifically to have all this out with the LORD. She is desperate to hear from God. It seems she is not planning to speak with anyone else about how she feels. She doesn't go to Shiloh to have a heart-to-heart with Eli. In fact, until this point, it seems she hasn't mentioned her feelings to anyone else, other than God. And her prayers are silent. She moves her lips, but there's no audible words. Another reminder that there are many ways to pray. (Today, later in this service, we will try out another way of praying, partly as a way of remembering Hannah. & there will be opportunity to pray with people after the service also).

4) Fourthly, Hannah's earnest prayers almost get her into trouble. Eli mistakes her desperation for drunkenness. He starts to rebuke her, before he learns the truth... How often have **your** prayers got you into trouble with others, I wonder?... It can happen. Taking God at his word & reaching beyond the ordinary can have this result. Not everyone understands. Sometimes people are 'jealous' of our faith. People can think anyone who prays is 'self-righteous'. More generally, how often have **we** mistaken someone's honest actions, for something less than honourable ? It's true of our human nature, that sometimes we can be too quick to judge. Here's a story I read b4 Christmas:

A pastor of a church was dismayed to see, shortly after Christmas, that someone had removed the baby Jesus from the church's life-size Nativity display. He was further shocked when he saw, a young lad from church, pulling 'the baby Jesus' around on a sledge in the snow... He went over & started to tell this boy, in no uncertain terms, that it was 'wrong to steal'... The boy looked

at him with a pained expression. ‘But Pastor, I’m NOT stealing... I promised Jesus that I would give him the first ride, if I got a sledge for Christmas’...

5) Fifthly & finally!... Yes, there’s an awful lot we can learn from Hannah’s story! How does she know that God has heard her prayer? Her prayer is heard by Eli the priest... Now, don’t get me wrong. I’m not going to start talking about the need for everyone to go to confession – with a pastor or other Christian leader...! I **do** think there is something to be said for the Catholic practice of ‘confession’. But ‘confession’ is possible between any Christian believers. It doesn’t need to involve Christian leaders. Just as long as the person is someone you trust & know to be following Jesus... We are sometimes called to share matters on our hearts with our fellow believers. Although, as in all things, we need to be ‘wise as serpents & gentle as doves’ – with ourselves & 1 another.

There’s something here about needing to be heard by God, but also by others... So, Hannah, has poured out her heart, for years to God. But it’s once she has told **one** other person about her situation that she is able at last to move on... Eli proclaims God’s peace over her. Then Hannah feels a breakthrough. She has received God’s peace, in a way she hadn’t until that point. She is able to stop agonising. Instead, she feels she can start feasting. She re-joins her family as a ‘new woman’. She is able to enjoy worshipping with them all, just before they return home. The Holy Spirit has done a work in her heart. It’s taken a long time. But she has come to a new place. She has found the peace of God which transcends all understanding... Alleluia !

This is before she actually sees her prayer answered. But, spoiler alert, God grants her request & she becomes pregnant. And once the boy is weaned, Hannah is as good as her promise. She returns little Samuel to Shiloh, so he can begin to serve the LORD there... Now, you probably feel similarly... To me, this is just as heart-breaking as the start of Hannah’s story. Especially as I can imagine Samuel as being about the same age as my grandson, Luca... I also think of a friend of ours from Chesham, who spent years of painful procedures, (and a lot of money) to have IVF treatment. Her & her husband rejoice to have a child...

Can you imagine what it must have cost Hannah to give away Samuel as she did?... I have two questions to leave with you, as we prepare to celebrate the sacrifice our Heavenly Father made, by giving His Son, Jesus for us... 1) Is there anything God has laid on your heart, **or** is laying on your heart to pray about in

2026? I encourage you to learn from Hannah's example... 2) What will it take before you see an answer, before you receive the peace of the LORD? I exhort you: 'pour out your heart to the LORD' in the days ahead... In these desperate days, God is looking for a praying, sacrificial & obedient people...