

Hannah's Story

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Hannah – Monologue 1, after I Samuel 1:1-18

I have always been one who prays fervently. I pray with my whole being – my voice, my emotions, my body, my heart. We've all been *taught* to pray this way – everyone in our village and temple, but prayer has always been a gift of mine. I recall a specific prayer, many years ago... I prayed so fervently there at the house of the Lord that old Eli accused me of being drunk! That was really hurtful, but Eli was a sad, old man. He had served his doorpost duty for many years and he had his own trials and tribulations with *his* ill-behaved and rebellious children. They were scoundrels, those boys! They totally corrupted our sacred system of offering sacrifices. Eli's boys were so disrespectful, they treated the sacrificial meat as if it was something they could just stick their forks into and serve themselves! No..., old Eli had much bigger problems than just guarding the doorposts of the temple against potential drunkards. His sons were the downfall of Israel's priestly line. It was partly because of their contempt that God moved us from being led by priests to being led by kings. Now with my gray hairs and hindsight, I can see how God used *my* son Sam to be the bridge between those two leadership styles. But I'm getting ahead of myself...

Eli's false accusation of me that day *was* hurtful, because it was added to the torment from that horrid Peninnah! There she was, day and night with her beautiful children running around and her pointed jabs, mocking me as I waited month and after month, year after year for the miracle of just one child to form in my infertile womb. Where I'm from, there's no fate worse for a woman than childlessness. Bearing children is your worth, your value, your place in the family, and in the community. You become an invalid as the years go on. And Peninnah knew that, of course, took full advantage of my misfortune and used it against me every day, wearing me down, bringing me to my knees.

But on my knees was exactly where I needed to be because, remember... I am one who prays. And I pray with no holds barred. And I made it clear to Eli that day that I was NOT drunk! I was, in fact, doing what we had all been taught to do – and what he SHOULD have been doing – pouring out my heart to God, asking for God's mercy and action, letting God know that all of my trust and expectations were in him. I wanted a child, yes. And I wanted my place back in my community. I wanted to be respected, validated and included as whole, functional, gifted member of society. I wanted healing. I wanted justice. I was asking for shalom... the deepest, most complete sense of things being made right and at peace.

This is how our ancestors understand prayer – and it's how we understood God. Yahweh honors the covenant with us, as individuals and as a people. God cares for us and shows us his HES-sehd – his steadfast, unchanging love and mercy. All of our existence is dependent on God working on our behalf. And we, in turn, bring our whole selves, in humble adoration To God. We would never think of trying to accomplish anything on our own – the moment we begin to think we can is the moment we always get into trouble. It happens over and over again.

The men seem to have short, collective memories about how it works to keep the covenant. They repeatedly try to get through life on their own, forgetting our covenant relationship with God. It seems that very often it's we women who remember and keep the covenant, bringing the relationship and the fate of our entire people back under the care of God's wing as we allow God to work through us in God's own, surprising, mysterious ways. This kind of a surprise is what I was praying for.

Hannah – Monologue 2, after I Samuel 1:19-2:11

As soon as I set Eli straight about my situation and he offered me that blessing, my spirits were lifted. I knew... I sensed... I understood deep down that I would be granted the shalom I had asked for. The pregnancy didn't happen right away, but it happened. I was happy, of course! But not giddy or gaga like I thought I might be. It was much more a sense of deep gratitude, knowing that a miracle had happened. I received a calm, steadfast joy that undergirded me.

There was never any doubt or hesitation in my mind that this child was a gift. Of course ALL children are gifts! But I knew from the get-go that this one was special. This one – Sam – had a job to do. I had made a vow to return him to the Lord's house and work. He and I shared a special bond with Yahweh and I knew that Samuel wasn't just special to me but that he would be important to the life and calling of our people. Samuel would become a judge – one of the greatest. He mediated many, many cases of conflict, delivering justice throughout the hill country of Ephraim.

There would be dark days ahead for our people, but as I mentioned earlier, Samuel was the one who led Israel from the leadership of priests, through the leadership of judges and on into the time of the leadership of kings – he would lead us to King Saul and then, eventually to David.

Not that all of those changes were necessarily what God wanted, but God gives the people choice – and the freedom to make bad choices. My Samuel tried to tell the people that human kings would make big, human mistakes. But they would not listen and God instructed Samuel to give them their kings. Samuel led our people through a very rebellious and difficult time. But through it all, he was faithful to Yahweh. My Samuel remembered and kept the covenant.

And so, when my little boy was a toddler, I took him, along with other very special sacrifices, to the temple at Shiloh. And through my tears as I left him there, I sang. That day I sang my prayer. I sang the same ancient song that my fore-mothers Miriam and Deborah sang before me. I sang of Yahweh's Sovereignty. I sang God's praises. I sang about God's victory and the vindication that it gave me. I sang about how our God turns all of our understandings and expectations upside-down! Yahweh works in the strangest ways and through the most unlikely and seemingly impossible situations. For who could have ever dreamed that God would use a woman – a *humiliated*, tormented, desperate, faithful woman to carry on the life of an entire people?