

## **Hannah – Rev Theresa Jones**

I'm here to re-live what it may have been like for the biblical character Hannah as she struggled with disappointment, rejection and shame. So here goes...we're back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE:

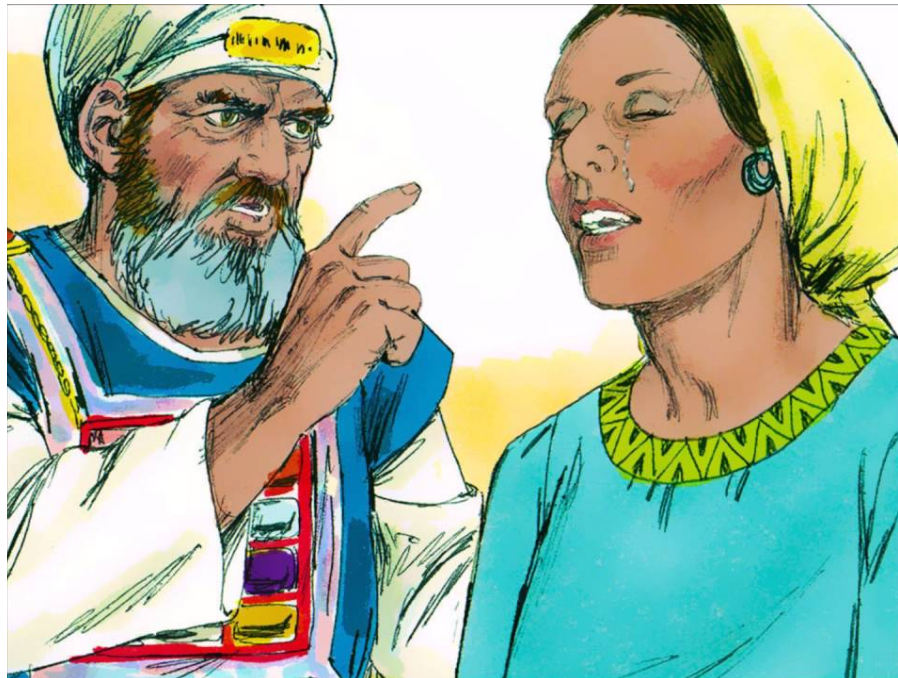
I live in the hill country of Ephraim, about five miles north of Jerusalem, with my husband Elkanah who is loving and kind but he has another wife, also, whose name is Peninnah. Peninnah is the mother of his children and we don't get on well together. While she has children I have none and that gives her a sense of superiority over me. I've offered to help her to bring the children up but she rejects my offers. She just goads me all the time, irritating and depressing me, reminding me over and over again of my barrenness and telling me how blessed she is with her offspring and how much my husband appreciates her vigorous fertility.

Elkanah is a God-fearing man and each year as a family, together with the whole household, we make our way to the Temple at Shiloh, which is our shrine and centre of worship. It's about fifteen miles away and there the tabernacle is housed. The Temple priest is Eli who ministers there along with his two sons Hophni and Phinehas. We go each year to worship God and to make a sacrifice. This is something I have come to dread because then Peninnah is even more unkind and abominable, flaunting her children before me with everyone admiring them and complimenting her on their good looks.

This Temple visit is supposed to be a time when we can not only worship God but enjoy a really good meal together. In spite of this my misery would know no bounds. My husband soon noticed and wanted to know what was wrong and why I wept and would not eat. When I told him he was surprised and said:

“Hannah, you know how much I love you, in fact, I’m filled with delight every time I look at you. I know you love me and surely I am worth more than ten sons to you”. It was plain that Elkanah, loving as he was, wasn’t going to agree with my reasons for sadness.

I then had an idea. We’re here in the Temple, in the very place where God is found, I’m going to beseech God with every ounce of my being to send me a son. I searched for the quietest place I could find, sat in silence for a few minutes then lunged into my petition, imploring God to grant me a son. I even made a vow that I would bring my child back to the Temple to serve there. Just as I was lost in prayer, soaked in tears, with my lips moving silently, Eli the priest tapped me on the shoulder. I turned to look at him and to my amazement he said: “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine!”.



Well, I was astonished. I got up the courage to tell him that I was not drunk but was deeply troubled and was pouring out my soul to God. I think he must have felt embarrassed and ashamed because he had judged me so harshly.

He then said: "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made". His words completely cheered me, lifted my spirits and gave me faith and confidence that my prayer would be answered. I went to our quarters and ate and drank with my husband with great joy.

Sure enough to my delight before a year was up our son was born. May God be praised! Now the question was: 'what shall we name him?' We thought back for a name among our ancestors but none seemed exactly right for him. We'll have to make one up we thought. Then that lovely word 'Shema' which is part of our basic confession of faith and means to 'hear' came to mind. But we needed more than that and we came up with 'Samuel' which means God heard. Yes, God has indeed heard my prayer, my son shall be called Samuel.

The time flew by as I rejoiced in being a mother. I knew that I would keep hold of my son for a couple of years until after he was weaned. The time came round to go to the Temple again. Elkanah expected me to go and take Samuel there to his new home. I said I won't go up this year, I think next year will be the right time. Elkanah told me to do what I felt was best, although like the wise man he is he reminded me of my vow.

It was a blessed time when we did take Samuel to the Temple. We made our sacrifices and brought him to the priest Eli to minister before the Lord for ever. I made a point of telling Eli that I was the woman whom he had spoken to those few years ago when I prayed for a son. I said: "The Lord granted my petition and I bring him here to you that he may serve the Lord as long as he lives". Eli blessed us and said to my husband: "May the Lord repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the Lord." Rather than being tearful and distressed my soul was elated after I had fulfilled my vow. Each year

when we went to the Temple I would take a little robe, which I made myself, for Samuel to wear, it was such a joy to see him growing and learning.



This is a story with a happy ending. Things got better and better since I later gave birth to three more sons and a daughter. I prayed to the Lord giving thanks for his love and compassion to me. I rejoiced in the fact that God can put down the mighty from their places of exaltation and raise up the lowly just as he has done for me.

May God bless you and hear and answer your prayers. Amen.