

Text: 1 Samuel 1

Theme: The Birth of Samuel: Hannah and the God who hears

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Healing and Anointing Service on 29/01/2017 at 10.30am

(Verses 1-2) The family of Elkanah

There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. 2 He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

At a strategic time in the history of the Israelites, God recognized a certain man - a person He will use. He could have called any of his angels to do his work but He always chooses a certain man or woman. And you will see from the onset that this man was not perfect. Because straightway we are introduced to the fact that this was a man with problems. The bible is so real and tells us that many of the bible characters are like you and me.

What was Elkanah's problem? He had two wives: Polygamy was a fact of life in the ancient world. However, the Bible never puts polygamy in a favourable light. Strife and conflict always characterize polygamous families in the Bible. Name any polygamous family on record (Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon etc.), and you will see conflicts, subterfuge, hatred, murder, ...you name it. Jesus condemned polygamy by saying God created man and woman together to be one flesh in a marital union.

In Mark 10:6-8, the Lord Jesus teaches that "from the beginning of creation 'God made them male and female.'" He then declares a great and beautiful truth inscribed in creation: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh".

There was an intense, competitive relationship between the two wives, Peninnah (who had children) and Hannah (who had no children).

(Verses 3-7) Elkanah and his family journey to the tabernacle.

Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord. 4 Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. 5 But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. 6 Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. 7 This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. 8 Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

Hannah (the favoured one) was Barren in a polygamous home and she is likely to be the first wife. She wanted to have children, but was unable. This was a situation completely out of her control. While we all cannot relate directly to Hannah's difficulty, we have all faced situations that were beyond our ability to control. Regardless of how much we desired a different outcome, we were unable to change our circumstances. Hannah is a picture of barren Israel, the favoured Israel but now in disarray, fruitless, and Peninnah is like Satan, mocking and reviling God's people.

She was Belittled (6-7a) – And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb. Peninnah (the prolific one) used Hannah's barrenness as a means to ridicule and belittle her. This added to the misery and despair

Hannah felt. Not only was she unable to bear children, she had to endure the relentless mockery and ridicule of Peninnah. Hannah was in bitterness of soul and great anguish yet she did the right thing. **She could have walked through the open door before her that says, "Enough of waiting on God. I don't believe anymore. God is dead." But Hannah took those bitter and anguished feelings to God honestly in prayer.**

It is worth noticing the increasing intensity of her prayer which is a pattern for intercessors—those who stand in the gap until God fulfils His plan for His people:

In verse 10 Anna prayed in the bitterness of soul with tears. In verse 12, she prayed consistently, (v15) she poured her soul to the Lord and expressed her deep troubles, (v16) she acknowledged her great anguish before the Lord. Listen to her as she addressed the Lord. **O Lord Almighty**— This title is used some 260 times in the Old Testament, and has the idea "Lord of the Mighty Armies." Hannah felt attacked by her rival, so she called on the *Lord of Mighty Armies* to be her protector.

The enemy likes to use others to add to our despair in seasons of difficulty. This is just one of the tactics he uses to challenge our faith. No doubt we have all dealt with mockery and ridicule at some time or another. These times are not enjoyable, but they are no reason to abandon our faith. Our Lord endured great mockery and ridicule by those He came to save, and yet His faith prevailed as He remained committed to the Father's will for our salvation!

As Elkanah brought his family each year to the tabernacle for sacrifice he ate a ceremonial meal at the tabernacle with his family, giving portions to his wives and their children. He showed his favour and love to Hannah by giving her a **double portion**.

Because of the conflict between the two wives, Hannah could not enjoy this display of love and favour from Elkanah. **It is possible for problems at home to make your time at the house of God miserable. Hannah is at the house of the Lord with a blessed double portion in front of her and she can't enjoy it.**

Hannah was chastised by barrenness. The taunting of her rival must have been like a sword drawn through her soul. Year after year she had to endure the shame and embarrassment of barrenness as though she was cursed by God. For years, she waited as she prayed but it was as though the Lord had closed her womb - as though her prayers were not being heard! Hannah shared the home and its comfort but she could not share the children because she was barren.

It seems strange that Peninnah (who seems to show a bad character) was blessed with children and Hannah (who seems to be of good character) was cursed with barrenness. Often, we don't understand God's ways until He completes His plan.

But beyond Hannah's painful trial there was a purpose of God. God used the trial of a closed womb to accomplish something great in her life and in God's plan for the nation. **Even though things were hard God was still in charge. We should never lose sight of this fact.**

(Verses 8-11) Hannah's godly vow.

Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

9 Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. 10 In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. 11 And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

Let us examine Elkanah's response to Hannah: Why do you weep? . . . Am I not better to you than ten sons? Elkanah, typical of most men did not fully understand Hannah's sorrow. We can see that he really loved her; yet like many men he was insensitive. He did not recognize that she had needs he could not fulfill (such as the desire to be a mother). Furthermore, she could not get into Hannah's skin to experience the burning sensation of grief which was a perpetual experience.

This woman could have prayed for a child and that should have removed her shame of barrenness but she raised her stakes and asked for a son that would in addition give her honour. **However, in all these and the years of waiting, God's plan and her own needs had a meeting point. God was preparing ahead for a man that would serve him as Israel's judge and prophet and the years of waiting fitted perfectly into His plans.**

Prayer changed Hannah and she became fruitful and useful to God. She was consumed by a Godly jealousy which is the hallmark of those who are interceding for revival in our Church and at Christ Church. Hannah could not stand the provocation of her adversary and neither should we just wait and steer and watch as the devil makes advances in people's lives. Do you know that there are more people born into the world everyday than people born into the kingdom of God? Where do the others go? Are you so concerned with revival in God's church that you would go on fasting and seeking the face of the Lord?

(Verse 11) Hannah promised to give her son to the work of the Lord, vowing he would be a Nazirite from birth.

The child was already dedicated as a Levite having descended from the tribe of Kohath and Levi. But the time of a Levite's special dedication to the Lord only lasted from the age of 30 to 50 (Numbers 4:2-3). Hannah took something that already belonged to the Lord and gave it again to Him in a greater way – for the whole life, which was a greater consecration.

Even so, we may be dedicated unto the Lord – but it is possible to give God a greater dedication. It would be easy for Hannah to say, "I don't need to dedicate my child to the Lord, because he is already dedicated." But she went a step further.

Verses 12-14

12 As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk 14 and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."

As Hannah prayed before the Lord, she caught the attention of Eli: It is often good to pray aloud, because it can help us to focus better our thoughts. Yet this passage shows that prevailing prayer doesn't need to be vocal. Effective prayer can be silent and in the heart.

Eli assumed she had been drinking and had come unto the Tabernacle drunk. The fact that he suspected that she was drunk shows that it may not have been unusual for people to become drunk at the "fellowship meals" with the Lord at the tabernacle. See what is said about Eli's sons (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22) showing that religion was at this time at a very low ebb in Shiloh; and it might be commonplace for drunken women to come to the place of prayer.

As he confronted Hannah, she assured him she had not been drinking, but was pouring her heart out in desperation unto the Lord. Her faithful commitment and desire was noticed and recognized by the man of God. Some may carry a heavy burden today that no one else knows or understands. Some may be aware of your heaviness, but are unable to relate. There may even be those who don't appreciate your burden and will even seek to hinder your pursuit before the Lord. In times of doubt and accusation, we must remain focused on our need and

persistent in prayer unto the Lord. Even if no one else understands, the Lord does. He sees; He knows; and He cares!

(Verses 15-18) Hannah responds to Eli's accusation; Eli answers with a blessing.

15 "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. 16 Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief." 17 Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." 18 She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

Hannah did not accept Eli's accusation. However, she did not respond in a haughty or angry tone. She would explain herself but she did it remembering that he was her high priest. This is exactly what Hannah needed to do. Instead of keeping the bitterness of soul and the anguish in her heart, she poured it out before the Lord.

Eli responded by saying, "The God of Israel grant your petition: Eli may have spoken this only as a kind wish; but it was in fact a word from the Lord.

Notice the response of Hannah.

Following her time of fervent prayer at the Tabernacle, Hannah's life began to change. Although she had not conceived a child, but she now enjoyed peace from the Lord. Eli had offered his blessing, and Hannah's hope was renewed. She began to eat again, and her countenance was now filled with joy instead of sadness. She did not yet know how it would transpire, but her faith was renewed and she enjoyed a positive outlook.

Life will have its share of difficulties and trials. We are not promised a life of ease, but the believer is promised a constant Companion in Christ. The Spirit can bring peace to our hearts, even while the storm continues to rage. If you are burdened, bring your burdens to the Lord and leave them there. You may not find the answer you desired, but I am certain you can find the peace and strength you need to continue for the Lord.

The birth and dedication of Samuel.

(Verses 19-20) Samuel's miraculous conception and his birth.

19 Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. 20 So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, [b] saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him."

And the Lord remembered her: To use the term remembered is a way of explaining God's actions in human terms that we can understand, even if it doesn't perfectly describe God's action. It isn't as if God ever forgot Hannah, but it is proper to say He remembered her.

In the course of time, it shows; it didn't happen right away. Hannah had reason enough to be discouraged, but when the promise of God was spoken she did not lose faith in the promise, even when it took some time. She is a great example of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:12).

I am reminded that even in the valley, our Lord is good. He is worthy of our praise and worship, even in the midst of our trials. We don't worship Him so He will answer our prayers; we worship Him because He is Lord and sovereign of our lives. If you are determined to wait until every prayer is answered before you praise the Lord, you won't be worshiping Him much. Go ahead and praise Him in advance for the blessings He will send in the future!

If I never received another blessing, or had another prayer answered, I would still be compelled to worship the Lord. He bore my sin and shame on the cross. He provided salvation for me,

granting eternal life in heaven. That is much more than I deserve, and more than enough to offer praise!

(Verses 21-24) Hannah keeps the child until he is weaned.

21 When her husband Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfill his vow, 22 Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the LORD, and he will live there always." [23 "Do what seems best to you," her husband Elkanah told her. "Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his[d] word." So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

In that culture, a child was usually not weaned until two years of age, or sometimes three years. It is reasonable to assume that Hannah was in no hurry to wean Samuel.

(Verses 24-28) Hannah dedicates Samuel to God's service.

24 After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. 25 When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, 26 and she said to him, "Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. 27 I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. 28 So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

They brought the boy to Eli: This was hard for Hannah and Elkanah. Their willingness to fulfill the vow even at great personal cost is evidence of godliness in Elkanah and Hannah. They were standing there as a testimony to what God had done for them.

So, they worshipped the Lord there: Worship is a repeated characteristic of this family (see also 1 Samuel 1:3, 19, 28).

Even in difficult situations, they could worship the Lord. Praising God on the day you give your little son away may not be easy but it is the type of praise God is pleased with, even as we are told to bring a sacrifice of praise to God (Hebrews 13:15).

God is faithful to hear and answer the prayers of the redeemed. He may not answer in the timeframe we desire, or even in the manner we thought He would, but He will provide in His time, according to His will for our lives. It is easy to get discouraged and face temptation to abandon our faith. We must do as Hannah did and remain persistent in prayer. It may take years of committed prayer, but if we are faithful, God will answer.

Conclusion: Hannah's life was definitely a journey of faith. Her burden lasted for several years, but she continued to pray and seek the Lord. She was even willing to offer the very desire of heart unto the Lord when He answered her prayer. Her life was directed by faith, and faith paid dividends for her.

Are you burdened and struggling today? Have you prayed and prayed, and yet it seems there is no answer? Are you on the verge of giving up? Bring your needs before the Lord. He sees; He knows; He cares. Come before Him and leave your burden there. You may not get the answer you desire immediately, but you can receive the peace you need to press on another day.

If you are unsaved, I urge you to come to Christ by faith. Respond to the call of salvation with a repentant heart, and be saved today!