

Hannah - The Grief And The Glory

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The marriage was tension filled. Elkanah and Hannah had no children, and in Israel this was disappointing, even disgraceful.

Elkanah took the way of the flesh. Judging Peninnah fit to accomplish the biological purpose of childbearing. Elkanah took her as his second wife. Hannah's world fell apart, when Elkanah brought the "other" woman into the home as a permanent and equal member. (See 1 Samuel 1:2.)

This violation of God's ordinance of marriage produced nothing but heartache. Elkanah became a father, but what a price he paid. Peninnah had his children, but Hannah had his heart. Peninnah became increasingly spiteful toward Hannah, and the children became caught up in the turmoil.

The worst times for Hannah were the annual feasts to the Lord in Shiloh. These were supposed to be happy times: feasting, worshiping, and fellowshiping. But Peninnah knew what to say and do to torment Hannah, and she reserved her most devastating taunts for the feast. She could do the most damage by robbing Hannah of her chance for spiritual renewal. And it worked.

Elkanah tried to balance things by lavishing twice as much on Hannah at the feast as on the other family members, but Peninnah provoked her so much she lost her appetite. Humiliated, her sense of worth shattered, all she could do was cry.

Elkanah was no help when he asked, "Am I not better to you than ten sons?" (v. 8 NKJV). Some husbands have the tact of a rhinoceros in a surgical ward.

Here is the real shocker: "The Lord had closed her womb" (v. 5 NIV). God did it. Did God cause all this trauma? No, people caused it. Then why did God do this? Because to accomplish His purpose He had to bring Hannah to the place where she would seek Him with all her heart.

And Hannah did. At one of the annual feasts in Shiloh Hannah slipped away to the house of the Lord and cried it all out to God. "And she made a vow, saying 'O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon 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'" (v. 11 NIV).

Israel desperately needed a strong spiritual leader, and God was preparing to raise up such a leader. This leader would need a mother who would realize her son was a gift from God and would totally dedicate him to God. God brought Hannah to the place where she was willing to pray that prayer. The Lord closed her womb so that He might open it. His sovereign purpose was there all the time.

Encouraged by Eli the priest, Hannah cheered up and had something to eat. Submission and faith brought joy and peace. The Lord remembered Hannah. (See v. 19.) He had never forgotten her. In due time Samuel was born. In gratitude Hannah composed a song. (See 1 Samuel 2:1-10.)

In her dedication Hannah set an example for all parents. Today when we bring our little ones to the Lord in dedication, often Hannah's words are read: I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:27,28 NIV).

Yes, Hannah had to go back into the same home and Peninnah was still there. But Hannah was living in victory, on top of the circumstances, not under them.

No matter what happens, God understands and He knows what He is doing. He may allow circumstances to bring us to himself. He is doing it for our good and His glory. What He is accomplishing is well worth the price of the process.

The outcome is our decision. God leads us, but does not force us. We can take matters into our own hands and make it hard on ourselves, or we can let Him work it out and show us what to do.

Adversity drives us either to God or away from Him. If we yield to Him in faith, He will take us through and bring something beautiful out of it. We will have something we would not have gained otherwise. We will be victorious in the same circumstances that once devastated us. God can close that He might open.

What is God working toward in your life? In what ways does He want you to grow? Are you taking the world's way out or God's way up?

God knows what He is doing. As you surrender to Him, trust Him, and follow Him, He will show you the way.