

## Hannah: Twisting G-d's Arm

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*Hannah's Prayer, Ilja Repin*



*The High Priest and Hannah, James Tissot*

### 1. 1 Samuel 1-2

There was a man from Ramathaim of the Zuphites, in the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. He had two wives, one named Hannah and the other Peninnah; Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless. This man used to go up from his town every year to worship and to offer sacrifice to the LORD of Hosts at Shiloh.—Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD there. One such day, Elkanah offered a sacrifice. He used to give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; but to Hannah he would give one portion only—though Hannah was his favorite—for the LORD had closed her womb. Moreover, her rival, to make her miserable, would taunt her that the LORD had closed her womb. This happened year after year: Every time she went up to the House of the LORD, the other would taunt her, so that she wept and would not eat.

Her husband Elkanah said to her, “Hannah, why are you crying and why aren’t you eating? Why are you so sad? Am I not more devoted to you than ten sons?”

After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose.—The priest Eli was sitting on the seat near the doorpost of the temple of the LORD.—In her wretchedness, she prayed to the LORD, weeping all the while. And she made this vow: “O LORD of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to the LORD for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head.”

As she kept on praying before the LORD, Eli watched her mouth. Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. So Eli thought she was drunk.

Eli said to her, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Sober up!” And Hannah replied, “Oh no, my lord! I am a very unhappy woman. I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to the LORD. Do not take your maidservant for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress.”

“Then go in peace,” said Eli, “and may the G-d of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him.” She answered, “You are most kind to your handmaid.” So the woman left, and she ate, and was no longer downcast.

Early next morning they bowed low before the LORD, and they went back home to Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah and the LORD remembered her. Hannah conceived, and at the turn of the year bore a son. She named him Samuel, meaning, “I asked the LORD for him.”

And when the man Elkanah and all his household were going up to offer to the LORD the annual sacrifice and his votive sacrifice, Hannah did not go up. She said to her husband, “When the child is weaned, I will bring him. For when he has appeared before the LORD, he must remain there for good.”...When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with three bulls, one ephah of flour, and a jar of wine. And though the boy was still very young, she brought him to the House of the LORD at Shiloh.

After slaughtering the bull, they brought the boy to Eli. She said, “Please, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you and prayed to the LORD. It was this boy I prayed for; and the LORD has granted me what I asked of Him. I, in turn, hereby lend him to the LORD. For as long as he lives he is lent to the LORD.” And they bowed low there before the LORD.

And Hannah prayed: My heart exults in the LORD; I have triumphed through the LORD. I gloat over my enemies; I rejoice in Your deliverance. There is no holy one like the LORD, Truly, there is none beside You; There is no rock like our G-d. Talk no more with lofty pride, Let no arrogance cross your lips! For the LORD is an all-knowing G-d; By Him actions are measured. The bows of the mighty are broken, And the faltering are girded

46 with strength. Men once sated must hire out for bread; Men once hungry hunger no more. While the barren  
47 woman bears seven, The mother of many is forlorn...

## 48 **2. Malbim:**

49 Why didn't Hannah pray until now?... Until now she relied on the prayers of her righteous husband. Now she  
50 saw that he had given up from mercy, she was awakened to pray for herself.

## 51 **3. Berachot 31a-32a**

52 R. Hamnuna said: How many most important laws can be learnt from these verses relating to Hannah...

53 R. Eleazar said: From the day that G-d created His world there was no man called the Holy One, blessed  
54 be He, Zeboath [hosts] until Hannah came and called Him Zebaath. Said Hannah before the Holy One, blessed  
55 be He: Sovereign of the Universe, of all the hosts and hosts that Thou hast created in Thy world, is it so hard in  
56 Thy eyes to give me one son? A parable: To what is this matter like? To a king who made a feast for his servants,  
57 and a poor man came and stood by the door and said to them, Give me a bite, and no one took any notice of him,  
58 so he forced his way into the presence of the king and said to him, Your Majesty, out of all the feast which thou  
59 hast made, is it so hard in thine eyes to give me one bite? If Thou wilt indeed look.

60 R. Eleazar said: Hannah said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of the Universe, if Thou wilt  
61 look, it is well, and if Thou wilt not look, I will go and shut myself up with someone else in the knowledge of my  
62 husband Elkanah,<sup>10</sup> and as I shall have been alone they will make me drink the water of the suspected wife, and  
63 Thou canst not falsify Thy law, which says, She shall be cleared and shall conceive seed. ...

64 ...Now Hannah, she spoke in her heart. R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Jose b. Zimra: She spoke  
65 concerning her heart. She said before Him: Sovereign of the Universe, among all the things that Thou hast  
66 created in a woman, Thou hast not created one without a purpose, eyes to see, ears to hear, a nose to smell, a  
67 mouth to speak, hands to do work, legs to walk with, breasts to give suck. These breasts that Thou hast put on  
68 my heart, are they not to give suck? Give me a son, so that I may suckle with them. ...

69 R. Eleazar also said: Hannah spoke insolently toward heaven, as it says, And Hannah prayed unto the Lord.  
70 This teaches that she spoke insolently toward heaven.

## 71 **4. The story of Eli's Sons**

72 Now Eli's sons were scoundrels; they paid no heed to the LORD....Now Eli was very old. When he heard all that  
73 his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who performed tasks at the entrance of the  
74 Tent of Meeting, he said to them, "Why do you do such things? I get evil reports about you from the people on  
75 all hands. Don't, my sons! It is no favorable report I hear the people of the LORD spreading about. If a man sins  
76 against a man, the LORD may pardon him; but if a man offends against G-d, who can obtain pardon for him?"

## 77 **5. Saul Losing his Kingdom (1 Samuel 15)**

78 And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to  
79 another who is worthier than you. Moreover, the Glory of Israel does not deceive or change His mind (*lo*  
80 *yinachem*), for He is not human that He should change His mind...Samuel never saw Saul again to the day of his  
81 death. But Samuel grieved over Saul, because the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel...And  
82 the LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel?"

83 וְגַם נָצַח יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִשְׁקַר וְלֹא יִנָּחַם כִּי לֹא אָדָם הוּא לְהִנָּחֵם ... כִּי הִתְאַבֵּל שְׂמוּאֵל אֶל־שָׁאֹל וַיִּקְרָק נְחָם כִּי־הִמְלִיךְ אֶת־שָׁאֹל עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל

## 84 **6. G-d's Response to Moses's Defense for the Jews**

85 And the LORD renounced (*vayinachem*) the punishment He had planned to bring upon His people.

## 86 **7. 1 Samuel 8**

87 When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons judges over Israel... But his sons did not follow in his ways; they  
88 were bent on gain, they accepted bribes, and they subverted justice.

## 89 **8. 1 Samuel 12 – After Rebuking the People for Requesting a King**

90 The people all said to Samuel, "Intercede for your servants with the LORD your G-d that we may not die, for we have added  
91 to all our sins the wickedness of asking for a king." But Samuel said to the people, "Have no fear. You have, indeed, done all  
92 those wicked things. Do not, however, turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart...As for me, far be  
93 it from me to sin against the LORD and refrain from praying for you; and I will continue to instruct you in the practice of  
94 what is good and right.