

# PRAISE HIM FOR PENINNAH

## 1 SAMUEL 1:1-18

Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim Zophim, of the mountains of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. And he had two wives: the name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. This man went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. Also the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there. And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, although the LORD had closed her womb. And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the LORD had closed her womb.

So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, that she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat. Then Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?" So Hannah arose after they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the LORD. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head."

And it happened, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli watched her mouth. Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, "How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!" And Hannah answered and said, "No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken until now." Then Eli answered and said, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him." And she said, "Let your maidservant find favor in your sight." So the woman went her way and ate... (And I want you to pay close attention to this last phrase... It's important...) and her face was no longer sad."

In OT times polygamy was a common practice. One man would marry multiple wives. Though this occurred, it was never a good idea. For a time, God tolerated the practice, but it was never His intention. We learn from the creation account in Genesis when God formed the first man, Adam, He provided him *not two wives*, but *one wife*, Eve.

Recently, Middle East archaeologists have unearthed a cuneiform tablet entitled, "*The Top Ten Reasons No Man In His Right Mind Would Want Two Wives...*" Here's the translation from the ancient Semitic Chaldean...

- 10) Twice as many birthdays and anniversaries to remember.
- 9) You have to pick who gets the second garage door opener.
- 8) By the time two wives take a shower there's no more hot water.
- 7) Who can afford *two dozen* roses on Valentines Day?
- 6) When it comes to choices... it's now two against one.
- 5) Your one drawer, and half a foot of closet space - gets cut in half.
- 4) Two honey-do lists.
- 3) Do you really want to decide who gets the master bedroom?
- 2) Two mother-in-laws.
- 1) PMS twice a month.

Apparently, this man, Elkanah, had never read this Top Ten List, for he had two wives. One wife was named “Hannah” - the other was “Peninnah.” And from Elkanah’s experience you can add one more reason to the list of why two wives are not a good idea... *they might not get along!* Every night when Elkanah came home from the office he was greeted by two *warring women*. There was constant friction and tension in his household.

Verse 2 reveals the underlying problem, “Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.” In ancient times, barrenness was the heaviest burden a woman could bear. Since children are considered a blessing from the Lord, the inability to bear them was unfairly viewed as a divine curse. Hannah deeply longed for a child, and bore this awful stigma. Over the years it wore on her that her desire went unfulfilled.

And here’s where Elkanah made a mistake... He loved his wife, Hannah, and he hated to see her suffer and grieve – so to compensate for her deficiency he showered her with extra favor. Verse 5 tells us when they went to Shiloh to offer sacrifices to God he always gave her a double portion - but I imagine Elkanah gave Hannah twice as much of everything... *Twice his time, twice the grocery allowance, two weeks of vacation to Peninnah’s one, double the mad money, a new SUV compared to Peninnah’s old mini-van, two credit cards instead of one.*

And how do you think Peninnah reacted to Elkanah’s extra affection toward Hannah? She despised him and hated her rival! She retaliated... She bombarded Hannah with *cutting comments* and *biting barbs*... Peninnah would brag about her children in front of Hannah, then make a comment like, “*And what about your kids, Hannah... Oops, I forgot!*” It was all poor Hannah could do to keep from slapping the ole girl silly!

Over the years Hannah learned to steer clear of Peninnah around the house. They probably lived completely separate lives. Their daily routine had little overlapped. Hannah was able to avoid contact with her rival. But once a year the two wives had to share a common space. At least time Elkanah obeyed God’s commandment. He loaded up his family, made the pilgrimage to Shiloh, and worshipped at the Tabernacle. This was when the sparks flew between Hannah and Peninnah...

I mean it’s hard to avoid a passenger in the same vehicle. I don’t care if they took a 15 passenger van they still had to see each other and interact. Hannah loved the Lord, but she hated these trips to the Tabernacle. The war between her and Peninnah spoiled her worship. It divided Hannah’s attention and distracted her focus from the Lord. What should’ve been a joyous *celebration* became a miserable time of *exasperation*.

Read verse 6, “*And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the LORD had closed her womb. So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, that she provoked her.*” Year by year a *pestering, pernicious Peninnah* just kept *pouring it on*... Every chance Peninnah got, she stuck it to poor Hannah. Another dig – another jab - another bite - another barb – another slap in the face. You wish you could’ve poured hot coffee in sassy little Peninnah’s lap.

At our recent pastors conference Pastor Pancho referred to “Peninnah” as “Piranha.” That’s a more descriptive name. She was a woman-eater. I tried to think of some illustrative names to call Peninnah myself - but none of the names I came up with would be appropriate from the pulpit.

Razor-tongued Peninnah saw to it that Hannah was harassed at every opportunity... *And understand, Hannah couldn’t just stay home alone.* Shiloh was the house of God! It was her duty, as well as the duty of all Hebrews, to go before the Lord to worship and offer sacrifice, and express their love to God. Staying home might sound appealing, but it wasn’t an option. Hannah had to go to Shiloh, and endure Peninnah’s insults. *Your heart just bleeds for Hannah...*

Did you know that in one sense, our Lord Jesus has multiple wives? Yes, you’ll find that the Bible always speaks of the “Bride of Christ,” *singular* – and never the “*brides of Christ,*” *plural*. But the Bride of Christ is made up of many members. Corporately, we are all His bride. But each of us is also wedded to Christ personally, and individually, and intimately. Look around and realize we’re all objects of our Lord’s eternal affection.

And as was the case with Hannah and Peninnah sometimes wives can become rivals. Christians will say, “*Oh, why does she seem to be getting a double portion of God’s blessing?*” or “*Why has the Lord made his ministry more fruitful than mine?*” We can make comparisons among each other... It stirs up contention, and jealousy, and competition...

And guess where the conflict so often surfaces? We can go for days, and never think about the other person with whom we experience the friction... Our routine never intersects the source of our jealousy... We’re never near the critical person... **until we come to church!** It’s at Shiloh, of all places, where the problem arises! Piranha – *I mean, Peninnah* - accompanies us to the house of the Lord... And it’s tough to worship God alongside a Peninnah! *There are times when it’s all you can do to keep from pouring hot coffee in her lap!*

I don’t even have to ask you... As I’ve been talking you’ve already identified a Peninnah in your life. There’s a Peninnah in every church. She’s obnoxious and inappropriate. She always finds a way to get under your skin. She’s an agitator. She’s never content. She grumbles... She’s jealous... She’s uncooperative... *but she comes every Sunday.* You’ve prayed for the Lord to move her on... *but God hates divorce.* You’ve tried to avoid her, but you feel guilty when you do. *It’s an issue...*

And this is an especially troublesome problem in a smaller church... In a church of thousands you don’t have to be friends with everyone. You can go to the same church as the other person and never see them. You can duck Peninnah... but not in a small or medium-sized church. It’s like riding to Shiloh in Elkannah’s SUV – there’s no where to hide from *prickly Peninnah*. At some point you’ve got to deal with the ole gal.

And here’s where I have to warn you. I’ve met a lot of believers over the years who run into a Peninnah at church, and just chose to stay at home. They’ve told me, “*If I’ve got to worship with Peninnah I’ll just not come.*” or “*I’d rather watch a pastor on television, or listen to a CD.*” I have no doubt we have some internet listeners who are trying to avoid a Peninnah.

It reminds me of Johnny. One Sunday morning he was late for church. His mom had to shake him to wake him up, and get him out of bed. “*Come on Johnny. It’s Sunday morning, time for church.*” He moaned, “*O mom, do I have to go to church again today? The people are so picky. I never have any fun. Nobody likes me.*” But his mother was insistent, “*Johnny, of course, you’ve got to go to church... you’re the pastor!*” Speaking from personal experience, knowing a Peninnah is waiting on you at church, can make even a pastor want to roll over and call in sick. I love the church! I love the body of Christ! But it doesn’t matter what church you attend there’s always somebody who’ll rub you the wrong way.

**And staying home is never an option!** In fact, there’s a verse that backs me up... Hebrews 10:24, “*And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*” Fellowship is a biblical imperative, not an optional activity. Paul Tournier writes, “*There are two things we cannot do alone, one is to be married and the other is to be a Christian.*” If followers of Jesus are identified by our love for each other; then there has to be someone to love. God created all humans with the need to know and be known - love and be loved - serve and be served. To be healthy human beings – and growing Christians - we need community... *and God’s outlet is the church!*

Hannah knew it was her duty to worship God privately *and corporately*. There were OT experiences with God only available where the people of God gathered together at Shiloh... *the Shekinnah glory, the priestly blessing, the public reading of the Scripture, the corporate worship, the sweet smell of the burnt offerings* - were only accessible at the Tabernacle. Likewise, our NT experience with Jesus will be far from complete until we become committed to meeting together with a local body of believers.

Never let a Peninnah rob you of *the fellowship of faith, the corporate worship of God, the biblical feeding, the opportunities to serve, the encouragement and hope* we glean when we meet together as the Church. At Shiloh, and at Church... the glory grows - prayers gain more punch - our witness shines brighter - the love of God becomes more tangible... The Church is where the action is, and you need to be there!

For Hannah coming to the Lord's house brought her in contact with *prickly Peninnah*, but she wasn't about to let a *sassy, brassy, crassy, lassie* like Peninnah rob her of God's blessing... **and neither should you!** God knows all about Peninnah, but He still commands in Hebrews 10:25, "Let us... not forsake the assembling of ourselves together."

Let me suggest, when you're tempted to stay home to avoid Peninnah don't look in the mirror. You might discover she stayed home with you. For there's a little bit of Peninnah in all of us. That *sassy, brassy, crassy lassie* can at times be me. Have you ever said a harsh, critical word at Church? Have you ever gotten jealous of someone who got a double portion, or seemed to be more fruitful? I'm a pastor and at times I'm guilty. We're all culpable... of unfair criticism - of conducting out-of-control fruit inspections. We've all fired off a few barbs. We've looked at the cup half-empty, while ignoring it was also half-full. We've judged others, while failing to recall we've been forgiven. We've forget the grace God lavished on us.

My given name is "Sandy," but at times I too can be a "Peninnah." I've been a Peninnah to my wife. I've made cutting and critical comments. And trust me, like Peninnah, I know just the right buttons to push to aggravate my Hannah...I know exactly how to get under her skin... Once I said to my dear wife on a particularly difficult day, "Well, we don't ever have to worry about being robbed. If a burglar broke into this house he'd take one look around, think we'd already been ransacked, and leave." Ooh, can you believe your pastor made such an insulting comment? Talk about *brassy*... My wife would've been justified in ramming the broom and dust pan down my throat sideways – and telling me to clean-up.

The truth is, we're all capable of being a Peninnah. The church is like two porcupines huddled up on a cold night. They *need each other* to stay warm, but they *needle each other* in the process. Here's a favorite poem, "To live above with saints we love, will certainly be glory. To live below with saints we know, we'll that's a different story."

When I go to a Braves' game I know there'll be hundreds of Peninnahs in the grandstands. I'll probably run into a couple when I try to get out of the parking lot - or when they get a little drunk toward the late innings ... but I'm not going to let a few Peninnahs stop me from enjoying a game. A Braves baseball game is worth the trouble. Likewise, why let a Peninnah rob you of God's blessing? Putting up with Peninnah is a small price to pay to be a part of God's forever family. It's been said, "Christians need the heart of a child, and the hide of a rhinoceros." *Tender and tough*. I've heard it put, "Too many Christians have tough hearts and soft skin. We need to tough skin and soft hearts."

On this particular visit to Shiloh, Hannah failed to deal properly with her rival. She allowed Peninnah to get to her – to get the best of her. Hannah came to offer her sacrifice to God, but it was Peninnah that got her goat. Look at what happened. The end of verse 7, "therefore she wept and did not eat." Hannah was so disturbed she refused to come to the table. She skipped supper and sulked. Peninnah caused her to stop being fed... And if you let your Peninnah get your goat she'll have the same effect on you. You'll stop coming to Bible study - or when you attend, you won't be able to concentrate, focus, and open your heart to what God has to say. The great danger of a Peninnah is she can distract a Christian from the main reason he attends church in the first place – to feed on God's Word.

In verse 8 Elkanah comes and comforts Hannah. He reassures his wife of his love for her. He says, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?" Elkannah's words are sensitive and kind - but notice the one thing he doesn't do... Elkannah does nothing to shut-up Peninnah! He doesn't even send her home... he never even promises to leave her home next year... I'm sure that's what Hannah wanted her husband to do. That's what we want God to do with our Peninnah. *Maybe not take her home to heaven*, hopefully we're more merciful than that... but have you prayed, "Lord, just take her to a different church home..." Apparently, that wasn't Elkanah's solution to Hannah's problem, and neither is it God's plan for you.

It's interesting the name "Peninnah" means "pearl" – and how appropo'. *How does a pearl form? By irritation*. A pearl starts as a spec of sand in the soft center of a oyster or a clam. The tiny spec irritates the lining of the shell which releases a secretion that forms a hard crust around the grain of sand. Over time layers of secretion add up to form the pearl. Understand, our husband, our Lord Jesus, lets the Peninnahs to come to church. He plants them in our fellowship. He puts them right next to us.

Jesus could make ole Peninnah stay home. He could send her home once her cutting comments started... but Jesus lets Peninnah come and rub shoulders with the Hannahs... and why?... **There are two reasons...** First, **being at church will change the Peninnahs.** And Second, **until she changes, the irritation she causes will turn Hannah into a beautiful pearl.**

Look at what Peninnah's irritation forces Hannah to do... Our text tells us she goes to the door of the Tabernacle and **"pours out her soul before the Lord."** Her prayer is so intense, and passionate, and uninhibited - so full of raw emotion - she confuses the High Priest, Eli. He's use to witnessing staged prayers. He hears fluent prayers... composed to *impress* others, not necessarily *express* one's true feelings. It seemed strange to Eli to watch a woman's lips move, but not hear her speak. He thinks Hannah was drunk. In verse 14 he rebukes her, **"How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!"** Hannah explains to the priest that she's not drunk. It's her heart that's praying, and not her lips.

Once, the elders approached their simple pastor about the content of his prayers. They didn't think his choice of words, and the theme of his prayers, were appropriate for the highbrow tastes of their congregation. When the elders had finished their criticism, the pastor answered them, **"Gentlemen, I have just one comment, *When I pray, I'm not talking to you!*"** Hannah wasn't talking to Eli, she was charging the throne of God.

Hannah's prayer was *heartfelt* and *heaven-bound*. She wasn't just mouthing from memory. She was convulsing deep desires. She prayed with passion and urgency. Hannah was serious – sincere - set on her goal. Hannah believed her prayer would make a difference... and she prays like it. There's a saying, **"When it comes to prayer, if God has a choice of words without heart – or a heart without words... He prefers the heart without words every time."** Hannah is getting down to business with God.

It reminds me of the little girl who always said her prayers at night. Each evening she followed a ritual. She would take off her clothes, put on her pajamas - then she and her mom would kneel by her bedside to pray... On her first Sunday in the church sanctuary she was surprised to see everyone drop to their knees. She thought about her nightly routine, then she whispered to her mom, **"You mean we're all going to pray with our clothes on?"** *I believe to pray effectively you've got to take off your clothes!* Not literally, I'm talking about the façade we use to cover up our real emotions and feelings - our robes of routine, and veils of formality, and masks of hypocrisy. We can say all the right words, but does it come from our heart? The key to prayer is to *not just to say prayers, but pray prayers.* Hannah prayed like she meant it – that's how we need to pray!

And let me say it, if a pestering Peninnah can cause you to pray with passion – if it takes a Peninnah and her inconsiderate behavior to end your pretense – and bury your pride – and create enough desperation so you'll really get down to business with God... **Then praise the Lord for Peninnah!** I believe it's the Peninnahs in our lives that drive us to our knees, and teach us to pray. They make us more desperate for the Lover of our soul. Think it through, if there had been no Peninnah – if Hannah could've lived happily ever after with Elkannah – do you think she would've been so urgent about going to the Tabernacle and pouring out her soul to the Lord? It was Peninnah that motivated Hannah to lean on the Lord... And it's the Peninnahs in our life and in our church, that causes us to do the same. **Don't let Peninnah get under your skin – let her force you to your knees!**

Like the name **"Peninnah,"** the name **"Hannah"** also has special significance. **Hannah** means **"grace."** And grace is **God's unmerited favor.** I like the acronym that's often used. **Grace - G-R-A-C-E - God's Riches At Christ's Expense.** That's grace! It's love that's **"not for sale."** It can't be bought, or earned, or won. It's a gift. You receive it humbly and thankfully. And it was the grace of God that transformed Hannah. She received a kindness she knew she didn't deserve. Eli the priest, God's representative, looked kindly on Hannah's prayer. He said to her in verse 17, **"Go in peace..."** She obeyed him, and trusted in God's grace. When she poured out her heart to God - He in turn, filled it with His peace.

If there's a Peninnah in your life, God has her there for a purpose. And here's what you need to handle her irritations... **God's supernatural peace.** In Colossians 3:15 Paul is encouraging the believers in Colosse' to bear with another, that's when he adds, **"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful."** It's the *peace on the inside* that enables us to put up with the *Peninnahs on the outside.* Ole Peninnah was still kicking up a storm - but on the inside Hannah was at rest. She was cool! She was enjoying God's perfect peace. Peninnah could no longer ruffle her feathers when the Dove of God's Spirit filled her heart with His peace... And you too can have God's peace.

I love verse 18, “So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.” Hannah has regained her strength. She’s no longer sad. What began as a *thorn in her side*, had now been replaced with a *smile on her face*. Hannah’s demeanor was no longer sad because she knew *God’s kindness* was more than sufficient for whatever *God’s will* required.

Grace might help her *bear a child*... or a greater miracle, *bear with a Peninnah*. Grace does both. At times God removes difficulties - at other times, God helps us turn our difficulties into blessings. It works both ways. It’s been said, “Prayer may not always change things for you, but it always changes you for things.” Nothing is too difficult to endure when you’ve got a grip on God’s grace - even a *sassy, brassy, crassy, lassie* like Peninnah! Pour out your soul to God and He fill it up again with His peace.

When the family returned home it was the same Peninnah in the SUV as when they first arrived in Shiloh... *but it was a brand new Hannah!* Peninnah was no longer a bother. Grace and peace made the difference. It’s amazing how differently we see people, and react to situations, when we trust in God’s grace and receive God’s peace. Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, and you’ll be able to *praise God for your Peninnah!*

This morning, if there’s a Peninnah in your life don’t try to avoid her - or begrudge her - or complain about her – rather make her a matter of prayer. Let her drive you to your knees. Trust in *God’s grace*... receive *God’s peace*... then *praise God* for your Peninnah! I believe the combination of *God’s grace* and *her irritations* are making your life into a beautiful pearl!