

# Where is Hannah today?

## Prophet Jim Smith

We don't know much about Hannah's background. She was a married woman, and from the story we are about to study, she had a loving and caring husband. She probably experienced all the ups and downs of life, just as we do. But she had one great burden, and in Africa we understand this burden very well. The Bible says in 1 Samuel 1:2:-

**“Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.”**

This sad experience could have destroyed her life, but in fact God used it, as he uses all of our experiences, to open a door for her into the world of the intercessor. We are going to pass through that door with her, and this is the challenge to the people of God in Africa – are we willing to be called into intercession, as she was, for our families, our churches, and our lands?

## Hannah's experience of intercession

### 1. Born out of experience

Like most intercessors, the call comes in a painful way. The beginning of Hannah's path to intercession is seen in one simple phrase – “ Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.” Elkanah had two wives, but one of them had no children. This great sadness is experienced in every part of the world, but is especially common in Africa. Whenever I pray for the gift of children in a meeting, many women will stand up. When I call for God to fill wombs, there is a great sigh which sweeps across the Assembly, shared by women and men. For to have no children is a great sorrow and burden in Africa. It causes many women to be beaten and to be put out of the home. But even in those marriages where the husband is understanding and loving, there is always a great sorrow. For no matter how much we fill our houses – and African homes are always full of people – it cannot hide the absence of a child. In this great sorrow, Hannah had to experience two more indignities. **First**, when Elkanah shared out the sacrifice, he would give portions to Peninnah and her children, and “to Hannah he would give a double portion, because he loved her.” (v 5) He was a kind man, but he didn't really understand how Hannah felt. The double portion, even out of love, only emphasised her sorrow. **Second**, she had to endure the taunts of Peninnah “because the Lord had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her.” (v 6.)

Women can be very cruel. Peninnah, knowing Hannah's vulnerability, didn't help, but insulted her, again and again. It got so bad, that Hannah could not eat. Elkanah saw this, and said “Hannah why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you so downhearted? Am I not worth more to you than ten sons?” The answer, Elkanah, is

simple. Nothing in all creation can make up for the empty womb of a woman who wants a child.

## **2. Lives in the bitterness of her emotions**

So the scene is set. Now Hannah must enter the painful way of intercession. Intercession is painful, and like childbirth, there is no way to avoid the pain. One day, Hannah could stand it no longer. Her feelings and emotions overcame her, and she went to the Holy Place, and “in bitterness of soul she wept much and prayed to the Lord.” This is the secret of all intercession - deep emotional disturbance and much praying to the Lord.

All intercession begins in this deep emotional disturbance. It is very biblical. Jesus knew very deep emotional distress. Study these passages:-

**Matthew 9: 36**            Jesus has compassion on the crowds.

**Mark 3:5**                         Jesus feels anger at the attitudes of his enemies.

**John 11:35**                 Jesus weeps at the death of his friend.

We should especially read Matthew 26: 36-46. In verse 38 we read “My soul is overwhelmed to the point of death.” This must be one of the deepest emotional disturbances found in the Bible. Jesus feels the whole weight of sin, the awfulness of the way ahead, the loneliness, the pain and sorrow his friends will experience. It is to this depth of emotion that all intercessors must finally come. Then we can truly cry out to the Lord in prayer, as Hannah did. How long did she cry and intercede? How long did she pray? We assume that it was not such a long period, and we should take note of this. Interceding at a deep level is very exhausting for our human spirit. We cannot endure it for very long at one time.

## **3. Paid the price of intercession**

Intercession has a price to it. This is a very hard lesson for all those called into intercession. What was Hannah’s price? **“Oh 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..”** (v.11) She is interceding, knowing the price which she will have to pay if her request is granted. When Jesus said “The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many people,” he was doing the same thing. (Mark 10:35) He knew the price he would have to pay if God was going to fulfil his salvation purposes through his son.

True intercessors know the price they will have to pay, and still go on crying out to God. Only the Holy Spirit can call a man or woman to this painful position, and only the Holy Spirit can give a man or a woman the courage to pray in such a way. Yet without this kind of intercessory commitment, there would have been no Samuel, and without Samuel, the plan of salvation could have been lost. If the intercessors of a Nation are unwilling to come forward and bear the burden, then the Nation is truly desperate, and

has little hope of salvation. If this looks like a serious statement, then it is to remind us that intercession is a serious business.

#### **4. Brought the fruit of it's exercise.**

Hannah's entry to the role of intercessor was blessed by God. **“So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying ‘because I asked the Lord for him.’”** (v. 20) And more – **“And the Lord was gracious to Hannah; she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters.”** (Ch 2:21)

Intercession achieves that for which it intercedes. God answers prayer. But remember, Hannah was only at the beginning of her road. She interceded and received the fruits of her prayer quickly. As we mature, so the answers take a little longer. Why? Simply because we have to fight harder in the heavenly places, to break through the enemy, and move the heart of God. Look at Simeon. God promised him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. (Luke 2:26) He had waited a long time for this promise to be fulfilled. Anna also (Luke 2:36-38) had been praying and interceding for many years.

While we rejoice that Hannah saw fruit, we must not expect quick results too often. Intercession is warfare - long, hard and lonely warfare. We have to endure, so that we can triumph.

Here is a summary of what is written here. It might be good to copy this out somewhere, so that you can refer to it:-

**Intercession is born out of experience.**  
**It lives in our emotions, and this is painful.**  
**There is a price to be paid.**  
**Intercession brings the fruit of its exercise.**  
**We might not see this quickly.**  
**We might not see it ourselves. Others will.**

### **How does intercession work?**

Hannah's life shows us what an intercessor can expect to experience, but how does this ministry work? Here is an outline:-

#### **1. Feeling the pain of God**

In Hosea 11, God outlines all his frustrations with his people. They don't love him, they don't care about him, they don't listen to him, they go after other gods, and so on. It's a long list of disobedience. But then, bursting from his heart, comes this cry:- “How can I give you up Ephraim? How can I hand you over Israel?” This is a painful cry, from the tender and broken heart of God. Those who enter into intercession, have to be able to see, feel and share this pain. I remember one occasion when I was in the presence of God,

and he showed me the pain in his heart for his broken creation. I was so shocked. Then God began to let me feel more and more of this pain. In the end I cried out “Stop. I can’t bear anymore.” God said to me “What kind of a friend are you then, who limits your willingness to share my pain?” I never forgot those words. If we want to intercede, then we have to be willing to see things as he sees them, and share the pain which he has to bear daily for his creation.

## **2. Feeling the pain of men**

When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because **“they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”** (Matthew 9: 36) He felt their lostness, their uncertainties, their sorrows and their hopelessness. He felt the pain in the heart of men. Those who enter intercession have to be willing to share the pain in the heart of men. One day, a woman came to me, and began to pour out her pain, because she had been raped. It was so painful to see and hear, but I refused to turn my emotions away. I let the devastation and the shame touch my heart. It hurt me so much, but how else could I intercede for her? The pain of men and women is endless, deep and bewildering. But we have to bear it, so that we can intercede. This is easy to write, but very painful to do. But there is no other way.

## **3. Bringing the two together in the heavenly places.**

Why must we feel these pains –the pain of God and the pain of men? So that we can bring the two together in the heavenly places. That is our job. This is the heart and burden of intercession - to be in the heavenly places, with the pain of God and the pain of men in our heart. Then we are fully equipped to begin to cry out before God. In Gethsemane, Jesus demonstrates to us exactly this principle:-

**“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”** (Matthew 26:38)

Here, Jesus is feeling the pain of men, and the ruin of sin in the lives of God’s creatures.

**“Going a little further, he fell with his face to the ground, and prayed ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’”** (Matthew 26:39)

Here, Jesus is struggling with the heart of God, which needed the Son to be obedient. It’s not hard to imagine how painful this was for God, and for Jesus. This agonising position is the point of intercession. No wonder few accept the burden.

## **4. Enduring, like a good soldier.**

Faced with problems which don’t offer an instant solution, many Africans run away! Perhaps they don’t run off into the bush, but they run away from dealing with hard issues, hoping that by leaving them, they will go away. But this attitude cannot be found in the heart of an intercessor. We don’t run away, we have to stand and fight! Sometimes, this involves us in standing, and taking the pressure of the enemy into our lives and into our spirits. Under these circumstances, we have to use a very strong weapon - we have to

endure. This means we have to stand fast, no matter what is thrown at us, and no matter what we have to endure. Standing firm and enduring is part of a soldier's discipline. Intercessors have to have this weapon. Often we are called on to pray and wait for long periods – for years, sometimes even centuries. Under these circumstances it is no good saying “But nothing is happening. I'm wasting my time. I want action now!” Instead, we have to do as Habbakuk commands:-

**“Though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails, and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my saviour.” ( Hab 2: 17-18)**

We have to do what Jesus commands:-

**“Stay here and keep watch.” (Mark 14: 34)**

We have to do what the Apostle commands:-

**“Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (2 Tim.2:3)**

Here is a summary of what is written here. Again, I suggest you write this down somewhere:-

**An intercessor feels the pain of God.  
An intercessor feels the pain of men.  
An intercessor brings these pains together in  
heaven before God.  
An intercessor endures.**

**What skills do we need to intercede?**

### **1.Equipping with spiritual armour.**

The intercessor, like any soldier, must go into battle with the right armour. There is much to choose from, but traditionally, we have looked to Ephesians 6 for the foundation armour:-

**“Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness**

**that comes from the Gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” (Ephesians 6: 10-18)**

Intercessors need the following equipment:-

### **The belt of truth.**

The belt of the Roman soldier was where he carried his weapon, and his supplies. It was very important to him, and it is also important to us. Our belt is biblical truth - knowing the truths about Jesus, and having a life firmly built on those truths. To do this, we have to know them in our heads, know where to find them in the Bible, and apply them to our hearts, so that we naturally live by them.

### **The breastplate of righteousness.**

The Roman breastplate was a kind of iron coat. It protected his heart. We stand clothed in the righteousness of Jesus –this protects our heart. We face no condemnation and no judgment, because the righteousness of Jesus has dealt with these things. His blood has sanctified and cleansed us. We are seen by the Father as righteous. And our enemy has also to see us and accept us as righteous. He will hate this – but that’s just his bad luck. He lost, and we won. We are the victors through the righteousness of Jesus.

### **The gospel shoes.**

The Roman soldiers had strong sandals, so that they could march, and could stand firm in battle. We have gospel shoes. We will not be pushed over, or pushed backward. Our feet are standing on the rock of the Good news of Jesus. We own the ground on which we stand. We are not thieves – our enemy is the thief. The good news of Jesus is our title deed. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Alleluia!

### **The shield of faith.**

The shield of the Roman soldier was a defensive and an attacking weapon. It protected the soldier from the blows of his enemy, but it could also be used to push his enemy down, so that he could be stabbed to death. By our faith, we are protected, and by our faith we advance. Incidentally, Roman soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder, so their shields looked like a steel wall to the enemy. Let’s make sure we fight together, and not separately.

### **The helmet of salvation.**

Our heads must be protected in combat but if it is hurt, we are unable to fight. In the spiritual realm, our spirit must be protected in the same way. The enemy will seek to

attack our spirit, but with the helmet of salvation, none of his attacks can work. By our salvation, we belong to Jesus. No attack can succeed, although sometimes the battle may be hard and long. In the end we will overcome.

### **The sword of the Spirit.**

The Roman soldiers carried a short sword, which could cut, stab and slash in the heart of battle, without damaging their comrades on either side of them. Our short sword is the word of God, which we must know how to use to stab, cut and slash against our enemy. We must know the Bible, and how to use it. This experience does not come quickly, but by daily practice and exercise. The older we get in faith, the stronger we should be, because we know more of the word of God, and how to use it.

### **2. Know how to pray.**

Marriage is not a legal contract, or an agreement between families. It is a relationship between a man and a woman. I don't speak about my marriage contract with my wife, just about my relationship with her. Intercession is the same. It is not a "gift" or a "calling", although we use those terms. It is a relationship between us and God, which allows us to have Hannah's experience, and to move the heart of God by being moved ourselves by the emotions and feelings in that heart. If you are an intercessor reading this, you know these things. If you feel the call to intercede, you will soon learn these things.

How do we exercise this relationship? Like all relationships, we have to give it time, care and love. Intercessors have to spend time WITH God, time LISTENING to God, and time FEELING the emotions and feelings in the heart of God. That is our job and our calling. If you have only ever "prayed" then you haven't begun to intercede. Ask God to teach you how to be with him. Ask God to teach you how to listen. Ask God to let you share his feelings, rather than just expecting him to share your feelings. Fundamentally, we have to spend time waiting on God and listening to him. Some find it best to set aside certain times and places for this. Others prefer to live their daily lives in an attitude of listening and waiting. We probably have to do a little of both. How we do it is not that important. That we allow the intercessory relationship to grow is important.

### **3. Know our prayer targets**

The Bible tells us that we have divine power to pull down strongholds. (2 Corinthians 10:4) But we are not expected to pull down all the strongholds by ourselves at the same time! It is vital that we are led by God to pray for the things which he wants us to pray for. He gives the targets as he sees fit. If each of us, and each group pray for the things which are God's plan for them to pray over, then many things are interceded for. If any of us tries to do too much, we will fall exhausted. Spend time thinking about the following list:-

\* There are things to pray for, and things to pray against. We must know the difference.

\* There are times when we must pray, but there are also times when we must rest from praying for a while. Otherwise we will get exhausted.

\* There are different ways of praying in different situations. We have to learn to match the prayer with the need.

\* It is nice to see answers, but they are not the measure of our intercession and our effectiveness. The relationship of intercession cannot be easily measured. Do not make the mistake of trying to measure your “success.”

\* This is a tiring calling.

\* Sometimes it takes years to overcome a strong place. We have to be patient, and persistent.

Here is a summary of what is written here. I suggest you write it out in a place where you can find it.

**Intercessors must be equipped with the spiritual armour.**

**Intercessors must know how to pray.**

**Intercessors must know their prayer targets.**

## **It’s up to you!**

It’s good to read about intercession, and God wants many intercessors – perhaps you are one of them. But books don’t make intercessors. We need the call of God, the training of God, and the desire to share the heart of God to go forward in this calling. But even that is not enough. Only the work of the Holy Spirit can help us hear the call, and only the desire to go forward, prompted by that same Spirit, can bring us into the experience of Hannah, and many like her. Intercession is a great call and a great privilege. But no one can make you have it. Only God can do that. It’s up to you.

## **A new target - interceding for Africa.**

Perhaps you have been an intercessor for years. If you have, I would like to point your thinking towards a new target – Africa, both the Continent and some of the countries. There isn’t space here to give you many targets, but you will find them all in my book “Africa in the heavenly Places,” which is available on the website.

## **AFRICA**

**God has raised a banner over Africa.**

**The banner of love, of freedom, of service.**

**“In this continent” says the Lord**

**“I will show my power.**

**From here a river will begin to flow, to the North and to the South, to the East and to the West. A river of cleansing for my broken and dying world.**

**Nations of the world will be blessed.**

**But first my people must be cleansed,  
be filled with new power, with new fire.**

**The leaders of the Nations must be cleansed,  
and become the servants of the people they lead.**

**The leaders of the Churches must be cleansed,  
and given the servant heart, the shepherd heart  
to feed and lead my people.**

**My people must be cleansed, and in confessing,  
I will fill the Churches with a new fire - as has never been seen before.**

**Then the river will begin to flow.  
I will send hundreds, thousands out from  
this continent to bless, to heal,  
to intercede for my broken world.**

**Come now to my cross.**