

FOCUS ON FAVOR

WHY ELKANAH MARRIED TWO WIVES: THE STORY OF HANNAH AND PENINNAH

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Background

We shall look at the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1. For easier understanding of the message, let us first focus on the keywords in the story.

Elkanah - redeemed or created/chosen of God (El means Elohim or Eloah)

Hannah – grace or favor

Peninnah – pearl or precious

Shiloh – the sent one (representing Christ)

Introduction

The story of Elkanah and his two wives is intriguing. First, someone might ask why a man of God has 2 wives. To me it appears the story gets sweet when we have Peninnah in the equation. Theologians believe Hannah was the first wife and Peninnah comes in when Hannah is unable to bear children. Elkanah was just fixing a problem in his home but his own way. However, the entry of Peninnah in the scene makes the story even sweeter.

Previously, there might have been doubt on who had a biological problem now that Elkanah and Hannah did not have children. Someone might think either or both of them was/were barren. But when Peninnah comes in she helps carry out a litmus test on who is the problem.

She deletes any suspicion that Elkanah might have been the problem biologically. By having children with Elkanah, it is now clear that Hannah is the problem. Therefore, when Peninnah is making Hannah to fret (feel anxious and worried) she is doing it from a point of confidence knowing Hannah is the problem.

Elkanah is a Gentleman

The reaction of Elkanah is what could be called today, a real gentleman approach. He encourages Hannah by saying, ‘am I not worthy more than 10 sons to you?’ This is a real encouragement to a woman who was looking for her worth in the marriage life. To hear such words, not from Eli the priest or a fellow woman, but from her husband, Elkanah, are quite uplifting.

To us today, it means we should also look at the next person and see greatness in them. Encourage them and see potential in them. Even if they have been heart broken or broken and hurt, we should see a great leader, a great husband of someone, a great child or sibling. But not to disband them, as reckless. This is what Elkanah did; he encouraged her wife Hannah even when she did not have children.

Imbalanced Life

Again the story begins with a point of imbalance. We see Elkanah who is a man of God doing so well when it came to one side of his life and doing so poorly on the other side of life. He is progressing when it comes to making his marriage complete by having children with Peninnah but he is poor when it comes to Hannah.

This is how we feel at times in life. We feel in some areas we are so good but in some areas we are not good. We lack even the moral authority to stand before people and talk about certain issues. In some, their marriages have broken and they feel they can never advise someone on that area. To others, it is finances and even the worst, some have backslidden and upon coming back to Christ, they feel less confident to talk about their faith. Sad, some are even worried to make the step of faith to accept Christ, for they feel their past is too dark.

When people talk of issues we know we are weak in we even bend our heads down and our hearts are soaked with anxiety. We feel like Elkanah who has married twice but his satisfaction is not yet satisfied. He still has some inadequacy.

However, looking at this man who is living an imbalanced life, he goes every year to Shiloh to worship. Now, there is a myth that Shiloh might be the root of the kikuyu name Wanjiru or Shiro but it is not. The name Shiloh means ‘the sent one’ or ‘messiah’. Therefore, every year Elkanah went to Shiloh or went to Christ to worship. This gives me courage that irrespective of how my life issues are I will still go to Christ and worship him. I will not miss fellowships or meetings because I have some imbalances in my life. I will still rejoice in God and be up for prayer and set time for meetings even when my heart is broken or when issues at home don’t seem to add up.

Worthy More than Ten Sons

Elkanah is also a divinely wise man here. When there is trouble in his marriage, he does not overreact and throw tantrums all over. He can see that Peninnah has children, which is what he wanted in life. But he does not forget the Hannah who seems barren. In fact, Hannah remains a favorite. He gives her a super encouragement. He compares himself with 10 sons. Now, why not 9 sons or 11 sons or even 100 sons? Remember number 10 symbolizes ‘divine order’ in the bible. Therefore, Elkanah was telling Hannah, “this is the divine order, don’t trouble your heart, you have me, God has seen it well to work it out this way at such a time, be calm, at least you have me”. Elkanah was thus pointing to the divine order where God had seen it perfect for Hannah to be in that state at that point in life.

To most men it could have been the opposite. They would focus on Peninnah and neglect Hannah who seems unproductive.

Peninnah for Precious and Hannah for Grace

Again we look at the meaning of the name Peninnah and Hannah and what it implies.

As we said earlier, Peninnah means pearl or precious while Hannah means grace or favor. It is an easy temptation for someone to focus on the precious things you can touch, see, feel and experience, neglecting the grace and favor which you may not easily see.

People have previously neglected the grace and favor upon them through Jesus Christ and they have gone for the quick fix solutions which seem tangible and real. At times someone may not see the sense why a Christian should uphold their Christian morals and fail to bribe their way out or engage in other corruptible issues.

For, Elkanah, he knows the real value in Hannah and does not neglect her. He does not get carried away by the children they have with Peninnah. But he still had a close connection with Hannah even if she does not have children. This is a case of focusing on the favor God has given you and not getting carried away by some job which may compromise your Christian values or doing anything which seem good before you and not good before the eyes of God.

The favor of life, food, shelter and health, the list is endless. Focus on the good things God has given you and do not get carried away by other blessings God has given you.

It is also easy to get tempted by the money by the swag some men have and get carried away, leaving behind the favor and grace God has placed on you. Although the worldly threshold may not identify you as an achiever, still **focus on favor** God has put on you.