

## Tears in the temple

### Beginnings

- It was the last straw!
  - true, it happened every year, but this time it was too much
  - the festive celebration only depressed her all the more...
- Suddenly she is gone:
  - we find her at the tabernacle entrance
  - we watch her there
  - she wants to pray... she will if the great, heaving sobs subside
- Hannah had almost everything an 1100BC Israelite woman could want:
  - she had a husband, Elkanah
  - he loved her
  - he was a pious man for his time
  - Elkanah was well-connected and had modest wealth › he could afford two wives
- But that was the problem › she shared him
  - she shared him with Peninnah, an overly fertile, mouthy, thorn-in-the-flesh woman
  - the home at Ramathaim-zophim (perhaps New Testament Arimathea) was not a happy one
- Hannah was barren and couldn't have any children:
  - worse, her 'sister-wife' taunted her about it, especially at the annual family visit to worship at Shiloh
  - she would go on and on about it, winding Hannah up to breaking pitch
- With the death of Samson the country was disunited and leaderless
  - the Philistines › off-shore invaders › were going from strength to strength, realising significant victories and relentlessly moving eastward from the coast
  - the priesthood was corrupt with tales of moral scandals at tabernacle worship abounding
  - the nation was weak and barren
  - the Word of the Lord was not heard in the land

### From Nothing

- How often had the Lord brought the hope of the nation forth from a barren woman:
  - Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Samson's mother, even the old, childless Elizabeth who gave birth to John the Baptist...
  - barren women seem to be God's instruments in raising up key figures in the history of redemption
  - new chapters often seem to start with barren women

#### They begin with nothing

- God makes our total inability his starting point
- our hopelessness and helplessness are no barriers to his work
- Indeed that is often when he does most with us
  - when we are at our wits end, without resources, without hope, without human gimmicks › then he loves to stretch out his hand from heaven
- Being childless was a great stigma:
  - Hannah had her nose rubbed in it by Peninnah
  - she may have been jealous of Elkanah's love for Hannah
  - in her perversity Peninnah's choice moment to rile Hannah was at worship
- The sacrificial meal over, Hannah abruptly rushes away to the entrance of the tabernacle
  - she didn't see old Eli the priest watching her
  - bitter in soul she began to pray to the Lord with many, many tears
  - old Eli (who indulged his wicked sons) got het up over an apparently drunk

woman....

- As she implored the Almighty, her mouth moved, but no sound came out
  - she was speaking in her heart
- Eli thought she was another soused woman, half-cut after the sacrificial feast
  - but his sharp rebuke was met with a sad confession
  - 'No sir, I am not drunk. I am a woman with a heavy spirit. I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.'
- Hannah is at the throne of grace and comes with boldness to the Lord
  - and as she does, she leads us also to Christ
  - she instructs us how to commune with God
  - he allows us to pour out our griefs and sobs and perplexities to him
  - he can handle our tears
  - he is not embarrassed by them
  - they won't make him ill at ease
  - we can unload our distress at his feet

## Moving On

- Hannah made a vow
  - she promised that if God would give her a son then she would dedicate him to service in the Lord's house
  - sounds like she was bribing God!
  - but Hannah's promise is simply to give what the Lord gives, back to him
  - at all times she is submissive to his will › as a childless woman, and now in asking for a son
- There is a danger in making rash vows
  - Jephthah, the judge, did that
- But Hannah's vow is not rash
- As the son of a Levite Elkanah and Hannah's son would be dedicated to the Lord's service:
  - what was distinctive about Hannah's vow was that her son would serve in the tabernacle from his earliest years and that he would be a Nazarite from the beginning
  - usually the Nazarite vow was only for a limited set period but what Hannah vows is for a lifelong, extraordinary servant of the Lord
- And this vow was well within Hannah's ability to keep, as we shall see
  - we are encouraged to ask God for our heart's desire by Hannah's example › **but for him**
- Eli's blessing signalled the peace Hannah would know in her heart
  - it is the peace that comes from God when we lay before him our heart's desire
  - it comes whether he says 'yes' or 'no' - **He speaks peace to us**
  - Hannah was now able to eat and she was no longer downcast
  - her son was not even conceived yet, far less born...
  - but God had already answered her prayer with the assurance of his love towards her