

**Reading Group Guide for
A Passionate Hope
by Jill Eileen Smith**

(Spoiler alert—these questions assume you've already read the book)

1. How does the prologue of the book—the relationship between Hannah and her friends and her meeting with Elkanah—set the tone for the rest of the story?
2. Throughout the book we are made aware of the corruption of the priesthood. How does this play into the story? How does it affect the lives of Hannah and Elkanah and the rest of Israel?
3. After years of marriage, it becomes acutely obvious that Hannah is barren. Why does Elkanah feel a second wife is his only option?
4. How does the presence of a second wife affect Hannah? How does she handle Peninnah's constant hostility? Have you ever had to deal with a very difficult person? How did you handle the situation?
5. How are the sins of the priests Hophni and Phineas brought out in the story? Do you think the situation was as bad as it sounded? What do you envision when Scripture says they were defiling the sacrifices and sleeping with the women at the temple? Do you think their sins could have grown to infect other members of the priesthood or Levites?
6. Hannah lived during the time of the judges, when, the Bible says, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." How do you think this affected the average person? Do you see similarities to our world today, and if so, what one thing can you think would help bring about change for the good?
7. What opinion do you have of Elkanah from the story? Do you think he made a wise decision to marry a second time despite pressure from outside forces? Why or why not?
8. Polygamy was not God's original design for marriage. In a polygamous union, was it possible that Hannah and Elkanah could have had a strong love for the Lord? Could living in disobedience have affected their relationship to God? How is their relationship a reflection of God's grace?
9. How do you think Hannah felt month after month when there was no sign of a child? Have you ever longed for something with all of your heart and had that desire denied? Have you come to a place of peace or acceptance of the life you wanted but couldn't have? If so, how did you get there?
10. Hannah lives for years in the shadow of watching her rival birth child after child. She comes to a point of such despair, she is tempted to end her life in the river. What stopped her? Have you ever felt that desperate? Would you care to share your experience with the group?
11. Hannah and her husband's family often travel to Shiloh to worship at various feasts. Why would Peninnah's taunts have bothered her more on that one fateful trip that led her to her surrendered prayer? Have you ever found that it took much time to reach a place where your prayers changed you and hope was at last restored? What was the catalyst that brought you to that place?

12. Though Hannah's prayer is not yet answered, how does she react once she finishes praying? Have you ever experienced that kind of joy after praying?
13. Elkanah could have nullified Hannah's vow, but he allows her to keep it. Considering the fact that he loves her best, why do you think he lets her give her only child to live among the corrupt priests? Do you think he should have canceled her vow? Why or why not?
14. How do the minor characters in the book enhance the story? Whom did you like best and why?
15. What was your opinion of Peninnah? Could you relate to her on any level? In your dealings with people in life, do you try to see past the behavior of difficult people to understand what might make them behave as they do? What can we learn from Peninnah's life?
16. When Hannah finally delivers Samuel to Eli at the tabernacle, she doesn't leave depressed or sad. Rather, she sings a song that mimics Mary's song of praise when she discovers she will bear the Messiah. Why do you think Hannah could feel joy when she had just handed her five-year-old son to an old man to raise in a less-than-stellar environment?
17. Hannah later goes on to have more children, though the Bible tells us that she remained devoted to Samuel. How do you think her sudden ability to bear children changed her relationship with her rival? Do you think it changed the way Peninnah viewed Hannah?
18. The book ends with a change in Elkanah's family. What is it? Do you think it's plausible, based on what you understand about human nature? About God?
19. Samuel grows to become a man of God that Hannah would be proud to call son. Do you think he felt a loss at being away from his parents all of those years? How do you think Hannah coped with her decision? Have you ever had to give up something you dearly loved? Who else in Scripture was forced to make a similar decision and allow her son to be raised away from home?
20. Hannah's decision led to a new leader in Israel, one who brought the people back to the true worship of Adonai. The corruption of the priesthood perished with Hophni and Phineas, and for a time the country followed Samuel and obeyed the Lord. Do you think God withheld a child from Hannah until she was ready to give him back to God for this purpose? Have you ever felt that you were called to do something in your life—that you were made for that purpose? How did you use what God gave you? Would you care to share the outcome with the group?

I hope you enjoyed *A Passionate Hope: Hannah's Story*. I also hope you will read the first few chapters of 1 Samuel to compare with the book. The Scripture illuminates life in a way no novel can. May you be blessed in your reading.