

1 SAMUEL 2:11-36 - GOD AND CORRUPTION

Study 3

LIFE WITHOUT GOD

Last week we saw the world through Hannah's eyes. A world in which an infinitely powerful God, creates, governs and orders and judges His world. Through this lens, Hannah knew that she could trust God with her circumstances.

This week, we see the world through another lens, that of Hophni and Phinehas. Two priests who were anything but Godly, they were in fact 'worthless men.' The last time this word 'worthless' was used in Judges 19, to describe men who did unspeakable acts to a Levites concubine. Paul also uses the translated word in 2 Corinthians 6:15, as a name that had become synonymous for Satan. These priests were unconverted men, sons of destruction.

What could be more tragic for the people of God than for those who are appointed to spiritual leadership being wicked men who do not fear the Lord? An issue that continues to this day!

Eli's sons are guilty of several spiritual abuses. First, they are failing to obey the regulation of God's law for worship and sacrifice (vv. 13–14). The law made provision for the priests to be given a certain portion of the sacrifices (Lev. 7:31–34), but Eli's sons take whatever part of the meat they want. They also violate God's law by taking the meat before it has been burned and then strong-arming pious worshipers who seek to follow the Scriptures (vv. 15–16). In addition, they are guilty of sexual immorality with the women who serve with them in the tent of meeting (v. 22). In this, they are not only guilty of gross spiritual abuse, but they are also making the house of the Lord like the pagan temples, which often incorporated sex acts into their worship (Num. 25:1–3). In their abuse of their power and office Eli's sons resemble the arrogant about whom Hannah sang (v. 3). The greatest sin of the sons of Eli is their disregard of the Lord himself (v. 17). Such worthless men will be brought down under the judgment of the Lord (vv. 4, 10, 25b).

READ 1 Samuel 2:11-21

1. What features of the passage stand out to you?
2. Are there any ways in which your religious activities are done for yourself, rather than for God?

3. If you were to gather a group of young ministers-in-training and had the opportunity to give them practical advice on how to remain faithful in ministry, what would you tell them?

THE PASSIVE PARENT

Eli is fully aware of the evil his sons are committing (vv. 22, 24). Eli, to his credit, does verbally admonish his sons as he seeks to put the fear of God into them (vv. 23, 25a). Hophni and Phinehas, however, pay no attention to their father's warning and continue in their sin (v. 25b). It is at this point that Eli fails. Because the tent of meeting and the priestly functions are under his authority, he is responsible for overseeing the work of his sons. Verbal warning is not enough. His rebuke should be backed up with action (3:13). At the very least, he could remove them from serving in the house of God. It may be that he should have had them executed as obstinate sons (Deut. 21:18–21; if ever there was a case that fitted the scenario described in Deuteronomy, this is it).

Why does Eli fail to act? The reason is given by the man of God sent by the Lord to rebuke Eli (vv. 27–29): “Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?” (v. 29). Eli is guilty of honoring his sons above the Lord. In other words, when push comes to shove, Eli chooses to please his sons at the expense of pleasing God. He is more concerned about keeping the peace with his wicked sons than keeping the peace with God.

READ 1 Samuel 2:22-26

1. What features of the passage stand out to you?
2. What factors determine why children turn out the way they do?
3. Our text says that the Lord was determined to put Hophni and Phinehas to death (2:25). How can this be reconciled to their responsibility for their sin? (see Romans 1:18-32; Romans 9:14-23)

JUDGMENT IS PRONOUNCED ON THE HOUSE OF ELI

God determines that Eli's family is unfit to lead Israel. Because they refuse to "honor" the Lord, they will be lightly esteemed by the Lord (2:30). Judgment is declared twice. First the man of God says that Eli's house will be cut off forever and that it will come to a sudden end, involving the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas (2:30–34). The same judgment is then revealed to Eli through Samuel (3:10–14). In response, Eli passively submits to God's decree (3:15–18).

God's judgment on Eli's sons is carried out when they both die in battle and the ark of the covenant is taken by the Philistines (4:11). When Eli hears the news, he falls over and dies (4:12–18). Interestingly, the shock which leads to Eli's death is not the news of the demise of his sons, but that of the loss of the ark of the covenant (4:18). So it appears that in his death Eli finally honors the Lord above his sons.

READ 1 Samuel 2:27-34

1. What features of the passage stand out to you?
2. What are the qualifications for our spiritual leaders? (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9;)

THE LORD RAISES UP A FAITHFUL LEADER FOR HIS PEOPLE

While the Lord is bringing an end to the leadership of Eli's house, he is preparing Hannah's son, Samuel, to lead the nation. The man of God who visits Eli prophesies that a "faithful priest" will be raised up to serve in Eli's place (2:35–36). Samuel, in contrast to Eli's sons, fears God and serves faithfully alongside Eli (2:26; 3:1a). The Lord directly reveals himself to Samuel (3:1–9). As Eli's house is fading from view, Samuel is receiving and proclaiming the Word of the Lord, and his reputation grows throughout Israel (3:19–21).

It is interesting that Eli, who failed so miserably in raising Hophni and Phinehas, enjoys such great success in training Samuel. The difference is God's sovereign grace. It is also ironic that Eli nurtures and grooms his successor. In contrast to Saul, who will try to kill his successor (David), Eli submits to God's plan.

READ 1 Samuel 2:35-36

1. What features of the passage stand out to you?

2. What does this passage tell us about the need for Godly leadership (both in homes and churches)?

3. Have you learned to look for God's work in quiet ways, or are you always needing to see him in dramatic experiences?

4. To whom does the promise of 1 Samuel 2:35 refer?