

This chapter should serve as a cautionary tale to those who would prioritize their family and/or friends over what is right in the eyes of God. Eli may not have liked what his sons were doing but he also did not correct the situation and allowed them to continue serving as priests. Their lack of repentance prompted the LORD to bring judgment to both Eli and his descendants.

12 Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD.

“Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial [worthless; wicked]” – The Hebrew expression “sons of Belial” referred to someone who was wicked and morally worthless. The idea was that a son inherited the nature of his father and so a “son of Belial [worthless; wicked]” had the nature of being worthless and wicked. Eli had mistook Hannah for a “daughter of Belial” (1 Sam. 1:16) but it was his own sons that were wicked.

“they knew not the LORD” – They did not have a personal relationship with the LORD despite serving as priests in the tabernacle under the leadership of their father, the high priest. They went through the motions of serving the LORD without actually knowing the One Whom they were serving. How many people are serving in churches today that have not been truly born again?

17 Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.

Verses 13-16 describe what Eli’s sons did when men came to make an offering to the LORD. According to Mosaic law, the priests were entitled to take certain portions of the sacrifice for food after the sacrifice had been offered to the LORD. Eli’s sons did not want to wait but wanted the best portions for themselves and forcefully took them if the worshiper did not cooperate. The result was that men began to hate bringing an offering to the LORD because they knew that it would not be handled properly according to the Mosaic law. It is a very great sin to interfere with the proper worship of the LORD and Eli’s sons were treading on dangerous ground. The LORD takes it serious when we discourage people from serving the LORD.

Verses 18-21: In contrast to Eli’s sons, Samuel grew up serving the LORD faithfully in the tabernacle with Eli. Each year Samuel’s mother would make him a new coat and bring it to him when she came with her husband for the annual sacrifice. The LORD continued to bless Hannah by giving her three more sons and two daughters.

22 Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

“Now Eli was very old” – Some commentators suggest that Eli may have been around 90 years old at this time since he died at the age of 98 (1 Sam. 4:15). His ability to serve as a judge in Israel (1 Sam. 4:18) and as high priest had dwindled and Eli’s sons were not suitable replacements for Eli’s leadership.

“and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel” – Apparently people had been complaining to Eli about the behavior of his sons. They were desecrating offerings brought to the LORD (vs. 12-17) and were engaging in sexual sins.

“and how they lay with the women that assembled [served] at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation” – These were apparently Levite women who served in various duties around the tabernacle. Eli’s sons used their positions as priests to either seduce or force these women to have sex with them.

23 And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. 24 Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD's people to transgress.

“And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people” – If Eli’s sons thought they were doing these things without his knowledge, they were wrong. Also, all the people were complaining about the son’s behavior, so their sins were not occasional incidents or missteps. The people understood the severity of the son’s sins.

“Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD's people to transgress” – Eli has heard and understood the magnitude of his sons’ sins. As priests, their sins were causing the people to transgress God’s law because (1) the offerings they brought were not being offered properly according the law; (2) the people were abhorring the process of bringing an offering to the LORD, which discouraged them from doing it; (3) since the people were being discouraged from bring their offerings to the LORD, they may have been tempted to take their offerings to other gods.

25 If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them.

“If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge [mediate] him” – The judge (be it the LORD or man) is a third-party authority that can reconcile the offender and the offended.

“but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat [intercede] for him?” – However, if someone were to sin against the LORD, who had the authority to serve as the mediator between man and God to reconcile them? Eli did not know that God has provided a Mediator for us, the Lord Jesus Christ!

“Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them” – Eli’s sons had already crossed the line beyond which forgiveness was impossible and so the LORD had decided He would kill them as punishment. Thus He hardened their heart so that they would not listen to the reasoning of their father and repent.

26 And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men.

Meanwhile Samuel was continuing to grow and learn about the LORD as he served in the tabernacle with Eli. The LORD showed His favor to Samuel, who also gained favor with those around him.

27 And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? 28 And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel *to be* my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel?

The LORD sent a man to Eli to remind him of the fact that the LORD had appeared to his ancestor Aaron and chose his descendants to be the family line that would serve as priests. When the people brought their offerings to the LORD, specific portions were to be used on the altar for a burnt sacrifice. As a reward for their service, the LORD allowed the priests to take for food other specific portions of the sacrifice after the LORD's portions had been properly offered.

29 Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded *in my habitation*; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?

“Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded *in my habitation*” – The sons of Eli had abused the privileges given to them as priests by the LORD and desecrated the LORD's sacrifices by taking what they wanted from the offerings that the LORD had commanded to be brought to the tabernacle (“my habitation”). The LORD held Eli responsible for the behavior of his sons, characterizing it as “kicking” (showing disrespect) at the sacrifices of the LORD.

“and honourest thy sons above me” – By not punishing his sons or removing them from being priests, Eli was showing that he cared more about his sons than about honoring the LORD whose offerings they were defiling.

“to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people” – The word “yourselves” is plural, grouping Eli along with his sons. Apparently Eli had also enjoyed eating the best cuts of meat that his sons had forcefully taken from the offerings brought by the people for the LORD. He may have known how this meat was obtained and looked the other way since he liked eating the meat. The LORD, however, was not looking the other way.

30 Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed *that* thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

The LORD had declared his blessing upon the house of Aaron with the honor of making them priests but now He was pruning Eli's branch from the family tree. Because Eli and his sons had not honored the LORD, the LORD would not honor or bless them.

31 Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. 32 And thou shalt see an enemy *in my habitation*, in all *the wealth* which *God* shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. 33 And the man of thine, *whom* I shall not cut off from mine altar, *shall be* to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age.

The LORD declares His judgment on Eli and his descendants. The arm represented strength, that is, the power and authority that Eli and his descendants' had as priests. The LORD was removing Eli's family from the priestly line and placing the curse on them that none of Eli's male descendants would live long lives. The Hebrew word for “enemy” can also mean “adversity” or “distress.” The LORD may be saying that Eli's descendants would always suffer adversity in their role as priests, no matter how much God blessed Israel. Eli's male descendants that did not die of a young age would be the object of pity because of their physical condition.

34 And this *shall be* a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them.

The evidence that this message of judgment spoken by the man of God (v. 27) did indeed come from the LORD will be that both of Eli's sons will die on the same day. This soon happens when Israel is defeated by the Philistines in battle (1 Sam. 4:11, 17).

35 And I will raise me up a faithful priest, *that* shall do according to *that* which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.

Some commentators have speculated that this “faithful priest” refers to either Samuel or Jesus Christ. However, the better interpretation is that the “faithful priest” refers to Zadok and his family line, who replaced Abiathar as high priest during the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 2:27, 27, 35). The descendants of Zadok will serve in the millennial temple (Ezek. 44:15, 48:11) before Christ (“mine anointed”). The Hebrew word for “Messiah” and the Greek word for “Christ” both mean “anointed one.”

36 And it shall come to pass, *that* every one that is left in thine house shall come *and* crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread.

In a fitting punishment for those who had made themselves fat on the sacrifices of the LORD, any survivors among Eli's descendants will be so impoverished that they will have to come and humbly “crouch” (bow down) before “him.” The “him” is likely Zadok or one of his descendants who would be serving as high priest at the time. The descendants of Eli will be forced to beg to be allowed to serve in the tabernacle/temple in order to entitle themselves to eat of the priests' food.