

**1 SAMUEL 1-4 THE HOUSE OF ELI AND SAMUEL THE PROPHET**



We now begin with a new section of Scripture – the books of the Kings of Israel--that consist of the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles.

So far, we can divide biblical history into 7 parts:

- 1) Gen. 1:1-2      PRE-ADAMIC TIME  
(Angels & prehistory)
- 2) Gen. 1:3-8:1    ANTEDILUVIAN AGE  
(Adam – Noah)
- 3) Gen. 9-11      SUMERIAN EPOCH  
(Noah to Abraham)
- 4) Gen. 10-50     PATRIARCHAL PERIOD  
(Abraham – Joseph)
- 5) Exodus-Joshua   WILDERNESS - JOSHUA
- 6) Judges- Ruth    ERA OF JUDGES
- 7) 1 Samuel        THE KINGS OF ISRAEL

This stage of the monarchy, or the kings of Israel, which we begin to study today, is from around 1050 BC to 486 BC, when Judah's last king, Zedekiah, dies. Yet, we know God's unconditional promise to David mentioned his descendants would never lack a throne (see Psalm 89). This was carried out when some of Zedekiah's daughters eventually made their way to the thrones of Ireland and England.

The key person in the transition from the time of the Judges of Israel to its Kings is the *prophet Samuel*. He was a multifaceted person, eventually holding the offices of *Priest* (1 Chron. 6:28), *Judge* (1 Sam. 7:15) and *Prophet* (1 Sam. 3:20). He composed at least most of this book in what the Bible calls, "the book of Samuel the seer" (1 Chron. 29:29) and probably also wrote the books of Judges and Ruth. Finally, Samuel is credited with beginning the school of the prophets, from where came such prophets as Nathan, Ahijah, Elijah and Elisha.

Also, 1 & 2 Samuel are divided in our Bibles since it follows the order from the Greek Septuagint version, but, in the Hebrew Bible, it was only one book, simply called, the book of Samuel. Samuel "achieves the maximum effect with the greatest economy of words. Its narratives are masterpieces of historical writing, and in its characterizations, both of the principal and of the minor actors, it presents 'an incomparable gallery of historical portraits'" (S. Goldman, *Samuel*, Soncino Books of the Bible, p. ix).

This book begins with the miraculous birth of Samuel. His mother, Hannah, had been sterile for a number of years, and his father Elkanah, had another wife, Peninnah, who did have children. Since Hannah was Elkanah's favorite, Peninnah made her life very difficult. The Bible says, "And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the Lord had closed her womb" (1:6).

Each year, they would go to Shiloh, where God's tabernacle stood, and make a sacrifice--probably during Passover, when it was stipulated to do so. There, Hannah poured out her heart to God, and vowed if God healed her, she would dedicate her son to him as a life-long Nazirite (see Numbers 6). God heard her heartfelt prayers and decided to save Israel through her son. She named him Samuel, which means, "Heard of God."

After he could walk, she took him to Eli, the high priest, to serve him. God was so pleased with her dedication, He eventually blessed her with five more children—three boys and two girls!

Eli saw the child was obedient and very dedicated, probably in part to his mother's continual faith and influence. Samuel was a stark contrast to Eli's two sons, whom the Bible says, "were corrupt, they did not know the Lord" (2:18). In other words, they did not respect or fear God—they just went through the motions of their priestly job. They abused their offices by stealing from the sacrifices the best portions that did not belong to them and caused people to disrespect the offerings and be offended. "Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord" (2:17). These sons even seduced some of the women coming to the tabernacle to worship! (2:22).

In contrast, the Bible says about Samuel, "Samuel ministered before the Lord, even as a child, wearing a linen ephod. Moreover his mother used to make him a little robe, and bring it to him year by year...And Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, 'The Lord give you descendants from this woman for the loan that was given to the Lord'" (2:20-21).

Tragically, Eli was very indulgent with his sons and would not punish them for their immorality and disobedience. He only complained and berated them about their bad behavior, but didn't act upon it. The Bible says, "Nevertheless they did not heed the voice

of their father, because the Lord desired to kill them” (2:25). In other words, because they were so evil, God had determined to end their lives, and so He hardened their hearts, maintaining their stubbornness—as it was done to Pharaoh in Egypt!

This is a spiritual lesson for the ministry of never taking what is God’s for one’s own benefit and also not abuse the office of the ministry, because they will be held up to a higher standard.

Even while aware of this corruption, young Samuel would not follow their example. The Bible says, “And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the Lord and men” (2:26). Probably his mother and father strengthened his faith and will.

So what happens when the priesthood becomes corrupt and also judges Israel? There was no one in power to straighten things out, so as it often happens, God then raised up a prophet to do His bidding.

“Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, ‘Did I not clearly reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh’s house? Did I not choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to offer upon My altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod before Me? And did I not give to the house of your father (Aaron) all the offerings of the children of Israel made by fire? Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?...those that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold the days are coming that...all the descendants of your house shall die in the flower of their age...Hophni and Phinehas in one day they shall die. Then I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart” (2:27-35). Despite the warning from God, Eli still not act and continued protecting his sons.

We see here how God, despite the checks and balances He placed, so there would never be one man with all the power, had to sometimes resort to calling individual and just men as prophets to do His will and be His spokesmen. Remember, even Moses was not totally in charge since Aaron was over the priesthood, serving as an effective check on power.

So God now rejects Eli and begins to work with young Samuel. One night He called him three times

before he knew it was God. And what a terrible first message God delivered to him!

This would be the second and last warning to Eli. God told Samuel, “In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, *and he did not restrain them*. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offerings forever...And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision” (3:12-15).

In the morning, Eli insisted Samuel tell him the entire vision. When he heard all the terrible news in advance—he still didn’t do anything about it! He never repented, and only said, “It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him” (3:18). Probably Eli thought God would be indulgent with Him because of his powerful positions! What a mistake!

Yet, young Samuel did not follow Eli’s wrong example. This shows a young person doesn’t have to “go with the flow” or even follow the leader if he has become corrupt. The Bible says about Samuel. “So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let *none* of his words fall to the ground” (3:19). What a powerful statement! Samuel was not a forgetful hearer, as Eli was, but he carried things out! Nothing was neglected, he was a man of action!

What was the result? The Bible adds, “And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord. Then the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel by the word of the Lord. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel” (3:20-21). Here we see God rejecting the legitimate heirs of Aaron for another with only Levitical heritage. God is no respecter of persons! This reminds us of what the Scriptures would later say about another young man, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). Such was Samuel.

Judgment would now come to the house of Eli, and God’s wrath would be shown with all its power. The fundamental problem was that God’s work was being discredited. God is very merciful, but some things are simply not tolerated. When Eli and his sons, that represented God’s ministry and work, caused people to lose faith and disrespect God’s name, they were treading on very dangerous ground. They had now

departed from their own mistakes and defects and had desecrated sacred ground. This is the principle mentioned in Ezekiel 20:39, “As for you, O house of Israel,” thus says the Lord God: ‘Go, serve every one of you his idols—and hereafter—if you will not obey Me; but *profane My holy name no more* with your gifts and idols.” It was the sacred offices of Eli and his sons that were at stake, and they were discrediting God and the true religion.

So God allowed the Philistines, now having recovered from the destruction Samson had afflicted upon them, to threaten Israel. “Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek” (4:1). The Israelites were then soundly defeated, and they wondered why God had let them lose. So they came up with a desperate idea.

They said, “Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies. So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant...and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God” (4:3). When the ark arrived, the Israelites were so excited they shouted so strong, the ground actually shook (4:5).

The Philistines were terrified when they found out. They still remembered the news about what the God of Israel had done to the Egyptians centuries ago! They said, “Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you...So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter; and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died” (4:8-11).

When a soldier in the battle brought the news to Eli, it had such a terrible impact that, “Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years” (4:18).

Yet another tragedy was about to happen to Eli’s house. “Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas’ wife, was with child, due to be delivered; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her

father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and gave birth...And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, ‘Do not fear, for you have borne a son.’ But she did not answer, nor did she regard it. Then she named the child Ichabod, (meaning, without glory) saying, ‘The glory has departed from Israel! Because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, ‘The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured” (4:19-22).

So finishes the tragic history of the house of Eli, with Eli having been both a judge and high priest, and yet lost it all through indulgence and negligence, by allowing his sons to corrupt the ministry and give God’s religion a bad name. Scripture never says he personally participated in their sins, but that he just that tolerated them. That is more than enough when you are representing God in the ministry! There are no compromises with God’s truths and ways!

What were the consequences? The ark, though later recovered, never returned to Shiloh. God later allowed the place to be destroyed by the Philistines. He would use the complete destruction of Shiloh as an example of what can happen because of corruption. God doesn’t want to remember the place. Jeremiah 26:6 says, “Then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.”

The Danish archaeologist, Aage Schmidt, excavated the site of Shiloh in the decades 1922-1952 and found pottery from the Israelite culture that had been destroyed around 1050 A.C. It coincides with this period of time. He wrote, “The pottery evidence adjusts perfectly to what we is described in the biblical record” (*Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, p. 603).

Now Israel would pass through a dark period of leaderless confusion and panic, for the Philistines are advancing from the coast to the mountains of Israel, threatening to exterminate all of Israel. There weren’t any judges left to protect Israel, and young Samuel was probably around 12 years old. What were they to do? How would Israel be saved?

They had lost the ark of the covenant to the Philistines and had over 30,000 of the finest men as casualties. They had no courage to stand up to the Philistines. Things indeed looked very bleak. What happened? How were they saved? Stay tuned to the next episode!