

I Samuel

Lesson 6 - Chapter 2 Conclusion

We'll finally finish 1st Samuel chapter 2 today even though there really is enough here to probably spend another week at the least; but we need to move forward. Last time we met we were informed about the dysfunctional apostate condition of the Priesthood of Israel and given examples of the sorts of unsavory things that Eli (Israel's High Priest) allowed to occur on his watch (even among his own sons). The two priests Hophni and Pinchas would harass and strong-arm the worshippers who came from all over the 12 tribal districts to the Tabernacle located at Shiloh in order to follow the commands and procedures of the Levitical sacrificial system. But what we ended with in verse 17 was that as terrible as it was for God's priests to treat these worshippers in such a shabby way, it was tantamount to suicide for them to treat the sacrifices set aside as holy to the Lord with such contempt. By taking the meat right off the altar fire, or sticking their long meat fork into the stewpots of the worshippers to skewer whatever meat stuck to it, they were robbing Yehoveh. Let's take up from there.

READ 1ST SAMUEL 2:18 – end

The statement that Samuel ministered (or better, served) in the presence of Adonai is at least partly to give us a contrast between the behavior and nature of Samuel as opposed to Eli's two worthless sons. "Ministering (or serving) before the Lord" is actually a Hebrew expression that means that Samuel was serving God directly in a divinely acceptable way. Here the narrator is telling us that Samuel had an intimate relationship with the Lord from a very early age. And while we might reasonably question whether Samuel OUGHT to have been doing **priestly** functions at 5 or 6 years old, even so we can also see that young children can grasp the fundamentals of who God is and form a close bond with Him. So it's never too early to start teaching our children about the Lord and even to teach them that service to Him is an essential part of that relationship.

We're told that even though he was but a small child, he still wore the typical priest garb of that era, white linen. While the CJB speaks of Samuel wearing a linen ritual vest, in fact the Hebrew says he wore a linen **ephod**. Technically an ephod was something that only the High Priest wore, however over time the outer garment that the regular priests served in came to be called an ephod (so Samuel was not putting on miniature High Priest garments).

Normally a Priest or Levite would not start their required service in the Tabernacle before their 25th birthday; however because Samuel was a biblically rare combination of being a Levite as well as a Nazarite for life, we find him learning the priestly ropes as a growing child who thus regularly needed larger clothes. So each year when Elkanah's family would journey to Shiloh for their family religious festival Hannah would bring a new coat for her young son.

Naturally little **Sh'mu'el** would visit and spend time with his mother and father when they came at their annual pilgrimage to the Sacred Tent, and equally as naturally so would Eli encounter Samuel's parents and speak with them. And upon each occasion Eli would pronounce a blessing over Elkanah and Hannah such that Hannah would produce more children as a reward for her entrusting Samuel to the Priesthood and to God. The blessing proved effective as Hannah bore 3 more sons and 2 daughters for a total of 6 (counting Samuel). Yet the writer of 1st Samuel clarifies in verse 21 that while Eli mouthed the blessing it was the Lord's decision and grace that made that blessing come alive (thus the human words spoken by the High Priest had no inherent power or magical quality to them).

Starting in verse 22 we see that some time passes, Eli was growing quite old, and it came to his attention that in addition to all the other contemptuous things his sons were doing, NOW they were even using women who served at the Tabernacle for their own sexual pleasures. These women were not Temple prostitutes that were so common to the Canaanite religious services, rather they were Levites who performed menial duties and were likely bullied into submission by Pinchas and Hophni. The sex acts were not being performed inside of the Sanctuary Tent proper, but rather nearby in some anteroom. But to do such an abominable thing in close proximity to God's dwelling place brought defilement and that was beyond the pale. Eli confronts his sons with this information and asks (rhetorically) why they would do such a thing. He goes on to say that in recent times he hasn't heard even one good report about them, everything was negative and troublesome.

But his sons' fate had already been sealed and so they paid no attention to their father. The reason for their refusal to repent and obey, though, is a familiar one especially in the Old Testament; God decided to kill them. In other words, God hardened their hearts so that they would continue to reject Godly instruction and reproof, and thus merit their demise due to their great and unrepentant sin. Hophni and Pinchas' fates (as well as Eli's) were sealed by the Lord and nothing they might do would reverse the situation. This reminds us of the Pharaoh of Egypt having his heart hardened by Yehoveh so as to bring wrath upon him that would ultimately lead to the release of Israel, and interestingly in a few verses we'll see the Lord chastise Eli using Israel's experience in Egypt as the context.

But these judgments of God on the priesthood also reminds us of Hannah's Prayer as we see some of these same attributes of God (that Hannah spoke about) in action. We see God killing some of His own people (Hophni and Pinchas), and we see Him deposing His own mighty High Priest Eli and bringing him low as a means to establish a just balance to the situation. Then in verse 25 Eli pronounces another divine reality (in the form of a question) that has much deeper implications than it might seem on the surface.

Eli says to his two sons, **“Don't you know that if a man commits a sin against another man that the Lord judges the situation and mediates between them. However when a man sins against God, who can possibly intercede and mediate for him?”**

There is some disagreement among scholars about precisely how to translate this verse. Our CJB takes one view, and most other translations cite the second view. The first view is that this means that the human judges of the court mediate between men, and the second view is that

God is the judge and mediator. Looking at the Hebrew I'm not sure how to justify the first view because in order to arrive at their conclusion, you have to translate **elohim** into "judge" and that is unwarranted and inaccurate. In other words, most literally, this verse says this if a man commits a sin against another then **elohim** judges and mediates. Elohim is the standard word for "god" throughout the Old Testament. But I think what these translators of the CJB are doing is trying to get across what this effectively means, or how it effectively operates on earth, as opposed to what it says literally.

"When man sins against another man" is referring to a civil judicial matter among humans. If for example a man steals from another man, or injures another man, or borrows money and doesn't return it and so on, then the idea is that God has already set up a justice system to deal with it: it's called The Law. Those 613 laws and commands in the Torah mostly (but not entirely) deal with matters of human interactions. The Lord, within the framework of those laws, created human government, as His primary means to deal will human-on-human matters. An official (a human mediator) of that human government is seen as having the divine authority and legal standing to administer justice according to how God has set it down in the Torah. Since the judicial decision (ideally) would be based upon Yehoveh's ordained principles and procedures that were designed to mediate between men, then from a certain aspect it can be said that God (**elohim**) is actually doing the judging and arbitrating through this human government official that is usually called a judge.

Further, since one man stealing from another or cheating another is on the one hand a fleshly issue between humans, but on the other it is also a spiritual issue because the law that was broken was a moral one set down by God, then there are both physical and spiritual ramifications that must be addressed even to offenses and trespasses that happen between men. Physically speaking (the fleshly aspect) there are certain punishments and consequences that a human judge can order to be applied, such as making restitution plus an additional sum as a penalty. As for the spiritual aspect the criminal can offer a proper sacrifice at the altar that is administered by the Levite Priesthood, and settle that part of the matter that offends God in the realm of the heavenlies.

However, says Eli, its one thing to have a human mediator (a government official) assigned to deal with a problem or criminal offense between 2 men; but what human being could possibly be called upon to mediate a dispute between a man and God? And this, folks, is at the very heart of the meaning of, and mankind's desperate need for, a redeeming mediator that we commonly call a Savior. Do you see that?

Now, sometimes it is said that the High Priest was to be the mediator between God and man, but that's a mischaracterization of his role. The High Priest can sprinkle blood on the Mercy Seat once per year, and along with the other priests can perform sacrifices of atonement daily; but atonement is NOT mediation. The High Priest can't argue for His people or bargain with God, or settle issues between God and man. This is the reason that we have both Moses and Aaron living and operating simultaneously, each being the highest authority in their particular sphere of influence. Aaron was in charge of making atonement for men according to the procedures set down in the Law, but Moses was in charge of mediation between God and man.

We have all directly sinned against God and therefore He has a personal cosmos-sized bone to pick with every one of us. God also has an open and shut, ironclad legal case against us all (based on His justice system) in that ANY sin directly against Him is by definition so grievous that the only possible penalty is death. Mankind has already been tried and convicted and sentenced to death (physical AND spiritual death) during the days of Adam and Eve, back in the Garden of Eden. Who, then, could possibly have the authority and standing to jump into the fracas between God and man and assume the role of a mediator or intercessor and save us from God's severity?

That is where Hophni and Pinchas find themselves and therefore Eli is trying to get them to hear that they are in the gravest danger. By their regularly stealing God's holy sacrifices, and leading the set-apart people (that they are supposed to be serving and protecting) into false doctrines and manmade rituals, and by desecrating the holy grounds of the Lord's Tent Sanctuary by having illicit sex there, they have committed the worst possible sins directly against the Lord. And Eli, even as the High Priest (who in this era was the highest human government official on earth), has insufficient standing or authority to mediate between God and those 2 wayward sons. Further, as we are informed in Leviticus and Numbers there is no available atonement for a high-handed sin (which is what Hophni and Pinchas were guilty of) so Eli couldn't make a sacrifice for his sons and save them; there was nothing Eli could do for his sons except to warn them.

This problem of finding someone worthy and with sufficient authority to mediate between man and God was known and understood ages before Eli presented the question to his sons here in 1st Samuel. In fact in bible history Moses was the first mediator who had sufficient standing and authority to intercede between God and man (and naturally only the Lord Himself could have given that standing to Moses). How often we read in the Torah of the people of Israel during their arduous wilderness journey committing idolatry against the Lord, or complaining against the Lord, and Moses rushing to stand between them and God to keep these ignorant rebels from being summarily destroyed by an incensed Yehoveh. Yet even the 1st God-appointed mediator Moses was limited in what he could accomplish as a Mediator. He could postpone God's wrath upon the people, but he couldn't eradicate their sins.

Job (who came far earlier than Moses) came to understand this common deadly dilemma that all mankind faced, but at the same time it was also a dilemma that remarkably few men ever recognized or considered. To this day (our era) only a relative handful of human beings give any thought to our precarious position before God, and our want of a mediator to intercede for us.

CJB Job 9:30 Even if I washed myself in melted snow and cleansed my hands with lye, 31 you (God) would plunge me into the muddy pit, till my own clothes would detest me. 32 "For he (God) is not merely human like me; there is no answer that I could give him if we were to come together in court. 33 There is no arbitrator between us who could lay his hand on us both.

And here in 1st Samuel we have Eli realizing this exact thing in the context of trying to save his sons' lives.

But just as God at the perfect moment in time gave Moses to His people to mediate between God and man, and even though the scope of Moses' intercession was relatively narrow and just lasted for a few years until he died, now God has given us a new and permanent mediator that CAN intercede between us and God, and the scope of that mediation is almost unlimited. And that long-awaited mediator was indeed a man, a human; but only by also being God could he be a mediator who eradicated the sins that caused the trouble between mankind and God in the first place! Yeshua Our Savior has answered Eli's question and Job's question that hung unanswered over the doomed heads of the human race for thousands of years.

St. Paul says:

CJB 1 Timothy 2:5 For God is one; and there is but one Mediator between God and humanity, Yeshua the Messiah, himself human, 6 who gave himself as a ransom on behalf of all, thus providing testimony to God's purpose at just the right time.

I am so taken by how early in the bible we find this issue raised for the need of a Savior, a necessarily HUMAN mediator to stand between God and man as our only hope. And it just underlines what a terrible thing has happened over the centuries within our Christian faith that we would accuse the older testament of being primitive, irrelevant, dead and gone, supposedly because it never addressed the issue of salvation. For it is here in the Old Testament that we find the entire and indispensable basis and foundation for everything that was pointed towards in the New Testament, and the vast majority of the Church has no idea it's even here.

Then suddenly, in 1st Samuel 2:26, the diatribe against Eli's family is interrupted and Samuel is again referred to as a child who gained great favor with God and man. Samuel is placed here as the antithesis of Hophni and Pinchas. Whereas they had lost all favor with God (never to be recovered), and they had become nothing but a plague upon God's people who came to worship Him at His sanctuary, Samuel was becoming highly regarded by Yehoveh and the people of Israel saw ***Sh'mu'el's*** spiritual gifting, faithfulness, and his love for them.

Some more time passes; and in verse 27 we read about a "man of God" who suddenly appears to Eli. In Hebrew this man of God is "***ish elohim***", which literally means man of God. But what is it referring to? An angel? The Lord pre-incarnate? What? ***Ish elohim*** was by now becoming a somewhat standard term for "prophet". A prophet acted much like an angelic messenger in that they would bring a direct oracle from God. BUT this prophet was a human not a spiritual being. An ***ish elohim*** was not a divine apparition; rather he was a man whom God found faithful and trustworthy to deliver a message. What we will find (and need to pay much attention to) is that prophets give God's Word in the first person. That is they simply quote God, apparently word for word. Prophets don't paraphrase God's Word and they aren't giving their opinions when they speak in terms of, "I the Lord" or some similar jargon. This is important. There are many important rules about reading the bible and one is to see the difference between God speaking, men speaking God's words, and men speaking their own words. There is a hierarchy of perfection in this. Men in the bible (even the Apostles) can make statements in their own words and they simply do not carry the same weight of God's direct oracles. Thus we must always consider that as we study God's Word and struggle to properly apply it to our lives.

We see the standard biblical prophet-oracle formula when this prophet says to Eli, “Here is what Yehoveh says”. This is the signal that what we’re about to hear is the Lord, word for word. And God, through the prophet, begins to take Eli apart by building a case against him. The Lord commences by reminding Eli that God came to Eli’s clan (the clan of Aaron) going on 400 years earlier in Egypt. And God says that He chose the clan of Aaron to be His priests who are given the awesome privilege of approaching the Altar of Burnt Offerings, of burning incense before the Lord, and of producing the line of High Priests (that’s what “wearing the ritual vest” is getting at) in perpetuity. The Lord reminds Eli that even the source of meat and produce that sustains his family comes from the same sacrifices offered to the Father; thus the Lord graciously shares what is His with them.

So this begs the question (verse 29) to Eli, why do you treat these sacrifices and offerings with such disrespect? The phrase “sacrifices and offerings” is in Hebrew **Zevah and Minchah** and it is meant to signify more than what it seems as the two words form another of the several merismus that are present in this series of 4 books we have just begun. Remember that merismus is a literary form meant to express a totality; the outer boundaries of a matter are spoken to mean, “all this and everything in between”. It’s like saying “from A to Z”. We don’t just mean the A and the Z but all the letters that lay in between as well. So it’s not ONLY the meat sacrifices (a **Zevah** is always meat) and not just the produce sacrifices (a **Minchah** is always plant life) but also everything that is God’s holy property that has been treated with disrespect. In fact the words chosen for this merismus are even more interesting and all encompassing when we understand that **Zevah** is a male gender noun, and **Minchah** is a female gender noun. But it means even more. It also includes the ritual protocols, everything that has to do with God’s dwelling place and sacrificial system. Thus the question to Eli could rightfully be paraphrased, “Why have you (as My High Priest) shown complete contempt for every element of my sacred dwelling place and the entire sacrificial system?” Oh boy, this can’t be good news.

And then the Lord completes His indictment by saying that Eli showed more honor to his no-account human sons (Hophni and Pinchas) than he does to Yehoveh. You see, even though Eli may not have been the actual one to steal sacrifices from the Altar, or to harass and oppress the Israelite worshippers, or to have illicit sex with the Levite girls on the Tabernacle grounds, he was responsible for all that went on and now will be held accountable. Eli had the authority and power to stop his sons. He could have and should have taken all measures necessary to end their blasphemy. But like many fathers have done since Adam, we let our emotions and our screwed-up priorities rule our actions towards our families; Eli did the same.

Here is God’s biblical hierarchy of relationship importance: Him first, parents second, spouse next, children after that. Someone please explain to me how we ever reached this place we are at today when “the children” reign supreme, the spouse next, and then God and parents are somewhere down the line. Now don’t get me wrong: I’m in no way saying that we actually are to make our decisions in a totally rigid manner; balance is always important. But just looking over the 10 Commandments clarifies what the ideal relationship hierarchy is: we honor God above all. We honor our parents or suffer divine consequences. The only mention of marriage is in the prohibition against adultery, which means we are to be faithful to our spouses in sexual matters and in our attitudes towards them. There is no mention at all of children. Rather

later there are some admonitions to discipline them on the one hand, but not to make them angry by being unfair or uncaring or overly harsh on the other. I could talk about this for a long time but that would pull us in a direction I don't want to go in this lesson. The point is that Eli elevated the position of his sons in the divine hierarchy of relationships ABOVE that of Yehoveh and God is calling him on the carpet for it.

Now (beginning in verse 30) come the inalterable consequences of Eli's apostasy from the ways of the Lord that Eli, above all humans, should have been aware of and scrupulous to obey. Remember that a "man of God", a prophet, is pronouncing the word of God upon Eli. This role of a prophet as God's human messenger, bearing God's direct oracle, begins to play a more and more central role in the bible from here forward.

Here's the long and short of what would happen. Even though Aaron's family would stand fast of the priestly clan, the Lord would heap divine disgrace upon those who have disgraced Him. Eli's house (his family, his children and grandchildren who would normally be priests and High Priests) would be broken. All members of his family would die young. They wouldn't be removed entirely from service to the Tabernacle, but they would be allowed to witness and despair over the coming fall of the Sanctuary at the hands of the Philistines when the precious Ark of the Covenant was taken from Israel.

However, since a High Priest was necessary in the Lord's justice system, He would raise up a new and faithful **cohen**. And this new and faithful priest would walk before (meaning, **to serve** before) His anointed. "His anointed" was referring to the coming king of Israel.

The sign of the manifestation of God's punishment upon Eli's family would be that on one day both Hophni and Pinchas would die. And after this, those from Eli's family who would have held the prestigious position of priests, and thus been given the choice cuts of sacrificial meat and the best produce offerings brought by the worshippers, instead would have to beg for the most menial of tasks just to earn a scrap of bread to eat.

To understand this somewhat prophetic pronouncement (prophetic because exactly how and when this would all come about wasn't revealed), we have to review the historical circumstances that come into consideration. Eli was a descendant of Ithamar (Ithamar being the youngest son of Aaron). By rights, Eli should NOT have held the High Priesthood because the descendants of the eldest surviving son of Aaron, Eleazar, should have borne that privilege in perpetuity. Josephus informs us that Ozi was the last known High Priest in Eleazar's line (up to that point), and then for reasons unknown Eli of the family of Ithamar was granted the position. Although this is pure speculation, almost certainly this transfer of power had to do with some kind of circumstance that none of Ozi's sons were strong enough or capable enough to hold such a position of prominence as High Priest over Israel, because until Israel finally had a king it fell to the High Priest as the highest authority over the 12 tribes. The Judges (who of course existed at the same time as the High Priests) were but occasional saviors who rescued their own particular tribe from some kind of predicament or another and never had any kind of far reaching national authority over Israel as did the High Priests. How is it that God's people could find themselves in such a dysfunctional situation? Remember: we're talking about tribalism and the battle for position and power never ends. The two great

sects of Islam, the Sunnis and the Shia, who have warred against one another for 1300 years, are the result of tribal conflicts over who ought to succeed Mohammed. So the High Priesthood of Israel early on became mired in political and tribal considerations.

In speculating on how it is that Eli came into power, we know that the family line of Eleazar didn't end, however, because in David's time Zadok (a descendant of Eleazar) became a High Priest and served as co-high Priest with Abiathar and then Ahimelech (they were descendants of Eli). So during David's reign we had a situation of dueling High Priests serving simultaneously (one from Eli's line, the other from Eleazar's line).

Later we'll see that the High Priest Abiathar was deposed (and so Zadok alone was High Priest for a time), but then King Solomon reinstated Abiathar and deposed Zadok (you don't think there was hardball politics going on 3000 years ago?) and so once again the line of Eli were the High Priests.

What we'll read in coming chapters is that after this pronouncement of God upon Eli, the priesthood lost virtually all authority and voracity and soon Samuel (as a kind of hybrid priest/judge/prophet) became the highest authority figure (political and religious) in Israel. However since Samuel was NOT a legitimate "priest" by any traditional priestly bloodline, the "faithful priest" of verse 35 that God would raise up to serve "His anointed" could not have been Samuel. Most Jewish sages agree that the faithful priest was Zadok.

Even more, Eli would live to see his two sons die. In a couple of chapters we'll read about the loss of the Ark of the Covenant to the Philistines in battle, and in that battle Hophni and Pinchas were killed on the same day, along with 30,000 Israelite soldiers.

So what we have here is again exactly as spoken of in Hannah's Song: the Lord will reverse the fortunes of men according to His will and purposes. The Almighty God of Israel "weighed" (*takan*) Eli's family and took action according to His justice. He made the mighty into the lowly, and brought the lowly into power. Eli's descendants would have to beg for bread, but the descendants of Eleazar who had been denied their rightful position as High Priests would (starting with Zadok) again have power (at least for a time).

We'll start chapter 3 next week and see the young Samuel grow in stature in God's eyes, and begin to take on his role as the ultimate earthly authority over the 12 tribes.