

1st Samuel 2:11-4:1a
The Calling of Samuel

Introduction

1. Last week we looked at Hannah's prayer as it reflected three theological truths that are present throughout the Scriptures
 - a. God is a god who saves/delivers
 - b. He opposes the proud but exalts the humble
 - c. He protects His people, but destroys those who oppose Him
2. Today we will see those three truths woven throughout the events surrounding the calling of Samuel as God's prophet

A. The corruption of the priesthood and the sins of Eli's sons (2:12-17)

1. Our passage today begins with a picture of the corruption that was common among the priests, and exemplified in the wicked acts of Eli's sons:
2. There are two specific sins mentioned here:
 - a. The first has to do with sacrifices:
 - 1) According to the Law, when the priests presented the offerings before the Lord, the fat along with most of the meat was to be burned off as an offering to God, but the priests were given the breast and the right thigh (Leviticus 3:3-5; 7:30-38)
 - 2) However, we see here that the priests weren't satisfied with their portion, but would steal additional meat from the one making the offering (using a three pronged fork to collect meat from the pot)
 - 3) To make matters worse, they demanded the fattier portions that belonged to God and threatened to take them by force if the worshipper didn't offer them willingly
 - b. The second has to do with immorality: this isn't mentioned until v. 22, but we learn that Eli's sons (and likely other priests as well) had the habit of committing immorality "**with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting**" (Exodus 38:8)
3. At the front and center of this were Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas (12 & 17):
 - a. The author describes them as "**worthless men**" who did not know the Lord (12):
 - 1) One lexicon defines this phrase as referring to good-for-nothing, base fellows
 - 2) In the OT it is used to describe wicked, ungodly, disobedience thugs and criminals who stand in opposition to God and those who follow Him
 - b. Their "**sin was great before the Lord, for the men despised the offering of the LORD.**" (17)

B. Samuel's devotion stood in stark contrast to the sins of Eli's sons (2:18-21)

1. Not a lot is said about Samuel's character in our passage today but what is said presents a stark contrast to the sons of Eli
2. There are three very simple statements made about Samuel by the author:

- a. The first is actually in v. 11 from our passage last week: **“but the boy ministered to the LORD before Eli the priest.”**
 - 1) “was ministering” is a reference to carrying out the priestly duties in the temple
 - 2) Where as Eli’s sons were serving themselves, Samuel was ministering **“to the LORD”**
 - 3) This is repeated in v. 18: **“Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy clothed with a linen ephod”** and 3:1: **“Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli.”**

- b. The second statement is found in vs 21: **“And the boy Samuel grew before the LORD.”**
 - 1) A more literal rendering would be **“and the boy Samuel grew up with Yahweh”**
 - 2) This is repeated in 3:19: **“Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him...”**
 - 3) This implies not simply that he grew up in the sanctuary (as the NET wrongly suggests) or that he merely grew up in the presence of the LORD (as the most others suggest)
 - 4) Rather, as the broader contexts supports, the emphasis is upon God’s divine favor resting upon Samuel

- c. The third is found in v. 26: **“Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the LORD and with men.”**
 - 1) The word order (placing the subject “the boy Samuel” before the verb) suggests the author intended for this verse to be in contrast to the ones that preceded it which describes the judgement of God upon Eli’s wicked sons
 - 2) Where as God judged Eli’s sons for their wickedness, **“By contrast”** as the CSB renders it, Samuel continued to grow in favor with both God and men (e.g. his reputation)
 - 3) The same word order appears in v. 18 where it also sets up a contrast to the verses that precedes—whereas Eli’s sons despised the Lord’s offerings, Samuel faithfully ministered before the Lord

- 3. Another way in which Samuel stands in stark contrast to Eli’s sons is more subtle:
 - a. Samuel was blessed with parents who were faithfully devoted to the Lord:
 - 1) In verse 19 we find that Samuel’s parents were faithful in making their yearly pilgrimage to Shiloh to present their sacrifices before the Lord
 - 2) We also learn that Hannah would encourage Samuel in his ministry on these trips by making him a new robe every year (likely the longer, outer garment worn by priests)
 - 3) We are also reminded that Hannah had dedicated Samuel to the LORD (20)
 - 4) Finally, we see that they, like Samuel, rested in God’s favor (as indicated by the blessing of more children; 21)
 - 5) One must certainly consider the Godly example of Hannah and Elkanah and its impact on young Samuel (notice he is still referred to as a “boy” in this passage)

 - b. This stands in contrast to Eli’s questionable devotion (v. 29):
 - 1) He was aware of the sins of his sons, and did rebuke them, but he ultimately failed to deal with it
 - 2) V. 27: **“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?”**

C. God’s judgment upon Eli and his sons (2:22-37)

- 1. Eli rebukes his sons (22-26):

- c. When Eli was old he was made aware of the sins of his sons:
 - 1) V. 22: **“All that his sons were doing to all Israel”**—a reference to their abuse of the offerings, stealing the offerings intended for God, threats against those making the offerings
 - 2) But, we learn of another sin here: **“how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting”**—they were not only committing immorality, but at the temple!

- d. The news came to Eli through the grapevine:
 - 1) **“...the evil things that I hear from all the people”** (23)
 - 2) **“for the report is not good which I hear the LORD’S people circulating”** (24)

- e. Eli tries to use a legal argument to convince his sons to stop sinning (25):
 - 1) **“If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him...”**
 - 2) **“but if a man sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?”**

- f. But, Eli’s sons **“would not listen to the voice of their father,”**
 - 1) The primary reason the author gives for their refusal is that **“the LORD desired to put them to death”**—how are we to interpret this?
 - 2) According to the Law, the penalty for immorality was death
 - 3) Yet, Ezekiel 33:11 says, **“Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’”**
 - 4) When David committed murder and death, God suspended the death sentence because of David’s genuine remorse and repentance when confronted
 - 5) However, Eli’s son’s felt no remorse and offered no repentance
 - 6) So, we have to see this statement regarding God’s desire to put them to death as a reference to God desiring to carry out His justice against hardened hearts and unrepentant sin

- 2. God pronounces judgment against Eli and his sons (27-36):
 - a. The prophet (**“man of God”**) lays out the charges against Eli and his sons (27-30):
 - 1) God has chosen the Levites (the house of Aaron) out of all the tribes of Israel and bestowed upon them the honor of serving as His priests (27-28)
 - 2) But, Eli scorned/despised (**“kick at”**) the Lord’s sacrifices and offerings (29):
 - a) Earlier Eli rebuked his sons for their wickedness, but here it is revealed that he was just as guilty (the **“you”** and **“yourselves”** are plural)
 - b) Both Eli and his sons were guilty of **“making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering”** which was reserved for God
 - c) Eli was also guilty of honoring his sons above God by allowing them to continue serving as priests in spite of their sins

 - b. The prophet lays out the consequences for their sin (30-36):
 - 1) God would destroy the power and influence of Eli’s house (30-33)—the reference to breaking his strength and the lack of older men among his descendants implies the house of Eli would no longer have any power or influence in Israel (elders were the more powerful and prominent leaders in Israel)

- 2) Eli's two sons would die on the same day (34)
- 3) Eli's descendents would be cut off from the priesthood altogether and God would raise up another priestly line (34-36)—this was fulfilled when Solomon banished Abiathar, the last priest in Eli's line, and replaced him with Zadok (1 Kings 2:26-27, 35)

D. The Lord calls Samuel as His prophet (3:1-4:1a)
--

1. The Lord had not spoken to Israel in a while: "**Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent**" (1)
 - a. The author doesn't tell us how long the Lord had been silent—it might have been through much of Eli's 40 years as judge (and might have been since Samson who died 30 to 40 years before Eli's reign as judge)
 - b. The author also doesn't tell us why the Lord was silent—it might have been a form of judgement as God's silence is in Amos 8:11-12

2. The Lord speaks to Samuel (2-14)
 - a. The Lord calls to Samuel three times but neither Samuel or Eli recognize that it was the Lord (2-8):
 - 3) Samuel had an excuse—God had not spoken to him yet (7): "**Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him.**" (know here should be understood in the sense of experiential, personal intimacy with the Lord)
 - 4) Eli, who we might argue should have known, didn't finally realize what was happening until the third time—just further evidence of what's recording in vs. 1, that God had been silent
 - b. The Lord revealed to Samuel His judgement against Eli and his house (10-14):
 - 1) This time it says the Lord "**came and stood**"—was there a physical manifestation?
 - 2) The Lord explains His judgement against Eli to Samuel
 - c. Samuel reveals the Lord's words to Eli (15-18)

3. Samuel confirmed as God's prophet (3:19-4:1a): "**Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail. 20 All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD. 21 And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD. 4:1 Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel.**"
 - a. As we saw earlier, the use of the words/phrase "**grew**" and "**with**" implies the Lord's divine presence with and favor upon Samuel, which stands in stark contrast to that of Eli and his sons
 - b. This is reflected in the fact that the Lord "**let none of his [Samuel's] words fail**"—in other words, God fulfilled everything he said through Samuel
 - c. This confirmed Samuel as God's prophet throughout all of Israel
 - d. This was the beginning of God speaking and revealing Himself again to Israel (3:21 and 4:1), which (in contrast to the silence mentioned in 3:1)

Conclusion

1. As I mentioned at the beginning of our study today the three theological truths that Hannah reflected upon in her psalm are all on display here
2. We see God's opposition to Eli and his sons due to their arrogant prideful sin and corruption, while at the same time seeing God exalt the humble boy Samuel
3. We see God pronounce judgement against Eli, his sons and his descendants (in essence destroying their power and influence in Israel), while protecting Samuel and confirming him as His prophet
4. Lastly, we see God's work in deliverance as He once again sends an undeserving Israel a faithful judge and prophet in Samuel