

Let's go to 1 Samuel 2.

1 and 2 Samuel, I think we told you last time, cover a period from the last judge (who is Samuel) about 1100 or so B.C., and it takes us through the life of Saul and through the life of David. They were the first two of the three kings that would rule over the united Israel before they split into two. 2 Samuel will take us almost to the end of David's life - about 970 B.C. So roughly 130 years in all of these pages, which means we've got a lot of information in kind of a crammed time.

Last week, in chapter 1, we looked at the times of the judges. We brought that up because it kind of ends with Samuel - 338 years covered in the book of Judges. But it was a horrible time in Israel's history. They did what was right in their own eyes. They did evil in the sight of the LORD. The last five chapters explain very clearly the kind of lives people were living. We've mentioned to you, I think, five or six times now, the sin-drome that is marked out seven different times in that book. The people had rest; rest led to rebellion; rebellion led to retribution (because God doesn't just let you run wild, He wants to keep you close); retribution invariably led to repentance (sometimes it took a long time, sometimes they wised up fairly quickly); whenever there was repentance, redemption would come (a judge would be sent, a deliverer); and then the people would finally have rest. And then the whole thing would just start over again. It really wasn't settled at all. But that was the description at the end of the book. Right? In their own eyes, evil in the sight of the LORD.

In that setting is the book of Ruth, which we just recently finished. And also in that setting is this first story in the life of Samuel and, in particular, as we started last week, in the life of this flawed but faithful couple named Elkanah and Hannah. There was another wife, a second wife, named Peninnah. And that's kind of how we started last week 1 Samuel. We looked at, in particular, last week their pilgrimage every year - actually three times a year - for the Jewish feast days to Shiloh, where the LORD had put the tabernacle. He would eventually move that to the Temple in Jerusalem. That's where He would then choose to put His name. But for now and for many years, actually, in the Old Testament, the tabernacle stood in Shiloh. We cannot take you to Shiloh today. It is in PLO hands for the most part.

We can show you the road that goes there - kind of drive around the outside. But maybe one day we'll get to go back and visit it. We used to be able to go there. We can't do it right now.

We looked last week at the picture of a heavy-hearted Hannah, who would come to worship the LORD. She was mocked by her rival, the other wife who seemed to have babies like a rabbit. And poor Hannah couldn't have any children at all. She believed, as a lot of people would have told her in that generation, that God was against her. And because He was, that's why they couldn't have children. It isn't biblically correct. There are some instances of God using that. There's no easily-verifiable way to say, "That's the way God always did it." In fact, sometimes people were just unable to have kids because God had other ideas. And that was certainly the case in Hannah's situation, but that didn't hurt her any less. She suffered year in and year out as they came to worship, and the other wife would kind of throw in her face that God preferred her over Hannah because look what the LORD was giving to her.

On the positive side, her husband, Elkanah, told her he loved her more than anyone. But even that preferential love of her husband was not enough to soothe her heart. And so every time that they would come for a week, Hannah would hang out at the tabernacle, crying out for God's help, and this year (that we are told about) was no different. And it had been going on for years, and she agonized, waiting upon the LORD. It's hard to wait upon the LORD, don't you think? I like when God comes through. We've been waitin' to knock that building down for eighteen months. Now we have to wait two more weeks to start building it back up because they're working out their grading thing with the City. The waiting's like this..... "Come on, Lord!" I always thought God could use a watch. Like I would send Him one. We could coordinate times. Do you ever feel like that? Or is that just me? If it's just me, I'm in big trouble because I feel like that a lot. But, at the same time, God has a way of preparing us while He has us wait. And so we're given lots of stuff to do - none of it to complain but to wait. And in Hannah's situation, this particular year that God gives us a report of in this historical book, she came at the end of herself. She had cried as much as she was going to. She was going to struggle as much as she had. All of the reasons she wanted a baby were now come and gone - like to get even with the other wife, to show her that God loved her; whatever it might have been, those things all fell by the wayside, and we find Hannah now, in all of her distress, saying to the LORD, "If You could just give me a son, I promise to give him back to serve You all the days of his life." And we get the impression,

reading chapter 1, that that's exactly what the LORD had been wanting to hear. Hadn't come out of her mouth for years; all kinds of other reasons, but she's now been shapen. And the LORD wanted to get a man that He could use to lead the nation out of this horrible condition they were in. But in order to get this leader, He had to first get the heart of a woman so she could bear a son and provide him to the LORD for that service from the days of his birth. The nation was on the brink of disaster from the book of Judges, but God found a woman who was willing to listen. So that's what she said to the LORD. She went away, not upset anymore. She just left it with God. And we are told that as time went on - we don't know if it was in that same time or not, but soon thereafter - God heard that pledge. And He gave to Hannah a son. She named him Samuel. The name Samuel means to be "heard by God." She weaned him, according to chapter 2, for three to five years, maybe. It was a typical practice, at least in those days. And Hannah (at four years old with this little boy) brought him with her husband, Elkanah (who had to sign off on her vow - Old Testament law), and they together brought him to Eli, the high priest there at Shiloh (although they didn't live in Shiloh). And they left him there to learn to begin to serve God. They raised him in the Nazirite vow - a total dedication of his life to the LORD. And so we ended, there in chapter 1, with them showing up with the young boy in tow, ready to leave him on God's doorstep, so to speak, to begin to learn to serve the LORD. Huge commitment. You can only imagine.

Well, chapter 2 tonight, which is what we're going to look at, is really the story of two different families. The story continues; it's historical, it's chronological. Eli, the high priest, had a couple of sons; Elkanah and Hannah had a boy now, too, named Samuel. They all end up kind of in the same place, serving in the same positions. But there's this vast difference between these children from these two different households. One is greatly loved, is devoted by parents (to the LORD), who prayed for him often. The other is a family that is very religious, but it is a father that is uninvolved, that is very aloof. He knows the Scriptures. He does seem to have a relationship to the LORD, but it doesn't extend to his family, and so he kind of keeps things to himself, and he doesn't apply the Scriptures. Although Elkanah and Hannah saw their only child three times a year for a week (if they came at all of those times) and would spend time with him (maybe they came more often, but at least those times), their influence, their love, their godliness, their diligence would bring great reward to this young man's life. I mean, he really turned out great. Eli rarely spoke a word of encouragement to his boys. He never rebuked their behavior, which was awful. He would bring destruction upon his own

household for his lack of or his unwillingness to deal with his own sons. So this story is kind of weaved together in this chapter of thirty-six verses, and it kind of is continued in chapter 3, when the proclamation from the LORD to Eli is going to be, "You're kind of done now. You let it go too long."

But tonight chapter 2, and we begin with the prayer of Hannah. I think we ended last week, did we not, with reading the first eleven verses, which are the words of Hannah as she drops off her young son at the tabernacle to serve the LORD. And Samuel is going to come here to learn how to serve the LORD from who else but Eli, the guy who is in big-time trouble with God for the way he has not done very well in raising his own children. The words that she speaks (and we can look at them for a minute here when we start) will certainly tell you that she is a godly woman who has learned a lot of stuff. Even though she's gone through these years of crying out and weeping and wondering if God would ever answer her prayer, you can almost put this prayerful song next to Mary's, there in chapter 1 of Luke. I mean, these are two ladies who have come to know the heart of God as few others did in their day. I mean, judges was a horrible, dark period, and yet this woman just shines like a bright light. She sings, she has great praise for the LORD, she's going to leave her son to serve God, and she believes that's the best thing she could have done for him and with him. God had taught her that He heard her prayers, He hadn't forgotten about her, He wasn't angry with her, He wasn't out to punish her, He knew her needs better than she knew them herself. And so she learned that God was in charge, and she comes with that kind of an understanding. She's really been delivered from whatever was driving her before that the LORD didn't answer or the work that He was seeking to do, still, in her life.

So verse 1, Hannah begins to pray. Now this is her prayer as she delivers her boy. "My heart rejoices in **Yahweh**. My horn is exalted in the LORD. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation." I love the words, "I smile at my enemies," which I have to believe was that other woman. Because all we read in chapter 1 was how she caused her.....it was like hell on earth with this woman, Peninnah, who was constantly taunting her. And now she could smile at her enemy. Why? Because God had delivered her. It's always nice when you don't have to depend on the others around you. Right? God's going to take care of me. And so the treatments of her enemies.....and maybe that's for you as well - the way you treat your enemies might be a pretty good indicator as to how much joy you have in the fact that God's taking care of your life. Because if you've got to fight with your enemies, it's probably because you don't rest that God can take care of you.

But I love that, "I can smile at my enemies." And everything we looked at last week, with all those years of conflict, we don't ever read of Hannah, "You shut up, you sourpuss." She didn't yell at anybody. She didn't get into hair pullin' with this woman. She just let it go. She cries before the LORD, but she doesn't take it upon herself. So, "I smile at my enemies because of Your salvation. I rejoice."

Verse 2, " 'No one is holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.' " "There's no one that even matches up. You're beyond compare." Wonderful prayer. She's a happy woman. But she's about to leave her only child. Isn't that something?

Verse 3, " 'Talk no more so very proudly; let no arrogance come from your mouth,' " (I'm thinkin' she's thinking of that other woman again) " 'for the LORD is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed.' " Any arrogance before the LORD shows you really that you don't know Him because arrogance, in God's sight, is a pretty dangerous decision. Right? To think that you're somebody and somehow that you can act that way towards others. It's the LORD who weighs the hearts; He weighs the intents, He responds accordingly. I think that Hannah, with all of the accusations she suffered at the hands of this other wife, she must have just rejoiced having this son, realizing God knew her all along. Right? It doesn't really matter what people think. What really matters - what does God think? I've always been convinced, especially in pastoring because everybody's got an opinion about you, it really doesn't matter until.....but what you should really be concerned about is what does God think? You've got to keep Him happy. And I probably don't most of the time, but I want to. And I think that's the concern that we have to have. Notice that she says, "He weighs the action." Pretty heavy, right? He knows what's going on. And we went over this in pretty good detail Sunday about the rewards that we're getting. But I thought about that. God knew that Hannah, in her prayers, was very sincere and that the other woman was very insincere in the way that she treated her. She told her God favored her; God did not favor her. God saw it all. Hannah knew it. But I tell you what. If you go back and read chapter 1, she didn't always know it. For years, she'd come and, "I don't know. Maybe God doesn't love me, or maybe God will not bless me. How come everyone else is having kids and I'm not having kids? How come she gets to have...and she's horrible! And I'm doin' my best."

God knows every motive and circumstance in which you find yourself. He's not fooled, not even once. I love when David speaks in 1 Chronicles 28:9 to his son,

Solomon, and he said, "You should know the God of your fathers, and you should serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; because the LORD will search your heart and understands the intents of your thoughts. And if you seek Him, you'll find Him; if you forsake Him, He'll cast you off." Just know that He knows. You can't fool God. Man, if we could just learn that. We can't fool God. It is encouraging to know that God knows, or it's very discouraging. If you know that God knows, if you're doing well, that's encouraging. If you're not, that's discouraging. What did the psalmist write in Psalm 142? "My spirit was overwhelmed within me, You know the path that I take and the ways in which I walk" (verse 3). And here's Hannah, with a new little three-year-old, four-year-old boy - God's blessing after years of prayer - and she's bringing him to serve the LORD. And all she can do is rejoice in how faithful God is, how arrogance hasn't moved His hand, how her enemies can now look to her but she can smile in response. How sobering. I don't know how often you've read through the gospels, but one of the phrases that sticks out in the Bible a lot, especially in the gospels, is the words "Jesus knew their thoughts." You'll read that quite often. Chapter 2 of John, for example, it says (verse 25), "He didn't need anybody to tell him or to testify of men. He knew what was in man." That was just kind of the introduction to the book of John. He knows all about you. You mess with Him, you're not gonna get away with it. You know? At the beginning of Matthew 6, Jesus talks about motivations, in the way that we do things in seeking glory for ourselves and how....I wrote in my Bible in Matthew 6:1, "If you keep track, God won't." Like if you're doing it for your own glory, then God says, "Well, you got what you wanted out of it," the applause or the praises of men or the reward, whatever you're looking for. But, on the other hand, to let God be God because He knows the actions and the intents of the heart, that's an entirely different story. And, in fact, if you start in verse 4 here and read down through verse 8, all it says is God knows the situation. He can reverse the circumstances. He can intervene. He's powerful. And He exalts the humble. He provides for the poor. A person's life is not fixed, if you will. God can change it. And Hannah is, I think, applying it to herself as well.

But here's what she says in her prayers, verse 4, "The bows of the mighty men are broken, and those who stumbled are girded with strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, and the hungry have ceased to hunger. Even the barren has borne seven, and she who has many children has become feeble. The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes

and make them inherit the throne of glory. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and He has set the world upon them.' " God is in charge. He can make poor and rich. He can change fortunes. And I love Hannah's view, after the fact, because for years she didn't see a way out; and then God comes through, and she goes, "He can do anything!" What a great lesson to learn. No need for Him, then you're cocky and arrogant. If you don't think you need His help, you're gonna learn otherwise.

And she says, in verse 9, " 'He will guard the feet of His saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness. For by strength no man shall prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken in pieces; from heaven He will thunder against them. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed.' " Only trying ourselves to do anything, our might is not sufficient; we have to yield to the LORD. And I think she learned that lesson. "I tried for so many years to make something happen, and then when I learned to just let God be God, surrendered my life to Him, in His care, then I found great deliverance." What a great promise. "From the beginning of the world, men have not heard nor perceived by their ear," Isaiah writes (64:4), "nor have their eyes seen what God has done beside You, who wait for Him." What a great verse. I think Hannah learned. Have you learned that? Waiting upon the Lord is the best way to go, that your strength won't work. In fact, it is the Lord who gives strength and position and success. We conquer. Here's how you conquer as a Christian - yield to the Lord. No strivin', no connivin', no strivin'. How does that song go? (Pastor Jack starts to sing a song and then asks Pastor Gerard how the song goes. He continues to sing, followed by the congregation clapping and whistling.) That's right. Where's the guitar? I'm ready to..... (Laughing) No strivin', no connivin', no jivin' will do. You gotta learn to yield.

And notice verse 10. I want you to notice the word "anointed" because it's the Hebrew word "**Mashiach**" or Messiah. " 'The LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His Messiah.' " It is ultimately a prophecy of Jesus, but the lesson from Hannah is very clear - when I learned to let go, God could be strong and change my fortune.

And verse 11 says, "Then Elkanah went to his house at Ramah. But the child ministered to the LORD before Eli the priest."

All right. Verse 12, we then change scenery, if you will, and we switch to the sad state of the priests at the tabernacle. We see the great love of the parents, the devotion to the LORD, the lessons they were learning. The boy was left, verse 11, there to serve with Eli. And then we go to verse 12, and it says, "Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD." Though Eli was, by now, quite old, and his sons did most of the work at the tabernacle, he was still the high priest. He had the final authority. And unfortunately he had, for years, let his boys run wild. He hadn't taught them the things of the LORD, though they were serving in that place between being a mediator between the people and God. It was the worst place for them to be. They were corrupt, verse 12. The word "corrupt" is the word "*belial*" in Hebrew; it means worthless or empty or vain or wicked, depending on what translation you read. The sons of Belial worshipped idols. They were immoral men, according to Judges 19, and they were perverted kinds of folks who served themselves. But maybe this is the key, verse 12, "they didn't know the LORD." Now you would think that someone in a religious leadership position would have at least some relationship with God. They didn't. And that kind of describes to you how the people coming to worship, what they would run into when they came here. So, there's a verse in Judges 2, right at the beginning, which said, "When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers," (speaking about Joshua's generation) "another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel" (verse 10). From a generation that knew the LORD but didn't really and hadn't experienced His power, to two generations earlier knowing both, this generation knew neither. So these guys are the product of a generation that followed, if you will, the generations that followed after Joshua. But they didn't know the LORD. Their dad, though, knew the LORD. Everything we read about him would convince us that he knew the LORD. But he didn't place any restrictions or constraints upon his sons, and because his sons were so vile, when people came to worship, they didn't want to come back. These kids would rip them off and tell them dirty stories and sleep with their wives. These guys were horrible! All in the name of the LORD. And so the people turned away. Any effect of worship and the feast days was nullified by these horrible men that were standing between God and the people. He favors his family to the detriment of the nation. He clouds his evaluation because those are his sons. He degrades the ministry of the priesthood - that many are now turning from the LORD - and Eli heads for judgment. In fact, just in a chapter or two, we're going to hear the LORD saying, "Your next generation is not going to sit upon the throne, and there's going to be an end to you down the road soon enough, completely." And this was all brought on by Eli's unwillingness to take the reins and be a godly man.

Now, I'm beatin' that to death to say to you here's Hannah with her husband, saying, "Here's our precious cargo. We love this kid. We've devoted him to the LORD, and here you go, Eli. Do your deal." And you go, "Wait a minute. I'll leave him with anyone but Eli! Have you seen those ratty sons of his and how they behaved?" And maybe that's the lesson of that, where you come to the point where you truly trust the Lord. So, putting God first had been difficult when it comes to Eli's family. It's important. You shouldn't make allowances for ungodliness in your own home just to keep the peace; you should stand up for what's right. But, again, that's the contrast. From verses 1-11 to verse 12.

We read, in verse 13, "And the priests' custom with the people was that when any man offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fleshhook in his hand while the meat was boiling. Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; and the priest would take for himself all that the fleshhook brought up. So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who sacrificed, 'Give meat for roasting to the priest, for he will not take boiled meat from you, but raw.' And if the man said to him, 'They should really burn the fat first;' " (which is the law) " 'then you may take as much as your heart desires,' he would then answer him, 'No, but you must give it now; and if not, I will take it by force.' Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for men abhorred" (or they hated) "the offering of the LORD." And who couldn't relate to that? Of course we could. According to the Law, a workman was worthy of his wages. You can go back into the Old Testament Law when it applied to the priests - both their spiritual duty and their compensation - and you find that that idea of a workman being worthy of his hire is carried out. Jesus said it in Luke 10:7. Paul shared it in 1 Timothy 5:18. In the Old Testament, God granted (Leviticus 7) a generous portion for the labor of the priest so he'd never really need to worry. It wasn't a position that you went to to get wealthy; it was a position of service, but God provided for His own. So they would take the breast of the wave offering, the thigh of the heave offering, I think - pretty substantial food for his family as he worked there, and it was to be given to them and to the priests of Aaron forever. They had a pay scale; God set it up. But not these guys. These guys came with hooks and demands, and they didn't want boiled meat; they wanted raw. They were going to take as much as they could, and, "I'll take it before you begin to burn it and the fat runs. I'll just take what I want. If you don't give it to me, I'll take it from you." Imagine going to worship service like that. So, in their greed - this is now Eli's boys - dissatisfied with God's provision,

intimidating worship leaders, they start making threats, even, against them, "I'll take what I want from you." In Isaiah 56:11, when the LORD spoke to the priests in Isaiah's days, He called them "greedy dogs who never have enough," (wow!) "shepherds who don't understand, who are looking for their own way, who are looking for their own gain, who only want their own territory." That's the way the LORD described the priests of Isaiah's day. Well that's kind of what was going on here as well. The book of Micah, as the LORD is speaking again to the priests, He says (Micah 3:11), "The judge works for bribes, the priest will teach you for pay, the prophet will divine for money. They say they lean on the LORD and say, 'Isn't the LORD among us? Nothing can hurt us.' " And the LORD said, "I'm not with that! I know that's what they're saying to you while you're paying the bills - to have them say that to you - but that's not coming from Me."

Well that's kind of the way it was at the end of the time of the judges. This was the condition to which Elkanah and Hannah brought their little, joyful boy, their praise to the LORD. God would reward them. I should tell you God will protect this child. He will grow up as a servant of the LORD in the midst of this circus. But what kind of faith does a mom have to have to drop a kid off here, in that environment? I hear sometimes that we excuse our service to the Lord by pointing out the wickedness of others. "Well, I'd like to serve, but those people are horrible." Well that doesn't hold any water. God knows the heart, and you're obligated to love Him and serve Him despite what other people might do. Right? In other words, your responsibility is to the Lord; not to, "Well, I would serve the Lord except for that guy," as if somehow that guy now gets you off the hook. Look what Hannah does here. She fulfills her vow and trusts the LORD to work it out. After all, He knows everything, and He's all powerful.

Notice, from verse 17, that greed and wickedness and bullying and selfishness is pretty much the explanation of these young sons of Eli and their friends. And the fallout is people have quit coming to worship; they don't want to come to the LORD anymore, they don't want to come and serve the LORD. These atrocities were occurring as they brought their peace offerings and their thanksgiving offerings. Fellowship with God was being clouded by the sins of men. They were stumbling blocks. I've heard more than one time and saying to people, "Hey, you oughta come to church," and they'll say things like, "Oh, the church is just out after your money. All they want is your money. Look, another telethon for God." And unfortunately, their perception, because of what they see culturally, is often right. There're a lot of religious charlatans out there hustling for money.

When I started pastoring years ago, I made a very conscious effort to never talk about money. Ever. Unless we happen to run into it in the Scriptures. I figured God can pay His own bills. And I want to distance myself from every hustler that's out to get your money. In fact, I've said from this pulpit, "Hey, if you don't trust it, keep it. I don't care. It's between you and the Lord." The Lord does not need your money. I believe that with all my heart. He'll pay our bills, and He doesn't need your money. Does that mean you shouldn't give? Hey, I think it's the best investment you can ever make. But you have to work that out. So I stay away from it entirely, unless we run into it in the Scriptures; then I try to teach it line upon line and all. The church is a place to serve Jesus, not a place to serve yourself, though. And one day we're all going to give an account of our stewardship. You might read Matthew 25 sometime. There's a parable there called "The Parable of the Talents." I remember writing one time, "Just shortchange God and see how short your change becomes." I always liked that line.

Well, in this generation, the greatest foe to evangelism was misrepresentation of the LORD by His servants. It was the worst thing that could happen here, and it was Eli's boys who had taken it upon themselves to serve themselves; and it sure highlights the need for godly leaders and not some people who would just try to use people for their own benefit. Well, into this "circus" (circus is a good word, I think), Hannah brings her boy. This is God's work.

Verse 18, "But Samuel ministered before the LORD, even as a child, wearing a linen ephod." From one side of the fence, again we turn to the other side - the progress of Samuel. "Moreover his mother used to make him a little robe, and bring it to him year by year when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. 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.' Then they would go to their own home. And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile the child Samuel grew before the LORD." So, cute little story. I don't know if little Samuel's embarrassed by the LORD rattin' him out that he stood around in a little miniature priest robe. It seems like the kind of pictures your mom would have you layin' on the.....where was I laying? On like a bear rug. Anyway. Nevermind. (Laughing) But I want you to notice something, and I point it out to you because it's stuck right in the middle here: little Samuel ministers to the LORD; his mom and dad stay involved with his life; Eli sees the blessings of God upon this couple; God continues to bless them and their family - they have now five more children; and this child, Samuel, continues to

grow spiritually before the LORD. So, in less than ideal situations and influences, here in the tabernacle with Eli and his rotten boys, this kid gets better spiritually. I've had parents say sometimes, "We can't afford to send our kids to a Christian school or private school. I'm worried about them being in public school." And my answer usually is, "If you're bein' a good parent, that's the last thing I would worry about. Find a good school they can learn, and it'll be just fine. Trust God to keep them." Or, "They have to stay with my unbelieving spouse for the weekend. We got a divorce. I'm always worried when the kids go over there." No, no. The Lord watches over kids. And if you want an argument, go back to this one, and look at how the LORD kept this little boy. Hannah came maybe for three weeks a year from what we can gather, year by year; at the feast days, she showed up. But she continues to love her child and continues to reach out to him, and God continues to bless. Eli fails with his two sons. Hannah, in her faithfulness to God, turns out five more. All the while Samuel's growin'. Right? By the time we get to chapter 3, Samuel's going to be thirteen years old. So we're passing over ten years here of just fragmentary information so that we can learn what God wants us to know.

Verse 22, let's turn back again to the other guys. "Now Eli was very old; and he heard everything his sons did to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting." Can you imagine? "So he said to them, 'Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the LORD's people transgress. If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?' Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the LORD desired to kill them." Now, get this right. "The LORD kills people on purpose!" What it says is - that Eli, hearing about his sons' behavior.....well, first of all, it's too little too late. He's an old guy, and this has been goin' on for years, and he's lookin' the other way. Second of all, he raises his voice, doesn't put them out of business. He could have just said, "You guys are done, and hand in your priestly garb." He could have removed them permanently and immediately. He does not. There's an old quote that said, "Eli raised his sons to bring down his house," and that's pretty much what happened. So, he might have gotten in the boy's faces, he might have tried to act.....when I was reading this the other day, I thought, back in chapter 1, Hannah was praying with her mouth and not making any sound, and Eli, who had dealt with a lot of drunkenness at the tabernacle, apparently, started to yell and her and said, "You drunk woman, get out of here! You're a disgrace," or something. And she said, "I'm not drunk, I'm brokenhearted." And then he had to apologize to her. And I

thought if he'd have talked to his boys like he talked to this woman, presuming that she was on the wrong side of things, maybe they'd have turned out okay. Look for a minute at verse 13 of the next chapter. We're not goin' there tonight, but just so you can kind of mark it for yourself. It says this, " '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.' " Later on, you will read, by the way, that same truth about David when it came to his son, Adonijah. Adonijah tried to make himself king when his father, David, was very old (in 1 Kings 1 - right at the beginning, anyway), and it says that "his father had never rebuked him in his life" (verse 6). So here's a kid that got away with murder. Kids need to be rebuked. You know that, don't you? You and I could have used some more rebuking, I think. We wouldn't have turned out the way we did. But poor parenting directly contributed to the demise of this family, to this ministry, to the spiritual wellbeing of the people. I always pray that God would give us godly leaders in our church. Not those who are excusing or tolerating sin in their own home but seeking to make some rules that are effective, that kids can grow up with. And notice the weak and the ineffectual oversight that Eli exercised. By the time you get to the words "they're not going to listen because He wants to kill them," all that means is God's done waiting now; judgment day has come, they've run out of chances. And even then, we're going to see, in chapter 3, God still gives them plenty of chances.

By contrast, verse 26, and don't you like the way the LORD weaves these two families together, "And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the LORD and with men." These wicked guys that were turning people away from the LORD, and then there's this young guy - headin' towards his teenager years, been livin' on his own, serving the LORD since he was a young kid. Mom keeps bringin' him new clothing, and he's growing in stature physically, but he's also growing in favor with the LORD. By contrast, in the midst of the perversion, here's a rose growing among the weeds. By the way, it's the same thing that you read about John the Baptist, towards the end of chapter 1 of Luke - that he was growing in stature and favor with God. Just almost two of the same kinds of guys. Being right with God brought him into favor with others. Samuel was not being moved by the poor example of Eli's boys; he was being moved by the Spirit. He could have easily been sucked into this, you know. Kids are pretty influenceable when it comes to peers. But he didn't. God protected him.

So, we come to the conclusion of chapter 2, and here, at the end, comes a warning to the house of Eli that he was standing, really, too close to the judgment of God in

letting his boys go this far and hurting so many and stumbling the flock, and their miserable ways of ministry, and their wickedness and all.

We read, in verse 27, "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 all the offerings of the children of Israel made by fire?" ' " The Word of God comes through an unknown, unidentified prophet that Eli has neglected his parenting skills. The key verse is in verse 29, " "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?" ' " A couple of implications there: that one of the reasons Eli was looking the other way was there was some benefit to him, and second of all, that he hadn't dealt with it at all. So, here's God's Word through the prophet. From the very beginning, God graciously dealt with the house of Aaron. When He brought them out of captivity, He picked them with the privilege of being priests. He asked them represent Him to the people. He adequately provided for them. One of his boys, Eli's boys, is named Phinehas. Phinehas was a godly guy 300 years earlier in Numbers; he's a horrible guy here. But Eli hadn't seen it that way, that God had been providing and been good to him. And the LORD said to him, in verse 29, "How come you hate what I've given you? How come you favor your sons above Me? It's because it has benefited you rather than My people." That's a horrible thing to hear, isn't it? "You have pursued personal ambition at My expense. You've looked the other way as your boys committed these horrible sins. You favored them over Me. Your appetite is as bad as theirs. You were in on this, at least by not doing anything."

So he says, in verse 30 (the prophet), " 'Therefore the LORD God of Israel says: "I said indeed that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever." But now the LORD says: "Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days are coming that I will cut off your arm and the arm of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. And you will see an enemy in My dwelling place, despite all the good which God does for Israel. And there shall not be an old man in your house forever. But any of your men whom I do not cut off from My altar shall consume your eyes and grieve your heart. And all the descendants of your house shall die in the flower of their age." ' " Boy, that's pretty tough. In

other words, if you go back to verse 30, the LORD says to Eli, "My promises to you are based upon obedience." In fact, there're only four words in this sentence in Greek, and it literally says, "Honor is reciprocal." In other words, judgment follows when honor is set aside. So, verse 31, 32, 33 - the judgment that God is going to bring on Eli's house: no one will be living long, there won't be any more high priests coming from his family. Judgment starts at the house of God. Pretty terrifying.

In fact, verse 34 says, " "Now this shall be a sign to you that will come upon your two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die, both of them." " " Terrifying thought. " " "Then I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before My *Mashiach* forever." " " Again, Jesus is coming, the faithful High Priest. " " "And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left in your house will come and bow down to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and say, 'Please, put me in one of the priestly positions, that I may eat a piece of bread.' " " " So, God says He's going to depose the family. They're going to be begging for bread. The high life is not going to last. Which is interesting because you go back to verse 3 and 4 and 5 and 6 and 7 of this chapter, where happy Hannah is saying, "God, You know everything, You can bring down the rich and raise up the poor," and then you get to the end of the chapter and go, "Man, that's exactly what happened here." God has the last word.

Now, let me say this to you, unless you've read ahead. The judgment that you read here is not carried out immediately. Eli's grandson is a fellow named Ahitub. He's going to be the high priest. After that, his grandson, Abiathar, is going to come and hold office. But Abiathar will be deposed by Solomon. He will be replaced by a guy named Zadoc, who will become a faithful priest both to David and to Solomon - would really be a type of Christ, not through all these kinds of horrible guys that were coming.

In the end, verse 35 and verse 36, the promise of a faithful one to come is, in the bigger picture, a promise of Christ. The terrible lesson is - here're two families and their offspring: one who has great advantage because his parents are godly and they've taught him to know the LORD, and then they've left him with a guy who's not very godly, who's under the judgment of God. And you might say, "Well, that's gonna rub off." No. I think parents, even from a distance, can have great influence over their kids. "Oh, they've grown up. They've moved away." You just keep prayin', then. You can have great influence. But notice that one does very

well. The other suffers tremendous loss, though they were in a position of honor. It's a great story - two sides. And it just gets us to Samuel at thirteen years old.

And then, next week in chapter 3, Samuel will get his chance to hear the LORD's voice for the first time, and he will be put to the test at thirteen, "Will you be willing to speak what God has spoken to you?" And he gets the test at thirteen years old, and this is going to prove whether he's gonna be a guy that God can use or not. So if you'll read chapter 3 for next week.....actually, next week I think I'm gone. I'm gone. (Laughing) Two weeks, you'll have time to read chapter 3. Okay?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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