



# Finer Grounds Bible Study

## 1 Samuel

### Lesson 3: 1 Samuel 2

At the end of the last lesson, Samuel had begun his life of service to God in the tabernacle. Daily, he had the opportunity to interact with the priests of Israel, including the High Priest Eli and his sons. Unfortunately, the rebellious Hophni and Phineas were not good role models for the young Samuel. In this lesson, we will explore how God dealt with the men who were supposed to be Israel's spiritual leaders.

#### Read 1 Samuel 2:22-26

News of Hophni and Phineas's sin spread throughout the nation of Israel. Eli, after hearing of their sin, spoke to his sons. He pleaded with them not to sin before God, but his rebuke had no effect. God had already determined that he would put them to death (2:25). Their hearts were hardened and they would not listen to their father's warning.

#### Read Romans 9:14-18. How did God use Pharaoh's hardened heart?

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Just as God used Pharaoh's rebellious heart to prove His might to the Egyptians, God would use the sin of Hophni and Phineas to proclaim His righteousness to the nation of Israel. God would not allow the priests to desecrate His tabernacle without receiving their rightful punishment.

#### Review 1 Samuel 2:12-17 and 1 Samuel 2:22.

#### What sins had Hophni and Phineas committed?

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#### Read Leviticus 7:25 and Leviticus 20:10

#### According to the law, what punishment should Hophni and Phineas have received?

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While Eli and several Israelites were aware of the sin of the priests, no one was willing to carry out God's prescribed punishment. Eli especially, as High Priest and judge, had a responsibility to teach, model, and enforce God's law (Leviticus 10:8-11). By tolerating his sons' sin, Eli allowed Israel's sacrifices to be defiled by their disobedience. Their adulterous relationships gave the tabernacle, God's tent of worship, the reputation of a place of immorality instead of a house of God. God would not permit it any longer; Hophni and Phineas would be held accountable for their actions, while Eli would be punished for his inaction.

#### Read 1 Samuel 2:27-36

#### What sin had Eli committed (see v. 29)?

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Eli and his sons had despised God's sacrifice by ignoring God's law concerning the priest's share. They took more than they were given out of their own greed. By ignoring their sin, Eli honored his own sons over honoring God. He may have even taken part in their sin, as he was accused of growing fat from the choice portions of the sacrifices. Because of these actions, God would punish Eli and his sons.

**Write down the four parts of the prophecy.**

1. v. 31-32:

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2. v. 33:

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3. v. 34:

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4. v. 35-36:

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Remember the four parts of this prophecy. The first three parts will all be fulfilled by the end of 1 Samuel.

**Describe the blessings that God's "faithful priest" would experience (v. 35).**

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God's faithful priest would serve His anointed forever. Remember that any reference to the Lord's anointed is referring to His king. Just like Hannah's prayer, the prophet's message foretells that a king is coming.

**Read 1 Samuel 3:1**

This brief introduction provides a key piece of information that makes the coming events even more significant. Verse 1 states that in those days, direct revelations from the Lord were rare. God had directly communicated with Joshua and some of the judges but had not, as far as we know, ever communicated directly with Eli, the current priest and judge. How terrible must it have been for a people chosen by God not to hear His voice anymore. Even more saddening, communication had been broken off because the people had chosen not to listen to God. Verse one reminds us that the current state of Israel is one of rebellion against God (Tsumura 174).

**Read 1 Samuel 3:2-14**

Some of you might remember this story from Sunday School. Young Samuel heard a voice call to him as he slept in the tabernacle. The eager boy ran to Eli's side, thinking it was him who had called. I can just imagine a groggy Eli sending the boy back to bed, having no clue that the boy had heard the Lord's voice.

When Eli finally realized what was happening, he told Samuel to lay down and prepare to receive the message from the Lord. Verse 10 states that the Lord came and stood in the tabernacle, and then called Samuel. Imagine that. God appeared to this young boy. I am sure that Samuel never forgot this encounter!



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Samuel listened as the Lord warned that His plans would leave the people of Israel dumbfounded. In verse 11, tingling ears alludes to the ringing in the ears that one would get after being hit over the head (Swanson). The coming events would be so devastating, so shocking, that the Israelites would find themselves disoriented. God had already told Eli through a prophet what would happen to his family and why. Now, God warns Eli through Samuel that punishment is at hand.

Verse 14 contains a devastating proclamation from God. Since Hophni and Phineas despised God's sacrifices, God would not accept any sacrifices as atonement for their sins. This statement addresses one of the key themes in the book of 1 Samuel; to obey is better than to sacrifice. Although Hophni and Phineas offered sacrifices daily, they did not do so out of obedience but for personal gain. God does not accept worship given under false pretenses.

### Read 1 Samuel 3:15-3:21

Eli recognized that Samuel was delivering a message from God. His statement that the Lord would do "what seems good to him," appears to be a statement of submission to God's will. Yet, it also seems like the old priest had given up. He was still not willing to reprove his sons in keeping with God's law, but he was more than willing to allow God to punish them instead.

Verses 19-21 contrast the coming destruction of Eli's house with Samuel's rise to prominence as a prophet. News of the new prophet reached all of Israel, from the northernmost city of Dan to the southernmost city of Beersheba. Remember that visions from God had been rare (3:2). Now,

through the faithful prophet Samuel, God could speak to His people again.

**Take some time to fill your character study chart with more details about Samuel. Remember to add information about his relationship with God, how he was viewed by his countryman, and his occupation(s). Include the chapter and verse where you found this information.**

### Read 1 Samuel 4:1-11

God used the Philistines to punish Israel and the priestly family. The people of Israel made two grave errors. Their first mistake was neglecting to consult God for His help in battling their enemy. The original Hebrew in Verse 1 can be read to mean that "though the word of Samuel was recognized throughout Israel, the people went out for battle without asking the will of the Lord through his prophet" (Tsumura 188). In the past, God granted victory to His people when they acted according to His instruction. Without His blessing, they were routed.

### Read Numbers 14:40-45

**What happened to the Israelite army when they went to battle without God's consent?**

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Even after they were defeated by the Philistines, the elders of Israel still did not consult God's prophet. Instead, they decided that God would help them if they brought the ark of the covenant into battle. This was their second error. The people did not understand what the ark signified. I am sure that they knew the history of



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the ark and hoped that its presence would ensure God's protection.

## Read Joshua 3:7-17 and Joshua 6:1-21

**How did the ark figure into these events?**

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**Who commanded the Israelites to use the ark?**

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While the ark was present at these two great Israelite victories, the elders missed the most crucial point concerning its use. In both cases, God had given His leader specific instructions on how the ark should be used and how the battle should be fought. He went with the ark because the people had listened to His command, not because they simply paraded the ark before them.

Now, as the elders of Israel called for the ark to be used, they revealed the true placement of their faith. Verse 3 states that they brought the ark so that “*it* may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies” (4:3 NASB emphasis added). They did not want the Lord to lead them; they wanted an idol to follow, a symbol to rally the people. Trust in the object representing God's covenant was not enough however, and the Lord allowed the Philistines to defeat the Israelites. In fact, the Philistines' fear of the ark caused them to fight with even more tenacity. The Israelites were slaughtered, and the Philistines took possession of the ark, the very object that the Israelites hoped would save them.

In verse 11, more losses are reported. Hophni and Phineas were killed, no doubt when the ark was captured. As priests, they would have been carrying the ark into battle. God used the Philistines to fulfill His words concerning the house of Eli (2:34).

## Read 1 Samuel 4:12-18

Upon hearing that the ark was captured, the shocked priest falls to his death. Verse 18 implies that Eli's age and weight both contributed to his death.

## Reread 1 Samuel 2:29

Eli had grown heavy from the choice portions that he and his sons unlawfully took from Israel's sacrifices. In the end, God would use Eli's sin to contribute directly to his death. However, it was the shock of losing the ark that caused Eli to fall in the first place. The ark, the sign of the covenant that God had made with Israel, was now in enemy hands.

## Read 1 Samuel 4:19-22

The birth of Ichabod clarifies two points for the reader. First, it reveals that the message that the prophet gave in chapter 2 is true. Eli's bloodline is not cut off completely as a son is born to Phineas on the very day of his death. God did not promise to destroy Eli's house, but did promise that no man would live to an old age.

Second, it clarifies the meaning of the ark departing from Israel. The name Ichabod literally means “where is the glory?” an allusion to God's glory departing from Israel in the form of the ark (Brand). In ancient times, if an idol of a competing nation's god was captured, it was



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believed that the god had been defeated. Ichabod’s mother knew that the one true God could not be beaten by other “gods.” God had departed on His own terms because Israel had failed to recognize it was God, not the ark, that could deliver them.

The story of Eli and his sons ends in death and despair. The men who were supposed to be the religious leaders of God’s people were responsible for the defeat of their nation both on the physical and spiritual battlefields. Eli, the judge and priest of Israel, was dead due to his own inability to keep God’s commandments regarding his sons.

**Why do we prioritize our human relationships over our obedience to God?**

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**What are some ways that we rationalize sin in ourselves and in others so that we do not have to confront it?**

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Jesus said in Luke 14:26 (NASB) “If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.” In this passage, the word “hate” is best translated as, “to regard less.” God does not want us to hate those around us, but he does want us to put Him first in our lives.

**Read Matthew 22:37-39**

While we must love those around us, we are to love and obey God first. Consistently following Him and His word should be more important to us than our husbands, our children, our family, and our friends. The hard truth to admit is this; if we put anything before God, we are serving an idol.

Idols had been an issue for the Israelites since they had left Egypt. Worship of Golden Calves, Bronze Serpents, Baals, and Ashtoreth’s had caused many to stray from obedience to God. Idolatry was still an issue for the Israelites in 1 Samuel 2-4; it was just subtler in form. Eli did not worship other gods, but he did honor his own sons instead of honoring God (2:29). Hophni and Phineas honored themselves instead of God. While they practiced the rituals associated with worship, they did not do so to honor God (2:12-17). The Israelite elders used the ark of God in hopes that it would deliver them from their enemies. They failed to realize that it was God, not the ark, that provided salvation (4:1-4).

We too must be careful not allow these subtle forms of idolatry to come between us and God. Read through the questions below to help you identify potential idols in your life.

**Eli’s idolatry: Are you honoring someone over honoring God? Are you accepting someone’s sin because they are “happy”? Are you ignoring disobedience in a sister because you do not want to deal with the potential pain of confronting it?**

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**Hophni and Phineas’s idolatry: Do you look for personal gain in good works or acts of worship? Have you tried to bend rules to benefit yourself? Do you prioritize your own desires over obedient service to God?**

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**Israelite Elder’s idolatry: Do you hope that your good works will save you? Do you hope that baptism without a repentant heart will bring salvation? Do you hope that taking communion every week will get you into heaven? Do you forget that it is God’s grace and the Jesus’s sacrifice that make salvation possible (Ephesians 2:8-9)?**

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Take this time to ask God to help you remove the attitude or behavior that is getting between you and Him. Remember that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive (1 John 1:9). Thank Him for His incredible love and mercy!

**What are some specific ways you will put God first this week?**

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