

Continuing in chapter 2 “Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord” (2:12). Hannah profoundly influenced her son to know the Lord, while Eli neglected this important calling. The key to Eli’s failure is found 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?” Eli apparently had no fear of God, using the sacrifices for his own convenience rather than to “draw near” God’s Presence (the Hebrew word for offering, *qorban*, 7133, means “something brought near,” from *qareb*, 7131, to draw near). When we want God more for what He can do for us than for the relationship with Him, then we fall into Eli’s category, *using* God for convenience.

Because Eli did not fear God enough to “restrain” (lit. *rebuke*, 3:13) his sons, God said “that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever” (v.14). Connect this to 2:25b, “Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the Lord desired to kill them,” and we see a picture of what the New Testament calls the “unpardonable sin” (Mt. 12:31). This “blasphemy against the Spirit” is more than mere words, or many of us would have never made it out of our former lifestyles. It is rather the hardening of one’s heart against the Holy Spirit until he no longer wants to repent or be bothered. He has “insulted the Spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:29).

Numbers 15 lists two broad categories of sin: (1) “unintentional” sins (NKJB) or sins of “ignorance” (KJV), and (2) “presumptuous” sins, that is, sin done with willful, deliberate intent. Of the latter, v. 29 says, “Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.” Sacrifice and offering would not atone for him (unless, of course, he repented), which might explain why the man who tested this law, picking up sticks on the Sabbath day, was placed under guard or “in ward” (KJV) while Moses waited for God to declare His verdict (15:32-36). No doubt this gave him time to repent.

The same can be said of Achan, who stole gold, silver, and a garment from the ruins of Jericho (Josh. 7:21). He too had plenty of time to repent while Joshua went through the process of casting lots, narrowing it down from the nation to the tribe, then to the family, and finally Achan. His lack of repentance reflected the hardness of his heart, worthy of death. Likewise Jesus gave the immoral woman in the church at Thyatira “time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.” So the verdict: “I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts.” (See Rev. 2:20-23) Judah’s two eldest sons apparently reached this point of no return and God “killed” them (Gen. 38:7-10). The wickedness of Israel and Judah also fell into this category, where God’s patience and mercy no longer applied (Jud. 2, 2 Ki. 24, Jer. 7:16, 28).

Hebrews 6 and 10 explain it this way: “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (10:26). John confirms it by telling us how to pray for a brother who has sinned. If his sin is “not leading to death,” we are to ask God to give him life. Otherwise no. (1 Jn. 5:16). No sacrifice will help someone who *willfully* sins in the face of God’s offer of redemption and the gentle wooing of His *Spirit of grace*.

Obviously, Eli’s sons had gone too far in God’s face and “put Him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:6). Their refusal to “heed the voice of their father” (1 Sam. 2:25) became what is called “judicial blindness,” where God turns someone over to his own willful deception and ripens him for judgment. This is why God calls us to witness to the truth even to those who will not receive it, so that they are “without excuse” (Rom. 1:20; see Mt. 13:14).

So God said, “I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind . . .” (2:35). God was looking forward to Christ, ultimately. Then why did God wait another six or seven hundred years of watching everybody fail, send His nation back into captivity, speak some final words through a few more prophets, and then draw back into silence four more hundred years until His Son appeared as a carpenter and died as a criminal?

That’s an important question with a difficult but powerful answer, corresponding the lesson in chapter 1: God is found in *darkness* and *perplexity* (Ex. 20:21, 1 Ki. 8:12, Ps.18:11, 2 Cor. 4:8). It would seem to be to our advantage if He *never* spoke in a tangible way and left us totally in the dark. But He must give us just enough to keep us seeking, asking, and knocking or we’d give up completely.

How He gives us that little bit that encourages us to seek Him is also deeply wonderful. He does it through very faulty human beings, *representative* of all of us. He must spend decades reducing them to weakness and darkness with barely enough Light to survive and keep seeking. Why? Because their lives communicate something infinitely more valuable than God appearing in such glory that we couldn't *absorb* it in a *meaningful* way. In other words, God is more than glory and majesty and power; He's *heart!* That explains why when He finally did come He came in such humble circumstances that most everybody missed Him, and when He left, He appeared to abandoned His disciples to persecution, affliction, disgrace, and martyrdom.

For God created man with the capacity to be as *heart-loving* as Himself. But strangely, He knew it would take the Fall and several thousand years of human failure to *enrich* our hearts with love, compassion, and *understanding*. That's why "the angels desire to look into" this whole thing (1 Pet. 1:12). They will witness layers and depths of love they have never comprehended in their unfallen state (Eph. 3:17-19).

Paul speaks of this in Ephesians 3: "To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (v.10). The whole angelic world is our audience watching us from a lighted cathedral of glory and awe while we, His Church, find our way to God's heart . . . in darkness. And someday we'll have the wisdom and heart to be their administrators.

Chapter 3. And so Samuel must develop and mature in the Tabernacle right there in the midst of the complacency and corruption of the priesthood. He will set the example for Saul and David of patient submission, refusing to move ahead of God. It is very similar to the Temptation in the Garden and the testing of anyone God would love to use; Saul buckled under it; David became what God wanted *through* it, which is what 1 & 2 Samuel are all about. And Samuel re-established the correct pattern as God's representative. Saul had much more access to him than David did, if only he'd used it. Instead God used Saul's failure to keep David in the darkness that would test and refine him in preparation for the throne.

Several verses in this chapter reveal God's *ways* (Ps. 103:7). In verse 1 we see that "the word of the Lord was rare in those days: there was no widespread revelation." Why? God was limited to His servants. "Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Am. 3:7). So "before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord where the ark of God was" (v.3), God had already placed someone with hearing ears there—Samuel. Put these thoughts together:

- § One barren woman going through a great trial until she felt as low as manure got through to God in her pain, never dreaming that God was using her trial and response to usher in a whole new age of His dealings with mankind.
- § The Ark of the Covenant, symbolizing His presence, was *not enough* to keep the lamp burning. A priest, clothed in "holy garments . . . for glory and beauty" (Ex. 28:2), who tended the lampstand "from evening till morning before the Lord" (27:21), was not enough to keep the *real* lamp burning in the spirit realm.
- § Eli, the priest, knew God well enough to tell Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears" (v.9) when little Samuel had heard His Voice three times, but Eli could not hear God for himself. God could not get through to him, for hearing is obeying (Heb. 3:7-15). He couldn't "hear" with his heart the physical voice of the prophet God sent to warn him (2:22-36), so how could he hear the voice of God?

And so Eli was "disqualified" from the race (1 Cor. 9:27). Even then he could have deeply repented, as wicked Ahab did (1 Ki. 21:27-29), changing God's mind, and as Manasseh did in a Babylonian prison (2 Chr. 33:13), one of the most remarkable examples of mercy and grace in the Bible. But all Eli could say was, "Let Him do what seems good to Him" (1 Sam. 3:18). It sounds like the complacency of the Laodicean church, whom God would "vomit" out of His mouth for their lukewarmness. And God's warning to Eli through Samuel was no less severe, and that His judgment against Eli's house would cause "both ears of everyone who hears it" to "tingle" (3:11).

"So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground . . . Then *the Lord appeared again in Shiloh*. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord" (vv. 19,21)

Points to consider:

1. Our attitude toward sin can determine our destiny or how God uses us. Kings rule by wisdom, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” and “The fear of God is to hate evil” (Pr. 8:13-15; 9:10). Thus one’s attitude toward sin is one of the most essential keys to authority: “But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” (Heb. 1:8-9)

2. But it goes beyond mere attitude; it is *character*. Chapter one shows how God develops character through pressure, adversity, and darkness. Chapters two and three show the development of character when surrounded by complacency and wickedness, even among those who should be role models.