

Samuel and the Two Sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas

Eli belonged to the tribe of Levi, and for years fulfilled dual roles of judge and High Priest in Israel. He lived at Shiloh in a dwelling adjoining the Temple for the greater portion of his life. We know very little about him until he was well advanced in age.

As a matter of fact, the first time Eli is mentioned in the Bible is when Hannah came and poured out her heart to him because she was barren. This very familiar story has been shared with eager listeners in Sunday School classes as well as preached from a pulpit in countless sermons.

Remember how Hannah cried out to God for a child?

“And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life..” (1 Sam 1:10-11 NKJV).

I love the story of Samuel. How a now older man, Eli, saw Hannah praying so intently that he accused her of being drunk. But, when he heard her story, he assured her that God had heard and would answer her prayer. So, after Samuel was born, he was given to the Lord and ministered under the care and leadership of Eli.

While we are familiar with Samuel, Eli also had 2 sons of his own. Their names are Hophni or Phinehas. I find it interesting that over the years I’ve met quite a few Samuels, and even some Eli’s, but never to my recollection a Hophni or Phinehas.

Eli’s sons were scoundrels! Unlike their father, they were corrupt and had no regard for God. 1 Samuel 2:12 *“The sons of Eli [Hophni and Phinehas] were worthless (dishonorable, unprincipled) men; they did not know [nor respect] the Lord” (AMP).*

From this scripture, we can assume that Eli’s sons grew up in a very similar environment to Hophni and Phinehas. So, what happened? How could these young boys grow up in a similar way and yet turn out so differently?

To compare the actions of Hophni and Phinehas with that of Samuel, look at the following verses of scripture:

SAMUEL	HOPHNI & PHINEHAS
“But Samuel, though he was only a boy, served the Lord.” 1 Sam 2:18	“So the sin of these young men was very serious in the Lord’s sight, for they treated the Lord’s offerings with contempt.” 1 Sam. 2:17
“Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew taller and grew in favor with the Lord and with people.” v.26	“Eli said to them, ‘I have been hearing reports from all the people about the wicked things you are doing. Why do you keep sinning?’” v.23
“And the boy served the Lord by assisting the priest.” v. 11	“Now the sons of Eli were scoundrels who had no respect for the Lord.” v.12
“But Samuel ministered before the Lord.” v.18 NKJV	“But Eli’s sons wouldn’t listen to their father, for the Lord was already planning to put them to death.” v.25

What a contrast!

There are two things that we can learn from looking at the lives of these three men.

First, their actions were not a result of what someone did TO them. They were brought up in the same temple, same environment, same religion, and with the same influences on their lives.

I can relate to this. I am one of four kids raised in a godly home with great parents. My minister dad and mom (closest thing I have ever come to meeting an angel) brought me up knowing right and wrong, yet it seemed I was always getting into mischief. Let me bring you back to one short, critical word in the previous sentence. “I.” Yes, when we make our own choices, we can’t play the blame game.

Second, their actions were not a result of what someone did FOR them. Hannah brought Samuel and gave him to the service of the Lord. Sounds great right? Likewise, Hophni and Phinehas were sons of the High Priest and Judge of Israel. All of them had been given the opportunity to see up-close what serving God should be like. They lived it – daily.

The difference between these boys was simple. They all had the same opportunities and the chance to make a choice.

Hophni and Phinehas lived their lives for what pleased them and what would satisfy them. Samuel on the other hand lived his life focusing on what pleased God.

A man of God came to Eli with the somber message that both his sons would die – on the same day. This was a result of their choices.

Samuel, in a time where there was no widespread revelation, heard a message directly from God. He answered, “Speak Lord for your servant hears.” That was his choice.

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Bonus material for *Over It. Conquering Comparison to Live Out God’s Plan*