

“You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have” (1 SAMUEL 8:5, NIV).

Bible Study 18

Samuel's Sons: Unworthy to Lead

BY WALTER NORVELL

Read 1 Samuel 2:11-36; 3-4 and 7:1-8:5.

Who was Eli? _____

Who were Eli's sons? _____

What were Eli's sons like? _____

What was Eli's relationship with Samuel? _____

Who were Samuel's sons? _____

What were Samuel's sons like? _____

How were Eli's sons and Samuel's sons similar? _____

Samuel was the son of Elkanah and Hannah. Hannah had been unable to have children, even though she longed for them. She prayed for a child and God answered her prayer with the birth of Samuel. In gratitude, she gave Samuel to Eli the priest to raise in the tabernacle serving God. His parents still loved and cared for him, visiting him every year. Hannah had promised her son to God, and she faithfully kept that promise.

Eli was a godly old man who faithfully served God. However, his own two sons who followed him into the priesthood lived wicked lives. They were sexually impure, selfish, and practiced corruption and graft in their official capacities as priests. While he tended the spiritual needs of the people well, Eli had been an ineffective spiritual leader to his own sons. He rebuked them, but it was too little, too late. God had had it with the harm they were doing to His people and His reputation. He took the priesthood away from them and they were killed.

Both Eli and Samuel had a vision for God's mission among His people, but they never developed an idea of the mission God had for their own families.

What do you think God's plan for Hophni and Phinehas would have been had they lived godly lives? How would their behavior and attitudes have been different? _____

When do you think a father's spiritual duties toward his children begin? _____

How do you think Hophni's and Phinehas' attitudes and behaviors influenced the people to whom Eli ministered? _____

No doubt Samuel learned many things from Eli. ... But, Samuel may have imitated Eli's greatest weakness as well.

What should Samuel have learned from watching his mentor Eli? _____

No doubt Samuel learned many things from Eli. Eli taught him to listen closely to God, to be constantly available to God, and to speak truthfully and boldly for God. After Eli's death, Samuel fully assumed Eli's priestly duties. But, Samuel may have imitated Eli's greatest weakness as well. His own sons, Joel and Abijah, seemed to have chosen the same lifestyle as Hophni and Phinehas had chosen. Even though grown children do make their own decisions (despite their upbringing), it seems Joel and Abijah did not receive the spiritual leadership they needed from their father.

What sinful things did Joel and Abijah do? _____

How did the people respond to seeing Samuel's delinquent sons? _____

The people looked to Samuel to be their leader, just as they had looked to Eli. Normally, their sons should have risen to succeed their fathers. However, seeing the corruption of Joel and Abijah caused the people to call for an earthly king. They had grown discontent with having God as their King and letting Him instruct human leaders to speak for Him. God wanted the nation of Israel to be a united people under His leadership.

Samuel's sons had encouraged the people to reject God by their ungodly behavior. In many cases, the lives of earthly spiritual leaders reflect upon God. When that reflection is negative, God's purpose for His people can suffer. Both Eli and Samuel had a vision for God's mission among His people, but they never developed an idea of the mission God had for their own families.

What mission does God have for your current family? _____

What mission might God have in mind for your future family? _____

How will you ensure that your mission will be accomplished? _____