

1 Samuel 2:12-4:22 – “A Departure from the Lord”

2:12-17 - *Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord. 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ And if the man said to him, "They should really burn the fat first; 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." ¹⁷ Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.*

What a contrast we see between Samuel ministering to the Lord before Eli (2:11) and Eli's sons who were corrupt and were abusing the ministry of the Lord. What a sad testimony this was. Perhaps Eli was looking at Samuel as a do-over. He's seen his own sons how they've drifted. But if Eli had been more focussed on them as he was now with Samuel, perhaps this could have been avoided.

- We can easily as parents think we've got to give our children all these opportunities and experiences in life, but the priority must be the worship of Jesus. Set Him as the most important thing in your home. They may not grow up to be the next NHL superstar, but they'll have a far better life when Jesus is the focus.

When offerings were brought before the priests, a portion would be given to the Lord, and then the priests would receive a portion as well (except for the burnt offering where all of it was given to the Lord).

But Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, wouldn't wait for it to be offered to the Lord, nor would they take the prescribed portion of the breast or right thigh. Instead, they would just reach in and selfishly take whatever they wanted.

Now according to Leviticus 7:28-34, the fat of an offering was to be given to the Lord. It was considered to be the best part of the meat. So too, we are to give our best to the Lord.

- However, we know today that the fat is not the healthiest. It's as though God was keeping them from that which would affect them in bad way.
- It's the way people often think about sin. They think God is just keeping them from enjoyment and fun. Yet in reality, God is keeping you from that which will ultimately be a detriment and hurt to you.

Why did they take this meat raw (vs. 15)? Perhaps they would try and sell it and make a profit from it, or they would take it home and prepare it the way they wanted to. These two are being led by their own lusts and appetites and are heading for a big fall. We'll see in a moment that there was no shame in these guys pursuing their own desires.

- This wickedness made people hate bringing the offering to the Lord (vs. 17). What a tragedy. These men should have been making this offering a joy to bring. Church should be a joy for people to come and be a part of. Sadly, many have been turned away because of immoral or corrupt practices. May we be a church body where people love to be around. May we not hinder worship by our actions or attitudes but rather foster an environment that draws people in.

So, we're seeing the contrast between the wicked sons of Eli and the faithfulness of Samuel...

2:18-21 - *But Samuel ministered before the Lord, even as a child, wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile the child Samuel grew before the Lord.*

A lined ephod was a priestly garment. Samuel is not just playing the part, he is obediently carrying out the role of a priest ministering before the Lord. This means he is serving. He's carrying out the duties of a priest.

And Hannah would come faithfully each year with her husband Elkanah to offer the sacrifice. As they came, they would bring a new robe for Samuel. Samuel was always reminded of his calling and his parents encouraged this rather than selfishly keeping him for themselves.

- This was a big sacrifice for Hannah. But notice, the Lord blessed her 5-fold. This one who struggled with barrenness surrendered all to the Lord, and she has now experienced the goodness and grace of God.
- 5 is the number of grace and it's what the name *Hannah* means.
- Again, you'll never come up empty when you are willing to give all to God.

2:22-26 - *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. ²³ So he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. ²⁴ No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people transgress. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the Lord and men.*

Here we see that Eli's sons were not just swindlers; they were sexually deviant. It's possible that they were adopting the pagan practices of temple prostitution. Whatever their motive, it was so completely corrupt.

And Eli steps in but he's old and weak. This man clearly has not stepped in soon enough to discipline his sons. Even here it's a mild rebuke. His sons have no respect for him and they don't listen to him.

Eli tries to warn them that if they sin against another, there's room to seek mediation and forgiveness. But when you sin against God, who will be your help? It's not that forgiveness is not possible, but it reveals the hardness of your heart when you willfully defy God. And because of that, God's judgment has been determined upon these two sons of Eli.

And yet, ***Samuel grew in stature, and in favor***... Samuel was becoming a young man that honored the Lord. And he gained favor not just with the Lord but with men.

- Living a life that is of godly character may not always be popular, but nobody can deny that that's someone that can be trusted.
- **Luke 2:52, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."**

What's amazing is Eli failed miserably with his own sons, yet God gave him a second chance with Samuel. God's grace let Eli have a do over, and He allows the same opportunities for us.

2:27-30 - *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? ²⁸ 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? 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?' ³⁰ 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.*

An anonymous prophet now comes to Eli and lays it all on the table for him to see the wickedness that has transpired. He reminds Eli that he's had a special lineage. He's come from the family of Aaron, Israel's first high priest who was called while in Egypt. This priestly line had a special responsibility and role before the Lord and His people. But Eli honored his sons more than God. He didn't discipline or correct them in the fear of the Lord.

- Parents, if you withhold discipline from your children in hopes of maintaining a better relationship with them, you will suffer the consequences of those actions down the road. We're called as parents to bring up our children in the training and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

2:31-36 - *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. ³² 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. ³³ 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. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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 anointed forever.³⁶ 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 the Lord says in vs. 31 that a day is coming when the family of Eli will be removed from their position as priests. But that doesn't contradict what was said in vs. 30. The priesthood would not be removed from the line of Aaron, just from Eli's particular branch.

Who is the ***faithful priest*** mentioned in vs. 35 who will ***walk before My anointed forever?***

It's partially fulfilled in Samuel who operated in this capacity.

It's more fully fulfilled in Zadok who replaced Eli's great great grandson, Abiathar (1 Kings 2:26-27, 35).

- “In human terms this was fulfilled when the priesthood was taken from Abiathar, descendant of Aaron's son Ithamar, and given to Zadok, descendant of Aaron's son Eleazar (1 Kings 2:27, 35). But in the ultimate sense the “faithful Priest” and “Anointed One” are One and the same, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is both Priest and King (Ps. 110; Heb. 5:6; Rev. 19:16).”¹

Sadly, the house of Eli, which has been marked by corruption and stealing, will be left to beg for their food (vs. 36).

3:1 - Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.

At this time the word of the Lord was pretty silent. Remember, this is the time of the judges where everybody did what was right in their own eyes. When the priests are living this way, you know it's not any better with the rest of the nation. But there's a glimmer of light. There's something new dawning. Samuel is ministering to the Lord. He's a young man that is serving faithfully and growing in the things of the Lord. God is going to speak as he has a heart that is receptive and ready to hear.

¹ Merrill, E. H. (1985). 1 Samuel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 435). Victor Books.

I love this next verse: ***and it came to pass***... 5 wonderful words found often in Scripture. You see, God does not want you to stay in that place where it is dry, dark, and hopeless. He wants to lead you through. Sometimes we don't make it through because we give up and fail to see that God is for us and will not leave us in that place. Keep looking to Him. Stay faithful and trusting Him. Because however bleak your situation looks, it will come to pass.

3:2-5 - And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, ³ and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down, ⁴ that the Lord called Samuel. And he answered, "Here I am!" ⁵ So he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." And he said, "I did not call; lie down again." And he went and lay down.

Eli is well advanced in years at this time.

They say there's three signs you are getting old: 1) a lack of energy, 2) a loss of memory, 3) I can't remember the third one.

But here's Eli with failing eyesight where he can't see. The lamp of God was about to go out (this indicated it was about morning when the priests would change the oil in the lamp).

- All of this is really a reflection of the spiritual state in Israel at this time. There's no sight for the things of the Lord and it's getting darker and darker. But it came to pass. The Lord is about to break through and shake things up.

The Lord calls out to Samuel and though Samuel has been faithfully ministering to the Lord, he does not yet know His voice. He thinks Eli is calling him. Eli tells him to go lie down and go back to sleep.

3:6-8 - Then the Lord called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." He answered, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷ (Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him.) ⁸ And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you did call me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy.

This is kind of humorous. It's like the Lord is having a bit of fun with Samuel. He's letting him think Eli is calling him and Samuel goes and disturbs Eli these three times before Eli suddenly clues in to what is going on.

Now up until this time, although Samuel has been ministering to the Lord faithfully, he has not yet known the Lord experientially – vs. 7, ***Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord...***). Samuel knew of the Lord, but He did not know the Lord. There wasn't yet a transformed heart to serve God.

- There's a lot of people living their life this way. They will say they know God, but there's been no desire to really live in Him or for Him. Samuel has been faithfully going through the motions, but this is where the motions become notions. This moves Samuel from works to relationship as he begins to understand more fully the reality of God.

And throughout this study we're seeing the connection between knowing the Lord and knowing His word. A lot of people don't readily know the voice of the Lord because they don't know His Word. When you are in the Word and the Word in you, you will know the Lord more deeply and sweetly. You will know His voice.

- And too often we're looking for God to speak to us in some loud audible voice that just shakes us off our feet. Or were waiting for some writing in the sky. But the way the Lord speaks to us today is through His word. Don't minimize that. Be in the Word and you will hear the Lord speaking to you.

And when did God call out to Samuel? In the early morning. I think there's something special about that beginning of the day. Before we get distracted and bogged down with other stuff, take time to be with the Lord. You will find this to be setting the rest of the day so much better.

- It reminds me of the story of the lost watch...

3:9-15 - Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.' " So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears." ¹¹ Then the Lord said to Samuel: "Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. ¹² In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³ For 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. ¹⁴ And therefore I

have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.”¹⁵ So Samuel lay down until morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision.

God comes with a word of judgment for Eli and his house. This is heavy responsibility for a young man.

This word will shake up the nation and leave them abuzz (**tingle** is a sign of judgment: 2 Kings 21:12; Jeremiah 19:3).

God is giving Samuel the opportunity to know that this is God's voice. God is showing Samuel what is to come, specifically with Eli and his house. Eli has already been forewarned of this, now Samuel is let in on God's plans.

When Samuel got up, he wasn't in any hurry to convey this message to Eli. Samuel could have easily come down on Eli with the judgment pronounced by God. Samuel has seen the wickedness and perhaps couldn't wait to rid the tabernacle of these guys. But Samuel is gentle and has a soft heart toward Eli.

- We must never use God's Word to try and hurt people. It's not a weapon to wield to condemn. It's a tool of truth to lead people to truth.
- Nevertheless, this will provide Samuel a great lesson in being bold to speak the truth when it's uncomfortable. He will have to do it many more times as a prophet of God.

3:16-20 - Then Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son!” He answered, “Here I am.”¹⁷ And he said, “What is the word that the Lord spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said to you.”¹⁸ Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And he said, “It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him.”¹⁹ So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord.²¹ Then the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

Eli knew this was the word of the Lord. He's heard it a second time now. And he's resolved to let the Lord do His thing. That's good, but what's even better is to repent of what has taken place. So far we've not seen Eli move in that direction.

The Lord is seen more and more now. All because of 1 righteous man. How was He revealed? **by the word of the Lord**. If you want to know the Lord and hear from Him, if you want a fresh revelation of God – turn to the Word! This is how He reveals Himself for the most part today.

For the next three chapters (4-6), we enter into what's known as the ark narratives. The ark of the covenant was the most important piece of furniture in the tabernacle. It sat in the holy of holies and contained the two tablets of the law, and was covered by the mercy seat – the very place God said 'I will meet with you'. It was the most visible representation of the presence of God. Wherever it went it showcased the power of God among the nations. But Israel has long forsaken their God. They've failed to abide in His presence and rely on His power. They've turned from relationship to religion and now the ark has become nothing more than a religious relic for them, kind of like a good luck charm. So these chapters are God reasserting Himself as the one true God over Israel and the nations around them.

4:1-5 - *And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek. ² Then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel. And when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men of the army in the field. ³ And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies." ⁴ So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. ⁵ And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook.*

The Philistines were Israel's arch enemy. They've been a real thorn in their side.

- The Philistines were an immigrant people from the island of Crete, in present day Greece (Amos 9:7).
- They came into force around the time that Israel entered into the land of Canaan.
- They had much military advancement and were experts in iron production, making helmets, shields, spears, which caused others to be in great fear.

So as Israel goes into battle against the Philistines they suffer a great loss. About 4000 of their men die. And they all ask an appropriate question: *Why has the Lord allowed this?* (vs. 3).

But instead of waiting for an answer from God, they just devise their own plan. They want to bring the ark to them and surely this will provide the help and power they need to bring about a victory!

- But instead of trusting in the power of God, they trust in an object. They saw the ark as their lucky charm.
- It's sadly what many do today. They look to a program, or a book, or some place by which they feel will bring them victory, rather than trusting in the Lord and depending on Him to provide for them.

Israel needed to wait and hear the Word of the Lord, but they jumped to easy substitutes and symbols that are really no substitutes at all. How many people have set the Word of God aside for something that lacks any power.

So being led by Hophni and Phinehas (big mistake there!) the ark comes into the camp of Israel and everybody is pumped up by what they hope this will provide for them. They all shouted so loudly that the ground shook.

4:6-9 - *Now when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, "What does the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" Then they understood that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp. ⁷ So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp!" And they said, "Woe to us! For such a thing has never happened before. ⁸ Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. ⁹ Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Conduct yourselves like men, and fight!"*

The Philistines had an understanding of Israel's history; that it was their God who struck the Egyptians with plagues.

They are in awe and in fear of Israel's God. They know they are in trouble. You would think this would cause them to surrender. However, we'll see they took a different approach.

The Philistines sucked it up and said: ***be strong and conduct yourselves like men!*** That's a good word but the wrong time for it.

God said to Joshua, *"Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

- When we are following the Lord's will, and when He is directing, it's time to be strong and courageous. When you're fighting against God, it's time to surrender and repent.

And yet we see the Philistines win another decisive victory, this time defeating 30,000 foot soldiers. How can this be. This was more a lesson for Israel than it was provision for the Philistines.

- Israel saw the ark as a sign of the presence of God, yet there was no relationship with the true God. God wants His people to walk in obedience to Him. That's where the blessing comes from. Israel has a long way to go to learn that lesson.

6:10-18 - *So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. ¹¹ Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. ¹² Then a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line the same day, and came to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. ¹³ Now when he came, there was Eli, sitting on a seat by the wayside watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told it, all the city cried out. ¹⁴ When Eli heard the noise of the outcry, he said, "What does the sound of this tumult mean?" And the man came quickly and told Eli. ¹⁵ Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were so dim that he could not see. ¹⁶ Then the man said to Eli, "I am he who came from the battle. And I fled today from the battle line." And he said, "What happened, my son?" ¹⁷ So the messenger answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been a great slaughter among the people. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead; and the ark of God has been captured." ¹⁸ Then it happened, when he made mention of the ark of God, that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.*

The news has gone from bad to worse.

It seems that Eli wasn't shaken at the news of his sons' death, but at the discovery that the ark was now gone.

4:19-22 - *Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, due to be delivered; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and gave birth, for her labor pains came upon her. ²⁰ And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, "Do not fear, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer, nor did she regard it. ²¹ Then she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. ²² And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."*

Ichabod means "no glory". And this marks one of the lowest points in Israel's history.

But this woman is making the same mistake. The glory is not relegated to an object but to a person. God has not departed, but they have departed from God. The solution is simple – turn back to God. God said these will be the consequence of disobedience. But there is always a solution. Turn to Him, for He is always present.

Deuteronomy 4:29–31, *"But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. ³⁰ When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice ³¹ (for the Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them."*

Jeremiah 29:13, *"And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."*

Points to Ponder:

1. What barriers have you had in your life that have restricted you from hearing from God?
2. In what ways have you relied on other things as a substitute for the Lord?