

Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 2:12-26

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1 Samuel 2:12-26

Verse 12

Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the LORD.

- Eli was Israel's High Priest. The priesthood was passed among the members of the family of Aaron, the brother of Moses. Only those who were members of Aaron's family could serve as priests in Israel. It was the normal procedure for the office to be passed from father to son. Most times this was a successful means of transferring the office from one generation to the next. However, there were times, as is the case here, when the system broke down as happened here. This was not considered nepotistic. It was the normal and accepted pattern.
- Eli's sons "had no regard for YHWH!" In keeping with the attitude of the times, Eli's sons disregarded the word of YHWH and "did what seemed right to them." They were what mattered most to them. They used the office of High Priest for their own benefit. Eli, their father, was High Priest, and they used their association with him to their personal advantage.

Verses 13-17

¹³ Now it was the practice of the priests that, whenever any of the people offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand while the meat was being boiled ¹⁴ and would plunge the fork into the pan or kettle or caldron or pot. Whatever the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh. ¹⁵ But even before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the person who was sacrificing, "Give the priest some meat to roast; he won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw."

¹⁶ If the person said to him, "Let the fat be burned first, and then take whatever you want," the servant would answer, "No, hand it over now; if you don't, I'll take it by force."

17 This sin of the young men was very great in the LORD's sight, for they were treating the LORD's offering with contempt.

- The corrupt practices at the top of the priesthood had infiltrated the entire priesthood.
- One of the ways this corruption showed itself was in the way the priest's portion of each offering was determined. The Old Testament Law allows the priests to receive a certain portion of each animal sacrificed. This portion was to be voluntarily given by the person making the offering. It was to be taken from the portion of the animal which was boiled. The commands about the way the sacrifice was to be made and how the priests' portion was determined are specific and absolute. In Eli's time, these rules were blatantly being disregarded by the priests.
- The priests "treated YHWH's offering with contempt." The offerings were not theirs in the first place. The offerings belonged to YHWH. The priests handled them in the way which seemed best to them without regard for the word of the Lord. This sin was highly offensive to God.

Verses 18-21

18 But Samuel was ministering before the LORD—a boy wearing a linen ephod. 19 Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. 20 Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, "May the LORD give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the LORD." Then they would go home. 21 And the LORD was gracious to Hannah; she gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD.

- Samuel's mother, Hannah, had dedicated her son to the Lord and had left him under the care of Eli. Samuel's father was not a descendant of Aaron. He was an Ephraimite. But the other priests dressed Samuel up like a priest anyway. His mother provided the robe which Samuel wore under the ephod, the priestly garment. This, too, was in disregard of the word of the Lord. They were, once again, doing what seemed right to them.
- Eli blessed Hannah for her devotion to YHWH and she was given more children, 3 sons and 2 daughters. In contrast to what is happening, Hannah is true to the word of God and is blessed by God for her faithfulness to His word.

Verses 22-25

²² Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ²³ So he said to them, “Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. ²⁴ No, my sons; the report I hear spreading among the LORD’s people is not good. ²⁵ If one person sins against another, God may mediate for the offender; but if anyone sins against the LORD, who will intercede for them?” His sons, however, did not listen to their father’s rebuke, for it was the LORD’s will to put them to death.

- Eli knew what was happening among the priests in general and his sons. He knew that his sons were having sexual relationships with the women who served as greeters at the door of the Tabernacle, the door to God’s house.
- He confronted his sons with their abuse of power, but they ignored his warnings. He did nothing more. He allowed their abuses to continue.
- However, YHWH will not tolerate such abuse of His word. The text reminds us that God will intervene to remove the guilty from using their office for personal gain. He will strike the sons of Eli down rather than allow them to gain the High Priestly office.

Verse 26

²⁶ And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with people.

- Samuel is the contrast to all this. While the priesthood under the leadership of Eli is corrupt and disregards the word of the Lord, Samuel is God’s hope for the people of Israel. He stands in favor with the people of Israel and, even more importantly, with YHWH. God is always faithful to His people. He is their hope. He will raise up faithful leadership for His people. Faithful leadership will always be true to the word of the Lord.

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