

Seven Applications For All Sincere Christians Today From The Final Chapter In The Life Of A Corrupt High Priest by David Cambridge

7 APPLICATIONS FOR ALL SINCERE CHRISTIANS FROM THE FINAL CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF A CORRUPT HIGH PRIEST

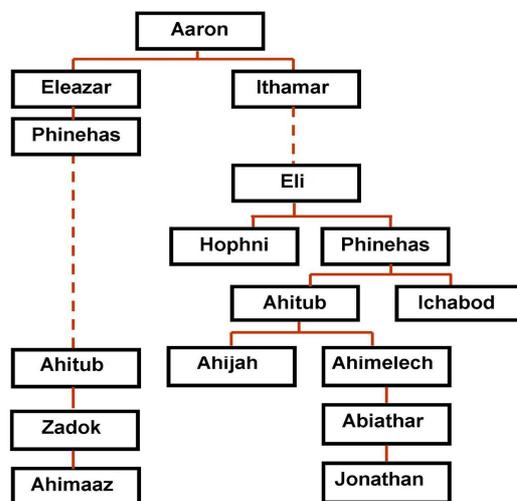
Introduction

1. About Eli:

¹Eli was High Priest, in the line of Ithamar. He was also Judge of Israel, at Shiloh, for 40 years. It was to him that Hannah entrusted her son, Samuel, to be raised (1 Samuel 1:21). Although he was High Priest, Eli failed to curb the sinful behavior of his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who were priests.

God told Samuel that Eli's family would be punished for dishonoring God. Samuel told Eli about this and Eli said that the Lord would do what is best (1 Samuel 3:11-18). Later, Eli's sons were killed as they accompanied the Ark of the Covenant into a battle against the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:1-11). When Eli had heard the news, he fell backwards while seated in a chair, broke his neck and died. He was 98-years old at the time (1 Samuel 4:12-18).

Eli's descendants continued in the office of High Priest up until the time of Solomon. At that time, Abiathar, who had supported Adonijah's bid for the throne, was replaced by Zadok, thus bringing an end to Eli's line (1 Kings 2:22, 35). This event is mentioned in 1 Kings 2:27 as the fulfillment of the prophecy against the house of Eli. The name Eli means "The Lord is exalted."



- Eli was a believer and a priest and a judge over Israel. But he was a man whose inconsistencies and failures ultimately marred his testimony, spoiled his legacy, and brought his own family to ruin. His life is a tragic cautionary tale.
- In this lesson we shall consider Eli's failures and what this revealed about his character, and then make several applications.

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- "... for a tree is known by its fruit" (Matthew 12:33).
- "As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death" (Proverbs 11:19).
- "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Galatians 5:9; 1 Corinthians 5:6).
- "Hear instruction and be wise, and do not disdain it" (Proverbs 8:33).
- "A ruler who lacks understanding is a great oppressor, but he who hates covetousness will prolong his days" (Proverbs 28:16).
- "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).
- "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

¹ This brief summary of Eli was taken from www.aboutbibleprophecy.com/p99.htm

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Text: 1 Samuel 1:1-4:22

The following outline provides the context of our study. The sections highlighted are those we will study.

I. Samuel The Last Judge (1:1 to 4:22).

- A. Elkanah and his two wives (1:1-3).
 - 1. One wife, Hannah, was childless (1:2).
 - 2. Elkanah went yearly to worship at Shiloh (1:3a).
 - 3. Eli was high-priest and his two sons served as priests (1:3b).
- B. Birth of Samuel (1:4-28).
 - 1. Distress of Hannah (1:4-8).
 - a. Elkanah tried to comfort Hannah (1:4-5).
 - b. Elkanah's other wife provoked Hannah (1:6).
 - c. Each year at Shiloh Hannah's bitterness grew (1:7-8).
 - 2. Hannah's prayer for a son (1:9-18).
 - a. Eli sat upon a seat at the tabernacle (1:9).
 - b. Hannah's vow (1:10-11).
 - c. Hannah's silent prayer (1:12-13a).
 - d. Eli rebukes Hannah (1:13b-14).
 - e. Hannah's explanation (1:15-16).
 - f. Eli's blessing (1:17-18).
 - 3. A son is born (1:19-23).
 - a. Hannah names the child Samuel (1:20).
 - b. Hannah keeps the child until he is weaned (1:21-23).
 - 4. Samuel is "lent" to the Lord (1:24-28).
- C. Samuel in service at the tabernacle (2:1 to 3:21).
 - 1. Hannah's thanksgiving (2:1-11).
 - 2. The wickedness of the sons of Eli (2:12-17).
 - 3. Samuel was a good servant (2:18-21).
 - 4. Eli rebukes his sons (2:22-26).
 - 5. A prophecy against Eli and his house (2:27-36).
 - 6. There was no revelation from God (3:1).
 - 7. The call of Samuel (3:2-10).
 - 8. God tells Samuel of the coming destruction of Eli's house (3:11-18).
 - 9. Samuel recognized as a prophet of God (3:19-21).
- D. The Philistines defeat the nation of Israel (4:1 to 6:21).
 - 1. Philistines win the first battle (4:1-2).
 - 2. Israelites bring the ark of the covenant from Shiloh (4:3-9).
 - 3. Philistines win the second battle and take the ark (4:10-11).
 - 4. Hophni, Phinehas, and Eli all die (4:12-18).
 - 5. Phinehas' wife dies in childbirth (4:19-22).

1. SEVEN DUTIES OF THE HIGH PRIEST

- a. The High Priest had seven duties:
 - 1) To offer sacrifices and make atonement for sin (**Leviticus 16:1-34**).
 - 2) To offer incense (**Leviticus 16:12-13**).
 - 3) To judge evil (**Leviticus 13:2**).
 - 4) To declare God's will to the people (**Numbers 27:21**).
 - 5) To decide controversies and solve difficulties (**Deuteronomy 17:8-12; 19:17; 21:5**).
 - 6) To represent the names of Israel on his shoulders and heart (**Exodus 28:9-29**).
 - 7) To bless the people in the name of the Lord (**Numbers 6:23-26; Deuteronomy 21:5**).
- b. So, as well as overseeing all the work of the priests, the High Priest also had his own duties to perform. The reason we point this out is to show that any claims on the part of Eli to be ignorant or unaware of his sons spiritual condition and wicked behavior would have been disingenuous, to say the least. It was the business of the High Priest to know what was going on! It would be like a husband that claimed to be ignorant or unaware of the spiritual condition and wicked behavior of members of his own household.

2. THE WICKED SONS OF ELI (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22)

- a. Consider this catalogue of sins committed by the sons of Eli:
 - 1) They had no regard for Jehovah (**1 Samuel 2:12**). What does it mean to have no regard for Jehovah? They lived their lives as if there were no accountability to Jehovah for their actions, as though He had no claim on them. They did not include God in their plans. They lived their lives without regard for God's will.
 - 2) They treated Jehovah's offering with contempt (**1 Samuel 2:17**). What does it mean to treat Jehovah's offering with contempt? It was to treat the sacrifices brought before Jehovah as an opportunity to fulfill their own fleshly desires with the choicest cuts of meat.
 - 3) They slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (see **Exodus 38:8**) - they were sexually immoral (**1 Samuel 2:22**). "Such religious prostitution was common among Israel's Canaanite neighbors" (MacArthur).
 - 4) They did not listen to their father's rebuke - they were unteachable (**1 Samuel 2:25**). Samuel tells us that rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft (**1 Samuel 15:23**). Solomon calls a person who will not submit to correction a fool (**Proverbs 15:5**). Mind you, it is not surprising Eli's sons did not heed their father because they were not unaware of his corruptness of heart.
- b. You can see, then, that this had been going on for some time, but Eli had not done anything to restrain his sons. One of the reasons he did not restrain them was because he was profiting from his sons wickedness (**1 Samuel 2:29**). Behind a father's failure to correct his children, there is always an unrighteous reason.

3. ELI'S FAILURES AND WHAT THEY REVEALED ABOUT HIS CHARACTER

- a. Eli failed in several respects:
 - 1) He failed to discipline his sons (**1 Samuel 3:13**) even though he was aware of their behavior. The fact that he made himself fat with best of the offerings proves he was aware of his sons wickedness (**1 Samuel 2:29**). A failure to discipline is to condone.
 - 2) He failed to honor God. In fact, he honored his sons more than God (**1 Samuel 2:29**). Eli's sons despised the law that allowed them their portions and took for themselves what part they pleased, and as much as they pleased (**1 Samuel 2:13-16**): thus they kicked at the sacrifices. In permitting them to behave this way they were thus first served. And this Eli secretly allowed and thus honored his sons above God.

The desire to avoid confrontation is common to many of us, but confronting another is often necessary for their spiritual welfare. A godly man takes the necessary action, but a coward never sees any necessity.

- 3) He failed to ensure the law of God was followed. As High Priest it was his duty to ensure that the law of God was followed in respect to the proper portions allowed for the priests, but he ignored the law because he himself was profiting from his sons disregard for the law (1 Samuel 2:29).
- 4) He failed to guard the reputation and dignity of the priesthood (1 Samuel 2:26-28). The priests were those to whom the people looked for an example of holiness and for guidance, but instead they saw corruption and were starved of teaching.
- 5) He failed to consider the influence his sons would have on the common people (cp. Hosea 4:9; Isaiah 9:16). The fact that God allowed the Philistines to defeat them and capture the ark of God indicates the general wickedness of the people (1 Samuel 4:2-11).
- 6) He failed to watch for the spiritual welfare of his sons. He knew they behaved wickedly and did not know the Lord (1 Samuel 2:12), and yet he did not take any action. This is not surprising I suppose because he himself was corrupt! So it is, when parents fail to watch out for the spiritual welfare of their children, it is an indication that they themselves have serious spiritual problems.
- 7) He failed to guard his own heart. Solomon wrote, “Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23 AMP). Many Christians today fall into the same kinds of sins as Eli because they fail to follow Solomon’s instruction. Indeed, many do not even understand what it means to “guard your heart”!

Harry is aware of Tom’s spiritual need, and willfully unaware of Richard’s spiritual need. Why does Harry choose to be aware of Tom’s spiritual need and willfully unaware of Richard’s spiritual need? Perhaps in Tom’s case he is sufficiently distant from him as to feel under no compulsion to act. In Richard’s case, though, he may be sufficiently close to him as to feel under compulsion to act, and so he chooses to be willfully unaware. We suspect that Harry considers every spiritual duty a burden and every good work an inconvenience. Harry is unaware of his apostasy!

b. What do Eli’s failings tell us about Eli’s character?

- 1) He didn’t care:
 - a) He didn’t care about the spiritual welfare of his sons.
 - b) He didn’t care for the commandments of God in regards to disciplining one’s children.
 - c) He didn’t care about the dignity of the priesthood.
 - d) He didn’t care about honouring God.
 - e) He didn’t care that his sons were setting a bad example to the people.
 - f) He didn’t care that he grew fat from profit gained through wickedness.
 - g) He didn’t care that God’s laws respecting offerings were being ignored.
- 2) He was selfish.
- 3) He was greedy.
- 4) He was disobedient.
- 5) He was unloving (toward his children and the people).
- 6) He was a hypocrite.
- 7) He was untrustworthy and not worthy to hold that office of High Priest.

The difference between character and reputation is this: character is what you really are, while reputation is merely what others think you are.

Spiritually, Eli was no better off than his sons. In fact, Eli was more accountable because of the office he held.

4. JEHOVAH'S JUDGMENT AGAINST ELI AND THE BEGINNING OF ITS FULFILMENT

a. The pronouncement of judgment by God through "a man of God" (1 Samuel 2:27-36).

- 1) God reminds Eli of his privileged position (2:27-28).
- 2) God identifies Eli's failures (2:29). The main charge is that of not honouring God.
- 3) God pronounces judgment (2:30-34). Basically, his descendants would no longer serve as priests and would die young. As a sign, Eli's two sons would die in one day.
- 4) The coming faithful priest (2:35-36). This refers to Zadok. "The High Priesthood continued in the direct descendants of Zadok as long as the monarchy lasted (see 1 Chronicles 6:8-15)" (Barnes).
- 5) The confirmation of God's judgment through Samuel (3:10-18).

The High Priests of the Old Testament were pointing to that one perfect High Priest, Jesus. When you consider this fact, then you can understand why the priesthood was taken from the house of Eli and passed to the house of Zadok.

b. The beginning of God's judgment against the house of Eli (1 Samuel 4:1-22).

- 1) The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, are killed in battle (4:1-11).
- 2) Eli breaks his neck and dies (4:12-18).
- 3) Eli daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, died in childbirth (4:19-22).

5. SEVEN APPLICATIONS FOR ALL SINCERE CHRISTIAN TODAY

a. "... for a tree is known by its fruit" (Matthew 12:33). Picture the high priest in his priestly attire, consider his great responsibilities to the people, and his special access to God... if anyone was righteous, then surely it was Eli. Yet the scriptures paint a true picture of Eli: his failings and corruptness. The lesson for us is obvious: what a person appears to be outwardly is not necessarily a true reflection of what he is inwardly (Matthew 23:25-28). As sincere Christians our concern ought to be the state of the inward man (Romans 2:28-29; 2 Corinthians 7:1). The onus is on each one to examine himself by the word of God to determine his true standing before God (Lamentations 3:40; 2 Corinthians 13:5). Let us be sure that the great aim of our lives is to please God, not men (2 Corinthians 5:9).

In determining your standing before God, don't listen to what others say about you, and don't consider all your good works - look into your heart.

b. "As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death" (Proverbs 11:19). We have two choices: to pursue righteousness or to pursue evil; there is no middle ground; no fence on which to sit. If we pursue evil then we will suffer the consequences (Galatians 6:7). But even if we do not suffer the full consequences in this life, then we certainly will in the next (Psalms 73:1-28; 1 Timothy 5:24).

c. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Galatians 5:9). What we often fail to consider, are the wider consequences of our sins, i.e., the consequences brought on others because of our sins. Adam, Achan, David, and Eli did not consider the wider consequences of their sins. I am sure the outcome for Eli and his sons would have been very different had he fulfilled his duties as high priest and as a father (Proverbs 22:6; 23:13; 29:15).

d. "Hear instruction and be wise, and do not disdain it" (Proverbs 8:33). Eli was aware of the sins and spiritual problems of his sons, but chose not to confront them. He also "heard" about his sons wicked behavior, and said he would deal with it, but he failed to do so. Eli was not wise and he disdained instruction. If we are aware that our children have spiritual problems or are involved in sin, then we ought to take immediate action. When a father pretends to be unaware of such problems, what does it tell us about his spiritual state? If it eventually comes to others having to highlight the spiritual problems or wicked behavior of our children, then we at least have an opportunity to repent. But what does it say about the father who puts on a show of disciple but actually doesn't do anything? If we take being a parent seriously, then we will discipline them when necessary and help them with their spiritual problems - such is the proof of love (Ephesians 6:4).

To be aware of a brother's spiritual need and do nothing reveals a heart that is void of the love of God. To feign unawareness of the brethren's spiritual needs reveals one's hatred for all the brethren.

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- e. “A ruler who lacks understanding is a great oppressor, but he who hates covetousness will prolong his days” (**Proverbs 28:16**). Eli certainly lacked understanding and loved covetousness and shortened his days. In view of all Eli’s failings, I think we can see that he had no right to continue as high priest. Such is true of all “rulers” in the Lord’s church today. A man that would be an elder, a deacon, a preacher, or hold any position of responsibility ought to be worthy of it. This is why we find qualifications listed for such offices (e.g., **1 Timothy 3:1-3**; **Titus 1:5-9**). If a man’s conscience tells him he is not fit to hold a position of leadership, then he ought to do the honorable thing and step down. If a congregation can see a man is not worthy to lead, then they should ask him to step down.
- f. “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (**Ephesians 6:4**). While both parents play a part in raising their children, the ultimate responsibility lays on the shoulders of the father to fulfill this responsibility because he is the head of the household (**Genesis 18:19**; **1 Corinthians 11:3**; **Ephesians 5:23**; cp. **1 Timothy 3:4, 12**). Fathers are responsible for their children’s educational, physical, emotional, and spiritual welfare. Raising children is a grave responsibility and requires a great deal of effort, and many balk at such an effort and leave them to themselves (cp. **Proverbs 29:15**).
- g. “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (**Galatians 6:1**). Eli was aware of his sons’ spiritual problems but failed to act. A man that does not care about his own spiritual condition is not likely to be concerned about the spiritual welfare of others (perhaps in word but not in deed – **1 John 3:18**). As Christians, we have a responsibility to look out for the needs and interests of others (**1 Corinthians 10:24**; **Philippians 2:4**; **James 2:8**; **1 John 3:17**); spiritual needs being of the greatest importance. A sincere Christian will respond in deed to every spiritual need.

There is a man so deluded that he thinks that merely discussing the spiritual need of a brother with another is doing something. This is much like Eli who supposed that speaking with his wicked sons was restraining them.

Summary Of Applications

- Be genuine on the inside because God looks upon the heart (**1 Samuel 16:7**; **1 Kings 8:39**; **Jeremiah 17:10**).
- Live righteously if you desire eternal life because the wages of sin is death (**Romans 6:23**).
- Resist the devil (**James 4:7**) because sin also affects those around you (**Galatians 5:9**).
- If you are in a leading role and you are unrighteous and corrupt (like Eli), then you need to repent or step down because such a man has no right to be in such a position (**1 Timothy 3:1-6**).
- Do not neglect the command to raise your children in the training and admonition of the Lord because (i) you will lose them to the devil (**Proverbs 22:6**), and (ii) you disqualify yourself from a leadership role (**1 Timothy 3:1-6**).
- A sincere and mature Christian will deal with brethren that have spiritual problems (**Galatians 6:1**) because to ignore such says much about your own spiritual state.

People ought to see the spirit of Christ reflected in our lives, not the spirit of Eli.