

Samuel to King David

1 Samuel Ch.2 – What is wrong at Shiloh?

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Christian greetings to you all and welcome to Truth for Today, where we are continuing with our series on the First Book of Samuel, entitled “Samuel to King David.” Today’s talk is the second in the series and is concerned with chapter two, being dealt with under the title “What is Wrong at Shiloh?” If you were listening last week you will have learned that Shiloh was the worship centre for the Israelites at that time, as Solomon’s Temple at Jerusalem was not yet built. We also learned last week that Hannah, the mother of Samuel, had vowed to give her young son to the service of God at Shiloh. This talk is not primarily concerned with Hannah’s prayer at the start of chapter two, where she scans the actions of the LORD. I shall, however, briefly touch upon it, if only as a comparison of living faith with some of the others, who we shall meet in this chapter, bearing in mind the force of the title “What is Wrong at Shiloh?”

Hannah’s Faith in and Understanding of God

The first verse of our chapter describes Hannah’s gratitude to God for answering her prayer:

“My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in the LORD.
My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your
salvation.”

We saw previously that Hannah was one of Elkanah’s two wives, who was continually berated and derided by Peninnah, the second wife, because she, Hannah, was childless, hence her prayers pleading for a child. Now, with her prayer answered, Hannah rejoiced with glad confidence, also finding that she could now deride Penninah. There are a few other verses that illustrate the changed circumstances, but the bulk of the first ten verses of our chapter is Hannah’s enlightened conception of God. Verses two and three hold a salient lesson for Penninah, in addition to a description of God:

“There is none holy like the LORD; there is none beside you; there is no
rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come
from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him
actions are weighed.”

I will leave it to your judgment to decide which phrases apply to God and which to Penninah, who was as sinful as we are. *If we had more time we could, with profit, look more closely at Hannah’s*

prayer. Sufficient to remark that the knowledge of the living God was not absent from Israel as the time of the Judges was drawing to a close. For any who wish to pursue the teaching from Hannah's prayer look up Truth for Today talks T0025, T0315, or T0337, which consider it in more detail.

The Tent of Meeting at Shiloh

We must now return to the subject for today's talk which is to find out more about Shiloh. Perhaps, I ought to outline some features of Shiloh, as we see it in Scripture. According to Judges 21:19 it was located to the east of Bethel, in the tribal territory of Ephraim. We read at various places, in the Book of Joshua, that Shiloh was a place where the people assembled to confirm decisions made when the land was being divided, or when war was declared. Owing to lack of time, I quote only verse 51 of chapter 19 of Joshua:

“These are the inheritances that Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the people of Israel distributed by lot at Shiloh before the LORD, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. So they finished dividing the land.”

Perhaps the most important feature is that it was where the tabernacle was set up, in the early days of the settlement of the land of Canaan:

“Then the whole congregation of the people of Israel assembled at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there. The land lay subdued before them” (Joshua 18:1).

At some unknown time, the tent of Joshua was replaced by a temple, with posts and a door, having become the centre where the worship of Jehovah was practised. Obviously, this would cease at Shiloh when Solomon built his temple but in actual fact worship was terminated there when the Philistines invaded the land. [Thus, we see the purpose and religious tone of Shiloh, during the years of Samuel. It was the place where it was expected that God's Name would be revered, in order for people like Elkanah and Hannah to travel to offer their sacrifices. To accomplish this a priest would always be on duty, though sadly, as we shall see, some of them were not spiritually up to the task.](#)

Sacrificial Services at Shiloh

If you were listening last week you will have met Eli, who had been the priest at Shiloh for many years, being in his nineties at this time. From the first six chapters of Leviticus, we learn just what the duties of the priest were, when an Israelite brought a sacrificial offering to the LORD. The priest, in charge at Shiloh, had to ensure that these laws were obeyed in every detail, which meant sacrifices could not be offered to God in any way the priest thought fit. For instance the specifications for the sin offering were:

“Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘This is the law of the sin offering. In the place where the burnt offering is killed shall the sin offering be killed before the LORD; it is most holy. The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tent of meeting. Whatever touches its flesh shall be holy, and when any of its blood is splashed on a garment, you shall wash that on which it was splashed in a holy place’” (Leviticus 6:25-27).

There were other regulations for guilt offerings, burnt or sweet savour offerings, grain offerings and peace offerings. All these had to be offered in a set way with no deviation, so sacred were the

services at Shiloh. It is also important for us to understand that the priest was legally allowed a modest portion of some of the sacrifices. We can see this by reference to Leviticus 7:31-33.

“The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be for Aaron and his sons. And the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a contribution from the sacrifice of your peace offerings. Whoever among the sons of Aaron offers the blood of the peace offering and the fat shall have the right thigh for a portion.”

The Law of Moses then enabled the priest to take a portion from the offering, for instance the breast and right shoulder of the peace offering, after first sprinkling the blood upon the altar. Next the internal fat was burned as an offering to God. It was only then that the priest's portion was waved before the altar. The remainder of the animal was returned to the offeror and his family, including his servants, who would then leave the temple, in harmony with each other and the LORD, for a joyful sacrificial feast. Shiloh being the sole place, at that time, where offerings could be made, meant such regulations had to be strictly observed. [Consequently, I have spent some time elaborating the method and means of worship that regularly took place at Shiloh. When the law was followed then the people could exercise the great privilege of worshipping the living God in the way that He had laid down. Sadly, things had developed differently at Shiloh.](#)

Sinful and Corrupt Practices at Shiloh

We have just considered what should have happened at Shiloh when a worshipper appeared before the priest. Now, Scripture presents us with the warped and evil priestly practices of the sons of Eli, the chief priest:

“Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD. The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, ‘Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but only raw.’ And if the man said to him, ‘Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish,’ he would say, ‘No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force.’ Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt” (1 Samuel 2:12-17).

This was the disdainful attitude of the sons of Eli, as they perverted the instructions of what was due to them and allowable by the law of Moses. Greed was their sole motivation. Many of the worshipers had their portion stolen from their sacred meal by virtue of a flesh hook wielded by the grasping priest's servant. Worse than that was the custom of stealing the meat before the fat was burned, which was akin to robbing God. Notice, also from the passage from 1 Samuel that I have just read, that the Israelites were threatened with violence if they objected. What a terrible turn of events when the priest could turn on his flock in a fit of sinful selfishness. We do not know the full extent of the effects of this corruption upon the faith of God's people. It was certainly not an example of pure and undefiled religion; neither would it add to the general piety of the nation. It would seem to me significant, that the first time the sons of Eli are mentioned in Scripture that two aspects of their character are stressed, namely that they were worthless and that they didn't know the LORD. I want us to acknowledge the seriousness of the claim that they were void of faith in that they did not know God. This was a terrible condemnation to make against two men who were

supposed to represent the people before God. I would also suggest that their unbelief was mainly responsible for their worthlessness, corruption and selfishness. We could spend much more time stressing the way the sons of Eli were contemptuous of the holiness of God and the justice due to His people. Suffice to say that, in some measure, the question “What was Wrong at Shiloh?” has been answered by outlining the practices of Eli’s sons.

Samuel at Shiloh

Not everything was rotten at Shiloh, for verses 18 to 21 introduce us again to a young lad whose service for God earned him a mention in the list of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. In addition to that, two books of Old Testament history bear his name. The first mention of his name, is in verse 18 of our chapter, typifies his life’s work:

“Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy clothed with a linen ephod.”

Even though he was but a young boy, Samuel’s service for, and growth in, God was achieved against a background of the corruption that has just been described. A careful reading of his mother’s prayers, in chapters 1 & 2, would indicate that she was a spiritual woman with a deep faith in the God she worshipped at Shiloh, and who obviously wanted her son to possess the same faith. [How very different from Eli who, as we shall see, knew about his wayward sons, yet seemed helpless to correct them.](#) Verses 19 to 21 reveal more of the mother and son relationship:

“And his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, ‘May the LORD give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the LORD.’ So then they would return to their home. Indeed the LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the young man Samuel grew in the presence of the LORD.”

We also see from these verses, how God honoured the faith of Elkanah’s household where God was worshipped and obeyed.

Notice that Hannah took Samuel a new robe every year, which he obviously needed as he grew and developed physically. In addition to this, he also grew spiritually for according to verse 21 he grew in the presence of the LORD. It behoves me now to ask myself, along with each one of us, “How much have I grown in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus?” Peter enjoins us to, “...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (2 Peter 3:18). We might not regularly receive new garments yet Paul, in Colossians 3:12-14, lists qualities that we can put on such as, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Though we live in a world marked by unbelief and indifference to the things of God, this does not give us license to act in the same way. We should do as Samuel did and grow in the things of God, and if we are parents should seek to bring up our children, “...in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, were a rotten and perverse influence at Shiloh, being responsible for everything that was wrong there, whereas Ramah, the home of Elkanah and Hannah, was a place where God was known. So much was it a place of rest and peace, that Samuel always returned to it, even dying there (1 Samuel 25:1). How different from Shiloh, that was eventually destroyed by the Philistines, an event that was a factor in the death of Eli, an event which will not be discussed today. It is both good and instructive for us to notice the stark difference between Eli and his family and Elkanah and his.

Eli's Attempts at Reform

To be fair to Eli, we must take account of his efforts to reform the dreadful practices at Shiloh, engineered by his sons. It is pitiful to witness the old man's pleas for them to mend their ways:

"Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And he said to them, 'Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?' But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death. Now the young man Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favour with the LORD and also with man" (1 Samuel 2:22-26).

This section attests how Eli tried one more time in a futile attempt to correct his sons' behaviour. How desperate is the question, "Why do you do such things?" (v 23). I would judge that this was not the first time that the old man had tried to modify the wicked behaviour of his sons that was so affecting the testimony at Shiloh. Verse 25 includes the phrase "...for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death." Hophni and Phinehas had reached an impasse, for their corrupt behaviour brought their down-fall. In this we have an example of God's foreknowledge and man's freewill. As far as I am concerned, this is a mystery wrapped in the eternal knowledge of our God. These two brothers seemed to have reached the stage where they would never change. Remorse was never a factor in their actions. [When considering God's response to their disregard of Eli's pleas, it brings the case of Pharaoh to mind in Exodus 4 to Exodus 14 when he, Pharaoh, continually hardened his heart against the appeals of Moses. Eventually, the moment came when God hardened Pharaoh's heart, as recorded in Exodus 10:27. Almost at the commencement of the Scripture record there is a warning that: "...My Spirit shall not abide in man for ever,..." \(Genesis 6:3\), a warning we all need to take note of.](#)

God's Judgment of Shiloh

As we approach the end of our time together, we also approach the end of our chapter. A man of God appears bringing a message that begins with a familiar phrase, "Thus the LORD has said." When Eli spoke the sons took no notice and ignored the warning. Now they have not that option. The dreadful words to Eli's house are in verses 33 & 34:

"The only one of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep his eyes out to grieve his heart and all the descendants of your house shall die by the sword of men. And this that shall come upon your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die upon the same day."

When Eli spoke sternly to his sons they scorned the rebuke by continuing to sin. When God spoke, through the man of God, they were powerless to prevent the tsunami of judgment, which eventually descended upon them. Whereas there are other features in the speech of the man of God that we could look at with profit, we only have time to examine just one:

"And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before me anointed for ever" (verse 35).

The question will be asked, "Who is this faithful priest?" Various suggestions have been volunteered as to his identity, so all I wish to do is to point out that he appears to God's anointed. Ultimately, I believe that God's anointed is the Lord Jesus in His millennial kingdom. In all things God has the last word. When He comes, corruption will not be rewarded as it was at Shiloh. We are given a view of the holiness of all things, at that time, in Zechariah 14 verses 20 & 21:

"And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses,
'Holy to the LORD.' And the pots in the house of the LORD shall be as the
bowls before the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be
holy to the LORD of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take
of them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no
longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts in that day."

Finally as we close, I want to impress the godliness and piety of Samuel, as he lived for God, through the maelstrom of evil at Shiloh. What happened at that place did not corrupt the young prophet, who laboured for God for the whole of his life.

We have now reached the end of our time, where we have sought to answer the question, "What is wrong at Shiloh?" This is also the title of this Truth for Today talk number T1278 in the series "Samuel to King David."

May the Lord bless you and thank you for listening.

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