

LESSON EIGHT

ELI

A. **THE PRIEST ELI:**

Eli was a priest of the line of Ithamar. Ithamar was the younger son of Aaron. Aaron had two sons, Nabad and Abihu who had been destroyed for offering strange fire. A line of priests descended from his other son, Eleazar, but Eli was a descendent of Ithamar. The office of the priesthood remained with the line of Ithamar through Eli until Solomon deposed Abiathar and turned the priesthood back to the descendents of Eleazar.

B. **ELI'S PIETY:**

Eli was a man of very noble character. His piety is shown by his meek submission to God's will as expressed in I Samuel 3:18, his reverential regard for the ark of God (I Samuel 4:18), his willingness to take and train the young child, Samuel and his discernment of the moving of the spirit of God (I Samuel 3:8-9).

The fact that God trusted Eli with the training and bringing up of Samuel speaks well of him. Eli served Israel during a period of decided spiritual decline. It was about this time that God so thoroughly abhorred the people of Israel for their continual backsliding that He turned His face from Shiloh. Eli dwelt in Shiloh at the house of the Lord. Not everyone in Israel had turned their backs on God but it was then as it is now, salvation was personal and not national.

C. **ELI'S NEGLIGENCE:**

Although Eli was a man capable of very high ideals, yet there was a great blemish on this man's record. He completely failed in training his own sons. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas also were priests. Eli was old and these two sons were in charge of ceremonies. They were wicked men sorely perverting the ritual and profaning the sanctuary in a debauchery similar to that of Canaanite temples. As a result people abhorred to come to worship. Eli was held responsible by God and was rebuked for permitting this abuse by his sons. Reprimand came first through an unnamed prophet and later through the boy Samuel.

Hophni and Phinehas were sons of Belial. This was shown in their greed, their disregard of God's order, their self-will and their unrestrained lust. God held Eli responsible for this and the sin of his boys brought judgment upon Eli and the entire nation.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul wrote that one of the qualifications of a minister was that his own children had to be in subjection and that the minister had to rule his own house well. *"One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" (I Timothy 3:4-5).*

Eli disqualified himself for being priest for not correcting and disciplining his two sons.

D. **ELI'S DEATH:**

Punishment came through a terrible battle with the Philistines. The Philistines had oppressed Israel for some twenty years and Israel attempted to end it by war. The battle was at Aphek. In the battle Israel was badly defeated and lost some 4,000 men. The people thinking that the presence of the ark at the battle front would help in fighting, and with permission from Hophni and Phinehas, they took the ark from Shiloh, contrary to God's will and brought it the 23 miles to camp. However, another great defeat was experienced. This time 30,000 men of Israel fell including Hophni and Phinehas and the ark was captured. When news of this catastrophe reached Shiloh, Eli fell from his seat, backward and died of a broken neck.

E. THE ARK TAKEN BY THE PHILISTINES: (I Samuel 5 & 6).

The ark of the tabernacle had been captured in the battle of Aphek, but was returned to Israel just seven months after its capture. This came about through a series of events in which God brought judgment upon the Philistines. First, the image of Dagon beside which the ark had been placed had twice been made to fall to the floor. Painful tumors had been inflicted on the people who in some instances brought death. Finally, the land had been overrun with mice.

The Philistine priests thought of a plan in which to test God, by placing the ark on a new cart drawn by young heifers. God intervened so that these young heifers drawing the wagon unbroken with their calves taken from them had wondrously moved straight along the road to Bethshemesh in Israelite territory. This story of the Philistine cows brings to us a great lesson of obedience, submission and sacrifice.

At Bethshemesh the ark was desecrated when curious people looked into it and God took the lives of many in punishment. Instead of sending it back to the tabernacle, the Bethshemites sent for men of Kirjath-jearim to come and get it. These people handled it properly because they experienced no harm but they still did not return it to the tabernacle. It remained with them until David brought it to Jerusalem.

F. ICHABOD: (I Samuel 4:21).

The wife of Phinehas was ready to bear a child when the news came of the death of her husband. She immediately gave birth to her child and died in childbirth. Before her death she named the child Ichabod. The word means: "The glory is departed from Israel." This tells us a great deal not only about the character of this good woman who died in childbirth, but also of the spiritual condition of all Israel. Ichabod not only spoke of the fact that the ark had been taken by the Philistines but it spoke of the great spiritual depravity of the entire nation. Israel had reached one of the darkest moments of her history.

