

HOPHNI AND PHINEHAS

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In 1 Samuel 2:12-17, we read about the two sons of Eli, Israel's high priest, and their great wickedness. The two men were named Hophni and Phinehas. They are described as "sons of Belial" who did not know Jehovah (1 Sam 2:12). In Hebrew, "Belial" means to be *without profit* or *worthless*. As priests of the Lord, they committed immorality (1 Sam 2:22). They also committed sin in regard to the sacrifices and offerings to the Lord.

Taking more than what God authorized

Concerning Hophni and Phinehas, 1 Samuel 2:13-14 says, "*And the priests' custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; and he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither.*" This was a direct violation of the law God had given to Israel by Moses. God had reserved the *breast* and *right shoulder* to be eaten by the priests (Lev 7:11-21,28-36; 10:14-15; Num 18:18), and the *skin* of the burnt offerings (Lev 7:8). And this was to be taken by the priest only *after* the one who brought the offering had made a wave offering of the breast and a heave offering of the shoulder (Lev 7:14,28-32). This was to be done by the person with "*his own hands*" (Lev 7:30). Eli's sons stuck their hooks into the vessels without allowing the people to make the wave and heave offerings, and took for themselves all that came up with the hook, not just the breast and right shoulder. This was a great sin.

Taking the fat

"*Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desires; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force. Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord*" (1 Sam 2:12-17). God commanded all the offerings to be *burnt*. Taking them raw was a violation of the law (see Lev 1,3,4,7). Furthermore, God had commanded that the fat be burnt on the altar of all types of offerings, whether burnt offerings (Lev 1:1-13; 9:16; 17:6), peace offerings (Lev 3:1-17; 6:12; 7:28-31; 9:18-21), sin offerings (Lev 4:1-35; 9:7-15), trespass offerings (Lev 7:1-5), offerings of the first-born (Num 18:15-19), the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:23-25), or the consecration of the priests (Ex 29:9-25; Lev 8:13-29). God plainly declared, "All the fat is the Lord's. It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood" (Lev 3:16-17). None of the children of Israel

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were ever allowed to eat any fat or blood (Lev 7:22-27). When Aaron offered the first sin offering, burnt offering and peace offerings (Lev 9:22), then “the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces” (Lev 9:23-24). God took the initiative to miraculously burn the first fat, which emphasized the seriousness of His law.

Stumblingblocks to Israel

The overall effect of the sins of Hophni and Phinehas was enormously damaging to the spiritual condition of Israel. God specifically commanded Aaron and his sons (the priests) to “profane not my holy name in those things which they hallow unto me: I am the Lord” (Lev 22:2), and, “They shall therefore keep mine ordinance, lest they bear sin for it, and die therefore, if they profane it: I the Lord do sanctify them” (Lev 22:9), “And they shall not profane the holy things of the children of Israel, which they offer unto the Lord” (Lev 22:15). Unfortunately, Hophni and Phinehas were just two in a long history of corrupt priests in Israel. Two of Aaron’s own sons, Nadab and Abihu, were struck dead for offering strange fire before the Lord (Lev 10:1-2). In the waning days of the kingdom of Judah, shortly before the Babylonian captivity, God said, “For both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the Lord” (Jer 23:11), and, “Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them” (Ezek 22:26). After the captives had returned from Babylon, God rebuked the priests again, saying, “But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts” (Mal 2:8). God had originally made a covenant of priesthood with Jacob’s son Levi because Levi “did turn many away from iniquity” (Mal 2:4-6). The priests’ main job is described in Malachi 2:7: “For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.” God said that the priests “shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean” (Ezek 44:23). Rather than causing the people to be turned away from sin to righteousness, and encouraging them to humbly offer sincere sacrifices to God, Hophni and Phinehas, by their wickedness, caused “the Lord’s people to transgress” (1 Sam 2:24), and to abhor the offering of the Lord (1 Sam 2:17). They had done the exact opposite of the will of God.