

THE FALL OF ELI'S HOUSE

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In the beginning of the Book of First Samuel, the High Priest in Israel was a man named Eli. Eli is not accused of any personal immorality or corruption, but his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were wicked. They corrupted the sacrifices offered by the Israelites, and “the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord” (1 Sam 2:17). These sins led to the downfall and destruction of the house of Eli.

Eli's weakness

Eli rebuked his sons for their wickedness. He said to them, “Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them” (1 Sam 2:23-25). But Eli, as their father and High Priest, had a responsibility to go beyond mere words and take action against his wicked sons. But he would not do that. Therefore, “There came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honorest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam 2:27-30). The Lord later said this about Eli in the first prophecy that he gave through young Samuel: “For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because *his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them nor*” (1 Sam 3:13).

The prophecy against the house of Eli

Because of their sins, God was no longer going to honor and esteem the house of Eli (1 Sam 2:30). The Lord said, “Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age” (1 Sam 2:31-33). After removing the high priesthood from the house of Eli, God said, “And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever. And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread” (1 Sam 2:35-36).

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(continued)

The sign of fulfillment

God gave a sign that would ensure that the entire prophecy would be precisely and completely fulfilled. "And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them" (1 Sam 2:34). When that happened, Eli and everyone else would know that the remainder of the prophecy would also be fulfilled. The first part of this prophecy that was fulfilled was the sign that was given. Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, did indeed die in one day. At Aphek, "the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain" (1 Sam 4:10-11). This confirmed that the entire house of Eli would face destruction and the priesthood would be given to someone faithful.

A century of judgment

A Benjamite soldier who had escaped in the battle came to Shiloh (1 Sam 4:12-16) and gave Eli the news that "Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy" (1 Sam 4:17-18). When the wife of Phinehas heard that the ark of God had been taken and that her husband and father-in-law were dead, she went into premature labor and gave birth to a son she named Ichabod (meaning "no glory"), and then she died (1 Sam 4:19-22). The high priesthood eventually passed to Ahiah, the son of Ichabod's older brother Ahitub (1 Sam 14:3). Something happened to Ahitub and Ichabod but we do not know the details. Something also happened to Ahiah, but we again do not know the details. We do know that the high priesthood passed to Ahiah's brother Ahimelech (1 Sam 21:1; 22:9). Ahimelech helped David in Nob, when David was running from king Saul, by giving him the shewbread and the sword of Goliath (1 Sam 21:1-10). Doeg the Edomite betrayed Ahimelech to king Saul (1 Sam 21:7; 22:9-10), and Saul called Ahimelech and all of his father's house, the priests that were in Nob, and had Doeg to slaughter 85 of them, plus women, children, infants and even their animals (1 Sam 22:11-19). Only Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, escaped, and he fled to David for protection (1 Sam 22:20-23). Abiathar was the last of the house of Eli, and he became the high priest under king David (1 Sam 23:6-12; 30:6-8; 2 Sam 8:15-17; 20:25; 1 Chr 18:14-16; Mark 2:26). But, unlike David's other mighty men, Abiathar (and his son Jonathan, 2 Sam 15:27-37; 1 Kgs 1:39-48) backed Adonijah the son of David as the successor to David's throne (1 Kgs 1:5-53; 2:12-25). Because of this, when Solomon became king, he removed this last high priest of the house of Eli. "And unto Abiathar the priest said the king, Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou art worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted. So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the Lord; that he might fulfil the word of the Lord, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh" (2 Kgs 2:26-27). The process took around 100 years, but God fulfilled all that He foretold about the house of Eli.