

God's Message for Leaders - I Samuel 2

To begin I would like to quote Peter Leithart in reference to Hannah's prayer.

"It is a general truth that God's faithful people are poor and feeble because elites are hostile to God. In our day, America's political and cultural elites are hostile to Christ and to faithful Christians, and the structures of power encourage wickedness: The more one has to lie and cheat and ruin his family to become a President or U.S. Senator, the less Christians will want to pursue that life. The same dynamics are apparent in the church: The more a preacher has to compromise his message to build a megachurch, the less attractive megachurches will be to serious Christians. Given that the system seems to be set up to encourage compromise and unfaithfulness, we should be joining Hannah in pleading that the Lord would shatter the bows of the mighty and cast down nobles. We should be praying for ecclesiastical (and social) revolution." (*A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 and 2 Samuel*, Peter Leithart, pg. 45-46)

Let's read I Samuel 2:1-10

Then Hannah prayed and said,

"My heart rejoices in the LORD;
My horn is exalted in the LORD,
My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies,
Because I rejoice in Your salvation.
² There is no one holy like the LORD,
Indeed, there is no one besides You,
Nor is there any rock like our God.
³ Do not go on boasting so very proudly,
Do not let arrogance come out of your mouth;
For the LORD is a God of knowledge,
And with Him actions are weighed.
⁴ The bows of the mighty are broken to pieces,
But those who have stumbled strap on strength.
⁵ Those who were full hire themselves out for bread,
But those who were hungry cease *to be hungry*.
Even the infertile woman gives birth to seven,
But she who has many children languishes.
⁶ The LORD puts to death and makes alive;
He brings down to Sheol and brings up.
⁷ The LORD makes poor and rich;
He humbles, He also exalts.
⁸ He raises the poor from the dust,
He lifts the needy from the garbage heap

To seat *them* with nobles,
And He gives them a seat of honor as an inheritance;
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S,
And He set the world on them.
⁹ He watches over the feet of His godly ones,
But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness;
For not by might shall a person prevail.
¹⁰ Those who contend with the LORD will be terrified;
Against them He will thunder in the heavens,
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
And He will give strength to His king,
And will exalt the horn of His anointed."

In looking at Hannah's second prayer, which is a prayer of thanksgiving and praise, there are several things we should note because of the great reversal God was working out. The text shows us that just as Hannah was harassed and persecuted, Israel was being harassed and persecuted by the Philistines. What is happening to Hannah was a picture of the nation. But God was about to answer her affliction and defeat the enemy of his people. Hannah's prayer can be divided into 3 sections. In the first section, verses 1-3, Hannah speaks about her own personal struggles. In verse 1, the Hebrew states, "my horn is raised." The word horn in the Bible usually represents power or strength. In Psalm 132 the text states, "There I will make a horn to sprout for David." (vs. 17) This of course means the Davidic dynasty will be established. In Deuteronomy 33:16-17 the text speaks of the horns of Joseph referring to Ephraim and Manasseh. Whether the word horn in I Samuel refers to the person of Samuel or not, the idea is that Hannah has been lifted up. She has been raised above her enemies. Such will also be the case for Israel under King David. Hannah rejoices in the salvation of the Lord – she also notes the holiness of God. There is no one like him to deliver. As Hannah continues she notes how we must respond to a holy God. The arrogance must cease and we must demonstrate humility before such a powerful and holy God. Hannah's prayer is a message of warning to those who walk proudly in their success and oppression of others. There will come a day when God will act on behalf of his people. The proud will fall and the humble will be exalted. Every word, every action will be weighed by God. That is why we repent and approach God with humility and faithfulness, trusting in him and not our circumstances.

The second section of Hannah's prayer is verses 4-8. Now, she moves from her own experience to how God works in general with his people. This reveals how God deals with us individually is the same as how he deals with nations. The principles are the same. He delivers his people, he crushes their enemies, he judges the wicked. Think about what she is saying, verse 8 states, "He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the garbage heap to seat *them* with nobles, and He gives them a seat of honor as an inheritance; For the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and He set the world on them." God's kingdom does not work like the world. God raises up the poor and needy, the oppressed. And you see this great reversal – the poor become rich, the insignificant become very influential and important. Why? Because God rules and reigns – he is mighty and just.

There is a story in the Old Testament about Queen Athaliah. After King Jehoshaphat died, his son, Jehoram, reigned in Judah. Because of an alliance between Jehoshaphat and Ahab, Athaliah married Jehoram. Unlike his father, Jehoram was an evil king and God struck him with a disease and he died a horrible death. So, Jehoram and Athaliah's son, Ahaziah, becomes king. But Ahaziah only reigned about a year. Because God had passed judgment on the house of Ahab, Jehu executed Ahaziah. When Ahaziah was killed, his mother, Athaliah spring into action. She murdered almost the entire royal house so she would be queen. And Athaliah succeeded for six years. But Jehosheba, who was a daughter of King Joram and sister to Ahaziah, and the wife of the priest, Jehoiada, hid Joash, who was a son of King Ahaziah. Jehosheba hid Joash for six years in the house of the Lord. But in the seventh year, the priest Jehoiada, entered into a covenant with the commanders of the army and made Joash king. And when they did this Athaliah was executed, and the people rejoiced. They tore down the house of Baal and all the altars and images of idolatry. Worship according to the law of Moses and what King David had set up and organized was restored (I Kings 11, 2 Chronicles 22-23). This story demonstrates that while evil may last for a season, eventually God will act and set everything right. He will destroy the wickedness and restore his people, his house and his worship.

Now, moving back to I Samuel 2, we find the conclusion to Hannah's prayer in verses 9-10. In verse 9 we see God's protection of his people and his judgment on the wicked contrasted. He guards the feet of the faithful, but destroys the wicked. The New American Standard says, "the wicked ones are silenced in darkness." If we look back at verse 3, we are reminded of the arrogant talkers. They have been weighed by God and now they have been silenced by him. The same theme continues in verse 10 where the adversaries of the Lord are broken in pieces as he thunders against them. But verse 10 is also Messianic. This verse speaks of universal judgment and the text talks about the power of the anointed. We should note that in the book of Samuel both Saul and David are anointed. And certainly Hannah's prayer could refer to kings. But anointed one also means messiah, and surely the text is referring to the coming of Jesus. Kings such as David foreshadow the true king, Jesus Christ. This prayer of Hannah is a cry of thanksgiving. But also speaks of the universal justice of God. It is a beautiful song that reveals the truth of God's reign, how his rule ultimately gives justice to the poor and oppressed as he lifts them up and give them victory.

Now, in this chapter the prayer of Hannah is like the conclusion of chapter 1. And as we move to verse 12 the text reveals the wickedness of Eli's sons and God's rejection of the house of Eli.

Now the sons of Eli were useless men; they did not know the LORD. ¹³ And *this was* the custom of the priests with the people: *when* anyone was offering a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was cooking, with a three-pronged fork in his hand. ¹⁴ And he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; everything that the fork brought up, the priest would take for himself. They did so in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. ¹⁵ Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest meat for roasting, as he will not take

cooked meat from you, only raw.” ¹⁶ And *if* the man said to him, “They must burn the fat first, then take as much as you desire,” then he would say, “No, but you must give *it to me* now; and if not, I am taking it by force!” ¹⁷ And *so* the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD disrespectfully.

¹⁸ Now Samuel was ministering before the LORD, *as* a boy wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁹ And his mother would make for him a little robe and bring it up to him from year to year when she would come up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. ²⁰ Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, “May the LORD give you children from this woman in place of the one she requested of the LORD.” And they went to their own home.

²¹ The LORD indeed visited Hannah, and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew up before the LORD. I Samuel 2:12-21

The obvious point of this section is how worship was being corrupted by Eli’s sons. It was a mockery of God. They were violating God’s law, and more than that, they did not know the Lord. The great irony is that they were priests!

The book of Samuel shows us a king after God’s own heart, who sets up pure worship. But before we get to that we see how far the priests of the land had fallen. Think about it for a moment, who was in charge of Israel? There were three leaders, Eli, and his two sons. Why were his sons leaders at all? They did not know the Lord! Did Eli remove them from leadership – apparently not. And how serious is their crime against God. In Leviticus 7 the text describes the process of sacrifices, and the priest was already allotted the breast and the right leg. The priest was supposed to burn the fat. Yet, Eli’s sons demanded raw meat and more than what God had allotted them. Why? Why did they have no respect for God’s sacrifice? Why did they abuse the people this way? Their sin was very great in the sight of the Lord. And in addition to this, in verse 22 we learn these priests are sleeping with the women who are serving at God’s house. Their iniquity is so great that God is going to remove not just them and Eli, but the entire house of Eli. There will no longer be any priests from the house of Eli. Their authority will be completely removed and revoked by God. I Samuel 2 is a picture of the worst kind of leadership. Why could Eli not control his sons? Why were they so wicked? The text does not answer those questions, but it does tell us the consequences for their sin.

I think the writer of Samuel demonstrates another very important point. God knew about the evil of Eli’s house. And even while all the iniquity was going on, the text tells us Samuel was ministering before the Lord. God’s work is not always loud and dramatic. While Eli’s sons were destroying the people’s worship of God, Yahweh was providing and growing the next leader who would be righteous. The day of judgment was coming, but it came quietly. God is always working, even when it looks like all is lost. We can look around our world today and see leaders just like Hophni and Phinehas. Leaders with no character, full of wickedness, those who do not know God. And if all we see is what these leaders are doing, we may miss all that God is doing quietly. All that he is providing as he prepares to remove leaders and their authority. The house of Eli was coming to an end for all of its wickedness,

but God was preparing another leader that would take their place. God is not surprised at all with the wickedness in our world. But mark this, he will answer it. He will remove leaders, remove their authority, and place others in positions of authority. God is holy and righteous.

Now, I want to explain something about Hophni and Phinehas' sin. First, they want more than their share of the meat. This meant they were robbing the people of meat. Second, they would not wait for the fat to burn. Why is this important? If you read Leviticus 3 you find out that the fat of the animal was the Lord's. It was his food offering. So, when the boys seize the meat before the fat is burned, they were taking their portion of meat before God received his offering! Let me ask you a question. Are leaders today taking more than their fair share? Are leaders taking their portion before God gets his offering? Are they insulting God with their worship? Do our leaders even know God? I would submit to you, a day of judgment is coming for those leaders who refuse to listen and show contempt for God's house and his holy word.

"If one person sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a person sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the LORD desired to put them to death.

Now the boy Samuel was continuing to grow and to be in favor both with the LORD and with people. 1 Samuel 2:25-26

So, God is never surprised. While he waits patiently for the cup of wickedness to become full, he quietly prepares the next generation of leaders for his faithful work. Is God preparing the next generation of leaders? If so, what will they be like? If they are being prepared by God, they will be righteous and follow him, not their predecessors. God is faithful, God is righteous, God is just!

Now, we come to the final section of the chapter. Let's read verse 27-36

Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "This is what the LORD says: 'Did I *not* indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt *in bondage* to Pharaoh's house? ²⁸ Did I *not* choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me? And did I *not* give to the house of your father all the fire *offerings* of the sons of Israel? ²⁹ Why are you showing contempt for My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded *for My dwelling*, and *why* are you honoring your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?' ³⁰ Therefore the LORD God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father was to walk before Me forever'; but now the LORD declares, 'Far be it from Me—for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be insignificant. ³¹ Behold, the days are coming when I will eliminate your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. ³² And you will look at the distress of *My dwelling*, in *spite of* all the good that I do for Israel; and there will never be an old man in your house. ³³ Yet I will not cut off every man of yours from My altar, so that your eyes will fail *from*

weeping and your soul grieve, and all the increase of your house will die in the prime of life. ³⁴ And this will be the sign to you which will come in regard to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them will die. ³⁵ But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always. ³⁶ And everyone who is left in your house will come to bow down to him for a silver coin or a loaf of bread and say, "Please assign me to one of the priest's offices so that I may eat a piece of bread."""

There is a lot in this passage, but what jumps out at me here is verse 29 where God says, "Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offering." And then he goes on to tell Eli that he has honored his sons above him. Eli did rebuke his sons, but there is no indication he did anything more than that. Let me ask you a question, how do people know you take God serious? By how you respond to sin. Your own and the sin of those under your care. We are talking about national leaders, we are talking about priests. We are also talking about God's law. The condemning of Eli's house is because of his sons. If we are taking God serious, we must take sin serious. And remove leaders who insult God by their gross and public sin. Was what Hophni and Phinehas did a secret? No! Everyone knew what they were doing and that it was wrong. They were hindering the worship of God and placing themselves in the place of God. Hophni and Phinehas put themselves first, before God himself. And yet, Eli does not remove them from operating as priests. Do we today really take God at his word – do we really take him serious? Meaning, do we believe he means what he says. God is righteous and just, he cannot and will not allow gross sin to go unchecked.

If you read I Kings 2, you find out that Solomon deposes Abiathar the priest, who was a descendant of Eli. The text tells us the word of the Lord was fulfilled. Solomon replaces Abiathar with Zadok. And this seems to fulfill what I Samuel 2 tells us, how God will remove Eli's house from power and the priesthood, and raises up a faithful priest.

We live in a day where the Bible and its principles are attacked daily. Everything is all of creation is said to be okay, homosexuality, fornication, lying, cheating, stealing, and every other abomination known to man. Yet, God's word does not change, not does he! Does Yahweh answer the gross and rebellious sin of Hophni and Phinehas? Does he not blot out the house of Eli from the priesthood, even to the point of having no bread. How does someone even become a priest like Hophni and Phinehas? Let me put it another way. How did we get the leaders we have today, with their corruption, moral failures, abuses, theft of power and so on. Hophni and Phinehas were national leaders who so abused God's law that he removed them forever. Do we have leaders today who consistently disobey God's law? Even going so far as trying to make their political abominations law. How will God respond – we can know exactly how he will respond. All you have to do is pick up your Bible and read it. God is consistent. He is passionate about following the rules and principles of his law. And why is that? Because it is best! Following and obeying God and his word brings life, salvation, and peace. Disobedient leaders destroy, but righteous leaders usher in life and prosperity.

One final point I want to make is many teachers flee from passages like this because God seems so harsh. And I believe that is very shallow and short-sighted to who God really is.

First of all, God's judgment matches the rebellious behavior, and certainly is a deterrent to such behavior. But there is more to it than that, God's righteous judgment is protective in nature. It protects his people from evil and those that practice evil and abuse their power. God's actions are not only just, they are restorative. Punishment for sin restores justice and righteousness, it ushers in the good, and righteous leaders can replace rebellious ones. God is passionate about his people, if we could only see that compromise breeds iniquity and only makes things worse. Sometimes it is easy to be nice, but when we do not act in the face of enormous rebellion, we are supporting and making room for darkness.

Here is the good news, verse 35 states, "But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always." I would submit to you today we are living in a time where there is a great shaking. God is removing leaders who are rebellious, but he is also raising up prophets like Samuel and priests like Zadok, who are filled with righteousness, justice, and a passion for God. Will we be faithful during such a time?

"Behold, I am sending My messenger, and he will clear a way before Me. And the Lord, whom you are seeking, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of armies. ² "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire, and like launderer's soap. ³ And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. ⁴ Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old, and as in former years.

⁵ "Then I will come near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, those who oppress the wage earner in his wages *or* the widow or the orphan, and those who turn away the stranger *from justice* and do not fear Me," says the LORD of armies. Malachi 3:1-5

We live today at a time when God's righteous justice is manifesting. He is coming to his temple to purify it. Leaders will be removed and leaders will be raised up. It is a time to be faithful, pure, and righteous as we watch God move and shake his kingdom for his glory!

In closing I want to quote Peter Leithart, he writes, "Eli's great sin was his failure to rebuke his sons. Eli did rebuke his sons, but did a poor job of it. He heard that his sons were committing fornication, but did not address that point in his rebuke. Eli's rebuke was too general to cut to the heart. Failure to restrain high-handed sin is judged as high-handed sin". (*A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 and 2 Samuel*, pg. 51-52)