



Turning Tragedy into Triumph  
1 Samuel 1-4  
June 21, 2020

Eli was a priest and judge in Israel for forty years. He was also a father. Like most of us, he had some good traits and some bad. Unfortunately, his bad traits were very serious and brought God's judgment on him.

Eli's sons, Hophni and Phineas, were also priests, but they were very wicked and did not have any regard for the Lord (1 Samuel 2:12). They forced the worshipers at the sanctuary in Shiloh to hand over more of their sacrificial food than they were entitled to, even taking the Lord's portion. In so doing, they treated the Lord's offering with contempt (2:13-17) and sinned directly against the Lord (2:25). The sons were also sleeping with the women who served in the tent of meeting (2:22).

In some way, Eli himself was sinning with his sons in regard to taking sacrificial food that they were not entitled to (2:29, "you" is plural; note also that Eli was "heavy" 4:18). In this, Eli was guilty of honoring his sons more than God (2:29).

Eli does not appear to have been closely involved in his sons' lives because he only *heard* about the things his sons were doing (2:22-23). He spoke to them about their sins, but God said he didn't do enough to restrain them (3:13). His sons didn't listen (2:25), and this is not surprising since he was sinning too and wasn't involved in their lives. Besides, their sin had reached the point that God had determined to remove them (2:25).

God sent a prophet to tell Eli that he was going to judge him and his family (2:27-36). God held Eli accountable not only for his own sins but also

those of his sons (3:13). Later, God repeated this message of judgment to Samuel too (1 Samuel 3). Samuel was afraid to tell Eli about it, but he did (3:15-21).

God did indeed send his judgment (1 Samuel 4). The Philistines defeated Israel in battle, the ark was captured, and Hophni and Phineas were killed. When Eli heard all this news, he fell over backwards in his chair, broke his neck, and died.

This is a terribly tragic story. Eli's failure to be a good father led to his sons becoming wicked men who oppressed, abused, and took advantage of many people. Indeed, the entire nation suffered as a result. Sin has a large ripple effect. How can we turn this tragedy into triumph in our own lives?

- By children obeying your parents when they teach you and when they correct you (Ephesians 6:1-3; Prov 15:32).
- By all of us viewing our roles not as an entitlement but as a responsibility and stewardship.
- By fathers being involved with their children and spending enough time with them that you know what is going on in their lives.
- By fathers teaching their children the ways of God and correcting them when they make bad choices (1 Samuel 3:13; Genesis 18:19; Prov 13:24; 19:18; Ephesians 6:4).
- By us honoring God above all else (1 Samuel 2:29-30).
  - ◇ Honoring God in worship (1 Samuel 2:13-17, 29-30; Isaiah 29:13; Malachi 1:6-14)
  - ◇ Honoring God by listening to him (1 Samuel 3:1 contrast vv. 4, 6, 8, 10-14, 19-21; cf. Isaiah 66:2; Mark 4:24-25)
  - ◇ Honoring God by obeying him (1 Sam 2:29-30; 15:22)

Fathers should honor God first of all, then strive to live honorable lives personally, and children should honor fathers and mothers (Exodus 20:12).