

1 Samuel 3-5 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

I. Samuel Chs. 1-8

A. *His Birth* 1-2:11

B. *Eli's Household* 2:12-36

C. *Samuel The Prophet* 3-4:1

1^a Now the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli.

Note that: Samuel *served* (that's what the word 'ministered' means) God, *before*—or, *by serving* Eli.

Even though the priesthood under Eli had become hopelessly corrupt, Samuel *did what he could* in service to God by assisting Eli.

This is a great model for each of us as we go to work.

Maybe your boss isn't saved or an easy person to work for.

Don't work for your boss or even your employer – Work for your Lord; work for Jesus.

Eph 6:5-8 • ⁵Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is a slave or free*.

Now we get a short & bleak description of what those days were like spiritually.

And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; *there was no widespread revelation.*

As we saw a couple Sundays ago when we looked at this passage – while there were a few individuals like Hannah & the prophet who rebuked Eli who enjoyed an intimate experience with God, there was no national leader who stood as God's ordained spokesperson.

That was about to change.

²And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, ³and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the LORD where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down, ⁴that the LORD called Samuel. And he answered, "Here I am!"

Now we launch into the story of Samuel's call by God.

It happened one night when Eli was old; his eyesight dimmed by age & ill-health. ^[1]

Sometime during the night, God called Samuel, who replied in the typical manner of a servant, "Here I am." He assumed it was Eli who'd called.

5 So he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” And he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” And he went and lay down.

6 Then the LORD called yet again, “Samuel!” So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” He answered, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” **7** (Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor was the word of the LORD yet revealed to him.)

Meaning while Samuel believed in God, he’d never had this kind of direct, personal encounter with Him; he didn’t know God’s ways yet.

8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you did call me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD had called the boy.

The last time Eli heard from God it was through an un-named prophet in ch. 2 who told him because he’d rejected God, God had rejected him.

It was a troubling thing to now realize God had by-passed him, the high priest, to speak instead to an underling, a child servant in his house.

9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, ‘Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. **10** Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”

The repetition marks an *urgency* to the call.

And Samuel answered, “Speak, for Your servant hears.” **11 Then the LORD said to Samuel: “Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.**

God is about to give Samuel a prophecy of some *really bad news* for Eli & the tabernacle.

Shiloh will be destroyed & Eli’s house toppled from its place as high priest. This news will cause the ears of everyone who hears it to “tingle.”

It’s interesting that the only other time this phrase is used is to describe the

greater destruction of the temple of Solomon by the Babylonians. ^[2]

Both times, it’s used to describe the calamity of the destruction of the holy sanctuary.

The idea is the *distress* that will come at the reversal that will take place in the expectation of the *religious but not godly* -- God’s judgment falling on that which is supposed to be the very center of His worship!

God is not adverse to wiping out that which at one time He mightily blessed, when it becomes corrupt & contrary to His will.

God judged Shiloh & wiped out the tabernacle.

Some 400 years later He wiped out Jerusalem & the temple.

500 years after that He did it again.

12 In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. **13** For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.

Let's take careful note of that – God judged Eli because he *failed to restrain his sons*.

It was within both his power & duty to remove Hophni & Phinehas from their offices as priests, but he didn't use his God-ordained authority to do what ought to have been done.

So he was considered as guilty as his sons.

His consent to their evil was deemed by God as culpable as they.

That's an important truth for anyone in leadership to take to heart.

Being placed in a position of authority carries with it greater accountability. Many people in leadership positions are rightly concerned about the *over-use* of authority.

They must not swing too far in the other direction and fail to use that authority either, so that evil is allowed to grow unchecked.

14 And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."

God is not saying that **IF** Eli & his sons had repented He wouldn't forgive them.

He's saying that they've traversed the point of no return; they aren't *going* to repent.

And without repentance, there's no forgiveness.

No sacrifice does any good without the right heart behind it.

This is something the *merely religious* need to understand – that going through the *motions of religion* do *nothing* in acquiring God's favor.

Going to church, dropping a 20 in the offering, taking communion, even getting baptized, avail not at all if there isn't a true heart of repentance & submission to God behind them.

15 So Samuel lay down until morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision.

16 Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son!" He answered, "Here I am." **17** And he said, "What is the word that *the LORD* spoke to you? Please do not hide *it* from me. God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said to you."

18 Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD. Let Him do what seems good to Him."

We've already seen plenty evidence of Eli's laziness – but this is *unbelievable!*

He is *so lazy* when he hears news of his family's *ruin*, he shrugs it off & says, "Oh well!"

It was God's knowledge of *this spiritual apathy* that moved Him to say in v. 14 there was no hope for Eli's household.

19 So Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.

Meaning that Samuel's ministry to the nation of Israel was marked by stand-out integrity.

His counsel was wise. His prophetic messages all came to pass.

20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel *had been*

established as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh. For the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

We covered this in depth 2 Sunday's ago.

D. The Ark of the Covenant Among the Philistines 4:1-6:12

1. The ark is captured 4:1-11

1a And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

He replaced Eli as the national leader.

As this closes out the period of the Judges & brings the dawn of the era of the Kingdom –

Most Bible students see Samuel as the last of the Judges & the first of the prophets who will also be a main feature of the period of the monarchy in Israel.

Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek.

We've already encountered the Philistines in the Book of Judges when we read about Samson.

The Philistines had arrived from the sea as part of a mass migration that came from further west.

They'd tried to settle the fertile northern coast of Egypt but had been repelled & landed on the sparsely populated coast of Israel right about the same time Israel was making their conquest of the region.

They quickly established 5 centers of power & began pressing eastward into the coastal plain where they eventually ran into the western border of Israeli settlement.

The Philistines had iron weapons which were a decided advantage over Israel who were still using bronze.

They were also a far more militaristic people who were able to field an army trained for war.

Israel was little more than a loose alliance of farmers.

The scene of this battle was about 25 miles west of Shiloh, where the coastal plains meet the central highlands.

The Philistines were headquartered at Aphek while Israel was 2 miles east at what would *later* be called Ebenezer.

²Then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel. And when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men of the army in the field.

A loss of 4,000 was devastating, but it had not been a complete rout; Israel didn't turn tail & run away.

Darkness came before the battle had been decided.

So they returned to camp, licking their wounds & wondering how they'd be able to endure another day's battle with such huge losses.

³And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?"

Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies.”

These people had been raised on the stories of the great victories God had worked for them over such might armies as the Egyptians & Canaanites.

How could they be defeated by these Philistine upstarts ?

Remembering the victories their ancestors had known, they decided what they needed was more of God’s help, so they hit on the idea of bringing up the ark of the covenant – that golden box over which the glory of the Lord appeared. But notice what they say – “Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD from Shiloh to us, that when **it** comes among us **it** may save us from the hand of our enemies.”

Not “He may save us,” but “It.”

They’ve thought the ark was a *magical relic* that would secure them victory.

4 So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

The ark is given its fullest description.

It’s “the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who dwells *between* the cherubim.”

In other words, the ark belongs to God, Whose throne is in heaven; sitting between angelic creatures who are so august in majesty they themselves inspire awe.

His throne isn’t just some gold covered wood box sitting in a curtained room & carried about on poles.

But the spiritual perception of most of Israel had degenerated into little more than superstition by this time.

Hophni & Phinehas had no belief in God, but thought aligning themselves with a possible victory over the Philistines would go far in advancing their position.

So they accompanied the ark into battle.

5 And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook.

They were so excited!

6 Now when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, “What does the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews *mean*?” Then they understood that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp.

Of course they had sentries who’d seen the ark being carried into the enemy camp & sent word back about what was going on.

7 So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, “God has come into the camp!” And they said, “Woe to us! For such a thing has never happened before.

It seems the Philistines had a greater sense of spiritual perception than Israel.

It wasn't the *ark* they feared but the God the ark belonged to.

In all their previous encounters with Israel, they'd never had to face this fabled & legendary piece of holy furniture – though they'd heard all about Israel's glorious past in the Exodus.

8 Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.

News of what God had done for Israel some 400 years before in the Exodus & conquest of Canaan was well known throughout the Mediterranean world at that time.

The Philistines mistakenly assumed Israel worshipped several gods because everyone else did, & because one of the generic names for God used by the Jews was 'Elohim' – the *plural* of *El*.

The Jews used this name for the One True God, not because they believed in many gods but because they believed God was so great in glory it was best to assign Him a name that spoke of *abundance* = Elohim.

9 Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Conduct yourselves like men, and fight!"

They indulged in a little positive self-talk here – then went out to battle.

10 So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. 11 Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

This was a major catastrophe!

Not only was the defeat nearly 10 times as great as the previous day, but the precious ark was captured & the priests were killed. [Some might say, "Good riddance!"]

The reason for the defeat was 3-fold:

- 1) The Philistines fought with courage & desperation.
- 2) The Israelites thought the battle would be a piece of cake since the ark would do the work FOR THEM.
- 3) God withheld His help because He could not bless Israel's superstitions.

We can make the same mistake the Israelites made –

That because we're God's people who've been promised His presence & blessing, we don't have to do anything.

God's blessing should not lull us into inaction.

On the contrary – it ought to spur us on to even greater work, knowing our labor is not in vain in Him.

There was nothing wrong with bringing the ark into the camp if it had only served to remind the Jewish soldiers of their covenant with God.

If they had gone forth that day against the Philistines trusting hard in Him while thrusting hard into the enemy, they likely would have won.

As it was—God wasn't obligated to bless them *just because of the ark*.

He wouldn't allow His arm to be twisted by the superstitions of the Israelites.

God is not some genie to be summoned at the will of man. You can't manipulate God. ^[3]

2. Eli dies

4:12-22

12 Then a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line the same day, and came to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. **13** Now when he came, there was Eli, sitting on a seat by the wayside watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told *it*, all the city cried out.

It's interesting that Eli was more concerned for the ark than his sons.

God had already told him his house would be torn down.

He'd already chalked Hophni & Phinehas off as lost.

The ark was another matter.

As the high priest, ultimately he was *responsible* for what happened to it.

14 When Eli heard the noise of the outcry, he said, "What does the sound of this tumult *mean*?" And the man came quickly and told Eli.

As soon as the guy got to the outskirts of the city he gave a report of the battle.

A great cry went up which Eli heard but didn't know the details.

As soon as the runner got to Eli he gave him the news he most dreaded.

15 Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were so dim that he could not see. **16** Then the man said to Eli, "I *am* he who came from the battle. And I fled today from the battle line." And he said, "What happened, my son?" **17** So the messenger answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been a great slaughter among the people. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead; and the ark of God has been captured." **18** Then it happened, when he made mention of the ark of God, that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

At the word the ark was taken by the enemy, Eli fainted & fell.

He was so old, brittle, & heavy that his neck broke, killing him instantly.

In modern terms, the ark had being captured by the Philistines would have been

like the president of the United States handing the nuclear launch codes over to Osama bin Laden.

Eli had *utterly failed* in his role as high priest.

God gave him 40 years to get things right, but he only went from bad to worse.

In the late 1970's, a five-line inscription was found on an ostrakon [piece of broken pottery].

It was found inside an iron-age grain silo in the ruins of a small village not far from the site of this battle.

It was a Philistine account of this battle, describing the capture of the ark, mentions the priest Hophni, and tells where the ark was taken, then returned to Israel.

This is the earliest known extra-biblical reference to an Old Testament event & an OT person. ^[4]

19 Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, *due to be delivered*; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and gave birth, for her labor pains came upon her.

20 And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, "Do not fear, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer, nor did she regard *it*. **21** Then she named the child [no glory] Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. **22** And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

This poor woman.

She's at full term – gets the news that her husband has just died, her father-in-law, who would then take charge of her care, has also just died, and the greatest national disaster in Jewish history has just taken place.

The grief throws her into labor, which drains her of life.

Her parting gift is to give her son a truly *icky* name – "Gloryless!"

According to other passages, it seems that not far behind the messenger that carried this bad news to Shiloh were the Philistines who attacked and destroyed the city & tabernacle. [Psalm 78:60-64; Jeremiah 7:12; 26:9]

3. The Philistines troubles with the ark Ch. 5

1 Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

Ashdod, was the capital of Philistia at the time.

It was about 30 miles SW of where they'd nabbed it at Ebenezer.

Ashdod is 3 miles inland & the most extensively excavated Philistine site.

2 When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon.

Dagon was the chief deity of the Philistines.

For many years archaeologists thought Dagon was a half fish, half human idol as would befit a maritime people like the Philistines.

But that's been almost universally rejected in light of further discovery.

Dagon was the father of Baal & was widely worshipped by peoples of the ancient Middle East.

It was a common practice in the ancient world to take the chief trophies of battle into the temple of one's patron god and set them before his/her idol as a kind of gift.

The idea was to show the power & supremacy of the victor's god over the defeated's deity.

Knowing what we do about God, this is a perfect set up for some fun!

3 And when the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there

was Dagon, fallen on its face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and set it in its place again.

During the night, the idol of Dagon fell down as though it was lying prostrate before the ark – in the position of submission & worship!

The Philistines were terribly embarrassed by this; this wasn't at all the way it was supposed to work.

So they propped Dagon back up again, asking one another if they'd felt the earthquake the night before.

⁴And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were broken off on the threshold; only Dagon's torso was left of it. ⁵Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

On the second morning, they again found the idol toppled over before the ark, but this time Dagon's head and hands were broken off, and lying at the door.

This was God's way of playing with them.

There was no way an earthquake could have done this.

This was the hand of God.

Dagon first bows down to God, then God removes his head and hands and places them neatly where all can realize someone far more powerful than they has been at work.

God removed the idol's head because beheading was the ultimate form of execution for authority.

He removed Dagon's hands to get across the idea that the idol was powerless to stop what was done to it.

So much for the ark of the covenant being a *trophy*!

And even though the message was so clear, the Philistines didn't take it to heart.

Though Dagon had been shown to be a worthless piece of junk, they continued to hallow the doorway of his temple long after.

What they ought to have done was haul that idol out & burned it and converted to Yahweh.

But they didn't – so God sent more evidence of His power.

⁶But the hand of the LORD was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and He ravaged them and struck them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory.

There's been a lot of conjecture over the years on what these tumors were.

The older view is that they were hemorrhoids and that God was both afflicting and mocking the Philistines by this plague.

But the severity of this judgment points to something more serious & most commentators now conclude these were probably the tumors that accompany the bubonic plague.

The Plague overwhelms the immune system and causes the lymph nodes to swell up to massive proportions, causing intense pain.

A bit later we'll see that mice were connected to this judgment, and we know

that the plague is carried about in the fleas that infest rats & mice.

7 And when the men of Ashdod saw how *it was*, they said, “The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is harsh toward us and Dagon our god.”

It didn't take them long to put 2 & 2 together & come up with the 4 of Yahweh's displeasure with them.

They may have defeated Israel, but they had not defeated Israel's God.

8 Therefore they sent and gathered to themselves all the lords of the Philistines, and said, “What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?” And they answered, “Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried away to Gath.” So they carried the ark of the God of Israel away.

This is just bone-headed!

Why didn't they oust Dagon & embrace Yahweh?

Instead, they figure the best way to relive the suffering of Ashdod is to send the ark to Gath, another of the 5 main Philistine cities.

I guess the ruler of Gath had missed this meeting!

9 So it was, after they had carried it away, that the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction; and He struck the men of the city, both small and great, and tumors broke out on them.

10 Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. So it was, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, “They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!”

11 So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, “Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go back to its own place, so that it does not kill us and our people.” For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. **12 And the men who did not die were stricken with the tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.**

All of this gives further weight to the idea that this is the bubonic plague, not just a bad case of hemorrhoids, which last time I checked, don't kill people.

The grand lesson from these chapters is that even when those who are supposed to be God's people get off track and lose touch with God, horribly misrepresenting Him to the world, God is not left without His *own* means of securing & guarding His glory & reputation.

Israel's faith had degenerated into little more than superstition which God refused to have any part with.

He used defeat in battle and loss of their national emblems as the means of correcting them.

And in the meantime, He used the presence of those emblems among the enemy to manifest His power.

Here's what we can learn from this –

Even when we're living less than perfect lives, blowing our testimony & witness among those we hope to see come to faith,

God is still at work in mind-blowing ways to get through to the lost.
This doesn't *excuse* us, but it ought to give us hope for the salvation of the lost,
knowing that it isn't all up to us.
Just as God was moving among the Philistines, He's moving in the lives of those
around us.
He's preparing them for the *work* of our testimony.
Be encouraged to share Him with the unbelievers around you.
You might be surprised at how your words will join to what's happening in
their lives and be used to bring them to faith.

[1] Clear eyes are seen in scripture as a sign of good health & vigor. Deut 34:7 says that though he was 120, when Moses died, his eyes were still bright.

[2] 2 Kings 21:2 Jer. 19:3

[3] Thanks to David Guzik (again) for the seed thoughts here.

[4] *Expositor's Bible Commentary* pg. 596 footnote 1