

### **“...I will cut off thine arm...”**

Two contrasting matters are brought before us in this chapter: the faithful, powerful, prayer of Hannah, and the sin of Eli's sons who brought God's service into disrepute. In the background we have a report of the young Samuel serving God truly.

Here we read of the most fearful thing that can happen to a man in this world – the removal of God's favour and active presence. Because he allowed his priest sons to do what they liked, Eli was told, through another man of God, that his days were numbered and his name would be removed from amongst those favoured by God. He was told that all would be lost. You will note God does not give Eli a second chance, nor even the opportunity for him or his sons to repent.

From this we might assume God must have warned them before this, so the warning we read of in this chapter must have been a last resort. It might be the case, but there is no evidence of God directly warning Eli or his sons before this time. We do read, though, that the whole of Israel was critical of the sons' evil ways. Eli knew of this national shame upon his house, but he did nothing substantial about it. At the very least he ought to have removed his sons from office; but, he did not.

How often modern pastors and preachers tolerate sin amongst themselves! They think maybe one day their brethren might repent and turn from their ways. And so the evil continues, often without ceasing. For Eli, the result was God's disapproval and wrath, and his own eventual shame. This can and does happen today. It is a mistaken view that God will always turn the other cheek. This is clearly not so! God is His own master and His requirements of His people do not apply to Himself.

Here we see God giving not a first warning, but a chilling final judgement. Because it was a judgement, it was sealed, and there was no way Eli or his sons could have escaped. Even if they had repented, they would still have suffered the penalty given by God. In other parts of this book, we will see God acting out his wrath suddenly and without warning, upon those who were His people. Not just upon His enemies, but upon His own children whom He loved. To God love and wrath are not opposites, but simply different aspects of His divinely holy activity.

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It should be a sobering thought for all Believers, that our God can and does inflict swift and final judgement upon His people, without any warning whatever. This is because we all KNOW how to think, speak and behave... we are without excuse. How, then, ought we to walk before God? In scripture we have the answers, and I urge readers to ponder upon these before it is too late. Because God seems to stay His hand most times does not mean we may test Him by continuing in our sins. At times, He can and does execute His judgement swiftly and without any warning.

We will see in this book (as elsewhere) that when we are called upon to 'fear' God, it means exactly that. It means to have a quaking terror of what God can do to mere mortals. I have heard many preachers try to reduce this 'fear' to a love for an indulgent human father... but, this is wrong. The fear of the Lord spoken of in scripture is an actual fear, the fear one ought to have for the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of all life; He Who holds all judgement, reward and punishment in His hands; He Who is above and beyond all of His creation; He Who can and does cut down even His own, if they earn His wrath. On that note let us read on...

### Verses 1-10

1.

"And Hannah prayed and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation.

2.

(There is) none holy as the LORD: for (there is) none beside thee: neither (is there) any rock like our God.

3.

Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let (not) arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD (is) a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

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The bows of the mighty men (are) broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength.

5.

(They that were) full have hired out themselves for bread; and (they that were) hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.

6.

The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.

7.

The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.

8.

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, (and) lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set (them) among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth (are) the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them.

9.

He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail.

10.

The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed."

Reminiscent of the Psalms, this prayer speaks of the greatness and awe-striking essence of God's Being. It points to the victory that is ours over those who are our enemies, through His power and the demise of people who despise us.

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Hannah's 'horn is exalted': the word 'horn' can have one of several meanings. As is usual, the context gives us the meaning: strength. Her strength is raised up for all to see. She attributes this strength to God, not to her own self – a lesson we can all learn. It is commonplace for Christians of substance to mouth these words, but to believe in their own powers, in their heart. They come to think that what they have is of their own making. Not so! Whatever we have is given to us by God, and not for our own luxury, either. Here Hannah is acknowledging the birth of her child to be a gift from God.

Today, folk tend to think that marital union produces a child. This is not true. What makes a child is God's will. If He decides you will have a child, then you will, whether for good or ill. He uses normal human reproductive processes to achieve this, unless He steps in and gives a child as a gift where none would otherwise be possible. In either case, it is He Who grants a child. There is no such thing, then, as the 'right to have a child'.

Another fallacy is that a child must be perfect. A child will be what it is meant to be, not what we wish it to be. That a child has nothing wrong with it is according to what God decrees. We have no more right to a healthy 'perfect' child than we have a right to have a child at all. So, the idea that a woman must fight to have a child at all costs is not scriptural, and the demand for a perfect child is also not scriptural. The point being made is the point made by Hannah – that God alone has the prerogative to give a child.

Hannah says 'my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies'. This means that she has triumphed over those who would put her down; in particular she refers to the other wife who ridiculed and scorned her for being barren. She says her triumph is directly attributable to God, who saved her. The 'salvation' spoken of in this text is not the salvation we read of in the New Testament. It simply means being saved from some problem. Hannah's problem was the constant sharp comments from Peninnah and the generally assumed notion that to be barren was a public symbol of God's denunciation.

No-one is as pure as the Lord, she says, because there is no other God. Nor is there any other source of help than He; He is the 'rock', or security, of the Jews. Before such a holy and powerful God no man can boast of himself. Only God can know what is past, present and future, and only He knows everything about Man. Therefore, only He has the right and ability to judge Man and what he does. He knew Hannah's heart and He gave to her according to His own knowledge of her and what a child would mean.

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Those who think they are 'something' are as nothing in His eyes. Even the mightiest of men find that their 'bows are broken' by Him, just by His very presence. Conversely, those who trust Him but who are feeble (e.g. poor, in bad health, unable to alter their circumstances, etc.) He will lift up. He will 'gird' them with strength – hold them close and wrap them around with might and ability. Only in trusting Him will we rise above our circumstances and prove the scorn of enemies to be wrong.

So, Hannah continues to compare those who rely on themselves to those who trust in God. People who once thought they had it all will be reduced to nothing, having to become servants in order to live, whilst those who had nothing and had no help from the rich, will be given everything by God. Barren women will have seven children and those who boasted of how many children they had will become weak and destitute. That is, if we boast of what we think we have in our own strength, God will take it all away and give it to those who rely on Him alone. However, God will often leave the rich and powerful to their own devices, so that they get more and more. Far from being a sign of His pleasure, it is a sign of His removal from them.

God will put to death whom He will. It is He Who gives, or extends, life. This is shown to us at the beginning of Genesis, when God breathed life into Adam. The term contains the meaning of the principle of life. In essence, God must literally put into our bodies the 'principle' that makes us a living being. Otherwise each of us could be born as wax dummies unable to do anything at all, being lifeless. Likewise, it is God Who decides when to remove that life principle, leading to death. Yet, so many Christians assume death is the product of illness, accident or even age. No, it is not. Death occurs because God decides to remove the life principle He placed in the person at conception.

Carrying on the theme, Hannah says that God makes a person rich or poor, makes a person well known and powerful, or lowly and without any kind of earthly power at all. So many times I have come across Christians who believe they have got to their position by their own merits. They often look down at lowlier Christians and actually say they have nothing because they are lazy, or have not worked hard enough, or are suffering because God has cast them adrift! Yes, these can certainly happen. But, mainly, a Christian's position in life is determined by God, not by himself. Sadly, he grabs what he can and forgets everyone else!

This is not what God gave the opportunities for. Those who are given much are expected to do much with it, for the good of the whole church. The rich Christian is not rich for his own gain (though he may enjoy what he has obtained), but is rich\* so that he can be used by God to help

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others. This might be to give a cash gift once in a while, or (for example) to create a business so that others might have work. The possibilities are endless and depend on how the person is led by God. (\* 'Rich' is defined as having one penny more than is needed to live reasonably).

In similar vein, beggars are made to have riches and to live amongst the richest and most powerful. This is made possible because God places people where they are for a purpose – 'the pillars of the earth' are the Lord's. This is symbolic language for what makes the world tick.

Those who are not directly in His will ultimately have no power and will live in perpetual evil, away from God, but those who are His will enjoy a close walk with God, knowing His path. The main point made in verse 9 is that human endeavour will get a man nowhere. It is all of God.

God will crush those who oppose Him (verse 10), but He will give power and authority and strength to the one who is His. This particular part of the verse might refer to Jesus Christ, though I doubt it. It can also refer to anyone who is 'anointed' (or, chosen) to act on His behalf, or it can refer to the future king of Israel chosen by God, whether Saul or David. My own choice is the middle one – anyone whose task has been allotted to him by God.

This long prayer, then, praises the Lord for His active presence in the world and in our personal lives. It shows that God's will does not necessarily coincide with the will of the most powerful in this world. Enemies of His will are crushed, and those who are normally lowly are raised up to be God's men in their time. The prayer is not just about Hannah's delight at having the mouth of Peninnah stopped. It is also, characteristically of scripture, quite prophetic, speaking of the lot of all who are His.

### Verse 11

1.

"And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest."

Hannah said this prayer after handing Samuel over to Eli for safekeeping. Then she and her husband went back home to Ramah. We are then told Samuel served God in the Temple, under

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Eli, even as a child. This might seem odd, but there have been other instances where God has had His hand on a person even from childhood. John the Baptist, for example, was said to have been filled with the Spirit from the womb. Again, this is God we are talking about – He can do anything He wishes.

### Verses 12-17

1.

“Now the sons of Eli (were) sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD.

2.

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;

3.

And he struck (it) into the pan, or kettle, or cauldron, 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.

4.

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.

5.

And (if) any man said unto him, let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and (then) take (as much) as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, (nay); but thou shalt give (it me) now: and if not, I will take (it) by force.

6.

Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.”

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The first thing to note about Eli's sons was that they were not of God. Today we would say they were not saved. Worse than that, they acted in a worthless and wicked way (they were 'sons of Belial'). Not all men who are unsaved act this way. Mostly, they are unsaved and will not enter heaven. But here we have two priests, the sons of the high priest and ruler of Israel, who are acting in the most unsavoury of ways.

It would be comforting to think their actions were the result of their unsaved character, but this is not always so. Many pastors and preachers act similarly! And not all of them act that way because they are unsaved. Vast numbers act wickedly even though they are saved! In my own lifetime I have witnessed many who are so inclined. How can this be? Partly this is due to their own pride and partly to the historical deification of pastors and preachers by those they teach. They live as though they had all-power of their own, driven by undue pride and arrogance.

We are told that when men brought animals for sacrifice, the priests sent their servants with a large three-pronged hook, to pull bits of meat out of the pots they were cooking ('seething' or boiling) in. Whatever size lump came out was the priests' portion.

The servants, though, went a step too far. They demanded raw meat to be given to them, before it was boiled. This was because the priests did not want boiled meat, but fried or baked! If anyone asked the servants to wait until the meat had boiled, they just took the meat anyway 'by force' – violently.

The servants were no better than thugs! In many ways some pastors today can be just as nasty. They demand all kinds of obedience to themselves that is not allowed by God. There are many examples – publicly recorded amounts of cash gifts, thus forcing people to raise the amounts they give; demands bordering on emotional threats to attend services (especially the prayer service); public humiliation of those who do not join in acts of 'ministry' decided upon by the pastor or deacons, such as outdoor services or 'witnessing'; raising the pay of pastors even if those they minister to are lowly paid or unemployed; demanding total and unquestioning obedience, and much more. These are all kinds of 'priestly thuggery' bringing God's word and work into disrepute.

As the text says, the 'sins of the young men was very great'. Look, friends, at what you demand and say. Is what you want required by God? Really? Or, is it of self? God allows us to make very few demands on others. The only demands we may make are on behalf of God. Nothing can be demanded for ourselves. The effect of the way the priests behaved was to denigrate the

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offering (or worship) of the Lord.

How many local pastors and preachers have this effect on the people of God? Unfortunately, too many. A huge number of pastors seem to think they are a law unto themselves. They allow no comment or question, nor will they allow 'outside interference', e.g. those not in their local church who question their behaviour or teachings. Though every local church pastor should act for his own fellow believers, it does not mean a pastor is above questioning, comment, or rebuke, by other Believers. Note how Paul sent letters of rebuke to pastors?

In stark contrast, we are given a picture of the child-priest, Samuel, ministering in purity and holiness...

### Verse 18-21

1.

“But Samuel ministered before the LORD, (being) a child, girded with a linen ephod.

2.

Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought (it) to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

3.

And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The LORD give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home.

4.

And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD.”

This touching section of the chapter is very human. Can you imagine the small child, Samuel, in the Lord's service in the Temple, wearing a tiny linen ephod on his chest? This was a cloth

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version of the metal one worn by Eli (and later by himself). Eli's was encrusted with precious and semi-precious jewels representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Samuel, being but a child and a kind of infant-priest, wore a lesser one. He probably did the small tasks in the Temple, including looking after the aged Eli.

His mother had contact with him, at least yearly, if not more often. Every year she made him a small coat, getting a bit bigger every year to allow for growth. When she and Elkanah came to Shiloh, Samuel would have his new coat.

For her faithful giving of the child back to God, God compensated her by giving her another five children! (You will note from the text that these other conceptions, too, were directly due to God's intervention). She could now easily hold up her head amongst other women! And whilst she had these other five, Samuel's spiritual growth was becoming noticed by the people.

### Verses 22-25

1.

"Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled (at) the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

2.

And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? For I hear of your evil dealings by all this people.

3.

Nay, my sons; for (it is) no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD'S people to transgress.

4.

If any man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them."

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Eli was basically a good man, but he was unable to maintain order in his own family. Of more import, was that he could not keep order in God's house and service. His sons even slept with women who 'assembled' at the tabernacle of the congregation. That is, these women were supposed to be serving at the Temple! They ministered at the sacred tent or tabernacle of Jehovah at feast times. Yet, here they were, acting like the prostitute 'virgins' found in pagan temples.

Eli told his sons their sin was against God and the people, and they caused others to sin, even inside the Temple grounds. If they were offending other men, then a human judge could defend them, but, as they were sinning against God Himself, they had no defence. Yet, they refused to listen, because they knew they were doomed anyway. It was a case of 'tomorrow we die so let us do whatever we like'! Modern Christians can act this way.

During the Toronto Blessing horror, many 'pastors' and preachers committed all kinds of sinful acts, including sexual ones, even in church buildings. They led thousands astray. God has already condemned them for this, yet almost none have repented. Instead, they either continue as they did before, or they have kept quiet hoping that everyone will forget. Well, people might forget, but the Lord does not, so they stand condemned. Sin in anyone will always be found out. But, when a pastor or other public minister leads others astray, God is very, very angry. The text continues by contrasting Samuel with these evil men.

### Verse 26

1.

"And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men."

What a contrast! Grown men misled many and drew them into sin. They grossly abused their priestly role. Yet, here was a mere child, outshining them at every turn. It makes one wonder why they did not attempt to kill him. The Lord must have stayed their hands. Samuel, though a child, must have been a spiritual giant, for God saw it and approved, as did all the Israelite people.

### Verses 27-36

1.

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“And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said him, Thus saith the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh’s house?

2.

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 unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel?

3.

Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at my offering, which I have commanded (in my) habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?

4.

Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed (that) thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

5.

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.

6.

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.

7.

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.

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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.

9.

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 he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.

10.

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 priest's offices, that I may eat a piece of bread."

Eli tried to reason with his sons when he ought to have removed them from office. God does not wait for us to do what is right, for His judgements are yea and amen. Thus, He sent a 'man of God' (a prophet) to Eli to pronounce His judgement upon him for allowing his sons to be so unruly. Today, we must remember that we have no duty or mandate to negotiate with, or debate, sin and sinners. Sin is to be condemned and cast away from our midst and minds.

The prophet caused Eli to remember that God had called his family to serve Him. The call went back to the time of the captivity of Israel in Egypt, when Eli's forefather was chosen to be high priest over the Hebrews. Eli knew the score. He knew what was expected of priests of the Living God. So, God asked Eli, "*Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice?*" Why do you kick out at what I have given you to do in my own Temple? Why do you glorify your sons instead of me and take the best meat from the sacrifices for yourselves?

Though Eli chided his sons, he ought instead to have thrown them out. Maybe he did not personally eat the best meats, but by his slowness to act, he was party to their evils. This text shows us how we ought to publicly act when men do evil in God's name, otherwise we condone what they do. Silence is no excuse, nor a protection from God's wrath.

Because of Eli's lack of proper guidance and action, God told him his father's house (family) would no longer hold perpetual tenancy of the high priestly office. The earlier promise to Eli's

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family was now removed far from God, for He will only praise and glorify those who praise and glorify Him. Those who 'despise' (treat despicably, with disdain, or contempt) God will themselves be treated as of 'little account', as someone insignificant, cursed and dishonoured. We ought to note this is how God sees all of us: if we allow evil to be acted out in His House, then we are just as culpable as the one who does the evil.

So, if a pastor or other believer is allowed to teach wrongly, or act badly, or if we allow wrong doctrine to be taught, or any other thing against God's will and word, then we will also be guilty and counted as worthless and the recipient of God's curse. We MUST respond to evil swiftly and decisively. We cannot stand by or sit on the fence. To act quickly against evil means to be a soldier at heart, ready to oppose and fight at a moment's notice. When those who enact evil do not repent or stop what they do, after counsel, then we must step in and do whatever is required, or reap God's wrath.

God then warned Eli of a further judgement that would affect his whole family, for the rest of this world's life. No man in his family, from that time on, would live to old age, but would die young! We should remember, then, that God can judge and punish us when we are still on this earth. He can also add to His judgement, by inflicting extra punishments, not just on us personally, but also on our family for generations to come\*. This is how we all are conceived in sin in the first place – due to the fall of Adam and Eve. (\*This is NOT 'generational curses', but specifically inflicted by God).

We cannot trifle with God or deal improperly with His word or His commands. Nor may we wrongly use our office or time. To do so is to invite His wrath and earthly punishment, not just on ourselves but also on our children and their children's children. God's holiness will be tampered with, because an 'enemy' (or, 'hard oppressor') would occupy His Temple. This might have been a reference to the taking of the Ark of God to the Philistine's pagan temple.

Eli's two sons would die, both on the same day. Then God would replace them and Eli with another high priest (Samuel), who, along with his family, would be praised by God forever. Samuel would receive many blessings for his coming faithfulness. The phrase 'before mine anointed' is qualified by the words 'for ever'. Without the qualification the words could have meant that Samuel would be honoured by the future kings of Israel. But, because of the qualification 'for ever', the phrase is more likely to mean honoured by Jesus Christ, as the word 'anointed' can signify in the Hebrew.

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To emphasise the fate of Eli's family, God then says they would be destitute and would need to subject themselves to Samuel (as yet not named to Eli as successor) in order to survive.

So it was that Eli, last-but-one of a long line of high priest Judges, and his sons, also of the familial priesthood, were suddenly to be cast down by God for their evil doing. What was to have been their perpetual praise became their nightmare, as God turned His back on the entire family of Eli. Not only that, but He pronounced a curse on every male ever to be born to Eli's lineage, so that they would all die in their youth. I ask you – is it worth defying our Almighty and most holy God? The answer should be obvious!

Though the answer is obvious, and Christians would readily affirm it, most of us nevertheless do deny God, by acting against His will and word! That is why many of us come to know the coldness of a life without His presence, giving us misery instead of grace. Many manufacture His presence by fooling themselves that He is still with them; charismatics do this all the time! May we all learn from such texts as these, so that we might retain whatever praise and honour the Lord cares to give us.

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