–Save This Page as a PDF–

‘Eli’s Wicked Sons
First Samuel 2: 12-17

‘Eli’s wicked sons DIG: How did ‘Eli’s sons corrupt their priestly office? What were the three ways in which the sons of ‘Eli treated offerings made to YHVH with contempt? To whom does Paul compare them? What did Yeshua say about them?

REFLECT: How should the congregations of God treat their spiritual leaders who fall? Under what conditions should they be restored? Fired? Prosecuted? Why do you think that ADONAI takes the responsibility of leadership so seriously?

The sin of these young men was very great in YHVH’s view.

The human reason for the birth of **Samuel** has been told (**to see link click Ag – The Birth and Dedication of Samuel**). **He** came in response to a godly mother’s prayer (see **Aj – Hannah’s Prayer**). Now it is important for us to see the divine reason. The book of **Judges** asserts: **In those days Isra’el had no king, and everyone did as they saw fit (Judges 21:25).** This was also true of **the priests**. **‘Eli**, although apparently a moral **man**, had lost control of **his sons**.[65] **The house of ‘Eli** is dealt with in three sections of the narrative. First, here, we see the ruthless and cynical use of **priestly** power by **‘Eli’s** wicked **sons, Hophni** and **Phinehas**. Secondly, **‘Eli himself** is seen as inept, but not evil. **He** is still a man of responsible faith (see **At – ‘Eli’s Ineffective Rebuke of His Sons**). The third section narrates the divine decree that **the house of ‘Eli** would be replaced by a different **priestly** house. The decree is in the mouth of an unnamed **man of God** (see **Au – God’s Rejection of ‘Eli’s House**).[66]



The introduction of **‘Eli’s sons** leave little to the imagination, **they were** sons of *beliyya’al* **who did not know YHVH (2:12).** This is a Hebrew term describing *worthless people* who openly practiced lawlessness **(Deuteronomy 13:13; Judges 19:22; First Samuel 25:25; Proverbs 16:27)**. In **Second Corinthians 6:15**, **Paul** uses **Belial** as a synonym for **Satan**, so **they** were sons of **the evil one**. Spiritually ignorant of **God’s** saving grace, and caring nothing for the demands of **His** holiness, **they** were a disgrace to **the priesthood**. **Yeshua** said to the wicked religious leaders of **His** day: **You are of your father the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires (John 8:44).** What a crisis it was for **Isra’el** that such men were **its** spiritual leaders. No wonder **Isra’el’s** spiritual life had been represented by **Hannah’s** barren womb (see **Ai – The Barren Wife**)!

The Torah provided that **the priests** serving at the Tabernacle would receive **their** food from **the sacrifices** brought by **the people**. While **the priests** were allowed **the breast and the thigh** of **the Peace Offering (Leviticus 7:28-34** and **Deuteronomy 18:3)**, **‘Eli’s sons** demanded **their** own form of potluck, sending **their servant** to randomly take **meat** from the family pots.[67] While **the animal was still boiling, the servant would stick a three-pronged fork into the pot and demand whatever it brought up be given to them. Hophni** and **Phinehas** took much more than the Torah allotted to **them**. **All the Israelites who came to worship at Shiloh** (see **Ae – The Tabernacle at Shiloh**) **were** robbed of **their Peace Offerings (2:13-14 NLT)**, but as if that weren’t enough, **the** wicked **priests** were depriving **YHVH** of ***His*** portion of **the sacrifice** as well.[68]

This rare description of worship in Canaan before the monarchy reveals that **the worshippers** knew that **the fat** of the sacrifice had to be **burned** first **(Leviticus 7:28-34)**, because it belonged to **YHVH (Leviticus 17:6** and **18:17)** as **a**

pleasing aroma to **Him (Leviticus 3:5).** However, **Hophni** and **Phinehas’ servant would actually come before the fat had been burned** on the bronze altar **and say to the man who was sacrificing, “Give the priest meat he can roast; because he doesn’t want your meat boiled, only raw” (2:15).** Torah required that **the meat** be **boiled**, but **they** wanted **the meat** to be **roasted**.

Here we have the extraordinary situation where **the priest**, who was supposed to know the Torah, acted in a way that even shocked an ordinary **worshipper**. Dissatisfied with what should have been adequate provisions, **‘Eli’s** wicked **sons** intimated **the man who was sacrificing** into allowing **them** to take a random selection of **meat,** whether **they** were entitled to **it** or not. Protest was useless, and resistance was met with force. **If the worshipper** answered: **Let the fat be burned first, then take as much as you want**, which was generous beyond what the Torah demanded. **They would** say: **No, give it to me now, or I’ll take it by force (2:16)**.[69] **Those** two ungodly gangsters wanted **their** portion even before **God** received what was rightfully **His**.

Devout **Israelites** who came to sacrifice before **the LORD** not only witnessed **the priest’s** blasphemous attitude toward **their** offerings, but also suffered the theft of what **God** had allotted for **themselves** and **their** families.[70] **The sin of these young men was very great in YHVH’s view, because they treated offerings made to YHVH with contempt** in three ways **(2:17).** First, **they** robbed **the people** of **their** share of **the Peace Offerings** (see the commentary on **Leviticus Ak – The Peace Offerings: At Peace with God**); secondly, **they** demanded **the meat** before **the fat** was **burned** on the bronze altar: and thirdly, **they roasted the meat** instead of **boiling it**. Therefore, like **their** post exilic counterparts **(Malachi 1:6-14), ‘Eli’s** wicked **sons** despised **ADONAI’s offerings**. Such conduct, especially being practiced by **the priesthood**, could only lead to disaster, as seen in **Korah’s rebellion** (see the commentary on **Numbers Cr – The Response of God**).[71]

*Dear Heavenly Father, thank **You** so much for being a **righteous** and pure heavenly **Father**. **Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne. Lovingkindness and truth go before You. (Psalms 89:14). You** are holy, and hate evil **(Psalms 97:10; Proverbs 8:13)**. It is such a comfort to know that not only are **You** a **God** of **steadfast love (Psalms 63:3), You** also are pure, and reign as King in a just and **righteous** way. No one can ever hide their sin from **You,** for **God** sees the heart of each person to discern the attitude behind each*

action. ***But ADONAI said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or his stature, because I have already refused him. For He does not see a man as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but ADONAI looks into the heart” (First Samuel 16:7).***

Even when a good deed is done, ***God*** *evaluates the action by the heart attitude.* ***Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in Your name, and drive out demons in Your name, and perform many miracles in Your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Get away from Me, you workers of lawlessness’ (Matthew 7:21-23)!*** *The applause of men for a deed done that looked good but was really from a selfish heart, is shorter in time than the blink of any eye. How much better and wiser it is to all for the glory of* ***God****! In* ***Messiah Yeshua’s*** *holy* ***Name*** *and power of* ***His*** *resurrection. Amen*