

Eli the Priest

Listed Scriptures

1 Sam 1-4; Deut 6:1-9; Prov 4; Ex 28-29; Lev 3

Lesson Aim

- 1) To enable students to recognize and value the noble status God has given us.
- 2) To realize the importance of establishing a family altar and religious education.
- 3) To realize the importance of sustaining our faith throughout our entire lives.

Memory Verse

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." (Prov 22:6)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 56-60

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



Since the fall of man, man could no longer come directly before God. Thus in the Old Testament God set up a system of priests who stood in the gap between God and man. At Sinai God designated Aaron, his sons and his descendants as priests. The priests were chosen and set apart for God's service. They were the people's representatives before God, and as such were required to live lives worthy of their office. Being holy formed the indispensable condition of approach to God. Hence in the qualifications necessary for the priestly office, bodily defect or infirmity were not allowed. At the same time they had to be spiritually blameless and sanctified in heart.

The chief, or high priest supervised the priests and Levites. Only a direct descen-

dant of Aaron could become a high priest. They supervised sin offerings (Lev 4), ascertained the will of God by the Urim and Thummim (Num 27:21; Neh 7:65) and each year went into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people (Lev 16). The Levites served as assistants to the priests.

W A R M U P



How do you generally deal with problems? Do you deal with them immediately, procrastinate till the last minute or ignore them? What would the consequences be for each response?

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

The Failure of Eli

The Book of First Samuel is a book of great beginnings and tragic endings. Eli means Jehovah is high or My God. He belonged to the tribe of Levi and must have certainly begun his life in close communication with God. For years he acted as a judge and high priest in Israel. But despite his good beginning, his life ended in ignominy. In his old age instead of receiving a reward for his many years of service, Eli received a curse. His tragic end and weaknesses in character serve as warnings for us today.



Ao Eli Failed Spiritually

During this period of Israel's history a spiritual famine had swept across the land (Amos 8:11) and the lamp of God was almost distinguished. 1 Samuel 3:1 says, "And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation." Without God's word the people cast off restraint and the society became corrupt (Prov 29:18). Amidst the darkness was the high priest Eli. He was the mediator between God and man but he was a poor spiritual leader whose weaknesses led to the decline of the nation's faith.

a. **Spiritual eyesight dimmed**

The Bible tells us that Eli was advanced in age. Eli not only aged physically, but he had also allowed himself to age spiritually. 2 Samuel 3:2 says Eli's eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see. Not only had his physical eyesight dimmed but his spiritual eyesight had declined also. A person who has poor spiritual eyesight is a person who lacks spiritual discernment. He mistook Hannah who was praying earnestly as being drunk. Although he was a priest and a judge, he lacked the ability to judge what was right and wrong. His priorities and values were turned upside down and he neglected the weightier matters of God. As a result Eli was like a blind man leading the blind (Mt 15:14). 2 Corinthians 4:16 exhorts us that "although our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day." We cannot allow ourselves to disintegrate spiritually as we get older, but to be "transformed by the renewing of our mind, that we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom 12:2).

b. **Eli's heart was distant from God**

1 Samuel 3:1 tells us that God's words were rare and visions were infrequent. Although Eli was the priest, God did not reveal Himself to him as Eli's heart had drifted far from God. God spoke to the boy Samuel instead. Although Samuel was merely 12 years old at the time, he had a pure heart, served daily in the temple and grew in the presence of God. Consequently, God constantly appeared to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of God (3:21). In life, we will only share our innermost secrets with the people closest to us. God revealed to Abraham what He planned to do to the cities Sodom and Gomorrah because Abraham was a friend of God (Gen 18:16-18). By the same token, God will abide with us and speak to us through His Spirit and His words only when we obey His will and draw close to Him.

Reflection:

1. One of the common weaknesses among believers is that the longer we believe in God, the less dynamic our faith becomes. How can we counteract "spiritual aging"?
2. How does the faith of Eli and Samuel differ?
3. How can we gauge ourselves to ensure a close relationship with God?



B. Eli failed as a Priest

a. He allowed the priesthood to fall into disrepute

Eli was a priest and a judge (1 Sam 4:18). He was responsible for teaching the laws to the people, executing judgement and offering sacrifices on behalf of the people. God reminded Eli how his lineage had been especially chosen to serve God: "Did I not clearly reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? Did I not choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to offer upon My altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod before Me? And did I not give to the house of your father all the offerings of the children of Israel made by fire?" (1 Sam 2:27-28). Unfortunately, Eli did not live up to this role. He did not treasure the priesthood, or maintain its sanctity. On one occasion, Eli saw Hannah praying in the temple, and mistook her for being drunk. This tells us that when people came to offer sacrifices, drunkenness was probably a common occurrence, for the people had no regard for the temple of God. As a priest, he had the responsibility to instruct the people about fearing God and how to behave in the temple (Num 3:38). Sadly, Eli failed to establish any respect for the priesthood and permitted sin and corruption to dwell within.

b. He did not set his heart right before God

Although Eli had served many years as a priest, his heart was not right before God. One day the Lord sent a man of God to rebuke Eli saying, "Thus the Lord has said, 'Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?'" (1 Sam 2:27-29). Although Eli did not personally take the meat from the offering pot, he condoned it and enjoyed the choicest parts along with his two sons. He misused his authority and status to "fatten himself." He appeared to be godly and devout while inside he was full of selfish gain. While we serve God, we need to examine our inner heart. We have to set our hearts right before God otherwise our service will be fruitless and we will be rejected by God.

c. He did not choose a good successor

Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, whom Eli appointed as priests. Although they were priests the Bible describes them as "corrupt men who had no regard of the Lord" (1 Sam 2:12). They mistreated the people of God, treated the offering of God with contempt and their sins were great before

God (1 Sam 2:12-17). In order for the work of God to continue to prosper it is important to cultivate successors and future pillars of the church (Lk 10:2). In the Bible, there are many great leaders who trained up successors to continue with the work. Moses trained Joshua (Ex 33:11), Elijah trained Elisha (1 Kgs 19:16, 19-21), the Lord Jesus trained the 12 disciples, and Paul trained the young Timothy. Since Eli failed to train his sons, God personally appointed the young Samuel as the prophet instead. As the future pillars and workers of the church, we should recognize the responsibility that will be placed upon us and prepare ourselves to receive the baton for the glory of God.

Reflection:

1. How did Eli fail as a priest?
2. When Eli saw corruption and sin infiltrating the temple, he did not do anything about it. What should we do if we see sin and weakness among the brothers and sisters we know?
3. How have we prepared ourselves to receive the baton as future pillars of the church?



C. Eli failed as a Parent

a. Eli's sons showed contempt towards God

Eli had the great responsibility to oversee all of the worship in Israel. But in the process he neglected the responsibilities in his own home. Although Eli's two sons were raised in a priestly family, their conduct was worse than the gentiles. Children are an inheritance from God and parents have the duty to bring their children up in the faith. What was the result of Eli's negligence?

- i. Hophni and Phinehas were priests. Their responsibilities were to take care of all the service in the tent of meeting, yet they failed in their priestly duties (Num 18:4).
- ii. They treated the offering of the Lord with contempt (1 Sam 2:13-17; Mal 1:7-8). They did not follow the law when taking the meat (Lev 7:31-34; Deut 18:3-5). According to the law, if the people made an offering of an ox or sheep, the parts that were given to the priests were the shoulder, the two cheeks and the stomach. For a peace offering, the priests were given the breast and the right thigh of the offering. Eli's two sons however, took whatever they wanted. They would send their servants who thrust a three-pronged fork into the pot and took whatever the fork brought up. According to the law, the priests had to offer the fat of the

animal. The Book of Leviticus 3:3-5 tells us that the fat covering the entrails, the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver had to be burned so that the aroma can be pleasing to the Lord. The fat was considered the best part of the animal which was offered to God, but Eli's sons robbed God of the best. They took the meat even before they were offered to God on the altar and before the fat was burned off (Lev 3:3-5). Such sin is great in the sight of God. When the man who was sacrificing refused to give the priest's servants the meat because the fat had not yet been burnt off, they would not listen. They demanded to have it immediately and they took it by force (1 Sam 2:16).

iii. Eli's sons also committed great sin by lying with the women who served at the entrance of the tent of meeting (1 Sam 22-23; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 18-20).

b. Eli failed to take severe disciplinary measures

When Eli found out about his sons' wicked deeds, all Eli did was to mildly reason with his sons saying, "Why do you do such things?" The cold and callous hearts of his sons were no longer able to hearken to such weak protests. What Eli failed to do was take severe measures to punish them or stop them from serving God. Sometimes severe punishment is necessary to purge sin. Eli did not realize that sparing his sons from punishment meant condemning their souls (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:14). Although severe punishment may bring temporary pain and suffering, it reaps peaceful fruits of righteousness (Heb 12:11).

c. Eli loved his sons more than God

Eli was twice warned that judgement would overtake him and his sons, but he did not take any action because he dearly loved his sons. Eli did no more than rebuke them. He did not even strip them of their priesthood. So God rebuked Eli saying, "You honor your sons above me" (1 Sam 2:29). Eli was not willing to stand up for the truth and he had become ineffective as a parent as well as a priest. As a result God took the necessary disciplinary action that Eli would not.

Reflection:

1. What sins did Eli's sons commit?
2. How did Eli fail in disciplining his sons?
3. What is the difference between spoiling our children and loving our children?



Part 2

The Consequences of Eli's Failure

Ao Affected the People of God

Due to Eli's passivity and his sons' wicked deeds, the faith of the Israelites suffered greatly. Their conduct caused the people to despise the priesthood and to lose faith and hope in God. The devout that came to offer sacrifices were sorrowful at the scene. Those who had lost a God-fearing heart "abhorred the offering of the Lord" and had no regard for it (1 Sam 2:24). The wicked and lawless people had an excuse to commit greater sins. All kinds of irreverent activities, such as drunkenness and sexual immorality pervaded. The people did not experience the power and presence of God because the word of God was rare. Truly these were times of spiritual darkness and decline. All this was because Eli chose not to confront the situation. By giving in to their wicked actions, Eli let his sons ruin their own lives and the faith and lives of the Israelite nation (Mt 18:6-7).

Bo His family Was Cursed

Because of their sins, God sent a prophet to announce judgement upon Eli and his house. The prophet outlined a series of tragic events that would occur.

- a. There shall not be an old man in his house forever (1 Sam 2:31-33). All will die early.
- b. Both his two sons will die on the same day (1 Sam 2:34).
- c. Eli's family line will lose the priesthood (1 Sam 2:36).
- d. God will punish Eli's house forever because his sons were blaspheming God and Eli did not restrain them (1 Sam 3:13).
- e. Sins will never be forgiven by sacrifice or offering (1 Sam 3:14).

Because of Eli and his sons' disregard for God, God was to completely wipe them out. God would raise up a faithful priest to take their place, one who would do according to what is in God's heart and mind. This prophecy was fulfilled in King Solomon's time when Solomon expelled Abiathar— the last priest from Eli's household— from being priest to the Lord (1 Kgs 2:26-27). Let us therefore take heed to our words and deeds as Hebrew 4:13 cautions us, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."



C The Kingdom of God is Shamed

Because of the failed priesthood, the sins of the people increased. They despised God and had no restraint (Prov 29:18). Consequently, when the people went out to fight against the Philistines, God did not abide with them. Many fell in the hands of the enemies and the ark of the covenant was captured so that disgrace fell on the kingdom of Israel (1 Sam 4:1-11; 21-22). A Christian's conduct not only affects him or her personally, but also the glory of the church. We must resolve to walk in God's way so that the kingdom of God can be glorified. The following testimony serves as a good reminder for us. One truthseeker was invited to come to church. When he got there he recognized a brother who was a gambler at the casino he frequented. The truthseeker commented that the behavior of the brother was far worse than some non-believers he knew, and if the church consisted of such people, he would be better off not coming.

Reflection:

1. Share an experience where your actions negatively affected others. What did you learn from that experience?
2. Do our speech and conduct enable others to see Jesus Christ in us?
3. Do godly parents always produce godly children? Explain.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Know the Condition of Our Faith

From our study today, we have learned that Eli was not altogether a bad or wicked person. In fact he comes across as a very mild priest. Eli's weakness was his growing complacency and lack of sensitivity to sin. Although he was a judge, he could not discern between right and wrong and he valued familial relationships more than God and His people. Eli is a good reminder for us especially as the Day of the Lord draws near, to examine the con-

dition of our faith. Most of us were baptized as infants. Over the years, we have come with our parents to attend services and RE classes. We are well acquainted with many of the Biblical stories and characters and are well grounded in our church doctrines and teachings. Despite all this however we need to ask ourselves, "Do I truly know and believe in God?" In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul exhorts the believers to, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? -unless indeed you are disqualified."

In the following survey, check the box or circle the answer that most applies to you. As you evaluate yourself, look at yourself objectively and honestly. Try to see yourself as you are now and not what you hope to be in the future. Sometimes seeing ourselves and discovering our faults and weaknesses is a hard process and there are times we don't like to face the truth. But by seeing ourselves clearly we can make improvements, turn back to God and be healed (Is 6:10).

Questions (circle one of the following):

1. a. I am a bro/sis.
b. I am in high school / college / working.
c. My entire family are believers / my parents are non-believers/I am the only believer / other (please specify)
2. On average I have attended services (not including RE classes) at least throughout the entire year (Check a box)
0 times
Once
Twice
Three times
More than 4 times
Once a week
3. I attend church services because
I want to listen to the truth
I want to catch up with friends
My parents insist that I go
It's a habit
Others (please specify)

4. The reasons why I do not / cannot go is because I... (Select at least one answer and three at the most. List your answers in the order of 1,2,3.)
 Have classes
 Find services boring
 Live too far from church
 Prefer to watch TV and be with friends
 Was offended by someone in church
 Others (please specify)
5. This year...
 I am implementing a plan on reading the Bible
 I have a plan but have yet to implement it
 I read the Bible often but have no plan
 I read the Bible now and then
 I rarely read the Bible
 I have never read the Bible at home
6. During the week, I read the Bible....
 Every day
 3-4 times a week
 Seldom
 Never
7. My knowledge of the Bible is
 Very good
 Good
 Fair
 Poor
8. What is the current state of your prayers?
 I receive much strength from prayer
 I get distracted easily
 I recognize the importance of prayer, but I constantly feel weak in prayer
 I feel tired during prayer
 I dislike prayer
9. How have you contributed to the holy work?
 I have a specific responsibility (please specify, then go to Q10)
 I often help when there is a need (go to Q10)
 I sometimes help out

- I rarely take part in holy work (skip Q10, go to Q11)
 I have never taken part in holy work (skip Q10, go to Q11)

10. How do you feel when you are involved in the holy work?
 I feel it's very meaningful
 I learn many things
 I feel weighed down by all the responsibilities
 Others (please specify)
11. I rarely or have never taken part in holy work because....
 I've been too busy with homework
 I don't have the capabilities
 It takes too much of my time
 I don't know where to start
 I have no interest
 My parents have discouraged me from taking part
 Others (please specify)
12. When I feel low, I usually....
 Call up a good friend and talk it over with him/her
 Sleep
 Exercise, or take a walk
 Pray
 Others (please specify)
13. The things I value most are ...(List your 1st, 2nd, 3rd choices)
 Education
 Money
 Faith
 Family
 Friends
 Health
14. Aside from school, the things I devote most time to are.... (List your 1st, 2nd and 3rd choices)
 Listening to music
 Reading books
 Exercising
 Hanging out with friends
 Services and church work
 Others (please specify)

15. The times for Student Spiritual Convocation and SAT classes conflict. My choice would be to...
- Attend Spiritual Convocation (state reason)
 - Attend SAT classes – (state reason)
16. Do your classmates know that you are a Christian?
- They all know
 - Some know
 - They don't know (state reason)
17. Usually, I am...
- More active at school than at church (state reason)
 - More active in church than at school (state reason)
 - More or less the same at school and at church
 - Not active in either
18. How often do you preach?
- Often
 - Sometimes
 - Rarely
 - Never
19. The difficulty about evangelizing to others is
- The fear of rejection
 - The fear of getting laughed at
 - Lack of knowledge
 - Lack of conviction of the truth
 - Others (please specify)
20. The greatest benefit of believing in the Lord Jesus is...
- To be able to be saved and have eternal life
 - To have peace and trust
 - To have higher morality
 - Have not given it much thought
 - Others (please specify)
21. What is your attitude to your faith at this time?
- I strive hard
 - I have not striven hard enough

I have neglected my faith
I can do without it

Analysis and Discussion:

Q. 2-4

The level of church attendance cannot be the sole standard to determine a person's faith. However, it is one way to gauge whether our faith is of importance in our lives. When God is given top priority, we will schedule our time so that we are free to attend services and participate in holy work no matter how busy we are. We have to be watchful that we do not "neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some" (Heb 10:25). If we do not attend services for a long period of time because of our busy schedule, or the fact that someone has offended us, we will stray further and further away from God.

Q. 5-7

Share your own personal experiences and testimonies on reading the Bible. Mention about the benefits and rewards of placing God's word in our hearts (Ps 119; Hos 4:6; 14).

Q. 8

Encourage students to form prayer teams and have them pray together (Dan 2:17-18). Through prayer meetings, students can learn about the needs of others, and weaker students can find support and strength through group prayers.

Q. 9-11

At this age, students should be encouraged to learn how to serve God and participate in the holy work (C.f. 1 Cor 15:58; Rev 14:13; Jn 4:34). Suggest ways for students to start getting involved. Provide basic guidelines, correct principles and concepts of doing holy work. For students who are already active in church work, and have expressed that they are burdened with too much church work, teachers should help students evaluate whether the cause is due to poor time management or taking on too many responsibilities.

Q. 12

There are various ways to deal with spiritual lows. Share your own personal experiences and testimonies (Cf 1 Sam 1:10, 15; Dan 2:17-18).

Q. 13-15

Our choices reflect our values. Our choices determine where we place our heart, time, and effort. From the Bible we can see that the choices made by cer-

tain people reflected what was most important to them. For example, the Lord Jesus' choice (Lk 4:1-12); Joshua's choice (Josh 24:14-15); Paul's choice (Phil 3:7-8). Ask students to look again at their answers and have them question themselves why they have made such choices and explain what the Bible says about these choices (C.f. Mt 6:19-21, 24-34, 1 Jn 2:15-17).

Q.16-19

Encourage students to preach the word of God wherever they go (1 Cor 9:16, 17). They should be reminded that the most effective form of preaching is not so much what is being said but what is demonstrated in daily life. You can also share your own experiences on personal evangelism (C.f. Phil 2:15,16, 1 Pet 3:15-16).

Q.20

Remind students that our lives in this world are short and temporary. Students may not yet fully realize the brevity of life, but they need to be reminded of who they are and their purpose here on earth. Philippians 3:20 tells us that we are citizens of the commonwealth in heaven (C.f. Eph 2:19), and our goal in life is to enter heaven (C.f. 1 Cor 15:19).

Q.21

"The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently" (Lk 16:16). From this verse, we learn that only those who strive can enter the kingdom of heaven (C.f. Lk 13:24). Those who enter it violently are those who make the utmost effort in denying themselves and changing their ways to conform to God's will.

REFLECTION & PRAYER



Like us, Eli had his merits and weaknesses. Unfortunately, Eli did nothing to change his weaknesses and that of his sons. He responded to them mildly, but took no further action and was thus punished by God. Let us examine our faith, mend our ways and rise from our complacency.

Lesson 13

Review

Lesson Aim

- 1) To learn from the merits of biblical characters and take warning from their failures.
- 2) To learn that we have to undergo a series of steps of transformation before reaching salvation.

R E V I E W

In this quarter we have looked into characters that represent the course of our spiritual life— from the time of our conversion when we take our first step of faith to maturation. Our salvation does not terminate with rebirth for we have a whole life ahead of us. Throughout our lives, we need to ensure spiritual growth, to pursue after transformation and newness in Christ. This also means purging ourselves from the ways of the world, old habits, and unbiblical concepts. With constant renewal, we will achieve maturation. We will bear fruits of peace, joy and harmony, even in old age. Such a life will not only bring blessings to the household of God but ensures our future salvation.

Lesson 1: Abraham

1. What is faith?

The body of truth which constitutes the whole Christian message (Jude 3).

A belief in the Lord Jesus and His redemptive plan.

Faith encompasses a complete confidence and trust in God.

Faith is believing every single word and promise that is written in the Bible about what God is, what He has done, is doing and will do for His saints.

2. How did Abraham manifest his faith when God called him from Ur?

He departed from Ur not knowing where he was to go.

He had to travel a long distance.