

1 Samuel 2

- Samuel opened his first book with a brief look at his family origins
 - He was born to a woman who promised to give him away in service to the Lord
 - And since the Lord was the One Who made it possible for Samuel to be born, we know this was the Lord's intention
 - Samuel is going to be a servant of the Lord
 - He is the son of a priest, so he's qualified to serve according to the Law
 - But his family is not the family we would expect to produce a child to lead Israel's priesthood
 - Nor is he likely to receive the favor of the existing priesthood
 - Since Eli already has sons to serve in the temple
 - So how will the Lord bring Samuel into a position of service given he lacks the proper pedigree?
- This question hints at important themes developing in this chapter
 - First, God will remove those who fail to seek Him in faith and obedience
 - Those who serve Him in selfish desire and pursuit will be thrown down
 - We remember the early chapters of this book are set in the times of the Judges
 - A time when men did what was right in their own eyes
 - Secondly, the Lord will raise up unlikely men to fill the void left by the departure of the expected leaders
 - Corrupt men will not stand no matter their pedigree
 - And the one upon whom God places His seal will rise
 - The content of chapter 2 is arranged in a very structured manner to reinforce these points

- We've already seen the opening of the chapter begin with a song that spoke of God defending the weak and frustrating the strength of men
- And our next section is framed by bookends that repeat this theme in a new way

[1Sam. 2:11](#) Then Elkanah went to his home at Ramah. But the boy ministered to the LORD before Eli the priest.

[1Sam. 2:12](#) Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the LORD

[1Sam. 2:13](#) and the custom of the priests with the people. When any man was offering a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand.

[1Sam. 2:14](#) Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.

[1Sam. 2:15](#) Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest meat for roasting, as he will not take boiled meat from you, only raw."

[1Sam. 2:16](#) If the man said to him, "They must surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as you desire," then he would say, "No, but you shall give it to me now; and if not, I will take it by force."

[1Sam. 2:17](#) Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the LORD.

[1Sam. 2:18](#) Now Samuel was ministering before the LORD, as a boy wearing a linen ephod.

- Notice how this section opens in v.11
 - The boy, Samuel, is ministering to the Lord before Eli the priest
 - To minister simply means to serve
 - So Samuel is serving the Lord even as Eli is priest
 - The statement is eye opening, since we would expect the appointed high priest to do the serving
 - But there's a young boy doing the work of service
 - And then we're introduced to Eli's sons
 - In v.12 we're told they are "worthless" men
 - Worthless means ungodly, wicked

- Two reasons are given for why they were worthless
- First, they do not know the Lord
 - Simply put, they are not saints
 - They are unbelieving Israel
 - They serve of examples of men, like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, who claim to be near God and yet are far from Him
- Secondly, they abuse their service as priests by despising the offering to the Lord
 - In v.13 they do not know the customs of the priests with the people
 - These customs refer to the Levitical rules God gave Israel
 - Imagine two men serving as priests who are not familiar with the customs of priests
 - And this isn't merely a matter of ignorance
 - They despise these customs, preferring to do things their own way for selfish reasons
- So the contrast that begins this section has on the one hand a young Samuel serving God while the established priests are abusing their positions
 - If you glance down to vs.17-18, notice you find the same pattern
 - In v.17 you see the same conclusion regarding the priests
 - They despised the offering and their sin was great
 - But in v.18 we find Samuel ministering before the Lord
 - And this time we see him wearing a miniature priest outfit, which only serves to reinforce the image of an unlikely hero
 - So what comes between these bookends is documented evidence of the brothers' guilt
 - They would steal the offering from the Lord
 - Part of the offering was to be boiled and a certain portion was to remain with the priests as their allotted portion

- But these boys would choose whatever portion they desired from the pot
- The brothers insisted the meat to be consumed by fire on the altar be given to them raw so they could roast it and eat it later
- If someone objected, they would take it by force
- These men were offensive to the Lord and the people
 - They are examples of the way people in positions of great power may become self-seeking and arrogant
 - That's why it's healthy to maintain a degree of cynicism when observing the piety of men and women in positions of religious authority
 - Many are every bit as pious as they appear
 - But others are merely working the crowd
 - Don't be sucked in by the persona or position...worship the Lord and give little regard to His servants
- The contrasts continue in the next section

[1Sam. 2:19](#) And his mother would make him a little robe and bring it to him from year to year when she would come up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

[1Sam. 2:20](#) Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, "May the LORD give you children from this woman in place of the one she dedicated to the LORD." And they went to their own home.

[1Sam. 2:21](#) The LORD visited Hannah; and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew before the LORD.

- This passage begins with a little encouragement to all mothers
 - If you were troubled at the thought of Hannah dumping her little boy off at the tabernacle and turning her back, it turns out it's not that way
 - Hannah gets to see her son at least annually
 - And because of her sacrifice, Eli the priest makes a point of blessing her when she visits with a promise of children
 - And in time, Hannah has more children to take the place of Samuel

- Five children, the number of grace, the meaning of her name
- The Lord blesses Hannah for her obedience
- But she hasn't forgotten Samuel, and so when she visits, she brings a little priestly robe for him
 - Since clothes wear out and Samuel was growing, Hannah brought a new robe each year
 - We can't help but to smile as we think of her bringing a child-sized robe to the tabernacle
 - Clearly, she's encouraging her son into a specific walk of life
- Although Samuel was qualified to be a priest (being a descendant of Kohath) and he has been dedicated to the tabernacle service, but he's not the son of Eli
 - And therefore, there is no reason to expect Samuel will become Eli's successor
 - And yet Samuel is wearing a miniature ephod
 - And only the High Priest wore an ephod
 - Hannah was saying something about where she believed God was taking Samuel
- So we see Samuel looking like the future High Priest, but he's not going to be the high priest of Israel
 - The Lord has a different plan for Samuel
 - Samuel will serve as a priest, but he will never become the high priest
 - Instead, he will be the final judge of Israel
 - And he will be the first prophet of Israel
 - Remember, this is the moment in Israel's history when the Lord is ready to disassociate the roles of leader, priest and prophet
 - In Moses' day, the roles were united as God brought the Law
 - Moses was the people's intercessor for the covenant with the Lord

- He was the leader of the people
- And he was a prophet who brought the word
- With Joshua's entry into the land and the establishment of the tabernacle, the Lord separated the role of leader and intercessor
 - Joshua led the people while priests interceded before the altar
 - The leader was also the prophet for the people, bringing the word of the Lord
 - This has been the pattern through the period of Judges up to Samuel's day
- But the Lord is now going to separate the role of prophet
 - So that there will be leaders, priests and prophets
 - Though Samuel is qualified to be a priest, he must be a prophet
 - And in this role of prophet, his first task will be to depose the current family of priests

[1Sam. 2:22](#) Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

[1Sam. 2:23](#) He said to them, "Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people?"

[1Sam. 2:24](#) "No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the LORD'S people circulating.

[1Sam. 2:25](#) "If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the LORD desired to put them to death.

[1Sam. 2:26](#) Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the LORD and with men.

- The story of Eli's sons is really the story of Eli and his sons
 - First, his sons were the worst sort
 - We've already heard they are godless and worthless
 - And beside robbing people and despising the Lord's offering, they are committing the worst sexual immorality

- They are having sexual relations with prostitutes at the doorway of the tabernacle
- Sex with prostitutes was a common practice among Canaanite pagans
- So in effect these priests were engaging in pagan worship practices
- Then we have Eli
 - First, we're told Eli was very old
 - At first, you might think this detail is intended to paint Eli as a sympathetic figure in the story
 - But the opposite was true
 - Eli's sons are full grown men and have been under Eli's authority for many years
 - And as an elder, Eli's word and authority should have been treated with unquestioned respect
- Instead, these men are clearly completely out of control, and we're told in v.24 that Eli chastises his sons for the evil that Eli hears is "circulating" or passing around
 - Notice that Eli isn't disturbed by their behavior so much as by the fact that it's become a point of public complaint or gossip
 - Eli is concerned about his reputation and the reputation of his family name
 - He's like a monarch that knows his sons are reckless playboys, but doesn't pay attention unless they embarrass the family
 - And if this is truly the first time Eli has heard of his sons' exploits, then it would mean Eli is guilty of gross negligence as High Priest
 - Either way, his sons' behavior reflects negatively on the father
 - Eli is a popular preaching example of the sin of bad parenting
 - Biblically, parents aren't responsible for the behavior of their children

- But they are held to account for poor parenting choices that allowed bad behavior to develop
- Every child is born in sin, and therefore every child is prone to misbehavior
- Knowing that, every parent is expected to take the necessary steps to discipline to child to address that sin
- Some kids are easier than others, but all need discipline
- Eli was old, which means he had years to mold the character of these sons, but he failed to do so
 - And even now we can see how he failed
 - When Eli hears of his sons behavior, his response is a mild talking-to
 - He counsels them as if he were speaking about running in the halls of the tabernacle or not showing up for work late
 - Eli's heard that his sons are stealing from the Lord, despising the offering, threatening violence against worshippers, fornicating with prostitutes and defiling the tabernacle
 - Any one of those offenses is punishable by death, and yet this man does nothing except shake a finger and say "tisk, tisk"
 - If Eli were the kind of father the Lord requires, he would have removed his sons from service and likely put them to death
 - But honestly, if Eli were that kind of father to begin with, the situation would never have come to this point
 - And that's the lesson of scripture to all parents

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

Eph. 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

- Notice the promise of scripture is that lessons taught to our children early will produce life long dividends, according to Proverbs

- And Paul says that bringing up a child starts with discipline and progresses to instruction
- Because if a child is not accustomed to correction, they will give little attention or respect to the instruction of elders, whether parents or teachers
- That's what we see here...Eli's sons neither listen to him nor respect him because he will not hold them accountable for their sin
- But though a human parent will not hold children accountable, the Father in Heaven does
 - And as weak as Eli may be, he is endowed to speak the word of the Lord
 - And so he speaks perhaps more truth than he realized when he tells his sons that they are sinning against the Lord
 - He says if a man sins against another man, then he can expect the Lord will mediate
 - Eli advice to his son is specious at best
 - He says that if a man sins against another man, then the Lord will mediate
 - But sinning against the Lord leaves no hope
 - This is not sound theological advice
 - Sinning against another man (i.e., murder) is just as punishable as sinning against the Lord directly as his sons are doing
 - In fact, his sons are doing both
 - If this kind of twisted logic is representative of the training Eli gave his sons growing up then it's no wonder they have little regard for right vs. wrong
 - This is like telling your children that it's ok to cheat on your taxes because you're not hurting anyone
 - Or a mafia boss who orders murders of rival bosses but apologizes for cussing in front of the priest

- Notice at the end of v.25 that the Lord had already determined how to handle these boys
 - He has determined to put them to death as would be expected for these offenses
 - In a very real sense, Eli's failures as a father have led to the death of his sons
 - And the same can still happen among today's parents, including in believing families
 - When parents shrink back from their responsibilities, the Lord may step into that gap
 - Sometimes the Lord will show mercy by raising up a godly child despite the mistakes of the parents
 - Sometimes the Lord will bring discipline upon the ungodly child by allowing the consequences of their sin to come back upon them
 - And sometimes the Lord may even take the step like the one He took in this case
 - We take these chances when we abdicate our responsibility to discipline and instruct our kids in the way of the Lord
- Finally, look at the contrast with Samuel once more
 - In v.26 he is growing in stature and favor with the Lord and men
 - This is a statement remarkably similar to what is said about Christ in Luke
 - Samuel is headed in one direction while Eli's family is headed in another
 - Now we're beginning to see how Samuel will emerge from this family on top
 - He is obeying while they are not obeying
 - Just as Hannah was obeying while her sister wife was not
 - Obedience results in blessing, while disobedience results in defeat and judgment

- Perhaps above all others, this is the lesson of the books of Samuel
- And now the time has come for the Lord to do as He declared
 - Only He will do much more than take the sons' lives

1Sam. 2:27 Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Did I not indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in bondage to Pharaoh's house?'

1Sam. 2:28 'Did I not choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me; and did I not give to the house of your father all the fire offerings of the sons of Israel?'

1Sam. 2:29 'Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?'

1Sam. 2:30 "Therefore the LORD God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever'; but now the LORD declares, 'Far be it from Me – for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed.'

1Sam. 2:31 'Behold, the days are coming when I will break your strength and the strength of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your house.'

1Sam. 2:32 'You will see the distress of My dwelling, in spite of all the good that I do for Israel; and an old man will not be in your house forever.'

1Sam. 2:33 'Yet I will not cut off every man of yours from My altar so that your eyes will fail from weeping and your soul grieve, and all the increase of your house will die in the prime of life.'

1Sam. 2:34 'This will be the sign to you which will come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them will die.'

1Sam. 2:35 'But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before Me anointed always.'

1Sam. 2:36 'Everyone who is left in your house will come and bow down to him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread and say, "Please assign me to one of the priest's offices so that I may eat a piece of bread.'"

- A man is sent to Eli
 - We don't know who this man is, but in the days before prophets, he would have been called a "seer"

- If there was a difference between the two it was in the magnitude of their ministry and their message
- In this case, a man is sent to Eli for a moment with a single message pertaining to him
- This seems to be the extent of the Lord's use of this man
- What he came to say to Eli was intended to rock his world
 - The Lord begins by reminding Eli of Whose house the tabernacle is and for Whom the sacrifices are offered
 - The house and it's functioning were establish by and for the Lord's purposes
 - And those who serve in the tabernacle were assigned their place by God as well
 - So of course the Lord takes a personal interest in how men serve Him there
- The point is that a failure to serve Him properly should be cause for great concern for Eli
 - And yet Eli is guilty of kicking at the Lord's sacrifice and offering
 - He honors his sons above the Lord
 - And now we learn, Eli has been enjoying the meat that his sons steal just as they did
 - Now we see additional reasons for why Eli offers just a half-hearted rebuke of his sons
 - He isn't entirely unhappy that they do what they do, since he profits from it too
- It's important to note that the Lord decided to send this word to Eli, not to the sons directly
 - It shows us who the Lord holds accountable for the situation
 - The Lord sees Eli was the guilty one when he allows his sons to act as they do

- Just as we said earlier that a parent shares a degree of culpability when they contribute to the delinquency of a child
- And the Lord declared that Eli is honoring his sons above the Lord when he fails to correct and restrain them
 - I used to tell my kids after they had made a mistake and they were objecting to a punishment that:
 - “The Lord tells parents to discipline children. When you do the wrong thing, you can’t expect me to do the wrong thing by not punishing you.”
 - To not discipline your children is to sin against the Lord
- And Eli is equally guilty of their offenses when he enjoys the fruit of their sin
 - The saddest sight is a parent who celebrates the sin of their kids, whether laughing off their rude behavior or congratulating them for finding a way to cheat on a test
- In v.30 we find essentially the theme of the books of Samuel, expressing the thought I gave a moment ago
 - Those who honor the Lord will be honored
 - While those who despise the Lord will be forgotten
 - This is true for Samuel vs. Eli and his sons
 - And it will be true for David vs. Saul
- Then the Lord reveals his plan for Eli’s sons and his entire family line
 - In a nutshell, the Lord declares that He will cut off Eli’s family line from serving as priests in the tabernacle
 - All the sons of Levi were called to serve in the priesthood perpetually
 - But this particular family line would cease to serve due to the sin of Eli and his sons
 - But in v.33 the Lord goes a step further declaring that the fulfillment of this curse will not happen quickly

- It will take years to play out so that the Lord can make sure His point is well understood in Israel
- Later generations in Eli's family will enter into the priesthood only so long as to die in the prime of life
- One after another will die, leaving the people to recognize that the family of Eli has been cursed by God
- In v.35 the Lord promises to raise up a faithful priest to replace Eli's family line,
 - The final fulfillment of this curse happened in Solomon's day
 - Solomon removed Eli's great-great grandson, Abiathar, from office
 - And no member of Eli's family line ever serves as priest again
- In his place, Solomon installs the priest Zadok
 - Notice that this priest is said to walk before God's anointed always
 - This is a reference to the Messianic Kingdom
 - Because in Ezekiel 44 and 48 we're told that the descendents of Zadok serve in the Millennial Temple as priests
- That's how thoroughly the Lord moves to remove one line and install another
 - Where before Eli's family abused their power as priest and stole food from the Lord and others in the tabernacle
 - In the future, they will be lowly in society and beg for charity from the priests
 - Because this one family acted in such foolish ways, they set the course of future generations on a downward path
- Notice in v.34 the Lord says that Eli will receive a sign that all this seer has declared will come to pass
 - Since Eli won't be alive to see the entire prophecy play out, the Lord is prepared to prove to him that it will happen as promised
 - And the sign will be particularly harsh though entirely justified

- Both of Eli's wicked sons will die on exactly the same day
- The point of course is that two boys dying on the same day can't be a coincidence
- Especially when it's predicted in advance
- Never mind the pain of losing both sons at all
- How do we suppose Eli might react to this prophecy?
 - Perhaps he would cry out in repentance and ask for the Lord's mercy?
 - Remember when David heard that he would lose his son because of his sin with Batsheba?

2Sam. 12:13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.

2Sam. 12:14 "However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die."

2Sam. 12:15 So Nathan went to his house. Then the LORD struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was very sick.

2Sam. 12:16 David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground.

2Sam. 12:17 The elders of his household stood beside him in order to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not eat food with them.

- David made appeals to the Lord and fasted and prayed and kept vigil hoping the Lord might relent
- That's how a man after God's heart responds to the Lord when he learns he has sinned against the Lord
- But what does Eli do?
 - We don't hear anything at this point, which in itself is telling
 - In the next chapter, Eli will hear from the Lord again on this matter
 - From Samuel directly next time
 - And when we see his reaction in that case, we will learn that his response is anything but David's

- We're seeing the rationale behind the Lord raising up a Samuel to lead the people
- The leaders of Israel are corrupt (as you see in the book of Judges)
- And now we learn the priests of Israel are corrupt
- And we have yet to see prophets arise in the land
- So where do men go for godly direction within Israel?
- It's evident that men cannot rule even under God's authority because sin is a barrier to obedience
 - Instead, God must bless those who will serve and raise them up to replace those who won't
 - And in chapter 2 we see a chiasmic structure that points out this truth
- Chiasms are hard to explain, because they are by their very nature visual representations
 - Dr. Thomas Constable suggests the following chiasm

A. The song of Hannah, concluding with reference to the Lord's anointed (2:1-10)

B. Samuel ministers before the Lord (2:11)

C. The sins of Eli's sons (2:12-17)

D. Samuel ministers before the Lord (2:18-19)

E. Eli blesses Samuel's parents (2:20- 21a)

D.' Samuel grows in the Lord's presence (2:21b)

C.' The sins of Eli's sons (2:22-25)

B.' Samuel grows in the Lord's presence (2:26)

A.' The oracles of the man of God, concluding with reference to the Lord's anointed (2:27-36)

- The "point" of the chiasm is the point of the message
 - Eli blesses his successor without knowing it
 - Samuel is being prepared to step into his place
 - Just as Samuel's parents raised a godly child to replace the ungodly children Eli was raising
 - The Lord removes the disobedient to install the obedient