

ELI'S SONS

1 Samuel 2:12-36

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Eli, Eli's sons, and a holy man

Key-location: Shiloh

Key-repetitions:

- Wickedness of Eli's sons: they were wicked men (1 Sam 2:12); had no regard for the Lord (1 Sam 2:12); showed no respect for offerings made to the Lord (1 Sam 2:17); ripped off the people (1 Sam 2:22); slept with women who served at the tabernacle (1 Sam 2:22); didn't listen to their father's rebuke (1 Sam 2:25); got fat off the best parts of the meat the Israelites brought to the Lord (1 Sam 2:29).
- Good Samuel: he grew up serving the Lord (1 Sam 2:18); he pleased the Lord and the people (1 Sam 2:26); God promised to raise up for himself a true priest (1 Sam 2:35).
- Warnings: Eli warned his sons (1 Sam 2:23-25); a holy man warned Eli (1 Sam 2:27-36).

Key-attitudes:

- Eli's powerlessness with his sons.
- Eli's sons' wickedness.
- Eli's sons' irreverent, bossy attitude.
- Eli's weakness, even though he had good intentions.
- Samuel likeable and respected.

Initial-situation:

During the time when judges ruled, Israel had no king. Everyone did what he thought was right, and each generation became worse than the one before.

Hannah had no children. Every year her family went to Shiloh to worship and Hannah cried and refused to eat. Hannah entered the tabernacle and uttered a silent prayer asking God for a son. She promised the Lord that if he gave her a son, she would give him back to the Lord. Hannah gave birth to Samuel. After weaning the child, Hannah presented the child to Priest Eli, and dedicated the child to God.

Initial-problem:

Eli's sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord nor for the customs of the priests among the people.

Final-situation:

A holy man told Priest Eli that both his sons would die on the same day and that the Lord would raise up a true priest.

BIBLE STORY

Eli's sons were wicked men. They had no regard for the Lord nor for the customs of the priests among the people. The custom was that whenever anyone offered a sacrifice, and while the meat was boiling, the priest came with a three-pronged fork in his hand. He plunged the fork into the cooking pot, and he took for himself whatever the fork brought up. But, Eli's sons did not follow this custom. This is how Eli's sons treated the Israelites who came to Shiloh to offer sacrifices to the Lord. Before they even burned the fat to the Lord, the priest's servant interrupted whoever was sacrificing and said, "Give the priest some meat to roast; he won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw."

If the man replied, "Let the fat be burned up first; that's God's portion! Then take whatever you want."

The servant demanded, "No, hand it over now! If you don't, I'll take it by force."

The young men's sin was horrible in the Lord's sight. They showed no respect for offerings made to the Lord (1 Sam 2:12-17).

In this environment, Samuel, a boy dressed in priestly robes, served the Lord. Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband for the annual sacrifice. The boy Samuel grew up serving the Lord (1 Sam 2:18-22).

Eli became an old man. Eli heard story after story of his sons stealing from the people and how his sons were sleeping with women who served at the entrance to the tabernacle. Eli told his sons, "Why do you do these evil things? I hear story after story about these wicked deeds of yours. If a man sins against another man, there's help; God's help. But if you sin against the Lord, no person can help you!" Eli's sons didn't listen to their father (1 Sam 2:23-25).

The boy Samuel continued to grow up. He pleased the Lord and the people (1 Sam 2:26).

A holy man of God came to Eli and said, "This is the Lord's message: I chose your ancestors out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priests. Why do you treat as mere loot these sacrificial offerings that I commanded for my worship? Why do you honor your sons more than me by letting them get fat on the best parts of the meat which the Israelites bring to me? Therefore, the Lord God of Israel declares, 'I promised that your house and your father's house would be my priests indefinitely.' But now the Lord declares, 'Those who honor me, I'll honor. But those who despise me, I'll despise. The time is coming when no one in your family will make it to old age! All your descendants will die in the prime of life. I'll give you a sign: Both your sons will die on the same day. I'll raise up for myself a true priest. He'll do what I want him to do. He'll be what I want him to be'" (1 Sam 2:27-36).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kind of upbringing did Samuel have?
2. What kind of family problems did Eli have?
3. What were the sins of Eli's sons?
4. What were Eli's wrongdoings?
5. Why did God blame Eli for his son's wrongdoings?
6. Why is a parent in the wrong if he only teaches his children what is right and wrong but never punishes them for wrongdoing?
7. How was the boy Samuel different from Eli's sons?
8. Did you learn anything from Eli's family that could help your family?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Spiritual leaders should fulfill their responsibilities in their own home. They should teach their children the way of the Lord, and they should discipline them when they disobey the Lord.** Eli spent his entire life in service to God and was responsible for all the worship in Israel. But in fulfilling this great mission, he neglected his responsibility to his own family. Eli was promised that his family would be severely punished forever, because he knew of his sons' wicked ways and did nothing to stop them (1 Sam 2:12-17, 29; 3:13).
2. **A person may be guilty of sin by either doing wrong or by omitting to do right.** Eli's sons were guilty of doing wrong. Eli's sons took parts of the sacrifices before the Israelites had time to offer them to God. They also ate the meat before the fat was burned off, and this was against God's laws (Lev 3:3-5). Eli's sons treated offerings made to God with contempt (1 Sam 2:12-17). Eli's sons slept with the women who served in the tabernacle (1 Sam 2:22). Eli was guilty of omitting to discipline his sons (1 Sam 3:13). By ignoring his sons' actions, Eli let his sons ruin their own lives and the lives of many others.
3. **The spiritual leader who shows contempt for the faith of ordinary people and treats their offering with contempt is guilty of a great sin.** Eli's sons were evil men who mistreated the people who came to worship the Lord, and they disrespected offerings made to the Lord (1 Sam 2:12-16). They were guilty of a great sin (1 Sam 2:17).

4. **Intentionally continuing to disobey God will result in severe punishment.** Eli's sons knew better, but they continued to disobey God intentionally by cheating, seducing women, and robbing the people (1 Sam 2:23-25). The Israelites made offerings in order to have their sins forgiven, and Eli's sons stole the offering and showed contempt for the people's repentant attitude. God promised to punish Eli's sons with death, and both of Eli's sons were killed on the same day (1 Sam 4:10-11). God took the disciplinary action that Eli would not.
5. **The person who allows others to continue in their sinful ways becomes an accessory to their sins.** Eli was guilty of honoring his sons above God by allowing them to continue in their sinful ways as religious leaders (1 Sam 2 :29).
6. **A person can be faithful to God in an environment where others disobey him.** Samuel was raised around Eli's sons who mistreated those who offered sacrifices to the Lord, who had no respect for offerings dedicated to the Lord (1 Sam 2:12-17), and who had sex with women who worked at the tabernacle (1 Sam 2:22). However, Samuel faithfully served the Lord (1 Sam 2:26).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Chant:

- Tell the story one time.
- Teach listeners the chants: "Evil men" for Eli's sons and "Good boy" for Samuel.
- Give listeners a hand signal that is a sign for them to repeat the appropriate chant. Retell the story, giving listeners the signal to chant at the appropriate places.

Teller:

Eli's sons were wicked men. They had no regard for the Lord nor for the customs of the priests among the people. The custom was that whenever anyone offered a sacrifice, and while the meat was boiling, the priest came with a three-pronged fork in his hand. He plunged the fork into the cooking pot, and the priest took for himself whatever the fork brought up. But, Eli's sons did not follow this custom. This is how Eli's sons treated the Israelites who came to Shiloh to offer sacrifices to the Lord. Before they even burned the fat to the Lord, the priest's servant interrupted whoever was sacrificing and said, "Give the priest some meat to roast; he won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw."

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The servant demanded, "No, hand it over now! If you don't, I'll take it by force."

The young men's sin was horrible in the Lord's sight. They showed no respect for the offerings made to the Lord.

Listeners chant: “Evil men.”

Teller:

In this environment, Samuel, a boy dressed in priestly robes, served the Lord. Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband for the annual sacrifice. The boy Samuel grew up serving the Lord.

Listeners chant: Good boy.

Teller:

Eli became an old man. Eli heard story after story of his sons stealing from the people and sleeping with the women who served at the entrance to the tabernacle. Eli told his sons, “Why do you do these evil things? I hear story after story about these wicked deeds of yours. If a man sins against another man, there’s help; God’s help. But if you sin against the Lord, no person can help you!” Eli’s sons didn’t listen to their father.

Listeners chant: Evil men.

Teller:

The boy Samuel continued to grow up. He pleased the Lord and the people.

Listeners chant: Good boy.

Teller:

A holy man of God came to Eli and told him, “This is the Lord’s message: I chose your ancestors out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priests. Why do you treat as mere loot these sacrificial offerings that I commanded for my worship? Why do you honor your sons more than me by letting them get fat on the best parts of the meat which the Israelites bring to me? Therefore, the Lord God of Israel declares, ‘I promised that your house and your father’s house would be my priests indefinitely.’ But now the Lord declares, ‘Those who honor me, I’ll honor. But those who despise me, I’ll despise. The time is coming when no one in your family will make it to old age! All your descendants will die in the prime of life. I’ll give you a sign: Both your sons will die on the same day.’”

Listeners chant: Evil men.

Teller:

The holy man continued with the Lord’s message, “I’ll raise up for myself a true priest. He’ll do what I want him to do. He’ll be what I want him to be.”

Listeners chant: Good boy.