

1 Samuel 2:27-36
Prophecy Against Eli's House

Introduction

People of God, imagine being handed the deed to your family's farm—a plot of land that has sustained generations. You aren't merely inheriting soil and barns; you're receiving the fruit of countless seasons of labor and the responsibility to steward it for future generations. Or imagine being entrusted with a sword—an heirloom from a great-great-grandfather who fought valiantly in the American War for Independence. This sword, gleaming with polished steel, represents not just family honor but a call to live with fierce liberty of your ancestors.

Finally, picture receiving a family Bible, its worn leather binding marked by years of prayer and promises. This Bible is more than a personal faith; it is a covenant—a spiritual heritage entrusted to you, with the expectation that you will continue in that faith and pass it on to your children.

In each case, the heirloom carries great responsibility. You are not merely a recipient of this gift, but a steward of a legacy.

This is the situation Eli faced as High Priest of Israel. He inherited a sacred responsibility to lead God's people in holiness and worship. Tragically, Eli failed to live up to that calling. His story serves as a warning about what happens when we neglect sacred responsibilities.

I. Privilege (vv. 27-28)

In verses 27-28, the man of God delivers a word of judgment to Eli, reminding him of the great privilege God bestowed upon his house. God revealed Himself to Aaron in Egypt and chose Eli's ancestors from among all Israel to serve as priests. The priesthood was a sacred role with responsibilities such as offering sacrifices, burning incense, and wearing the ephod in God's presence.

This calling was not earned but given by divine grace. In His mercy, God chose Aaron's house to serve as priests. They were granted access to the holy things of God, enabling them to offer sacrifices at the altar. From this sacred space, they confessed their sins and those of the nation, dedicating themselves fully to God, raising their hearts to heaven as the smoke ascended from the altar.

Through these sacrificial offerings, they maintained peace with God. This privilege was a sacred trust, meant to glorify God and bless the nation.

However, to whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). Eli and his sons failed grievously in their duty. Instead of being grateful for the privilege of approaching God as priests and embracing their sacred responsibility, they profaned God's holiness.

II. Profanation (vv. 29)

In verse 29, the man of God rebukes Eli for profaning his priestly office. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, had been exploiting their position for personal gain. They treated the Lord's sacrifices with contempt, seizing the best portions for themselves and engaging in sexually immoral behavior with the women who served at the entrance of the Tabernacle, thus defiling Israel, and opening her up to judgment. (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22).

Though Eli rebuked his sons mildly, and only after public outrage had forced his hand, he failed to take decisive action against his sons. Instead of putting his own sons to death as the law required, Eli allowed their wickedness to continue, thereby sharing in their guilt. The accusation of the man of God is sharp: Eli honored his sons above the Lord. This indictment reveals a fundamental failure in Eli's leadership.

When those entrusted with caring for holy things of God abuse their position, they dishonor God, insult their ancestors, and bring future devastation to this His family and people. Eli's failure reminds us that the worship must never be taken lightly. Holiness and reverence are essential in approaching the living God. And it is something to be preserved, and not treated lightly with contempt.

III. Punishment (vv. 30-34)

The man of God announces judgment on Eli's house, proclaiming, *Behold, the days are coming when I will cut off your arm and the arm of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house.*”

The “arm” that is cut off represents the strength of Eli's sons. God confirms the prophecy by declaring that both of Eli's sons will die on the same day.

This imagery of cut off arms connects to the later incident when the Ark of the Covenant is captured and placed in Dagon's temple. The next day the statue of Dagon had fallen prostrate before the ark of the covenant, and its head and hands are found severed on the threshold.

The parallel highlights that Eli is symbolically aligned with Dagon's broken head. When he heard of his son's death and that the ark was taken, he fell backwards and broke his neck. Eli's two sons, who perished in the battle of Aphek, are also signified in the two severed hands of Dagon.

Rather than being identified with the holy God of Israel, Eli and his sons stand as tragic figures whose downfall mirrors that of the powerless idol Dagon.

Because Eli's household despised God's holiness, God will cut off Eli's arms, his strength and lineage, ensuring that no man from Eli's line lives to old age. Those who remain will weep in grief as their descendants perish violently.

This prophecy began to be fulfilled with the death of Hophni and Phineas. But it was further fulfilled in Eli's great-great-grandson, Abiathar. Abiathar witnessed the downfall of his house when King Saul massacred the priests at Nob (1 Samuel 22:11-19). Abiathar, the sole survivor, fled to David, carrying the ephod (1 Samuel 22:20-23), deeply grieving the near-extinction of his family.

Additionally, God foretold that Eli's descendants will beg for bread, echoing Hannah's song: *"Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread."* Eli, Hophni, and Phineas had fattened themselves by greedily seizing sacrificial offerings, and now their surviving descendants will face hunger and have to beg for bread, and a job.

IV. Promise (vv. 35-36)

Amidst judgment, God offers a glimmer of hope—a promise to raise up a faithful priest who, unlike Eli and his sons, will serve with reverence and faithfulness, aligning his heart with God's, and will cherish the legacy of holiness that was given to the sons of Aaron. This priest will stand as a trustworthy mediator, in stark contrast to Eli's corrupt lineage, and God will establish his house forever.

To grasp this prophecy, we must understand Aaron's genealogy. Aaron had four sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. After Nadab and Abihu's death for offering

strange fire, the high priesthood continued through Eleazar and Ithamar. Notably, Aaron's grandson Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, zealously defended God's honor in Numbers 25:10-13. God rewarded him with a "covenant of perpetual priesthood."

However, by Eli's time, the high priesthood had shifted to Ithamar's line, likely due to Israel's tendency to do what was right in their own eyes. Eli, from Ithamar's lineage, failed to uphold God's holiness, resulting in lasting judgment on his house.

The prophecy in 1 Samuel 2:35 predicts the restoration of the priesthood to the line of Eleazar, fulfilling God's promise to Phinehas. This was realized during the reign of Solomon when Abiathar, a descendant of Eli, was removed from the position of High Priest for supporting Adonijah in his rebellion against Solomon (1 Kings 2:26-27). In his place, Zadok, a descendant of Phinehas, was appointed as High Priest (1 Kings 2:35). This act permanently cut off Eli's line and re-established the priesthood with Zadok's descendants.

Application:

Having walked through the passage and considered its meaning, we now turn to application. What does this text

teach us about living faithfully as God's holy priesthood today?

1. Be Thankful for the Privilege of God's Calling

First, we must be thankful for the privilege of God's Calling. God told Israel in Deut. 7 that they were chosen by God because of God's love, and His love alone.

⁶“For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. ⁷The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; ⁸but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Similarly, Eph. 1 tells us that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ. It was because God loves you that He chose you. It was not because of anything good or bad that you have done, but rather it was based solely upon the fact that God chose to love you, before the world even existed.

And in the fullness of time, God sent His Son into the world to redeem those he chose to love in Christ, those who were held under the bondage of sin, and enslaved to the Devil through fear of death. Because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins He made us alive together with Christ. It was by God's grace you have been saved.

Like the house of Aaron. God revealed himself to us, and He brought us out of our Egypt through Christ, and called us to be a royal priesthood. We have been chosen to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). We have been chosen, among all the people of the earth, to offer to God spiritual sacrifices of worship, praise, thanksgiving, and our own very hearts to God.

The first point of application therefore is to respond to the grace of God's calling and election by being thankful for His amazing grace and unconditional love and election.

Be thankful that God chose to save you at all. He could have left you in slavery to sin. There was nothing in you that made God choose to save you. It was nothing other than the very love and kindness of God that you believe in Him. It was by God's grace alone you have been saved, through faith in His son Jesus.

Eli was not thankful for this. Eli despised God. He saw His privilege of God's calling of worship, prayer, and intercession as a burden and not a blessing. And so he despised God and honored his sons over God, and forfeited the blessings of God for his descendants after him. Eli lost it all from through dishonor. You however remain in God by being thankful to God and honoring Him above all.

This leads us to our second point.

2. Guard Against Profaning God's Worship

Eli and his sons mishandled sacred worship, treating what was holy as ordinary, and paid dearly for it. They used the things of God for personal gain, rather than honoring Him. This is a solemn warning for us: has our familiarity with worship dulled our sense of awe and reverence for the Holy One?

First, does your life outside of worship reflect the reverence you express inside it? God rebuked Israel for offering sacrifices while ignoring His Word in their daily lives. They lived wickedly yet presumed that a few ritual offerings could cover their sin. As Isaiah and Jesus declared, *"These people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me."* Our worship must be consistent with a life of obedience and reverence.

Second, what attitude do you bring into worship? Are you reluctant or indifferent, longing to be elsewhere? Or does your soul truly yearn for the courts of the Lord? Psalm 84 says, *"My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God."* True reverence begins when worship becomes your soul's delight. As Psalm 66 proclaims, *"Blessed is the man You choose and cause to approach You... We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house."*

God knows the posture of your heart. As you stand in His holy presence, adjust your attitude accordingly. Worship is both a sacred privilege and a joyful responsibility—a trust to steward for future generations. Let us honor the God of our fathers, passing down the fear of the Lord to our children and grandchildren.

Consider, too, your behavior as you enter the sanctuary. Habakkuk 2 declares, *"The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him."* While our fellowship as a church family is a great blessing, let's be mindful of preparing our hearts for worship. Light-hearted chatter before the service may hinder us from grasping the gravity of what we are about to do: meeting with the Holy One. When the sinless Cherubim stand before God, they cover their faces and feet in reverence, crying out, *"Holy, Holy, Holy."* How much more should we, who are redeemed sinners, approach Him with awe?

Let us enter this sanctuary as its name suggests—a holy place—offering God the pure sacrifices of our lips and lives. Fellowship after the service is welcome, but before worship, let's cultivate a sense of reverence fitting for the presence of our Thrice-Holy God.

As Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 warns:

"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few."

1. Prepare Your Heart Before Entering Worship

Solomon's call to "guard your steps" implies careful preparation before coming into God's presence. Just as one would approach a king with deliberate thought and respect, so should we approach the King of Kings.

- **Practical Application:** Before coming to church, take a moment to pray and reflect. Ask God to help you focus on Him and lay aside distractions. Encourage your family to do the same, emphasizing that worship begins in the heart, not just when the service starts.

2. Listen Before Speaking

Solomon contrasts listening with the "sacrifice of fools," meaning that true reverence involves a posture of humble listening rather than rushing into empty or thoughtless speech.

- **Practical Application:** During worship, cultivate a spirit of attentiveness—listen carefully to the reading of Scripture, and the sermon. Come with a teachable heart, eager to hear God's Word. Resist the urge to mentally drift or treat the time lightly.

3. Offer Thoughtful and Sincere Worship

The warning against being "rash with your mouth" reminds us that worship is not about impressing others or uttering many words but offering sincere praise and prayer. God values thoughtful, heartfelt worship over external rituals or empty chatter.

- **Practical Application:** When singing hymns or praying, engage your heart and mind. Let your words reflect genuine awe and gratitude for who God is. Avoid turning worship into a routine or performance but offer it as a thoughtful response to God's majesty.

4. Recognize God's Holiness and Transcendence

Solomon concludes by reminding us of God's

greatness: "God is in heaven, and you are on earth." This underscores the vast gulf between God's infinite holiness and our frailty, calling us to approach Him with awe and humility.

- **Practical Application:** Let this truth shape your attitude in worship. Enter the sanctuary with a sense of awe, remembering that you are standing before a holy God. Physical postures—such as bowing your head or kneeling—can help facilitate this inner reverence.

Reverence in worship is not about stifling joy but about directing our hearts rightly toward God's majesty. When we guard our steps, listen carefully, and approach God with humble hearts, we honor His holiness and experience deeper, more meaningful worship. As Jesus said, true worshipers will worship the Father "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23)—and reverence is the pathway to that kind of worship.

And lest we forget, Hebrews 12 reminds us that New Covenant worship actually takes place in Heaven. And so the holiness and reverence that we ought to have is greater than that of the Old Covenant saints at Mt Sinai where God spoke directly to the people from the top of a fiery Holy Mount Sinai. In Christian worship we ascend into Heaven itself. It says:

¹⁸For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, ¹⁹and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. ²⁰(For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.” ²¹And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.”)

²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, ²³to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel...

²⁸Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. ²⁹For our God is a consuming fire.

3. Rejoice in God's Promise

Finally, we must rejoice that God's faithful priest foretold in 1 Samuel 2:35 has come in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the fulfillment of all God's promises, the one who perfectly mediates on our behalf.

First, concerning his Faithful Priesthood, God says:

³⁵Then I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind.

Jesus is this faithful high priest who is perfectly obedient to God's will. Jesus' life and ministry are depicted in the New Testament as being in complete alignment with God's desires. He always does the will His Father. Obedience to God's Word is more important to Him than physical food.

This is exemplified when he told the Devil that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And also when he told his disciples *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."* This is what every priest was supposed to learn from the sacrificial food they received from the altar. But Jesus Christ exemplified this perfectly for us.

Secondly, this Priest was promised a Sure House. The "sure house" is the Church. Christ is the cornerstone of this spiritual house. And...

"you yourselves like living stones are being built up into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

The Church is the house of the faithful Priest Jesus, and we are members of His family, his own flesh and blood.

And thirdly, God says: *and he shall walk before My anointed forever*. Hebrews describes Jesus High Priesthood as better than that of Aaron's being "after the order of Melchizedek," which emphasizes his priesthood is eternal. Hebrews 7 says, Jesus has *the power of an indestructible life*. ¹⁷ *For He testifies:*

*"You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek."*

Jesus's priesthood did not end in death. He lives forever. And so He always lives to intercede on your behalf. So there is nothing that ever prevents you from coming to God to find mercy and grace in a time of need.

And finally, the part about *going in and out before God's Anointed* originally underscored Zadok's close proximity to the King. But in Jesus Christ both offices of Priest and King are united after the order of Melchizedek. He is a Priest King. Priest of God Most High, and King of Salem – Peace. He intercedes forever before God on our behalf, and He is putting all his enemies under his feet, serving his people with bread and wine.

Conclusion:

Just as Eli failed to steward his sacred calling with the reverence it required, we too are reminded that God's call is a solemn privilege, demanding faithfulness, gratitude, and holy living. The priesthood of Eli's house ended in

judgment, but the promise of a faithful priest finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ, who serves as our eternal High Priest and Mediator.

Through Him, we are now called to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. Let us not take lightly the legacy of grace entrusted to us. Rather, with gratitude for God's mercy, reverence for His holiness, and hope in His promises, may we live faithfully, guarding the inheritance of faith we have received and passing it on to future generations. Amen.