

1st Samuel Chapters 3-4 – John Karmelich

1. In this lesson, we get into the issue of “God and judgment”. This is about judgment for believers.
 - a) This is not about the final judgment of sending people to heaven and hell. There are times where God punishes believers for lack of obedience. This lesson focuses on that issue.
 - b) One of the difficult things we have to accept as Christians is the idea of accountability to God. The “bad news” of good biblical knowledge is that God demands accountability. Failure to act upon such knowledge can and does bring judgment.
 - c) For Christians, God “technically” does not forgive us of our sins in that Jesus paid the price for them. If we accept that fact, then all of our sins are forgiven, past present and future. My point is that God does not just “shrug off” sins that we commit.
 - d) The next thing to understand is that God punishes believers for sins. This is not a salvation issue, this is about accountability. Since we “belong to God”, His reputation is on the line. Therefore, God cannot allow us to get away with sin.
 - e) As a believer, have you ever noticed that you “can’t get away with stuff” that a nonbeliever does? ☺ Part of that reason is that God holds us to higher standards. For example, I have yet to see a pastor or a priest get away with a significant-sin in their lifetime. Those things tend to get out. If you are publicly representing God in some fashion, then God holds you to a higher standard.
 - f) In the Book of Acts, there is the story of a couple named Ananias and Sapphira. In Chapter 5, these two lied about how much money they were giving to the church. In summary, God struck them dead. My point here is these two believed in Jesus and were members of the church. I do believe these two are in heaven, but they lost out on eternal rewards based on their actions here on earth.
 - g) Jesus summed up this principal in Luke 12:48 when He said “to much is given, much is required”. Whatever special gifts and talents God has given us, He holds us accountable to how we use those gifts. To whatever knowledge we have of God, He holds us accountable for that knowledge.
 - h) For example, I don’t believe any “fully-functioning” adult American has any excuses about “not given the proper chance” to accept Jesus. In our world of bible television, bible radio, etc., one cannot tell God in that situation that we didn’t have a chance to hear the Gospel message.
 - i) To those living in situations where the Gospel message is not known, God judges people based on what information they do have.
2. On that happy note, welcome to Chapter 3 and 4 of 1st Samuel. ☺
 - a) Let me summarize both chapters in a few sentences:
 - i) Samuel is now a teenager (assumed) as opposed to being a little boy in Chapter 2.
 - ii) Samuel hears a voice and assumes it is his boss, Eli the high priest. After hearing this voice a few times, Samuel learns it is God himself speaking to him.
 - iii) The message Samuel receives is that of judgment on Eli and his two sons.
 - iv) In Chapter 4, the Nation of Israel goes to battle with a local enemy, the Philistines.
 - a) The Israelites lose, and 4,000 Israelite soldiers die in battle.
 - b) The next battle, the Israelites bring in the Ark of Covenant as a “good luck symbol”. This time, 30,000 Israelites die in battle. The ark is captured by the Philistines. Eli and his two sons die at the end of the chapter.

- b) As you can tell, these two chapters are not about happiness. ☺
 - i) Chapter 3 focuses on the judgment of Eli for failure to discipline his two sons.
 - ii) Chapter 4 focuses on the judgment of the Nation of Israel for collectively turning their back on God at this moment in history.
 - c) This chapter teaches us that God not only judges individuals, but nations.
 - i) God held the Nation of Israel to a higher standard than the surrounding nations because they had greater understanding about God himself. Therefore, when the nation collectively turned their backs on God, judgment came.
 - ii) The “good news” of judgment on Israel is that judgment is always lined with hope. One of the things you read throughout the Old Testament is that whenever judgment is proclaimed or executed, there is always this “ribbon of hope” tied around it. Here we read of the rise of Samuel during this time of corruption.
 - iii) What you have to understand is God is mixing judgment with his unconditional promises to Israel. God promised them that the Promised Land belonged to them forever. God promised them a Messiah would come from their descendants. Therefore, when the Israelites were disobedient, there has to be some future hope mixed in with that judgment or else God is going back on his promises.
 - iv) What does this have to do with us? Everything! As a believer, God may judge you for some particular action, but you are “still one of His”. You can’t lose your relationship with Jesus as long as you are believing in Him. That means when we mess up, we may lose some eternal rewards or we may be punished here on earth, but there is still that eternal hope of salvation blended in. That hope is there because it God’s reputation that is on the line, not ours. This is about God’s unconditional promises to us through Jesus that must coexist with any punishment God dishes out for disobedience.
 - v) My point about reading these two chapters in 1st Samuel is that it not just “history lessons”, they are examples for us to learn as believers. If God can punish the Jewish High Priest (Eli) for disobedience, He can and does punish Christians for disobedience as well. God’s “reputation is on the line”, especially to those God raises up to power and authority.
 - d) With that said, it’s time to go line by line and see the “why’s’ of God’s judgment on the Nation of Israel and particularly upon Eli, the current High Priest.
3. Chapter 3, Verse 1: The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.
- a) We don’t know how old Samuel was at this point in his life. The common speculation and Jewish tradition is that he was a young teenager. He is older than the 3-4 year old boy we read about in Chapter 2.
 - b) To recap the historical parts of the last lesson, Eli is the High Priest of Israel. He had two sons named Hophni and Phinehas. By the way, those are both Egyptian names. It makes you wonder why Eli picked those names. Did Eli have an Egyptian wife? The text doesn’t say. If that is the case, that alone is a violation as the Priests were only supposed to marry from within the tribe of Levi.) Anyway, the two boys were corrupt and violated a bunch of God’s laws as the next in line to be the High Priest.
 - c) The good part of the last chapter had to do with Samuel. His mother Hannah “gave” Samuel to God by literally delivering him to this Temple site and told the High Priest he will be here as long as he lives as a servant. Despite the corruption of Eli’s two sons, Samuel ignored them and did what was right. That is the point of the first sentence.

- d) The second sentence states, "The word of the LORD was rare/not many visions".
 - i) In these times, the main way God spoke to the people of Israel was by prophets. God would pick someone to be His spokesmen to the people.
 - ii) We get clues in the Scripture that this was a time era where the Nation of Israel turned their collective backs on God. 1st Samuel opens where the Book of Judges ends. Judges ends at a time of moral corruption.
 - iii) My view is the reason that the "word of Lord was rare" is because judgment was coming. It is as if God is saying, "OK folks, you want to ignore me, fine, I'll ignore you too. You won't hear from me. Just remember, the words I gave to Moses hold true. Just because you don't study them, doesn't mean you're not accountable. You know what they are and they are there for your learning."
- 4. Verse 2: One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.
 - a) Notice the phrase "The lamp of God had not yet gone out" in Verse 3.
 - i) Part of the job of the High Priest was to keep the lamp burning at night. (Ref. Leviticus 24:2-4).
 - ii) This reference in Verses 2 and 3 tell of the time of day. It mentions it was late at night. It mentions that Eli could "barely see". I believe the reference is also designed to be a "pun" or a "word-picture" that judgment is coming. When we think of "pun's" in English, we think of using inappropriate words in a sentence that have a double meaning. In Hebrew, a "pun" is a connecting word picture between the immediate action and some future event.
 - iii) The "lamp not yet going out" is a "pun" to the fact that Eli had not disciplined his two sons for their bad behavior as discussed in the last chapter and will be mentioned again in a few verses. The "pun" is the judgment comes when the "lights go out". Eli and his two sons die at the end of Chapter 4.
 - iv) It is also a "pun" about the Nation of Israel, in that they have been corrupt just as Eli's two sons are corrupt. While there were exceptions like Samuel, for the most part, the nation of Israel was ignoring God.
 - v) My point is that these verses set the stage that judgment is coming.
- 5. Verse 4: Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." ⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. ⁶ Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.
 - a) In Verses 4-8, we are going to have the story of God calling out to Samuel three times. All three times Samuel thought it was Eli calling him and not God. On the third time, Eli realized it was God speaking. Eli told Samuel that if you hear that voice again, realize it is God, and ask the Lord to speak to you.
 - b) First, let's talk about why this event occurred the way it did.
 - i) Let's face it, God could have sent an angel with bright lights all around him. This angel could have stood in front of Samuel and say something to the effect of "I'm an angel sent by God with a message. Now listen up kid!" ☺

- c) Part of the reason for this triple-appearance was for Eli's sake. God wanted Eli to realize that He was speaking through Samuel as opposed to say, Eli himself or his two sons!
- d) The other reason for this whole exercise was for Samuel himself to learn to recognize the voice of God. Further it is about obedience to that voice.
 - i) The most powerful sentence in this chapter is the one that says, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." If you want God to communicate with us, we need to:
 - a) 1) Acknowledge that God is Lord of our lives. He is in charge.
 - b) 2) We need to have a servant's attitude. A servant is one who is interested in making their master look good as opposed to themselves. Our jobs as Christians are to make God look good in our lives as opposed to ourselves.
- e) What fascinated me about this whole thing was Eli's attitude.
 - i) On one hand, give the guy credit for teaching Samuel how to listen for God's voice. On the other hand, I don't know how Eli could go back to sleep! If I knew God was trying to give a message to someone next to me, I'd be awake the rest of the night standing next to Samuel watching what he has to say.
 - ii) I believe is reflective of Eli's problem. His biggest sin was not raising his two sons properly and not removing them as priests when he became corrupt. Now here he was, knowing that God is about to speak to Samuel, and the guy goes back to bed! Contrast that attitude with Samuel. Every time God spoke Samuel got up to be a servant. That is a good attitude for us when God calls us. God is looking for people willing to step out in obedience to whatever He calls us to do.
- f) This is a good time to deviate and discuss "hearing God's voice".
 - i) First of all, I don't believe we have to strain ourselves to hear God's voice. If God wants to give us a message, He can talk louder than any background noise or thought. God can do anything He wants. He can give us a message audibly or through a dream or quietly. He is in charge and we are not.
 - ii) Most Christians never audibly hear the voice of God. God wants us to walk by faith and not wait for special messages. For example we don't lay in bed and think, "Oh Lord, shall I get up today and brush my teeth? ☺ God responds by saying "I gave you a brain, now go use it". ☺ We usually pray for difficult decisions or for guidance. There is nothing wrong with that.
 - iii) We just have to know that God usually works in the background of our lives, just as he works in the background of the lives of the bible characters.
 - a) For example, we don't read in the Book of Acts of God telling Peter or Paul, "Now an angel came and said, "Make a left turn here". ☺ We pray for guidance and then we just "go out and move". We use our brains and the circumstances to discern how to best glorify God in any situation.
 - iv) One of my favorite bible illustrations is between Jesus and Peter in Matthew 16.
 - a) To summarize, Peter calls Jesus Lord at one point. Jesus said that God the Father revealed that knowledge to Peter. I seriously doubt that Peter heard any special voices when he made that statement. It just "came naturally" to Peter to speak out that Jesus was Lord. That is how God speaks to us.
 - b) In that same chapter, when Jesus predicted his crucifixion, Peter said in effect, "Not so Lord". Jesus said in effect that Satan used Peter for that statement. Again, I don't think there was a little guy with a red pitchfork on Peter's shoulders making that statement. Peter just blurted out his thoughts the same way Peter said Jesus is the Messiah in the same chapter.
 - c) My point is we use the Word of God to discern "God's will" and to know when God is "speaking through us" as opposed to our own thoughts.

- g) OK, what about situations like Samuel? Can God call us and speak audibly?
 - i) Sure He can. Again, God is in charge, and therefore, God can do whatever He wants. If that can happen in the Old Testament, it can happen in our lives as well.
 - ii) My point is that we should not expect it nor demand it. That would be us telling God how He should act in any situation. Remember we are the servants, not God.
 - a) At the same time, consider the possibility that if you can't sleep, God may want to talk to you! There have been times when a middle of the night prayer about whatever is on my mind has helped me get back to sleep.
 - iii) If God has something audibly He wants to say to us, He will on His timing. We don't have to panic if we don't hear God speaking to us. We simply go about our business of being obedient to God. We go about praying for God's will to be done as well as studying God's working and applying it accordingly.
 - h) One last thing from the text and we'll move on. Notice Samuel's obedience to Eli.
 - i) The last part of Verse 9 states, "So Samuel went and lay down in his place."
 - ii) This is after the two times Samuel woke up and after Eli told him to say if God calls him again, "Speak LORD, for your servant is listening".
 - iii) In order to be used by God, we have to have a willing to listen to God and take the time to wait on God. Samuel went back to his place to wait for the voice of God.
 - iv) That does not mean we can skip work or school so we can lie in bed and wait for the voice of God. ☺ ("Sorry I'm late for work, I was waiting for God to speak to me." That won't work, even for a Christian boss!)
 - v) It does mean we pray to make ourselves available to God. It means we are willing to do something we didn't plan on doing if God tells us. It means we are willing to change some aspect of our lifestyle if it is God's will.
6. Verse 10: The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."
- a) Again, we see Samuel's obedience. By the way, there is no "magic words" to Verse 10. It is not a matter of saying these exact words in order to get God to speak to us. It is about attitude. It is about our willingness to see God as the Lord of our lives on a moment-by-moment basis and to be willing to do whatever He commands us. That lesson not only applies to audible messages, but to the times we read our bibles as well.
7. Verse 11: And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. ¹² At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family--from beginning to end. ¹³ For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. ¹⁴ Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.' "
- a) Here comes the moment where God announces His judgment on Eli and his family.
 - b) God held Eli accountable as the High Priest. The next High Priest was to be the son of the current High Priest. Part of the duty of the High Priest is to train up the next generation. It was a capital crime to not correctly perform the duties as described for the High Priest in the Book of Leviticus. Eli's great sin was "failing to restrain them" (Verse 13).
 - c) This is not so much about a father-son issue as it is a "boss-employee" relationship. Eli's two sons were grown men and accountable for their actions. However Eli was held accountable as the "boss" for not removing them.
 - d) This is a good lesson for Christian parents and their grown Christian children. Our primary loyalty as believers is to God over and above our children. We still love our grown children when they mess up, but it is a sin to "let their actions go" if and when we have the power to do something about it.

- e) Notice the judgment was given to Samuel and not to Eli himself. Let's face it, if God wanted to, He could have spoken audibly to Eli himself or his sons. This was done this way for a number of reasons:
- i) It helps to establish Samuel as a spokesman (i.e., "a prophet") from God.
 - ii) It was done to show Samuel himself that God holds the high priest accountable. God is going to spend the rest of Samuel's life building him up to be a prophet. That means God needed to teach Samuel himself about responsibility.
 - iii) It was also done this way to tell Eli in a sense, "Just to show I am through with you and your family, I am not going to speak to you directly anymore. You're family has been disobedient to me as High Priest and I'm communicating this message to you through another source (Samuel) just to show I no longer accept you."
- f) Let's talk about the long-term affect of their judgment. God declared that "The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering."
- i) Loose translation: It's too late to say they're sorry. ☺
 - ii) There is a "point of no return" in Christian duty. If God raises you to a prominent position for Him, and out of arrogance became negligent in that duty, I find that God turns and removes you from that position.
 - a) A modern example would be a famous pastor who got caught cheating in adultery. He is probably still saved if he confesses that sin and turns away from it, but that person will most likely be removed from his ministry position. I've watched this happen many times in my lifetime.
 - b) Recently the Roman Catholic Church in the United States had problems with priests who were caught molesting young boys. The issue is the same. God won't let believers "get away with stuff", especially those who are held to prominent positions.
 - c) When God raises us up in those situations, His reputation is on the line even more than ours.
 - iii) In a sense, Eli's sons violated one of the "10 commandments". That is to "not take God's name in vain." (Exodus 20:7). That commandment is not about accidentally swearing using God's name as much as it is about taking lightly our duty before God. If we grow arrogant in the power God has given us to a point where we become negligent or sinful in our duty, we are violating that commandment.
- g) This prediction about the fall of Eli's family came true in the next chapter.
- i) We're going to read of Eli's sons dying in the next chapter.
 - ii) Technically, the family of Eli is not completely removed from the priestly duties until the time of King Solomon. Does that mean the "innocent children" of Eli's sons have to suffer for the sins of their parents? Well, yes and no. ☺
 - a) On one hand God says, "The Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me" (Exodus 20:5 NIV).
 - b) On the other hand God says, "The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son." (Ezekiel 18:20 NIV)
 - c) This is not a contradiction. God does not hold the children guilty of sins committed by their parents. The effect of sins goes on for several generations, and that is the point of the Exodus Verse.
 - d) For example, if a parent is an alcoholic, it will affect those who are his children. That would be an example of Exodus 20:5.

- iii) Since Eli's kids were corrupt, it would seem likely that that attitude was past on to their children. Therefore when God removed Eli's grandchildren or great-grandchildren from the priesthood, it is a statement that the "family corruption is beyond repair". In a sense, it is like a mercy killing of a horse that broke its leg.
- h) Before we move on, notice the time frame gap between Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.
 - i) In Chapter 2, Eli was warned through an unnamed prophet that Eli was failing to perform his duty as a boss and remove his sons. In Chapter 3 we have this pronouncement of judgment. There is a time gap where God gave Eli a chance to repent and change. His failure to change things in the years between these two chapters is when God spoke to Samuel and said, "That's it, I've had it." ☺
 - ii) I have found God works that way in our lives as well. I have yet to see a Christian that has "fallen" that was not aware of their sin and had time to repent.
- i) This might be a good time to discuss battling addictions.
 - i) There are many Christians who are doing things they know are wrong and are struggling to change.
 - ii) I have heard stories of say, drug-addicted people who accept Jesus and they had the miraculous ability to change overnight. For most people, that change is a slow painful process. Remember that crucifixion itself was slow and painful. God often works the same way killing the sin of our life.
 - iii) The one thing I highly recommend in those situations is to not tackle it alone. Get involved in some Christian accountability group going through or have gone through the same situation. Have them pray for you and vice versa. In the modern world of internet-based information, it is easy to find such groups for help. The point is "don't try to solve it by self-discipline". You'll lose every time.
 - iv) The last thing to remember is that God has all knowledge. God knows of all sins you commit past, present and future. Therefore, if God calls you into salvation, He is quite aware of what you are currently going through back when He did call you. He knows of all the times you have "failed" even after you are saved. He is not going to send you to hell if you are trusting in Jesus despite your "losing battle" with sin. The issue at hand is not eternal judgment. The judgments of these chapters are about life-on-earth punishments for disobedience.
 - v) Meanwhile, back to Samuel. ☺
- 8. Verse 15: Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, ¹⁶ but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son." Samuel answered, "Here I am."
 - a) I doubt Samuel slept that much that night. Here he was told that judgment was coming upon the guy who has raised him since he was a little boy. Imagine trying to tell that news to the person you look up to as your father!
 - i) This is another example of "where God leads, God provides". If God gives you a specific task to perform, God will make it possible to perform that task.
 - b) There is a parallel between how Samuel responded to God and Samuel responded to Eli.
 - i) When God spoke to Samuel, Samuel responded with "Here I am". The same words were used when Eli called Samuel.
 - ii) Notice what Samuel did not say to Eli "Hey God spoke to me last night. You're doomed old timer and I don't have a lot to say to you!" ☺
 - iii) The point is Samuel was still an obedient servant to Eli despite the judgment. Samuel was not negligent in his duty.

- c) The text also mentions that Samuel performed his daily duty of opening the door to the House of the Lord. I was curious why the bible included that little fact.
 - i) My personal theory is that I see a little “word-picture” of the future of Israel. Samuel himself “opening the door” is a word-picture that the future religious leadership is becoming his responsibility as opposed to Eli and his children.
 - ii) It’s a bit trivial, but I needed to mention that. ☺
9. Verse 17: "What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes."
- a) Here is Eli getting the news about God’s judgment on him and his children. Eli responded with a statement of essentially, “Let God do what He thinks is best”,
 - b) I have to admit, Eli’s reaction puzzled me.
 - i) Eli accepted the fact that this was a genuine message of God.
 - ii) There is no mention of Eli being frightened.
 - iii) There is no mention of Eli desiring to repent and change.
 - iv) The reaction is sort of “oh well, let God do what he think is best.”
 - c) You get the impression Eli was near of his life. It is almost as if he knew this judgment is correct and he accepted it.
 - i) I’ve heard stories that when criminals get caught who have been on the run for a long time, there is often a sense of relief. They know they are guilty of a crime and being caught releases the guilt of their conscious.
10. Verse 19: The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹ The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.
- a) What Verses 19-21 are saying is that people would make pilgrimages to this Temple location, and Samuel would speak words to people, and essentially, whatever Samuel said came true. Word got out all over Israel that Samuel was a prophet.
 - b) When the bible says, “from Dan to Beersheba” would be like an American saying, “From Maine to California” or “Maine to Hawaii”. The tribe of Dan had the northern-most territory and Beersheba is the southern border of Israel.
 - c) It’s interesting to read this and think about Hannah from the last chapter. Here was this woman who gave Samuel to God to help get past her barrenness. The last thing she ever thought was that he would be this prominent prophet in Israel. That reminds us that we don’t know how God is working things out for us in the long run.
11. Chapter 4, Verse 1: And Samuel's word came to all Israel. Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. ² The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield.
- a) Chapter 4 is an expansion of details of the predictions of Chapter 3. In this chapter we will read of the death of Eli and sons. We’ll also read of the deaths of lots of Jewish soldiers in battle. In both cases it is about judgment based on behavior.
 - b) The local enemy of the Israelites at that time is the Philistines. Amos 9:7 says they came from Capthor, which is the ancient name for Crete, part of Greece today. Historians claim they had a technology advantage over the Israelites when it came to warfare.
 - c) The modern word “Palestine” is a derivative of the word “Philistines”. When the Romans destroyed Israel after 70AD, to further insult the Jews, they renamed the land “Palestine” after the Philistines as to not recognize the Jewish people.

- i) The modern Palestinians are not the descendants of the Philistines. The modern Palentians are of Arabic descent that settled there in the past millennium.
 - ii) OK, I've drifted off topic again. Sorry about that. ☺
 - d) We are not given the reason for this battle, just the fact that it happened. It may have been a case of conquest and/or the land is not big enough for the both of them.
 - e) A pattern to notice all through the Old Testament is that whenever God is angry with the Nation of Israel for collectively turning their backs on Him, "all of a sudden" some enemy group wants to attack Israel. It is as if there is a connection between being spiritual weak as a country and physical weak as a military.
 - i) The "word picture" of course is that when we become spiritually weak is when Satan does his best work on us. God designed it this way to keep us close to him. In those times when we turn our back on God is when "things often happen." This is not a guarantee, but I've seen this pattern in my life on small and big scales.
 - f) The important line here is that this battle happened, and 4,000 Israeli soldiers died. That fact ties to the next set of verses.
12. Verse 3: When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the LORD bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies." ⁴ So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.
- a) First of all, let's give the Israelite soldiers a little credit in that they turned to God to ask why they were defeated. They didn't blame their own lack of courage or they didn't blame bad military strategy. They understood there was a correlation between God protecting them and how they were to fare in battle.
 - b) The mistake was they then turned to the "ark of the Lord" as a good luck charm. Notice in Verse 3 the word "it". Let's bring "it" into battle as opposed to God's will.
 - c) Before we move on, let's discuss the "ark of the Lord" itself.
 - i) About 400 years earlier, in the Book of Exodus, there were instructions on how to build a tabernacle to worship God. This was to be the central place of worship for several million Jewish people. The location itself was not that big. It was designed for priests to be in charge of the people. Individuals could also come to this location to offer individual sacrifices. Every aspect of the tabernacle is "word-pictures" about our relationship with God. It is a great study unto itself.
 - ii) There was an open court in this tabernacle and a covered tent. Within the tent itself was a bunch of pieces of furniture. The most holiest thing was the "ark of the covenant". This was a small box (say half the size of a coffin) that contained the original 10 commandments among a few other things. The High Priest was only to approach the area where the ark existed once a year. Bottom line, this was a "special thing" and it was only to be "messed with" in a specific manner.
 - d) Here we are 400 years later. I'm sure the original tabernacle structure was worn out and was now replaced with a more permanent like structure where Eli and Samuel worked.
 - i) The Israelites of Samuel's time new the ancient stories of the parting of the Red Sea, the fall of Jericho, etc. and knew that this "box" was the center of worship.
 - e) Getting back to the text, notice what was not said by the Israelite soldiers:
 - i) "Maybe the reason we lost is there is some sin we must confess".
 - ii) "Maybe the reason we lost is that we failed to pray for God's guidance".
 - iii) The desire for the soldiers to take the Ark into battle was not to bring God along, but it was to bring "it" along. The "it" is the Ark, as a good-luck charm.

- f) This leads back to God's promise of conquering the land:
- i) If you read Exodus through Deuteronomy, Moses led the Israelites to conquer the individual tribes living in the Promised Land at that time.
 - ii) Notice this promise given to Moses: "Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land." (Exodus 23:30 NIV). Does this mean God "failed" when the Israelites lost this battle?
 - a) No. In fact, there is a story in the book of Joshua how they lost a particular battle 300-400 years earlier because of their arrogance of trying to win a battle without seeking God's help. (Reference: Joshua Chapter 7).
 - iii) God stated on Exodus 23:30 that He will drive out Israel's enemies "little by little". That means that as we seek God moment by moment He works with us. In practical terms, we can't pray once, say 5 years ago, and figure that is good for the next 10-30 years. ☺ There is a parallel thought between the fact that God drives out the enemies of Israel "little by little" and at the same time God wants to mature us by driving out the sin in our life on a "little by little basis".
13. Verse 5: When the ark of the LORD's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook.
- a) The Israelites had a praise meeting! ☺ I'm sure it was loud. I'm sure it fired them up. It was probably like a sales-staff meeting with a powerful motivational speaker.
 - b) Skip Heitzig, a Calvary Chapel pastor gave an illustration that applies here: There was 19th Century church service where the pastor didn't have time to prepare. He improvised and spent a lot of time "getting emotional". The speech was emotionally charged, but lacked substance. In the audience was an old Indian that converted to Christianity. When asked what he thought of the service, the Indian responded, "Big clouds, big thunder, no rain". What he meant by that is that it lacked substance.
 - c) This army sought after God to do their will. They failed because they didn't seek God to do His will. Remember that we go to church to serve God, not for "what we can get" out of church. As servants of Christ, our job is to make Him look good, not vice-versa.
14. Verse 6: Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, "What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?" When they learned that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp,⁷ the Philistines were afraid. "A god has come into the camp," they said. "We're in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before."⁸ Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert.
- a) Verses 6-8 are the Philistines reaction to the noise of the Israelites praising God.
 - i) Notice the Philistines knew the accurate history of the Jewish people who lived there 400 years earlier. They knew that the Hebrew "gods" struck the Egyptians.
15. Verse 9: Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!"
- a) The Philistines believed in many gods. To them, the Hebrew "god" was just another god. Therefore, they thought this "god" could be defeated.
 - b) Think about this from the perspective of the Philistines. They understood that this Hebrew God was powerful enough to do amazing miracles. It is as if they saw the movie "The 10 Commandments" and understood all of it to be true. ☺ Yet despite that, they refuse to serve that God, or at the least inquire about it. If anything, it got the Philistines to "dig their heels in deeper" and fight the true God. This is the way many nonbelievers act when confronted with God. It just makes them resist all that much more.
16. Verse 10: So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers.¹¹ The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

- a) Verses 10 and 11 maybe the most powerful in this section. Stop and take that in for a moment: 30,000 soldiers died in defeat.
 - b) It makes you wonder if the Israelite soldiers got arrogant because they were carrying around the Ark of the Covenant into battle. The Israelites expected their enemies to just give up because they had their good luck charm with them.
 - c) Further, this is where Eli's two sons died. They were not soldiers. Maybe they were the ones carrying the ark to the battle. Maybe they were just there.
 - d) Let's go back to the prediction made to Samuel earlier in this chapter. Part of it said: "See, I (God) am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle." The idea of "tingling ears" is the idea that everyone will hear about it.
 - i) I believe that prediction ties to the death of the 30,000 soldiers. If it was just the death of the high priests son, people would say, "oh too bad". But the death of 30,000 affected everyone in the land as well as the ark being captured.
 - ii) As to the death of the two sons, this was predicted in Chapter 2, Verse 34. The specific prediction was that they would die on the same day.
 - e) What we have in Verses 10-11 is God acting out on His judgment on Eli's sons as well as his judgment on the Israelite Nation.
 - i) Their sins were the same: Lack of obedience.
 - ii) Eli's sons did not act as High Priests in the specified manner. It was a capital crime. Because Eli himself refused to punish them, God did.
 - iii) Leviticus 16 states that the Ark of the Covenant is to be kept in the "Holy Place" in the Tabernacle. That is a specific room that was only to be entered by the High Priest once per year. The Nation of Israel violated that command, led by Eli's two sons. The penalty for violating that law was the death of the 30,000.
 - f) So does that mean each of the 30,000 soldiers were at fault?
 - i) God held the Nation of Israel accountable to know God's law. Further, he held the leaders responsible to teach that law. Failure to keep that law meant judgment.
 - ii) Again, I don't think the deaths meant that all 30,000 are in hell. Eternal judgment is an individual thing. This is "group judgment" for lack of obedience.
 - iii) The important thing to understand is that God still judges nations and groups. I am convinced churches have faltered for a lack of obedience. The bible speaks of Nations that have been destroyed based on their treatment of Israel. As to the Philistines, "they get theirs" later in the book for attacking God's chosen people.
 - iv) What does this mean for us? A healthy "fear of God" is a good thing both on an individual basis and a group basis. The group could be our church, our country, or a specific ministry we belong to. If we claim to be working "In God's Name", then God holds us accountable for our actions.
17. Verse 12: That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh, his clothes torn and dust on his head. ¹³ When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry. ¹⁴ Eli heard the outcry and asked, "What is the meaning of this uproar?" The man hurried over to Eli, ¹⁵ who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes were set so that he could not see. ¹⁶ He told Eli, "I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day." Eli asked, "What happened, my son?"
- a) This text tells the details of someone who escaped from the battle to go tell Eli the results.
 - b) Notice Verse 13 says, "Eli feared for the ark of the God"
 - i) Notice it does not say Eli feared for the Nation of Israel.
 - ii) Notice it does not say Eli feared for the life of His sons.

- iii) Eli knew the law. Eli knew the predictions about His sons. I'm speculating that Eli was most concerned about his duty as High Priest and the ark as the most important symbol of the presence of God.
 - c) A minor note: The man bringing the news to Eli was "wearing sackcloth and ashes". This is a Jewish sign of mourning, the same way we wear black clothing to a funeral.
 - d) There is a Jewish tradition that man bringing the news was Saul. It is not verifiable to know if that was true.
 - e) Onto the "why" question: Why give all these details about the messenger bringing the detailed news to Eli? Part of it is to fill in the story of how Eli found out. I believe a big part of it is to show the completeness of God's judgment. God in a sense is saying, "I've had it with this Nation and this High Priest" and pronounced judgment.
 - i) It shows that judgment often comes through circumstances. "Judgment" does not come from a lightning bolt from heaven to zap someone. ☺ What we may see as a "coincidence" that Eli's sons died in this battle is God working behind the scenes to complete His promised judgment.
 - f) This brings up the question: Are all natural disasters and battle loses due to God's judgment? Essentially, no. This is a specific case where God brought judgment. There are lots of bible predictions of God's judgment on a particular nation or city. My point is that we should not assume that say, a modern earthquake is God's judgment.
 - i) I use "Sodom and Gomorrah" as a key example. God told Abraham that he would spare those cities if 10 "righteous people" were found (Genesis 18:32). So lets say there is a wicked city. If there are a handful of devout Christians there, I don't believe a destruction type of judgment that is specifically God ordained.
18. Verse 17: The man who brought the news replied, "Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured." ¹⁸ When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy. He had led Israel forty years.
- a) The news of Israel losing a battle was shocking to Eli. That didn't kill him.
 - b) The news of Israel losing his two sons was shocking to Eli. That didn't kill him.
 - c) The news of Israel losing the ark was shocking to Eli. That killed him.
 - d) Both the predictions of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 never mentioned any type of death judgment on Eli himself. The point is a God-given prophecy may not give all the details.
 - e) Notice Verse 18 mentions Eli was heavy. If you remember from the first two chapters, Eli's sons were guilty of stealing the best cuts of meat. Most suspect that Eli benefited from this business and grew fat himself.
 - f) The number "40" in the bible is often associated with judgment. For example with Noah, it "rained for 40 days and 40 nights".
 - i) What is interesting here is that Eli had a long time to repent and didn't. If anything, this story shows the patience of God waiting for Eli to change. It also shows there is a limit to God's patience. Judgment day does come.
19. Verse 19: His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor pains. ²⁰ As she was dying, the women attending her said, "Don't despair; you have given birth to a son." But she did not respond or pay any attention. ²¹ She named the boy Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel"--because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. ²² She said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

- a) We have this epilog story of Eli's daughter-in-law. She hears about her husband, her brother-in-law and her father-in-law dying, the ark being lost, etc. and goes into premature labor. The baby's name is Ichabod, which means "glory departed".
 - b) This story shows that the priestly line of Eli was not 100% done. The end of that line being High Priest did not end until the time of Solomon.
 - c) I went pretty quickly through the last set of verses as in a sense, they are "just the details" of the promised judgment by God in Chapter 3.
 - i) We read that God's judgment was thorough and complete.
 - ii) There is an old expression that goes something like, "The mills of God grind slowly, but the mills of God grind completely." It means that when God's judgment does come, it is slow in coming, but when it does finally happen, it is complete and does a thorough job.
 - a) A lack of obedience by Eli cost him his life, his sons and his lineage to be high priests forever.
 - b) That corruption of the high priest spread to the people. Their failure to be obedient caused the death of 30,000 soldiers.
 - iii) It makes you wonder if the people were corrupt to begin with and that spread to Eli's sons or vice-versa. Either way, God expected His people to know His laws and be obedient to them.
 - d) There are Christians who state, "I live under grace and not under the law. That means they are not condemned by the Law because God forgives them of their sins.
 - i) Yes, this is true, but they forgot to read the fine print. ☺
 - ii) Paul said, "For if God did not spare the natural branches (Jewish Nation), He may not spare you (a believer) either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off." (Romans 11:21-22 NIV)
 - iii) Again, this is not a salvation issue. This is about being God's representatives to the world. God does hold us accountable. He does judge people and nations today. In Acts, God "killed" a couple that lied to the church. He can and does the same today.
20. OK, on that happy note, we can end the lesson. ☺ God uses a "carrot and a stick" approach on us. Today's lesson focuses more on the "stick". Let us keep both in mind.
- a) Stay tuned for the next lesson. Life gets better. Where there is judgment on earth for believers it is always tied with a ribbon of hope. We'll get to that in the next lesson.
21. Let's pray: Heavenly father, we are grateful you called us into salvation. We have turned our lives over to You and live to be Your witnesses. Help us to stick close to You so we can be a good witness for you. Help us to learn from the characters in this story so the same mistakes won't have to be wasted on us. Forgive us of our arrogance and lack of obedience for what You call us to do. Help us to live with a healthy "Fear of God" in our lives so we can be Your representatives both to other believers and nonbelievers as well. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.