

**THE CASE OF ELI**  
 Faith and Action  
 Banska Bystrica, 12 October 2014

1Sa 1-4; Jer 17:9

1Sa 2:30

וְעַתָּה נֶאֱמַר יְהוָה... כִּי־מִכְבְּרֵי אֶכְבֵּד וּבְנֵי יִקְלֹוּ

1Sa 2:30 ...those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed

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**0. INTRO: THE STORY AND ITS BACKGROUND**

**0.1. THE TEXT**

- **1Sa 1:1-3** There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite. <sup>2</sup> He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. <sup>3</sup> Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of **Eli**, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD.
- **1 Sa 1:9** Now **Eli** the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. ... **1:12-14** As she continued praying before the LORD, **Eli** observed her mouth. <sup>13</sup> Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore **Eli** took her to be a drunken woman. <sup>14</sup> And **Eli** said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put away your wine from you." ... **1:17** Then **Eli** answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him."
- **1Sa 1:25-28** Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to **Eli**. <sup>26</sup> And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence,

praying to the LORD. <sup>27</sup> For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him. <sup>28</sup> Therefore I have lent him (אָנֹכִי הִשְׁאֵלְתִּהוּ לַיהוָה) to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

- **1Sa 2:11-18** And the boy ministered to the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest. <sup>12</sup> Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD. <sup>13</sup> The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, <sup>14</sup> and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. <sup>15</sup> Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but only raw." <sup>16</sup> And if the man said to him, "Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish," he would say, "No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force." <sup>17</sup> Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt. <sup>18</sup> Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy clothed with a linen ephod.
- **1 Sa 2:20-21** Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the LORD." So then they would return to their home. <sup>21</sup> Indeed the LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the young man Samuel grew in the presence of the LORD.
- **1 Sa 2:22-25** Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. <sup>23</sup> And he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. <sup>24</sup> No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. <sup>25</sup> If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.
- **1Sa 2:27-36** And there came a man of God to Eli and said to him, "Thus the LORD has said, 'Did I indeed reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh? <sup>28</sup> Did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? I gave to the house of your father all my offerings by fire from the people of Israel. <sup>29</sup> Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?' <sup>30</sup> Therefore the LORD the God of Israel declares: 'I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out 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 shall be lightly esteemed. <sup>31</sup> Behold, the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. <sup>32</sup> Then in distress you will look with envious eye on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed on Israel, and there shall not be an old man in your house forever. <sup>33</sup> The only one of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep his eyes out to grieve his heart, and all the descendants of your house shall die by the sword of men. <sup>34</sup> And this that shall come upon your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day. <sup>35</sup> And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever. <sup>36</sup> And everyone who is left in your house shall come to implore him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread and shall say, "Please put me in one of the priests' places, that I may eat a morsel of bread.'"
  - **1Sa 3:9-10** ...therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. <sup>10</sup> And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." ...**1Sa 3:11-18** Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. <sup>12</sup> On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. <sup>13</sup> And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because

his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. <sup>14</sup> Therefore I swear to the house of **Eli** that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." <sup>15</sup> Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to **Eli**. <sup>16</sup> But **Eli** called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." <sup>17</sup> And **Eli** said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." <sup>18</sup> So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him."

- **1Sa 3:17** And Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." <sup>18</sup> So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him."
- **1Sa 4:11-18** And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. <sup>12</sup> A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes torn and with dirt on his head. <sup>13</sup> When he arrived, **Eli** was sitting on his seat by the road watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out. <sup>14</sup> When **Eli** heard the sound of the outcry, he said, "What is this uproar?" Then the man hurried and came and told **Eli**. <sup>15</sup> Now **Eli** was ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set so that he could not see. <sup>16</sup> And the man said to **Eli**, "I am he who has come from the battle; I fled from the battle today." And he said, "How did it go, my son?" <sup>17</sup> He who brought the news answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great defeat among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured." <sup>18</sup> As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years.
- **1Ki 2:27** So Solomon expelled Abiathar from being priest to the LORD, thus fulfilling the word of the LORD that he had spoken concerning the house of **Eli** in Shiloh.

## 0.2. BACKGROUND – SOME RELATED ISSUES

- Shechem → Shiloh (the sanctuary – Tabernacle)
- Samuel's genealogy - **1 Chronicles 6:32-38** they ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting until Solomon built the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they performed their service according to their order. <sup>33</sup> These are the men who served and their sons. Of the sons of the Kohathites: Heman the singer the son of Joel, son of Samuel, <sup>34</sup> son of Elkanah, son of Jeroham, son of Eliel, son of Toah, <sup>35</sup> son of Zuph, son of Elkanah, son of Mahath, son of Amasai, <sup>36</sup> son of Elkanah, son of Joel, son of Azariah, son of Zephaniah, <sup>37</sup> son of Tahath, son of Assir, son of Ebiasaph, son of Korah, <sup>38</sup> son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, son of Israel;

## 0.3. COMMENTARY

Eli<sup>1</sup>

Eli was one Old Testament person with a very modern problem. The recognition and respect he earned in public did not extend to his handling of his private affairs. He may have been an excellent priest, but he was a poor parent. His sons brought him grief and ruin. He lacked two important qualities needed for effective parental discipline: firm resolve and corrective action.

Eli responded to situations rather than solving them. But even his responses tended to be weak. God pointed out his sons' errors, but Eli did little to correct them. The contrast between God's dealing with Eli and Eli's dealing with his sons is clear—God gave warning, spelled out the consequences of disobedience, and then acted. Eli only warned. Children need to learn that their parents' words and actions go together. Both love and discipline must be spoken as well as acted out.

But Eli had another problem. He was more concerned with the symbols of his religion than with the God they represented. For Eli, the Ark of the Covenant had become a relic to be protected rather than a reminder of the Protector. His faith shifted from the Creator to the created.

<sup>1</sup> Life Application Bible

It may be easier to worship things we can see, whether buildings, people, or Scripture itself, but such tangible things have no power in themselves. ...A relic or antique has to be carefully stored away; God's Word has to be used and obeyed. Which attitude accurately describes your approach to the Word of God?

Strengths and accomplishments

Judged Israel for 40 years

Spoke with Hannah, the mother of Samuel, and assured her of God's blessing

Reared and trained Samuel, the greatest judge of Israel

Weaknesses and mistakes

Failed to discipline his sons or correct them when they sinned

Tended to react to situations rather than take decisive action

Saw the Ark of the Covenant as a relic to be cherished rather than as a symbol of God's presence with Israel

Lessons from his life

Parents need to discipline their children responsibly

Life is more than simply reacting; it demands action

Past victories cannot substitute for present trust

Vital statistics

Where: Shiloh

Occupations: High priest, judge of Israel

Relatives: Sons: Hophni and Phinehas

Contemporary: Samuel

#### 0.4. FALSE OPTIMISM

- [STALKER]<sup>2</sup> "The loss of oneself in missing one's opportunities of moral and spiritual development . . . **may end in the loss of the "soul" in the awful sense of being cast away for ever.**"

- **Ecc 8:11** Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.

אֲשֶׁר אֵין־נִעְשָׂה פְתוּגָם מַעֲשֵׂה הַרְעָה מִהֲרָה עַל־כֵּן מָלֵא לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם בְּהִמְלָעֵשׂוֹת רָע

[LLOYD-JONES] People say, 'Do not be negative; let us be positive; let us just preach the simple gospel'. But the Bible is full of negatives, full of warnings, ever showing us these terrible possibilities. If you find in yourself a dislike of the warnings of the Scripture and of this negative teaching, it is obvious that you have been duped by the wiles of the devil. You have not realized the situation in which you are placed.<sup>3</sup>

- **Jer 17:9** The **heart** is **deceitful** (עָקָב) above all things, and desperately sick (וְאֵנֶשׁ); who can understand it? (מִי יֵדְעֶנּוּ)

Modern church is very anti-negativism, but in the Bible there are many warnings and negative statements about sin and consequences of a sinful life without repentance.

## 1. ELI HAD GOOD THEOLOGY

### 1.1. ELI'S PRAYER FOR HANNAH

- **1:17** Then **Eli** answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him." (וַאֲלֵהִי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִתֵּן אֶת־שְׁלֹתְךָ)
- "May the LORD give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the LORD." ... Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters.

Eli believes in intercession. He is able to change his opinion (drunk Hannah → praying Hannah). He believes in seriousness of sin (reprimanding his sons).

<sup>2</sup> STALKER, J. *The Ethic of Jesus*, Cincinnati : Jennings & Graham, ?, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> LLOYD-JONES, D.M. *The Christian Warfare (Eph 6:10-13)*, Grand Rapids : Baker Books, 2003, p. 110

## 1.2. ELI REPRIMANDING HIS SONS

- **1 Sa 2:23** And he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. ...If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?"
  - believed in forgiveness
  - took the sin against the LORD seriously
  - warned his sons about the terrible consequences of their behaviour

## 1.3. ELI'S ADVICE TO SAMUEL

- **1Sa 3:9-10** ... "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'
- He knew how to respond to God – did he ever do it himself?

## 2. ELI WAS A GOOD CARETAKER

### 2.1. THE FORTY YEARS OF MINISTRY

- **1Sa 4: 18** ...He had judged Israel forty years.

### 2.2. ELI AS A CARETAKER [HANNAH]

- **1Sa 1:12-14** As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth... And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put away your wine from you."
- [If you aspire to real faith, spirituality or holiness, at all costs *do not take offence!* = Hannah's example – she did not get offended when Eli asked her whether she was drunk]

### 2.3. ELI AS AN EDUCATOR [SAMUEL]

- **1Sa 2:11-18** And the boy ministered to the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest.  
(אֶת־יְהוָה אֶת־פָּנָי עָלַי הַכֹּהֵן)

### 2.4. ELI AS A RELIGIOUS LEADER [THE ARK]

- **1Sa 4:13** ...his heart trembled for the ark of God. ...**1Sa 4:18** ... As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy.

## 3. ELI HAD A PROBLEM

### 3.1. THE HINTS AT ELI'S CORE PROBLEM

- hidden idolatry?

#### 3.1.1. THE FAMILY

- sons before God? **1Sa 2:29**...honor your sons above me
- **Lk 14:26-27** "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup> Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.
- **Mt 18:7** "**Woe to the world for temptations to sin!** For it is necessary that temptations come, but **woe** to the one by whom the temptation comes!

#### 3.1.2. FOOD

- food/comfort before worship? **1Sa 2:29**...fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel (לְהַבְרִיאֲכֶם מִרְאשֵׁית כָּל־מִנְחַת יִשְׂרָאֵל)
- **1Sa 4:18** for the man was old and heavy (בִּי־זָקֵן הָאִישׁ וְכָבֵד)
  - *the problem of overweight*
- **Phil 3: 18-19** ...enemies of the cross of Christ ...their **god** is their **belly**...

- **Rom 16:18** For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites (κοιλία); and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

### 3.1.3. PEACE

- peace before truth? (→ love with truth)
- **1Sa 3:17** And **Eli** said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." <sup>18</sup> So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "He is the LORD. Let him do what is good to him." (יְהוָה הוּא הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵי יְעֻשָׂה) – a passive statement/attitude

[Eli]...he went to bed betimes, being unfit for business and soon weary of it, and perhaps loving his ease too well. Probably he kept his chamber much, which gave his sons the greater liberty. And he sought retirement the more because his eyes began to wax dim, an affliction which came justly upon him for winking at his sons' faults.<sup>4</sup>

## 3.2. SPIRITUALITY AND DISCIPLINE

- Fear of God → fear of sin
  - **Prov 16:6** by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.
  - **1 Peter 1:17** And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile
  - **Heb 12:28** Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, (λατρεύομεν εὐαρέστως τῷ θεῷ μετὰ εὐλαβείας καὶ δέους)
  - **Jude 1:12** ...they feast with you without fear (συνευωχούμενοι ἀφόβως)
- **1Cor 9:27** But I discipline my body and keep it under control (ὑπωπιάζω μου τὸ σῶμα καὶ δουλαγωγῶ)

[Kanatchikov] To begin with, he was somewhat afraid of these 'students' because 'they didn't believe in God and might be able to shake my faith as well ...But he also admired them 'because they were so free, so independent, so well informed about everything, and because there was nobody and nothing on earth that they feared'. As the country boy grew in confidence and sought to emulate their individualism, so he became more influenced by them.<sup>5</sup>

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

- Correct theological views and faithful ministry may coexist with some sort of idolatry in your heart. (Eli died after having heard that the arch had been stolen – he was very religious.)
- Christian life cannot be just a passive submission to “the will of God”. God expects our active involvement in the fight for His honour.
- Beware of the dangerous boldness to sin. Love casts out the fear to approach God but not the fear to sin.

<sup>4</sup> HENRY, M. *Commentary*, 1Sa 3:1-10

<sup>5</sup> FIGES, O. *A People's Tragedy*, London : Pimlico, p. 65.