

Part 2

• *Israel's disgraceful and offensive sin provokes God to action*

**God is dishonoured by religion which fails to lead to godliness**

• *Greed, violence and immorality*

• *Hannah and Samuel are a contrast*

• *Passivity – Eli's sin*

**How God honours or dishonours people**

1. *By speaking to us*

2. *By giving us honourable work*

3. *By meeting our needs*

Israel's sin was so offensive the priests who were leading the nation were about to be entirely removed by God. Shiloh, the central place of worship in the nation, would be destroyed. There was sin at Shiloh, the spiritual centre of the nation. God said: *'Those who honour me I will honour, but those who despise me will be disdained'*<sup>1</sup>. When God's leaders are disgracing his name he is likely to take action.

**God is dishonoured by religion which fails to lead to godliness.** Although Eli wished to be a godly man and acted as friend to the young Samuel<sup>1</sup> and to Hannah<sup>2</sup>, his weakness was his tolerance of his sons<sup>3</sup>. He would rebuke them but would do nothing more<sup>4</sup>. Despite a godly background his sons became wicked men<sup>5</sup>, despising God's worship. Priests were permitted to have the breast and the right thigh of the sacrificed animal for themselves<sup>6</sup>. But the servant of Eli's sons would take whatever the sons liked rather than restrict himself to the portions that were allowed<sup>7</sup>. Also<sup>8</sup> they would want the meat before the best portion had been sacrificed. They were dishonouring God by greed, violence<sup>9</sup> and (as we learn later) by their immorality.

Hannah and Samuel are a contrast to Eli and his sons. Samuel honours the Lord by sincere ministry to God<sup>1</sup>. His mother annually provides for the needs of Samuel, God's servant<sup>2</sup>. Eli's prayers for her are heard by God<sup>3</sup>, and she is rewarded.

Eli had apparently handed over much of his work to his sons. He would hear of the corruption of the worship at Shiloh<sup>1</sup> but would do little about it. He would complain to his sons<sup>2</sup> but would take no action. His sin was that of passivity. He was the most powerful person in Israel, for there was no king and he was the spiritual ruler of the land. He could have stepped in when he first heard of their corrupt ways. Yet he preferred to honour his sons. However, they did not honour Eli and would not obey what he asked<sup>3</sup>.

The writer goes on<sup>1</sup> to tell us how God rewards or dishonours those who treat him in these different ways. Samuel was being progressively honoured by the Lord<sup>2</sup>. Eli and his family were moving towards disaster.

1. **God honours us by speaking to us** and dishonours us by refusing to speak to us. A prophet comes<sup>1</sup> with a word from God. God had revealed himself to the nation<sup>2</sup>. Soon he is speaking to Samuel but no longer speaking to Eli directly.

2. **God honours us by giving us honourable work**; he dishonours us by refusing to use us. God had chosen Eli's ancestor, Aaron, and had given him a ministry<sup>1</sup>. Why should Eli get gain for himself in such a wicked way<sup>2</sup>? He too was profiting from the food that his sons obtained. The ways in which God had honoured his family would have continued for ever. Now Eli and his family were dishonouring God, and would reap a return according to the way they had lived<sup>3</sup>.

3. **God honours us by meeting our needs**, and dishonours us by deprivation. *'I also gave your father's house all the offerings,'* says God<sup>1</sup>. Part of the sacrifices were for the use of the priests. Now that would be lost.

1 2:30

1 2:11

2 2:20

3 2:12

4 2:22-25

5 2:12

6 Lev 7:28-34

7 2:13-14

8 2:15

9 2:16-17

1 2:18

2 2:19

3 2:20-21

1 2:22

2 2:23-25

3 2:25

1 2:26-36

2 2:26

1 2:27

2 2:27

1 2:28

2 2:29

3 2:30

1 2:28

4. By allowing us to reap a good reputation

4. **God honours us by allowing us to reap a good reputation.** Eli would be 'disdained'<sup>□1</sup>.

□1 2:30

5. God honours us by giving us happiness within a family

5. **God honours us by giving us happiness within a family,** but dishonours us by sending that which removes such happiness. God says to Eli 'I will cut off your arm'<sup>□1</sup>, which means that Eli's own strength would soon fail. Soon he would be almost blind<sup>□2□3</sup>. 'I will cut off the arm... of your father's house'<sup>□4</sup> means that a disaster would soon come upon the family. We shall read of the death of his sons<sup>□5</sup> and of his daughter-in-law<sup>□6</sup>. About twenty years later the descendants of Eli were slaughtered by Saul<sup>□7</sup> and only Abiathar, Eli's descendants, escaped. A generation later still, Abiathar lost the privilege of the priesthood<sup>□8</sup>, and the privileges Eli had inherited were lost for ever. He would live to 'see the ruin of the house', the destruction of Shiloh. So frequently would tragedy strike Eli's family none would live to old age<sup>□9</sup>. God says<sup>□10</sup>: 'And any man belonging to you that I do not cut off from my altar will be weeping out his eyes and wearing out his strength and all the descendants of your family line shall die by the swords of men.'<sup>1</sup> Soon Eli's sons shall die in one day<sup>□11</sup>. Another priest will be raised instead<sup>□12</sup>. The reference is to Zadok who in a future generation would replace the line of Eli (1 Kings) and would remain in the priesthood until the end of the Davidic kingship which as a political entity ended in the days of the exile to Babylon. Ultimately Jesus is the faithful priest who perfectly does all of God's will. The line of Zadok was an interim measure until the perfect priest should come. Until Jesus comes the Zadokite line would walk before the Davidic king. When the Saviour came he would be Davidic king and perfect High-Priest at the same time.

□1 2:31

□2 3:2

□3 4:15

□4 2:31

□5 4:11

□6 4:20

□7 22:17-20

□8 1 Kings 2:27

□9 2:32

□10 2:33

□11 2:34

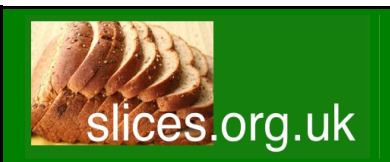
□12 2:35

6. God honours us by giving us contentment

6. **God honours us by giving us contentment** rather than deprivation and subservience. Eli's family would become so degraded that the remains of the family would be begging for financial assistance (a piece of silver), for food (a loaf of bread) and for employment (one of the priests' offices). The godly may suffer for a while. The ungodly may flourish. But in the long run, honouring God is rewarded. Honour comes to us, when honour is given to God.

**Footnote**

1 I have followed the Hebrew reading of the Qumran manuscript, 4QSam<sup>a</sup>, supported by Greek translations (see P.K. McCarter, 1 Samuel, Doubleday, 1980, pp. 90-91).



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible* (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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