

October 17

Scriptures: Read 1 Samuel 2

Key Verse: "... those who honor Me I will honor...". (1 Samuel 2:30b)

Overview

Hannah's beautiful song on the occasion of bringing Samuel to the Lord (2:1-10) is one of praise and thanksgiving to God. It expresses her God-given victory over depression and barrenness. It also proclaims God's great strength and victory over enemies, as well as His providence and absolute sovereignty over all the earth. This song is considered a prophetic utterance as well. "He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed" (1:10b) points to the Messianic hope of Israel which we know to be fully realized in Jesus Christ, the King in the line of David, the "anointed" One whom Luke calls "a horn of salvation for us" (Luke 1:69).

Samuel went to live with Eli the priest. Even from his early childhood, he ministered before the Lord, and all the while he "grew... in favor both with the Lord and men" (2:21, 26). In sharp contrast, however, the sons of Eli were wicked and corrupt. They were extremely sacrilegious, having no regard for the holiness of God nor the sanctity of the ritual offerings unto the Lord. They used their priestly office for their own selfish gain and desires of the flesh. They took the choicest portions of meat from the worshippers before they performed the priestly duties. This was contrary to the prescribed way set forth by Moses (Leviticus 7:29-34). They would not hesitate to use force to get what they wanted. It may also have been with force that they "lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle" (2:22; cf. Exodus 38:8).

How degenerate the priesthood had become! Rather than leading the people in the ways of the Lord, they were leading them to sin. This was a very serious offense (2:24; cf. Mark 9:42). It is no wonder God sent the unnamed prophet to Eli with words of judgment that his house would be cut off from the priesthood. Eli was to some degree responsible for his sons' behaviour, because he did not rebuke them strongly, nor soon enough. Sadly, he may have been too busy in the ministry and taking care of other people's spiritual needs to notice the needs of his own children. The prophet's words indicate that although Eli did not approve he still participated by eating of the wrongly-taken portions of the offerings. Thus he, and his sons were all accused: "Why do you kick at my sacrifice?". This is an idiom meaning that they held the offerings of the Lord in disrespect or scorn. Therefore, even though they were from the line of Aaron through his youngest son Ithamar, they were found unworthy of the holy priestly office and were rejected by God. The sign of this rejection would be the death of both Hophni and Phinehas on the same day (fulfilled in 4:17).

The prophet's solemn words, however, conclude with a note of hope: "I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest..., and he shall walk before My anointed forever" (2:35). God, in His redemptive purpose, would not allow the priesthood to die with Eli, for He had been preparing Samuel to fill that role. This was only a partial fulfillment of the prophecy, as was

the later priesthood of Zadok (1 Kings 2:27). The ultimate fulfillment is found in the eternal Priesthood of Jesus Christ, for only He is a priest “forever”.

In cutting off the family of Eli from the priesthood, God superseded the conditional promise of the priesthood to the family of Aaron. He introduced a higher law: “those who honour Me I will honour” (2:30). Clearly, Eli’s sons did not honour God, therefore God’s wrath and judgment came upon them; but Hannah and Samuel did honour God, so He in turn honoured them. Our Lord Jesus explained that those who serve Him would be honoured by God (John 12:26), since “all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him” (John 5:23).

Prayer

We honour You, O Lord. Thank You for Your promise to honour us. You honour us most of all by Your love and by Your presence. Please keep us from the sins of Eli’s sons and even from Eli’s seeming approval of sin. We pray this in the name of Your “Anointed One” Jesus. Amen.