

“A Tale of Two Families” (1 Samuel 2:11–36)

Do you like reality TV shows? Do you like the family reality shows? (I use this term “family” here very loosely.) There are countless examples: Wife Swap, Super Nanny, and Raising Sextuplets. There are also shows that feature particular celebrity families such as the Hogans, the Hasselhoffs, the Osbournes, the Kardashians, and the Simmons.¹ Reality shows are the most popular programs on TV. For whatever reason, people love observing the personal lives of others.

First Samuel 2:11–36 is one of the original family reality shows.² In this narrative the lives of two families are contrasted and weaved together like a fast-paced reality show. The author’s focus is upon the sins of Hophni and Phinehas, and their father, Eli. Yet, sprinkled throughout this passage are several encouraging scenes that highlight Samuel and his family. Please note the following structure.³

Samuel serving (2:11)
 Worship sins (2:12–17)
Samuel serving (2:18–21)
 Moral sins (2:21–25)
Samuel growing (2:26)
 Prophecy of judgment (2:27–36)
Samuel serving (3:1a)

This text answers the question: What happens when we fail to honor God as we should? The answer is sobering, yet throughout this story there is plenty of encouragement for individuals and families who are seeking to honor the Lord. The point is: *What goes around comes around.*

1. Family contrasts in worship (2:11–17): Our story begins in 2:11 with a startling event: **“Then Elkanah went to his home at Ramah. But the boy ministered to the LORD before Eli the priest.”**⁴ Elkanah dropped off his son Samuel to live with Eli and serve in the temple all the days of his life. The phrase “to the Lord” is telling. While Samuel was trained and mentored by Eli, he worshipped and served the Lord.⁵ Elkanah and Hannah raised Samuel in the Lord to be a person of great impact. As a parent, it is never too early to dedicate your child to love and serve the Lord.

In 2:12–17 the story shifts scenes to spotlight another family. **“Now the sons of Eli⁶ were worthless men; they did not know⁷ the LORD and the custom of the priests with the people. When any man was offering a sacrifice, the priest’s servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand. Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Also,⁸ before they burned the fat, the priest’s servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, ‘Give the priest meat for roasting, as he will not take boiled meat from you, only raw.’ If the man said to him, ‘They must surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as you desire,’ then he would say, ‘No, but you shall give *it to me* now; and if not, I will take it by force.’ Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the LORD.”** The word “now” serves as a transition marker throughout this passage (2:12, 16, 18, 22, 26). The narrator begins by stating that Eli’s sons were “worthless men.” He uses very strong language, literally calling these boys “sons of Belial.”⁹ Belial later became a name for Satan.¹⁰ These boys were “devilish.” What is especially disconcerting is that in 1:16 Eli had accused Hannah of being “a worthless woman” (lit. “a daughter of Belial”). However, 2:12 indicts Eli’s sons as “worthless men” (lit. “sons of Belial”). These priests neither knew the Lord (2:12) nor treated His offerings as special (2:17; cf. Mal 1:6–14).¹¹ Indeed, the misdeeds of the “young men” caused the “men” of Israel to treat with contempt the sacrificial ritual (2:17).

It is important to fully grasp the wickedness of Hophni and Phinehas. Although priests were permitted to have select sacrificial portions for themselves,¹² the servant of Eli's sons would take whatever the boys liked rather than restrict himself to the portions that were allowed (1 Sam 2:13–14). This was likely the original “potluck!” Hophni and Phinehas went even further in their total disregard for the Lord's sacrificial regulations. They insisted on receiving their raw portion, *before* the Lord's fat portion (2:15),¹³ which was normally removed from certain internal organs and offered as a burnt sacrifice to God.¹⁴ But Eli's sons had no regard for God's Law; hence, if anyone resisted, the servant was instructed to take the meat by force (2:16).¹⁵ These sons of Belial had perverted their temple service and were dishonoring God by greed and violence (2:16–17).¹⁶ But, they will soon learn *what goes around comes around*.

There is probably a touch of bitter irony in this section. The word translated “custom” (*mishpat*) has a basic meaning of “justice.” It is based on the same root as the term “judge” (*shaphat*). The leaders God provided for Israel in these days were called “judges.” “Justice” is what they were meant to bring to Israel, by delivering them from their enemies in resolving disputes. The young priests at Shiloh brought their own version of “justice” to Israel, taking as much as they could from the people with the threat of force.¹⁷ Fast-forward into the twenty-first century: It would be like me asking you to give your cash to me instead of putting it into the offering. If you gave me any grief or refused, I would then take it by force! This kind of greed and violence is unimaginable. If I were to ever do anything like this our elders would show me the door. I would then quickly learn the lesson that *what goes around comes around*.

2. Family contrasts in morality (2:18-26): We now return to our boy, Samuel, who serves as a glaring contrast with Eli's sons:¹⁸ **“Now Samuel was ministering before the LORD, as a boy wearing a linen ephod. And his mother would make him a little robe and bring it to him from year to year when she would come up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice”** (2:18–21). In 2:18 and 21 Samuel is described as “before the Lord.” Previously, he was ministering “to the Lord” (cf. 2:11), but as Samuel grows he moves towards greater intimacy with God. He is dressed up in priestly garb. (1) He is wearing a “linen ephod,” which is a sleeveless priestly garment. (2) Every year Hannah would make Samuel a “little robe,” likely the kind worn by the Levites in priestly service.¹⁹ Hannah is not just sewing clothes for her little boy; she is sewing priestly garments for him.²⁰ When Hannah came and visited Samuel, what do you think she said to him? I am confident that she spoke words of hope and blessing over him. I am sure she reminded her son about his calling. She undoubtedly spoke to him about the dignity and duties of the Levitical priests. Hannah had a tremendous impact on her son by the things she sewed, and no doubt, by what she said.²¹ Samuel's life was the outcome of a splendid mother of faith.²²

It is important to note that Hannah powerfully influenced Samuel even though she seldom saw him, lived miles from him, and could not prevent the daily wicked influence of Eli's sons over him. Her previous dedication of him to the Lord undoubtedly was a factor in her success. Other important factors included her continuous encouragement and her prayers for Samuel.²³ These verses offer hope to military moms and wives. They also provide hope for moms whose children have left for college. If you are separated from your loved one, your prayers and your gifts can still mark him or her. Environment does not always determine holiness.²⁴ As parents, we must strive to pour into our marriage and family and then trust God with the results. He cares more about the sanctification of our immediate family members than even we do.

Admittedly, God has not blessed all parents who have the same desires for their children that Hannah did with godly offspring. Children are responsible for their own decisions as they grow up (Ezek 18:4, 20). Some choose to rebel and turn away from the Lord. Nevertheless, this story shows what *can* happen. Children can grow up in an ungodly environment away from their parents' personal supervision and still become godly. Samuel ministered when not yet of age in a spiritual vacuum.²⁵ The influence of a wise and godly parent can overcome many other ungodly influences in a child's life. When you strive to honor God *what goes around comes around*.

In 1 Sam 2:20–21 our author shares some beautiful words: **“Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, ‘May the LORD give you children from this woman in place of the one she dedicated²⁶ to the LORD.’ And they went to their own home. The LORD visited Hannah; and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew before the LORD.”²⁷**

Previously, Eli dishonored Hannah by misinterpreting her behavior and making false accusations against her (1:13–16). Fortunately, he corrected his error and prayed a blessing over her to have a child. Hannah then conceived (1:19–20)! Now in 2:20–21, Eli again blesses Hannah and Elkanah, and God demonstrates His faithfulness to them. God “visits” (*paqad*) the couple by again intervening in time and space and making a way out of no way! God gives this godly couple five more children in place of Samuel. Indeed, God is no man’s debtor because you can’t out give Him! God has an uncanny way of blessing His children when they make sacrifices with their children, money, possessions, or time. When you honor God, He honors you. *What goes around comes around.*

Not only did God bless faithful Hannah and Elkanah, He also showed compassion to faithless Eli. God, in His grace, gave Eli a son to raise to replace his two worthless sons. But not just any son . . . one of the greatest men who has ever lived! Samuel must have been a joy to this elderly priest’s heart. We must always remember that God is a God of forgiveness and grace. Are you plagued by regret because of how you neglected your own children? Maybe you failed to raise your kids in the Lord. You may even think that it’s too late for you to be used by God because of how you have failed at home. God can use you to impact your adult children, your grandchildren, or young people at your church. He can’t give you back the years that you’ve lost, but He can give you the years you have left to use for His glory.

In 2:22–25 we see yet another contrast between the two families:²⁸ **“Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting.²⁹ He said to them, ‘Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people? No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the LORD’S people circulating. If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?’³⁰ But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the LORD desired to put them to death.”³¹** Eli was very old. According to one manuscript he was ninety at this time (cf. 4:15).³² So he was probably physically and emotionally weary from old age alone. But the sin of his boys certainly didn’t help him age gracefully. Of course, priest sex scandals are nothing new. However, this scandal was all the more devastating for several reasons: (1) Eli’s sons defiled women who were temple servants dedicated to holy service.³³ (2) Phinehas, at least, is a married man (4:19). This act of adultery is punishable by death, particularly since Hophni and Phinehas were priests (Lev 7:25; 22:9).³⁴ (3) Eli’s sons flaunted their sin in God’s face. The doorway of the tent of meeting is the place where God met with the Levitical priests, the place where God revealed His glory (Exod 29:42–46). Even Eli recognizes that this priest sex scandal is as bad as it gets (1 Sam 2:25).³⁵

If there is any doubt about the severity of this scandal, 2:25b settles the issue. It’s easy to read this final phrase too hastily, as if it said that Hophni and Phinehas did not listen to Eli and, consequently, the Lord decided to put them to death. But the text does not say that; it says Eli’s sons did not listen to him because (“for”) the Lord had decided to put them to death. The sons’ resistance is not the rationale for the Lord’s judgment but the *result* of His judgment.³⁶ It was the Lord’s will to slay them for disobedience but not the Lord’s will that they *should be* disobedient. God is a God of justice. Eventually His patience runs out, and He says, “Enough is enough!” When He says it is finished, or worse . . . you are finished He means it. While God rarely seems to discipline people with death, we must take His judgment seriously! As parents we must instruct our children in the fear of God. This is especially true for families in full-time ministry. Such spiritual leaders often give so much to ministry that they neglect the ministry that they are to have to their own families. Yet, as parents we are responsible to love our kids and teach them God’s ways. This certainly includes warning them that God judges sin with divine discipline. *What goes around comes around.*

As parents, how can we ensure that we help our children avoid experiencing severe divine discipline? One answer is for fathers to discipline their children and encourage them to honor God. Eli's sons ignored him (2:25b). Later in 3:13 we learn that Eli did not restrain his boys. Instead, he just complained to his boys about their behavior. This is what Super Nanny calls a "threatening parent." A parent who is always saying, "Well, the next time this happens . . . If you do that again, I promise I will . . . I'm warning you for the last time." Eli is all bark and no bite. He is the most powerful person in Israel, for there is no king and he is the spiritual ruler of the land. Yet, he never stepped in to deal with his sons' corrupt ways. He preferred to ignore them. Maybe Eli feared losing what little relationship he had with his sons.³⁷ He may well have been afraid that he would have to go back to the kind of meat he didn't really prefer.³⁸ Whatever his rationale, his sons suffered no priestly unemployment or temple discipline.³⁹ Instead, God killed them! If Eli had not been a passive disciplinarian, this could have been avoided.

Fathers, how are you raising your children? Some fathers don't understand their role, or they are just lazy in fulfilling it. Some are preoccupied with self, hobby, friends, etc. Some fathers had fathers who were excessively strict; thus, they swore they'd never be. Some fathers would just rather leave all discipline to their wives to deal with—a kind of, good cop bad cop, and they choose to be good cop. Some fathers are trying to be the child's friend, rather than the parent.⁴⁰ Of course, other fathers are prone to be too strict because they are concerned about their reputation or want to keep their kids in line. There really needs to be a balanced approach to discipline. Raising children is like holding a wet bar of soap: too firm a grasp and it shoots from your hand, too loose a grip and it slips away. A gentle but firm hold keeps you in control. We must ensure that we are exercising the appropriate biblical balance. I was impressed by the story of an Amish man who caught his two boys drinking beer at a local tavern. The disappointed father promptly disciplined his sons. He told them, "I'll take the horse home boys . . . and you bring the buggy." What a lesson those boys must have learned that fateful evening.

In 2:26 the narrator draws another point of contrast: "**Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the LORD and with men.**"⁴¹ Samuel's growth in stature and in favor with God and people foreshadowed the boyhood development of Jesus (Luke 2:52). Why does Luke choose to employ the same description as the author of 1 Samuel to speak of Samuel's development as a child? The days in which Jesus was born were also very dark days in Israel's history. The religious system had departed from the Word of God, just as in Samuel's day. And yet, while things looked very bleak for Israel, a young boy was growing up, virtually unknown and unnoticed by the nation. This Child was the Messiah. He would save His people from their sins. He would someday sit on the throne of His father, David. And He, like Samuel His prototype, would exercise priesthood in a way that would deliver the people of God from their sins.⁴² This backdrop ought to encourage us. Despite what the naysayers may claim, God loves to raise up godly children in a dark world. There is hope for our children!

3. Family contrasts in judgment (2:27-36): This prophetic judgment speech looks at Israel's past, present, and future. In 2:27–28 the narrator draws upon God's past faithfulness: "**Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, 'Thus says the LORD, 'Did I *not* indeed reveal Myself to the house⁴³ of your father when they were in Egypt *in bondage* to Pharaoh's house? Did I *not* choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me; and did I *not* give to the house of your father all the fire *offerings* of the sons of Israel?'**" God sent an unnamed prophet to reveal his judgment against Eli's house.⁴⁴ In 2:27–28 God summarized the grace He had extended to the line of Aaron. God chose Aaron to be His priest, to attend to the altar in the tabernacle courtyard, to burn incense in the holy place, and to perform all other official priestly functions while wearing an ephod. All this was done in God's presence to demonstrate His faithfulness to his people. How has God shown Himself faithful to you and your family? What has God taken you and your family through that you can praise him for? Why not take time today to write down the specific ways that God has demonstrated His faithfulness to you and your family?

Verse 29 touches upon the present challenges in this narrative: **“Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?”** God ordained that the sacrificial meat portions given to him by the Israelites were to be eaten by the priests. This great office was to be taken seriously because, in the handling of sacrifices, the priests were to mediate between God and man. Unfortunately, this did not occur. Rather, Eli and his sons “kicked” at God’s sacrifices just like we might kick shoes that accumulate at our front door out of the way. As a family we dare not dishonor our commitment to worship God at home or at church. We must take family worship seriously.

The final seven verses of this chapter look into the future: **“Therefore the LORD God of Israel declares, ‘I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever’; but now the LORD declares, ‘Far be it from Me⁴⁵—for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days are coming when I will break your strength and the strength of your father’s house so that there will not be an old man in your house. You will see the distress of My dwelling, in spite of all the good that I do for Israel; and an old man will not be in your house forever. Yet I will not cut off every man of yours from My altar so that your eyes will fail from weeping and your soul grieve, and all the increase of your house will die in the prime of life. This will be the sign to you which will come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them will die. But I will raise up for Myself a faithful⁴⁶ priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always. Everyone who is left in your house will come and bow down to him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread and say, ‘Please assign me to one of the priest’s offices so that I may eat a piece of bread.’”** (2:30–36). The last section of the prophetic speech begins with an ominous “therefore.” The Lord, the God of Israel announced the judgment against Eli and his house. God proclaimed that he would cut short Eli’s strength and the lineage of his father’s house (2:31). This would happen in two ways. (1) The current generation of Eli’s family would suffer. Hophni and Phinehas would die on the same day (2:34). (2) Future generations of Eli’s family would suffer. His descendants would die untimely deaths (2:33) and lose their livelihood (2:36). The reference to a “faithful priest” likely points 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 fulfills God’s will. Eli’s statement in 2:25b underscores God’s grace in sending Jesus Christ as the mediator between God and mortals (2 Tim 2:5).⁴⁷ Final fulfillment would come only in Jesus the Christ, the supremely Anointed One, designated by God to be high priest (Heb 5:10).

Now back to the original question of this text: What happens when we fail to honor God as we should? Please look back at 1 Sam 2:30, which drives home the point of this whole story.⁴⁸ The word “honor” (*kabed*) means “to treat as weighty or to make heavy.” This term is related to the word “glory” that shares the root meaning “heavy.” God’s glory is “heavy”; to honor God is to consider Him “heavy,” so to speak. To dishonor (*qalah*) is translated to “lightly esteem,” but this is a weak rendering. The same basic term rendered here “lightly esteemed” is translated “brought a curse on themselves” in 3:13. Here, God is saying: “Those who honor Me, I will honor, and those who despise Me, I will curse.”⁴⁹ It is really that simple. If you honor God, He will honor you. It may not be to the degree that you may like in this life, but I can assure you, in the life to come He will honor you beyond your wildest imagination. If you dishonor God, He will dishonor you. The consequences may even be life-threatening. Never forget: *What goes around comes around.*

Scripture References

1 Samuel 2:11–36

Deuteronomy 6:6–15

Ephesians 6:1–4

Psalm 78:1–8

Isaiah 8:16–22

Proverbs 22:6

Luke 2:52

Study Questions

1. In what area(s) have I failed to honor God as I should? In what specific way(s) have I failed to honor God? What was the result? What have I learned from the experience of other believers who have failed to honor God? How can I avoid their mistakes?
2. How did my family of origin impact me spiritually? What spiritual priorities did my parents impress upon me? How have I implemented these same priorities in my own family? What would my children and grandchildren say about my influence upon them? How do I want to be remembered by them?
3. In what specific ways can I relate to Eli's failures with his boys? How have I failed to bring my children up in the "discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4)? Am I too strict or not strict enough? Am I guilty of loving my children more than God? Am I dishonoring God by putting others before Him?
4. How have my spiritual leaders failed me? What was the result of their actions? Did I become discouraged or disillusioned? Did I become cynical and turn away from God because of them? What lessons have I learned from the failures of these leaders? Am I using my position of leadership to serve myself or to serve others?
5. Do I know of situations in which Christians have suffered because they have chosen to allow sin to control their lives? What have I learned from these examples? How can I obey the Lord in all things and make no provision for the lusts of the flesh (see Romans 13:14)?

Notes

¹ For a complete list of reality shows, see www.realitytvworld.com/realitytvworld/allshows.shtml; accessed 14 October 2011.

² The tragic story of Hophni and Phinehas should be read in light of Lev 10:1–11. Robert D. Bergen, *I, 2 Samuel*. New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 77.

³ These encouraging “notes” are detected by Dale Ralph Davis, *I Samuel* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2000 [1988]), 24.

⁴ Tsumura observes that 1 Sam 2:11 is sequential to 1:28 (“and he worshiped the LORD there”). David Toshio Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*. New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 135.

⁵ Andrews and Bergen observe: “Hannah gave Samuel to minister ‘before the LORD,’ and this is what he did for the rest of his life (see 1 Sam. 2:18, 21; 7:6; 10:19; 11:15; 12:3, 7; 15:33).” Stephen J. Andrews and Robert D. Bergen, *I, 2 Samuel*. Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), Electronic ed.

⁶ Eli’s name means “Exalted is [the Lord].”

⁷ The NET study notes state: “The verb here has the semantic nuance ‘recognize the authority of.’ Eli’s sons obviously knew who the Lord was; they served in his sanctuary. But they did not recognize his moral authority.” Samuel will be introduced in the same manner in 1 Sam 3:7.

⁸ The Hebrew particle *gam* (“also,” “moreover”) makes it clear that the narrator is describing two different sinful acts in 1 Sam 2:13–14 and 2:15–16.

⁹ For examples of this expression, see Deut 13:13; Judg 19:22; 20:13; 1 Sam 1:16; 10:27; 25:17, 25; 30:22; 2 Sam 16:7; 20:1; 23:6; 1 Kgs 21:10, 13; 2 Chron 13:7; 2 Cor 6:15.

¹⁰ See 2 Cor 6:15.

¹¹ Bergen, *I, 2 Samuel*, 78 notes that 1 Sam 2:12 and 17 form an *inclusio*.

¹² The priests were allowed to receive the breast and the right thigh (Lev 7:28–34) or the shoulder, the two cheeks, and the stomach (Deut 18:3) of any sacrificial animal.

¹³ Priests were allowed to take their share only after the fat portions of the sacrifice had been burned on the altar. Furthermore, on occasion Hophni and Phinehas even preferred roasted meat to boiled—as if in mockery of the necessarily hasty method of preparing the first Passover feast (Exod 12:8–11).

¹⁴ See Exod 29:13; Lev 3:3–5.

¹⁵ Meat was luxurious food in Israel’s economy, so Eli’s sons were living off the fat of the land.

¹⁶ I like how Peterson puts it: “Religion, for the two Eli boys, was a chance at privilege and power, by which they were thoroughly corrupted.” Eugene H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*. Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 34.

¹⁷ John Woodhouse, *1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader*. Preaching the Word series (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 55.

¹⁸ Bergen, *I, 2 Samuel*, 79 remarks that the family portraits are studies in Torah blessings and curses (cf. Lev 26; Deut 28).

¹⁹ See Lev 8:7; cf. Exod 28:31; 2 Sam 6:14. Youngblood writes: “Indeed, the little ‘robe’ that Samuel’s mother made for him annually as he was growing up (v. 19) may well have been an example of the ‘robe of the ephod’ mentioned in Exodus 28:31 (the Heb. word for ‘robe’ is the same in both passages). Although David is not described as wearing such a robe in 2 Samuel 6:14, he is so depicted in the parallel text of 1 Chronicles 15:27.” Ronald F. Youngblood, “1, 2 Samuel” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), Electronic ed. It should also be noted that Samuel’s robe is featured at two important points later in the story (1 Sam 15:27; 28:14).

²⁰ Similarly, today, parents buy things for their children that will give them a love for those things and encourage them to pursue interest in them (e.g., a football, a child’s cooking set, etc.).

²¹ See also Bob Deffinbaugh, “Samuel and the Sons of Belial” (1 Sam 2:11–36): www.bible.org/seriespage/samuel-and-sons-belial-1-samuel-211-36; accessed 10 October 2011.

²² Bergen, *I, 2 Samuel*, 79.

²³ Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on 1 Samuel,” 2010 ed., www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1samuel.pdf; accessed 10 October 2011.

²⁴ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 35.

²⁵ Gary D. Vreeland, *The Darker Side of Samuel, Saul, and David* (Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2008), 57.

²⁶ The use of *sheelah* in 1 Sam 2:20 (here translated “the one she dedicated to”) echoes its sevenfold use in chapter 1 and reminds us of Hannah’s vow.

²⁷ Samuel grew up “before the Lord” (lit. “with Yahweh”). This same phrase is used of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments (Exod 34:28).

²⁸ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 35 notes several contrasts: “The contrast between Eli’s sons, and Hannah’s son intensifies. Eli blessed Samuel’s parents (2:20), but is forced to rebuke his own sons (2:23–24). Hannah’s chaste fertility (2:21a) is contrasted with the blatant promiscuity of Eli’s sons (2:22b). At the very moment that Samuel was growing up in God’s presence (2:21b), Eli’s sons were being consigned to a premature death (2:25c).”

Davis, *1 Samuel*, 26 charts it out like this:

Verses 19–21

Mother love, 19

Eli’s blessing, 20

Yahweh’s provision (life), 21a

Samuel’s growth, 21b

Verses 22–26

Father’s sorrow, 22

Eli’s rebuke, 22–25a

Yahweh’s provision (death), 25b

Samuel’s growth, 26

²⁹ See Exod 38:8.

³⁰ See Heb 10:26, 29; 6:6.

³¹ Constable, “Notes on 1 Samuel,” 14: “Earlier in Israel’s history another Phinehas, the godly son of another priest, Eleazar, had executed an Israelite named Zimri and a Moabite woman named Cozbi for practicing sexual immorality in the tabernacle (Num. 25). Now this Phinehas, a priest and the son of another priest, Eli, was practicing sexual immorality in the tabernacle. How far the priests had departed from the Lord during the approximately 300 years that separated these incidents!”

³² James E. Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*. College Press, NIV Commentary (Joplin: College Press, 2000), 63.

³³ Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 64

³⁴ Andrews and Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, Electronic ed.

³⁵ Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 65 notes: “The verb ‘mediate’ (*palal*) comes from a root that has connotations of acting in the capacity of a lawyer. In transgressions between people, God or His representative (judge, priest, or prophet) can argue the case or smooth out the difficulty between the two. If, however, a man sins deliberately and directly against God, who will be the mediator? God can no longer serve as an impartial moderator. By the very nature of the case, there is no superior third-party to intercede as mediator or impose a just settlement.”

³⁶ Davis, *1 Samuel*, 27.

³⁷ Child idolatry is all around us. But Jesus declared “. . . And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (see Matt 10:35–37).

³⁸ Deffinbaugh, “Samuel and the Sons of Belial.” “I know I will be seen as politically incorrect, but I believe I am accurately interpreting what God says to Eli through the prophet. I do not mean this unkindly, but Eli is a very fat man (see 2:29; 4:18). I am not implying anything negative about overweight people (among whom I must be included). But God seems to say to Eli, ‘Look at yourself, Eli. You’ve gotten fat as a priest! Think about how this happened. You, along with your sons, have made yourselves fat by the meat you have eaten, the meat you wrongly acquired as priests.’”

³⁹ Whenever you put your children’s sports, school, leisure, career, or whatever ahead of the need for them to see God’s will for their lives . . . then you get in God’s way and you ultimately hurt your children.

⁴⁰ Brian Bell, “Priest Sex Scandal!” (1 Sam 2:12–36): www.archives.calvarymurrieta.com/brian/studies-books/old-testament/09-1Samuel/09-1Samuel-002-012-10.pdf; accessed 10 October 2011.

⁴¹ Samuel was “great” and the boys’ sin was great.

⁴² Deffinbaugh, “Samuel and the Sons of Belial.”

⁴³ The term “house” (*bayith*) here is not a physical house, but a dynasty. This is the way God spoke of the “house” He would build for David as well (see 2 Sam 7:1–17).

⁴⁴ It is clear that this individual was a prophet. The phrase “man of God” is the second most common designation for a prophet in the OT. (Perhaps the implication is that Eli could no longer be described in this way. He was still the high priest, but he was no longer a man of God.) The messenger also began his statement with the classic prophetic introduction “Thus says the Lord.”

⁴⁵ The phrase, “Far be it from Me,” is a statement of strong denial of the previous statement (1 Sam 12:23; 2 Sam 2:20; Gen 44:7; cf. 1 Sam 20:9).

⁴⁶ The Hebrew word *aman* is translated “faithful” and “enduring” in 1 Sam 2:35.

⁴⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 628 n. 12.

⁴⁸ Many students of this book have identified 1 Sam 2:30 as its key verse because it articulates the principle that 1 and 2 Samuel illustrate.

⁴⁹ See also Deffinbaugh, “Samuel and the Sons of Belial.”