

Lesson 2: Fall of the House of Eli

The Man of God and Eli, First Samuel 2:27-36

Read First Samuel 2:27-36.

1. What do we know about Eli?
2. What are the charges that the man of God brings against Eli (v29)?
3. What is the curse that the LORD institutes with Eli's house?
 - a. He will cut off the "arm" of Eli's house and his father's house.
 - b. There will not be an old man in their house forever.
 - c. "You will see an enemy in My dwelling place."
 - d. God will raise up a faithful priest for Himself.

The man of God begins by reminding Eli of the covenant God made with his father's house, and he was clearly referring to Aaron, Eli's ancestor, and not his immediate father. So, when God says he is going to cut off the arm of Eli's father's house, that would seem to conflict with the previous covenants God made.

4. What previous covenants might the curse negate?

There was a covenant made with the tribe of Levi and then with the **house of Aaron**, that they would be a priesthood before God forever.

God also made another covenant specifically with **Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron**, along the same lines. (Numbers 25).

Since this new curse falls not just on Eli's house but on his father's house as well, who is his father? The word father is a little vague in the Hebrew. It can refer to an immediate father or an ancestral father such as Phinehas or Aaron.

- Is the LORD bringing the curse on the priesthood in its entirety?
- Once God makes a covenant with a people, does He go back on His word?
- Can the LORD bring a curse on an arm of the family without affecting the previous covenants?

5. What is Eli's lineage? (see chart)

Samuel and Eli, First Samuel 3

Read First Samuel 3.

Identify the picture in Chapter 3 (who, what, when, and where).

6. Who are the key characters:
7. What is happening:
8. When do the events take place:
9. Where do the events take place:

In verse 3, it says that the lampstand stood in the *hekal* of the LORD. The NKJV translates *hekal* as tabernacle, but that is not a good translation. The Hebrew word *hekal* actually means palace or temple—a permanent structure with walls and doors and doorposts. It is the word used when the Scriptures speak of Solomon’s Temple and the king’s palace. This is odd because there is no record of such a structure being built for the LORD, at least not yet.

In Joshua’s day, the Tabernacle was still a tent. Joshua 18:1 tells us that the people set up the *ohel* of meeting, the tent of meeting, at Shiloh, and nothing more is mentioned of it throughout the book of Judges. But now there is this deviation from the original tent to a semi-permanent structure here in First Samuel. While it anticipates the transition to a permanent Temple, this *hekal* seems rather inglorious for the lack of description, compared to the amount of detail given for the Tabernacle and Temple.

Eli and Samuel were both sleeping in the house of God. There were no sleeping quarters mentioned in the original Tabernacle arrangement, and yet it seems that this *hekal* has accommodations not just for Eli, but Samuel as well, and they clearly weren’t sleeping in the same chamber. The original Hebrew word order indicates that Samuel was actually sleeping in the same chamber as the ark of the covenant. Technically this would have been the holy of holies into which no man was allowed except the high priest once a year, and yet here in the *hekal*, there doesn’t seem to be a separation of the holy of holies from the rest of the sanctuary.

This also explains the fine wording in First Samuel 3:10 where it says that the LORD came and took His place and called to Samuel. The place from which the LORD speaks is the ark of the covenant. So, it seems that Samuel was indeed sleeping in the sanctuary, while Eli was in an adjoining chamber somewhere.

10. There is a theme of light and dark that runs through chapter 3. How does it play out in the narrative?

First Samuel 3:1-3:

First Samuel 3:7-8:

First Samuel 3:11-15:

First Samuel 3:18-19:

First Samuel 3:21:

11. What is the focal point of Chapter 3?

Chiastic Structure of Chapter 3

The narrative of Chapter 3 has a tight chiastic structure. Chiastic structures are a way of organizing an argument or a narrative in such a way that the information builds to the point an author desires to make. The narrative elements are mirrored around a central point.

The narrative elements are arranged in an A-B-C-D-E-D-C-B-A order, almost like an outline.

- A** **3:1a** The word of the LORD was rare in those days
- B** **3:1b** There was no widespread revealment
- C** **3:2-9** The scene between Eli and Samuel
- D** **3:10-11** God speaks to Samuel – the announcement of judgment
- E** **3:12-13** God speaks to Samuel – what the judgment is and the reason for it
- D** **3:14-15** God speaks to Samuel – the resolution, judgment is final, no atonement
- C** **3:16-18** The scene between Samuel and Eli
- B** **3:19-20** There was widespread revealment
- A** **3:21** Then the LORD appeared again at Shiloh

“A” represents the opening and closing pictures. Israel’s condition in the first verse is reversed in the last verse. It is the same with “B”.

“C” is the scenes between Eli and Samuel. Verses 2-9 build the tension in the narrative as Samuel keeps running to Eli every time the LORD speaks to him. There is a resolution at the end in verses 16-18 where Eli comes to Samuel this time and asks for the prophecy. Samuel went to Eli in the beginning. Now Eli comes to Samuel. So, there is a reversal and a resolution.

“D” and “E” are part of the prophecy where God speaks to Samuel. He begins with the announcement, then what the judgment is and the reason for it, and finishes with the resolution that the judgment is final and there will be no atonement.

“E” is the apex of the chiasm. What is the focal point of the narrative?

12. What reason does God give for judging Eli?

Questions for Discussion

What does Eli model for us?

Eli is a man who rebuked his sons for their wickedness, and yet reaped the benefit of their sin and sinned in the same way himself. This is a picture of something that Paul talks about in Romans 2. **Read Romans 2:1-13.**

In this part of his argument, Paul is not necessarily speaking to believers. Paul is building a case against all kinds of sinners, and he will conclude that all have sinned and there for need that grace gifted to them through Christ's death on the cross.

Paul's words are addressing the moral sinner who points the finger at others' sin but doesn't judge himself—the one who knows the Law, as Eli certainly knew the Law—and yet is only a hearer of the Law and not a doer of it. And we see the judgment come upon him.

- Do we have a role in judging (restraining/rebuking) one another? (1 Corinthians 5:11-12, 6:1-11, Ezekiel 33:7-9, Leviticus 19:17)
- What are right ways and wrong ways to do this?
- Do we earn a rebuke from God for not doing this?

If you are pursuing the crown, that role as a leader will require you to bear the responsibility for others. That includes looking after each other's well-being, holding others accountable even as we hold ourselves accountable, and dealing with sin not just in our own bodies, but in the body of Christ as well.

What do Hophni and Phinehas model for us?

Eli's sons made themselves vile – lightly esteemed, dishonorable. They had been given a glorious calling and place in the LORD's kingdom and yet they abused their position and scorned what the LORD had given them. And they are going to lose their crowns.

Hophni and Phinehas are bad role models, and yet we cannot judge them without looking at ourselves through the same lens. We are holy vessels and a royal priesthood. We have a priestly role in our handling of each other.

- Can we take glory from God in our handling of one another or in our mishandling of the ministry with which we have been entrusted?
- How do we diminish ourselves in the process? (Parallel example: Ephesians 5:28)

Fighting Philistines, First Samuel 4:1-11

Read First Samuel 4:1-11.

13. Who are the Philistines?
14. Where are we on the timeline and what is Israel's condition?
15. Where does the battle set up? (see map)
16. How does the battle play out (v2)?
17. What is the leadership's response (v3-4)?
18. When this kind of defeat occurred in the past, what did the leadership do then?

After the victory of Jericho, Joshua was defeated Ai. Joshua and the elders threw themselves down before the LORD and mourned until evening, and then set to the task of dealing with the sin of Achan, who had taken forbidden booty from Jericho. (Joshua 7)

In the days of the judges when Israel went against Benjamin and Gibeah and were defeated twice, all the people came before the LORD weeping and fasting and offering burnt offerings and peace offerings. Once they changed their attitude toward their brethren, then the LORD gave them victory (Judges 20).

Is this what the leadership does here?
19. What was the purpose of the ark of the covenant?
20. When was the last time the ark left the Tabernacle and was carried into battle?

21. What did the elders think would happen when they brought the ark out to the battlefield?

22. How do the Philistines react?

23. What is the outcome?

The Big Picture

What is Israel modeling for us?

So far, in this chapter, we are presented with a people who claim the name of God but haven't maintained a relationship with Him. They are faced with a battle they cannot win by their own strength and so they carry with them the ark—that symbol of God's dwelling place and the agent of intercession—to help them in the battle. They think that just because they have the ark with them that the victory is assured.

Do we put God in a box like this?

But Israel had already given herself over spiritually to the dark side, so it is no wonder that when the actual Philistines attacked, she was unable to withstand the assault. Even though she has the ark with her, there is no relationship with God. She goes about the battle the wrong way, and so she loses the battle at that point. It is not a permanent loss, but for a time God's dwelling place gets overrun and taken captive by the Philistines.

Where is God's dwelling place among us now?

Like Israel, we have within us God's dwelling place. It is not a physical ark that we carry around. It is an indwelling Holy Spirit that we carry inside us, who is God within us and also our intercessor.

Just because we have the Spirit within us, does that mean we have conquered our Philistine side?

No. The Spirit is there. He prods us toward holy living and conscience before God, and yet the battle remains to us to conquer our carnal Philistine side. Conquering our carnal side is part of pursuing the crown.

"And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." - 1 Corinthians 9:25-27

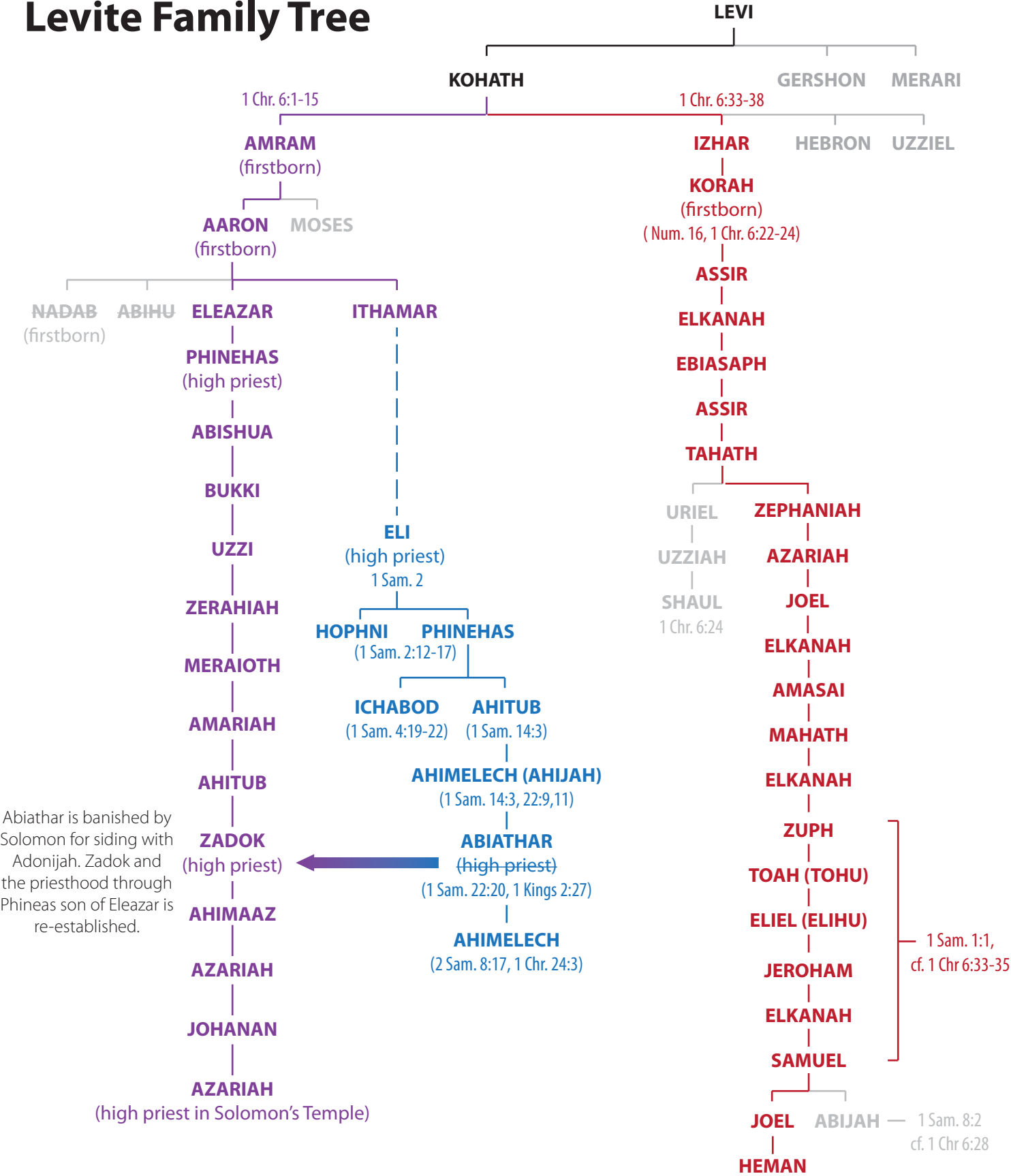
Christians who give themselves over to carnality lose the battle on the internal front and allow that holy dwelling place to be overrun with Philistines. The power and glory depart from them until the relationship with God is remedied.

Just because we carry that indwelling Spirit with us into battle does not mean we are assured victory. Victory only happens when:

- 1) We are aligned with the God and pursuing a relationship with Him first.
- 2) We are pursuing the reward for the right reason and are aligned with His goals.
- 3) We are pursuing the reward the right way, and in a way that glorifies Him.

When we lose the internal battle and let our carnal side rule our bodies, then when the ungodly world attacks, we should not be surprised if we lose the battle on that front as well.

Levite Family Tree





ZEBULUN

ISSACHAR

Jezreel Valley

WEST
MANASSEH

GAD

REUBEN



Shiloh

EPHRAIM

Aphek • Ebenezer



Kirjath Jearim

DAN

Beth Shemesh

Ekron

Gath

Ashdod

Ashkelon

Gaza

JUDAH

PHILISTINES

Coastal Highway