

**May Teaching Theme:** The Characters in Samuel 1-4

讲员 Speaker: Elder Pang / Pastor William R. Horne

题目 Topic: Eli

经文 Scripture: 1 Samuel 1-4

**Monthly Theme:** As we continue under our year's theme, "Rebuild," we will spend the month of May looking at the key characters in 1 Samuel 1-4. Those characters include Elkanah, Hannah, Eli, Samuel, Hophni & Phinehas. We will see what we can learn from the life of these character's stories.

**五月 May: 撒母耳記中的人物 The Characters in Samuel 1-4**

May 1st – 以利加拿 Elkanah

May 8th – 哈拿 Hannah (Mother's Day)

May 15th – 以利 Eli

May 22nd – 撒母耳 Samuel

May 29th - 何弗尼 & 非尼哈 Hophni & Phinehas

**Resources:**

[Sermon Video](#) (Elder Pang)

[Sermon Video](#) (Pastor Will)

[Sermon Slides](#) (Pastor Will)

[Bible Project: 1 Samuel Overview](#) (English)

[Bible Project: 1 Samuel Overview](#) (Chinese)

**Primary Claim:** Knowing about sin that harms others and failing to restrain it leads to generational damage.

**Discussion Questions** (Pastor William R. Horne/ Elder Pang)

- (1) Read 1 Samuel 2:12-26; 3:1-18; 4:12-18 together. What observations do you make, and what stands out to you? How would you summarize the passage? What do we know about Eli? (Also, recall your previous reading from chapters 1-2).
- (2) Ultimately, why is Eli judged by God? What does Eli's story call us to?
- (3) Eli knew about his sons' harm to others and failed to restrain it. What kept him from going far enough to stop their actions? What keeps us from taking action when people are being hurt and abused by others?

*Elder Pang:*

- (1) 从以利家庭的失败中，你学到了什么样的功课？What lessons can we learn from Eli's failure?
- (2) 作为父母，你认为你是否为你的孩子树立了一个敬虔的榜样？在哪些方面需要改善？你上一次与你的孩子分享信仰是什么时候？你上一次为你的孩子祷告是什么时候？As a parent, do you think you set a faithful example for your children? Anything you can do to

be better? When was the last time you shared your Christian faith with your children?  
When was the last time you prayed for your children?

- (3) 你认为如何才能保持健康的灵修，经常的团契？你有哪些困难需要我们一起祷告？What do we need to do to keep a healthy devotion and fellowship life? What are the difficulties we can pray about?
- (4) 当今社会，持守信仰的最大挑战是什么？我们如何准备去迎接这个挑战？What is the biggest challenge in keeping the Christian faith in today's society? How do we prepare to meet the challenge?

**Important Notes** (Pastor William R. Horne):

Notes on Q1: Eli is quite an interesting character, as he is never depicted or called “wicked” like his sons are, but he is painted as a sincere and devout priest who yet was a failed institutional leader as he refused to stand up against wrongdoing and failed to protect the vulnerable under his care.

Eli’s leadership in the story is three-fold:

(1) He was a priest called to lead the religious institution known as the temple. Though it is not explicitly stated here in the text, it appears that Eli is the High Priest.

(2) He was a judge, called to lead the people and nation of Israel, leading the governmental institution. Judges' roles were to be military and judicial leaders who delivered the people of Israel from their enemies. And the period of judges goes through the Book of Judges through the first 12 chapters of the book of Samuel.

(3) And he was a father, called to co-lead his family with his wife (who is never mentioned in the Scriptures, so we don’t know anything about her or if she is even around). We know of his family from the text that he is a Father who has two sons, Hophni and Phineas. With the combo of these three intertwined leadership roles, Eli has been entrusted with much and has much that he is deemed responsible over.

We should also note that Eli’s failure and the sin of Hophni and Phinehas did not just affect them but affected generations, creating a similar pattern of failure in the life of the nation of Israel. **Sin is not isolated in its damage. It never only affects us, but it harms those around us and those who will come after us. Sin is a multiplier of harm, hurt, and damage.** The judgment on Eli’s family is extended to the reign of Solomon, over 100 years later, where we are told in 1 Kings 2 that Abiathar, a priest in Eli’s line, was removed “from the priesthood of the LORD, fulfilling the word the LORD had spoken at Shiloh about the house of Eli.”

But it was not just generational damage to his own family, but a chain of events hurting all of Israel. Eli’s inability to restrain the sin of his sons leads to multiplied corruption and abuse - a cycle that continues throughout the book of Samuel leading to disastrous national consequences.

First, Eli’s honoring his sons above God allows them to walk in wickedness - leading to untold generational trauma for those under their care. Trauma that is never recorded in Scripture, but certainly there, especially in the women’s life. Hophni and Phinehas are then unworthy to take Eli’s place; thus, young Samuel is called into service. Unfortunately, Samuel

fails to learn from Eli in his own dealings with his sons later in the story. Samuel's sons Joel and Abijah are made leaders of Israel and did like Eli's sons - seeking dishonest gain, accepting bribes, and perverting justice. The Israelites later rejected Samuel's sons as national leaders and asked for a human king to "be like the other nations," leading to King Saul. Saul continues the cycle by using his power to try and maintain the kingdom for his sons when it is promised to David. And David (even as the best King in Israel's history) elevates his sinful sons Amnon and Absalom, whose unchecked sin leads to devastation and division in Israel. Eli's Cycle continued. When we know about sin that harms others and fails to restrain it, there will be generational damage.

Notes on Q2: We are told that Eli and his family faced judgment "because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them." So, what is the sin Eli knew about? This sin Eli knew about concerned his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who were also serving in the role of priest at the temple. What complicates things is that his sons cross over all three of his leadership roles of which he carried responsibility - high priest, judge of Israel, and father.

First, we are told that Hophni and Phinehas were using their religious and institutional power to steal from those coming to Shiloh to present sacrifices. (See 1 Sam 2:13-16). "Hophni and Phinehas were taking the priestly share of the fellowship offerings "before the fat was burned"—that is, before the Lord had been given his portion." Plus, consuming the fat of a sacrificial animal was explicitly prohibited in the Torah (which you can find in Leviticus 7). And add on top of all this the threat of violence. Hophni and Phinehas were stealing from worshippers and threatening violence if they didn't get what they wanted.

In modern-day, this would be like embezzlement of the church funds, threatening violence to anyone who exposed you. Or, because the temple functions in a governmental role at this time, it would be like some form of tax fraud - a governmental leader bending the rules to make his own gains at the loss of those he represents. Hophni and Phinehas are what you would call corruption leaders. Those who use their power for their own gain. And we have plenty of modern-day examples we could fill in the blank with that fit the "Hophni/Phinehas type."

But it gets worse...

1 Samuel 2:22 NIV "Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting."

Eli's sons were not only involved in corruption but were guilty of sexual misconduct. And I would argue not only sexual misconduct but likely sexual assault with the presence of power difference between them and the women.

And the Scriptures tell us that, ultimately, their misconduct was a disregard for the sacred - both the sacredness of humanity created in the image of God and the sacredness of God himself and the calling he had given them as priests. This is what the text means when it says - they blasphemed God. Their actions were the opposite of blessing or praising God, but they detracted from God's glory by their abuse of power. Blasphemy.

**At the end of the day, Eli is not condemned for the sin of his sons, but he was condemned for his own sin - honoring his sons more than the Lord (1 Sam 2:29) - thus allowing their sin to go unchecked.** Eli's story calls us to put honor in the right place and calls us to be people of integrity who stand up against people who are harming others.

Notes on Q3: We could list many possible reasons why we fail to go far enough to restrain evil and stop harm from happening in our spaces. It is certainly easier to look the other way. Eli says something but does not go far enough to stop the abuse. He honors his sons above God by not putting them out of power. We might not go far enough to restrain evil in our spaces because we fear further rejection. Maybe we are conflict-avoidance and do not want to face more serious but needed confrontation. Perhaps we are unwilling to put our own power and well-being at risk within the institution or community. When our leaders or those under our care continually practice sin that harms others, we must do everything in our power to restrain it.