

July 25, 2020

Dear Students,

The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. (2 Samuel 2:20)

What makes people feel greedy? Is it because we don't trust God to give us what we need? Is it because we forget to think about other people and what they want or need?

The story of Samuel starts with some greedy priests. Instead of waiting for their fair share of the sacrifice food, they poke around in the offering pot and grab what they want. God sends a prophet to remind them he can see exactly what they are doing, but they don't stop. They think they are special, that God won't do anything.

Meanwhile, Samuel is just a kid. He lives at the Temple and tries to do what's right. God sees Samuel's heart, just like he sees the hearts of the greedy priests. God chooses Samuel to be the next leader for Israel, while the greedy leaders get the consequences of their own bad actions.

When you see someone being greedy and unfair - and getting away with it! - you might feel like, "Who cares? Why should I be the only one following the rules?" Samuel shows that God always cares, and in the end, he will bring justice against greedy people and help people who do what's right.

Read the Solo Bible Study below, or read [1 Samuel 1-4](#) on your own.

Solo Bible Study

The Setup (1 Samuel 2:11-18)

The boy Samuel served the Lord by assisting Eli the priest. ¹² Now the sons of Eli were scoundrels who had no respect for the Lord ¹³ or for their duties as priests. Whenever anyone offered a sacrifice, Eli's sons would send over a servant with a three-pronged fork. While the meat of the sacrificed animal was still boiling, ¹⁴ the servant would stick the fork into the pot and demand that whatever it brought up be given to Eli's sons. All the Israelites who came to worship were treated this way.

¹⁵ Sometimes the servant would demand raw meat before it had been boiled so that it could be used for roasting. ¹⁶ The man offering the sacrifice might reply, "Take as much as you want, but the fat must be burned first as God's law says." Then the servant would demand, "No, give it to me now, or I'll take it by force." ¹⁷ So the sin of these young men was very serious in the Lord's sight, for they treated the Lord's offerings with contempt. ¹⁸ But Samuel, though he was only a boy, served the Lord, wearing a linen ephod like a priest. ²⁶ Samuel grew taller and grew in favor with the Lord and with the people.

- Compare Eli's sons and Samuel, who is sort of an adopted servant kid. Samuel serves the Lord, but Eli's sons only care about themselves. You might be just a teen, but you could be more ready to serve God than some adults!

The Warning (1 Samuel 2:27-35)

²⁷ One day a man of God came to Eli and gave him this message from the Lord: “I revealed myself to your ancestors when they were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. ²⁸ I chose your ancestor Aaron from among all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer sacrifices on my altar, to burn incense, and to wear the holy apron as he served me. And I assigned the sacrificial offerings to you priests. ²⁹ So why do you scorn my sacrifices and offerings? Why do you give your sons more honor than you give me—for you and they have become fat from the best offerings of my people Israel!”

³⁰ “Therefore, the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I promised that your branch of the tribe of Levi would always be my priests. But I will honor those who honor me, and I will despise those who think lightly of me. ³¹ The time is coming when I will put an end to your family, so it will no longer serve as my priests. All the members of your family will die before their time. None will reach old age. ³⁴ And to prove that what I have said will come true, I will cause your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, to die on the same day!³⁵ Then I will raise up a faithful priest who will serve me and do what I desire. I will establish his family, and they will be priests to my anointed kings forever.”

- God never ignores sin. He might not fix it right away - like in this story, he’s waiting for Samuel to be old enough to start taking charge.
- God is always fair! He doesn’t punish someone without warning them first. Usually he warns us many many times, and gives us chances to fix our behavior.
- In the end, if you refuse to change, God will let you have consequences for choices you make.

The Kid Who Listened to God (1 Samuel 3:1-4:1)

In those days the Lord did not speak directly to people very often; there were very few visions. ² Eli’s eyes were so weak he was almost blind. One night he was lying in bed. ³ Samuel was also in bed in the Lord’s house, where the Ark of the Covenant was. God’s lamp was still burning. ⁴ Then the Lord called Samuel, and Samuel answered, “I am here!” ⁵ He ran to Eli and said, “I am here. You called me.” But Eli said, “I didn’t call you. Go back to bed.” So Samuel went back to bed. ⁶ The Lord called again, “Samuel!” Samuel again went to Eli and said, “I am here. You called me.” Again Eli said, “I didn’t call you. Go back to bed.”

⁷ Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the Lord had not spoken directly to him yet. ⁸ The Lord called Samuel for the third time. Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “I am here. You called me.” Then Eli realized the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹ So he told Samuel, “Go to bed. If he calls you again, say, ‘Speak, Lord. I am your servant and I am listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in bed. ¹⁰ The Lord came and stood there and called as he had before, “Samuel, Samuel!” Samuel said, “Speak, Lord. I am your servant and I am listening.”

¹¹ The Lord said to Samuel, “Watch, I am going to do something in Israel that will shock those who hear about it. ¹² At that time I will do to Eli and his family everything I promised, from beginning to end. ¹³ I told Eli I would punish his family always, because he knew his sons were evil. They acted without honor, but he did not stop them. ¹⁴ So I swore to Eli’s family, ‘Your guilt will never be removed by sacrifice or offering.’”

¹⁵ Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli about the vision, ¹⁶ but Eli called to him, “Samuel, my son!” Samuel answered, “I am here.” ¹⁷ Eli asked, “What did the Lord say to you? Don’t hide it from me. May God punish you terribly if you hide from me anything he said to you.” ¹⁸ So Samuel told Eli everything and did not hide anything from him. Then Eli said, “He is the Lord. Let him do what he thinks is best.”

¹⁹ The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up; he did not let any of Samuel’s messages fail to come true. ²⁰ Then all Israel knew Samuel was a true prophet of the Lord. ²¹ And the Lord continued to show himself at Shiloh, and he showed himself to Samuel through his word. And Samuel’s words went out to all the people of Israel.

- Eli is not a great dad, or a great priest. He lets his sons cheat, and he eats the sacrifice food they grab. Eli doesn’t have the willpower to do what’s right, but he can still help Samuel to follow God. Not all your teachers will be great people, but God can still use them to teach you good things.
- Notice how God connects with Samuel: “he showed himself to Samuel through his word”. God loves to communicate with you!
- Reading the Bible is one way you can listen to God and get to know his voice.

The Outcome (from 1 Samuel 4:1-18)

One day the Israelites went out to fight the Philistines. ² The Philistines made a fierce attack. They defeated the Israelites and killed about four thousand of them. ³ The Israelite army returned to their camp, and the leaders said, “Let’s get the Ark of the Covenant. Then the Lord will help us.” ⁴ As Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, ⁵ brought the chest into camp, the army cheered so loudly that the ground shook.

⁶ When the Philistines learned that the sacred chest had been brought into the camp, ⁷ they were scared to death and said: The gods have come into their camp. Now we’re in real trouble! ⁸ Who can save us from these powerful gods? They’re the same gods who made all those horrible things happen to the Egyptians in the desert. ⁹ Philistines, be brave and fight hard! If you don’t, those Hebrews will rule us, just as we’ve been ruling them.

¹⁰ The Philistines did fight. They killed thirty thousand Israelite soldiers, and all the rest ran off to their homes. ¹¹ Hophni and Phinehas were killed, and the sacred chest was captured. ¹³ Eli was afraid that something might happen to the Ark. ¹⁸ So he was sitting on his chair beside the road, just waiting. When the messenger said that the Philistines had taken the sacred chest, Eli fell backwards. He was a very heavy old man, and the fall broke his neck and killed him. He had been a leader of Israel for forty years.

- Notice how God's prophecy was fulfilled - their own actions killed them in the end. Eli's sons thought they could control God's power by controlling the Ark (the sacred chest), like a magical battle item. God's power doesn't work that way! It's not magic we control but choices God makes to use his power through us.
- God made us, and he set up our actions and attitudes to have outcomes and consequences. Sometimes God steps in and saves us from those consequences - but not when we hide behind sin. If you sin and avoid God, he may stop protecting you, like he stopped protecting Eli's family.
- Try to remember these four points from today's story:

1. God doesn't let greedy leaders get away with it forever.

2. Usually, God's punishments are consequences we cause by our own actions.

3. Sometimes a kid or teenager can serve God better than an adult.

4. If God calls you, be ready to listen!

"Dear Jesus, please forgive us for times when we have been greedy. Help us to hear your voice and listen to what you're telling us. Give us the courage to follow you honestly. Amen."

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