

# PROPHETS & JUDGES

IN THE PROMISED LAND

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“God intends that even in this life the truths of His word shall be ever unfolding to His people. There is only one way in which this knowledge can be obtained. We can attain to an understanding of God’s word only through the illumination of that Spirit by which the word was given.”

*{Steps to Christ, p. 109}*

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## WEEK 10 - HOPHNI & PHINEHAS

### I. The Sons of Eli

1. As children, what had Hophni and Phinehas been faithfully taught? What then were they lacking spiritually?

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2. What would make you a person of intellectual and moral power—elevating, developing, and strengthening all your faculties?

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3. The Bible teaches that the “entrance” of God’s Word gives light. How is this light different from the light that most SDA young people have? What happens when the Word “enters”? How can I have this experience?

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4. What happens if one sets his best affections upon any finite object or any earthly good?

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5. What is the result of indulging appetite and passion?

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6. What was the result of Eli passing over his sons’ crimes again and again without punishment?

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7. What should he have done? Why didn’t he do that?

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## II. God's Judgment Upon Sin

1. How faithful had Eli been as high priest?

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2. What is one of Satan's most effective ways to accomplish his work?

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3. How serious a problem is it when Christian parents neglect their work and indulge their children?

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4. Who does the greatest harm to the cause of Christ?

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5. What will be the end result to those who claim to be Christians, but are unconsecrated and live in sin?

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**The Sons of Eli****December 1, 1881**

As the sons of Eli advanced to manhood, and entered upon the duties of the priesthood, the evil effects of their early training became more apparent. Though engaged in so important and sacred a work, they were “sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord.” From childhood they had been familiar with the solemn, impressive services of the sanctuary. They had been faithfully instructed in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. Intellectually, they had a knowledge of God; but their hearts had never yielded to the influence of divine grace. They loved not God’s character or his requirements. {1.1}

Had these youth improved the privileges granted them, they might have become men of both intellectual and moral power. A faithful obedience to God’s requirements will have a surprising influence to elevate, develop, and strengthen all man’s faculties. Those who have in youth devoted themselves to the service of God, are found to be the men of sound judgment and keen discrimination. And why should it not be so? Communion with the greatest Teacher the world has ever known, strengthens the understanding, illuminates the mind, and purifies the heart—elevates, refines, and ennobles the whole man. “The entrance of Thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” {1.2}

Among the youth who profess godliness, there is a large class who may seem to contradict this statement. They make no advancement in knowledge or in spirituality. Their powers are dwarfing, rather than developing. But the psalmist’s words are true of the genuine Christian. It is not, indeed, the bare letter of God’s word that gives light and understanding; it is the word opened and applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit. When a man is truly converted, he becomes a son of God, a partaker of the divine nature. Not only is the heart renewed, but the intellect is strengthened and invigorated. There have been many instances of persons who before conversion were thought to possess ordinary and even inferior ability, but who after conversion seemed entirely transformed. They then manifested remarkable power to comprehend the truths of God’s word, and to present these truths to others. Men of high intellectual standing have considered it a privilege to hold intercourse with these men. The Sun of Righteousness, shedding its bright beams into their minds, quickened every power into more vigorous action. {1.3}

God will do a great work for the youth, if they will by the aid of the Holy Spirit, receive his word into the heart, and obey it in the life. He is constantly seeking to attract them to himself, the Source of all wisdom, the Fountain of goodness, purity, and truth. The mind which is occupied with exalted themes, becomes itself ennobled. Those who profess to serve God, and yet make no advancement in knowledge and piety, are Christians only in name. The soul-temple is filled with desecrated shrines. Frivolous reading, trifling conversation, and worldly pleasure, occupy the mind so completely that there is no room left for the entrance of God’s word. Worldliness, frivolity, and pride take the place which Christ should occupy in the soul. {1.4}

To fix the heart’s best affections upon any finite object, any earthly good, degrades the soul and weakens the intellect. God alone is worthy of man’s

supreme devotion. The individual whose heart is placed on worldly gain becomes covetous, selfish, and even cruel, in his efforts to amass wealth. Living for himself, he becomes narrow-minded. All his thoughts and feelings are absorbed in promoting his own interests. Mind and heart are dwarfed to meet his low standard of excellence. {1.5}

Those who seek as their chief good the indulgence of appetite and passion, are never good or truly great men. However high they may stand in the opinion of the world, they are low, vile, and corrupt in God's estimation. Heaven has ordered that the mark of their depravity shall be written upon their very countenance. Their thoughts are of the earth, earthly. Their words reveal the low level of the mind. They have filled the heart with vileness, and well-nigh effaced therefrom the image of God. The voice of reason is drowned, and judgment is perverted. Oh, how is man's entire nature debased by sensual indulgence! When the will is surrendered to Satan, to what depths of vice and folly will not men descend! In vain does truth appeal to the intellect; for the heart is opposed to its pure principles. {1.6}

Eli's sons chose the false, the sensual, the debased, instead of the true, the pure, and the holy. Thus they became sons of Belial—children of Satan. Standing, as they did, in sacred office, the chosen exponents of the divine will, mediators between a holy God and repentant sinners, the course of these wicked men brought temptation upon all Israel. Again the faith and devotion of the people were tested. Those who had cherished iniquity in their hearts, were inclined to unite with these vile men; and many excused their own sins, because those in high position led the way in transgression. {1.7}

The typical service was the connecting link between God and Israel. The sacrificial offerings were designed to prefigure the sacrifice of Christ, and thus to preserve in the hearts of the people an unwavering faith in the Redeemer to come. Hence, in order that the Lord might accept their sacrifices, and continue his presence with them, and, on the other hand, that the people might have a correct knowledge of the plan of salvation, and a right understanding of their duty, it was of the utmost importance that holiness of heart and purity of life, reverence for God, and strict obedience to his requirements, should be maintained by all connected with the sanctuary. {1.8}

The Lord had, through Moses, given the most explicit directions concerning the sacrificial offerings. But selfish, avaricious priests, to serve their own interests, had departed from these instructions. The sacrifice of the peace-offerings especially, which were made as an expression of thanksgiving to God, and were presented in great numbers when the people assembled at the annual feasts, afforded a favorable opportunity for unscrupulous priests to enrich themselves at the expense of the people. The Lord had directed that the fat of the peace-offering should be burned upon the altar as a type of the great Sacrifice; a specified portion, the breast and the right shoulder, with some minor parts, were given to the priest as his perquisite; the remainder was to be eaten by those who brought the offering. {1.9}

Infinite wisdom had foreseen that the clamors of appetite, and a covetous desire for gain, might lead the priest to appropriate to himself the sacrifices solemnly devoted to the Lord. That there might be no room for confusion or misunderstanding, the most exact and minute directions had been given. <sup>[1.10]</sup>

Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, disregarded the laws of the sanctuary more boldly than had any of their predecessors. While they arrayed themselves in the sacerdotal garments and ministered before the Lord, they cared only for the gratification of their own debased appetites and passions. The priests not being content with their rightful share of the peace-offerings, it had become customary for one of their servants to come while the offerers were cooking their portion in some apartment adjacent to the sanctuary, and to carry away whatever could be taken up with the flesh-hook. The great numbers of sacrifices offered, made this a considerable addition to the priest's requisite. <sup>[1.11]</sup>

But even this departure from the Lord's commands failed to satisfy Hophni and Phinehas. They desired the fat, which the Lord had expressly stated should never be eaten, but burned on the altar as an offering to himself. As they had learned to despise the authority of their father, they now despised the authority of God, and sent their servants to demand the flesh of the peace-offerings before the fat had been separated from it. When the offerer remonstrated, "Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth," the answer was, "Nay, but thou shalt give it to me now; and if not, I will take it by force." The people stood in awe of the priests, and submitted to their unlawful claims, robbing themselves of their rightful share of the offering. Thus, appetite, selfishness, and avarice triumphed, exerting their evil influence upon the people at the very time when every heart should have been directed in penitence and faith to the great Sacrifice which was to take away the sins of the world. These things had a telling influence upon the people, and they were fast losing all sense of the sacredness of the sacrificial offerings, and of the importance of attending upon the services of the sanctuary. <sup>[1.12]</sup>

The recreant priests added licentiousness to the dark catalogue of their crimes; yet they still polluted by their presence the tabernacle of the Lord, and, laden with sin, dared to come into the presence of a holy God. As the men of Israel witnessed the corrupt course of the priests, they thought it safer for their families not to come up to the appointed place of worship. Many went from Shiloh with their peace disturbed, their indignation aroused, until they at last determined to offer their sacrifices themselves, concluding that this would be fully as acceptable to God, as to sanction in any manner the abominations practiced in the sanctuary. <sup>[1.13]</sup>

The worship which Jehovah himself had ordained was despised and neglected because associated with the sins of wicked men. This was a critical time for the people of God. Ungodliness, profligacy, and even idolatry prevailed to a fearful extent among them. And where now was the priest and judge of Israel? Eli was not ignorant of the course pursued by his sons. Faithful men, who mourned over the corruption of the priesthood, presented the matter in its true character before him. The indignation of the people had been aroused, and complaints were com-

ing to him from every side. He had passed over these transgressions till he dared remain silent no longer. But the aged father still manifested the same partiality which he had ever shown his wayward sons. He took no decisive measures to bring them to justice, but mildly remonstrated with them, as with persons of tender conscience, who had for once fallen under temptation: {1.14}

“And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear; ye make the Lord’s people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?” {1.15}

Eli had long known that his sons were not what God would have them. He knew that they did not give to Israel an example worthy of imitation. But he was growing old, and the burden of official care rested heavily upon him. Some one must assist him in bearing this responsibility. Should he deal justly with his sons, they would be speedily rejected from the priestly office, and punished with death. He dreaded thus to bring public disgrace and condemnation upon them. By passing over their crimes again and again without punishment, his own abhorrence of sin was lessened, and in his efforts to shield them, he became accessory to their guilt. {1.16}

God held Eli, as priest and judge of Israel, accountable for the moral and religious standing of his people, and in a special sense for the character of his sons. The most severe punishment should have been meted out to them, as due the insulted honor of God, and as needful to counteract the influence of their daring sacrilege and gross immorality. Well had it been for Eli and for all Israel, had the high priest manifested such zeal for the honor of God, and such a desire to avert his wrath, as had been shown by the tribe of Levi in slaying the worshipers of the golden calf. On that occasion the priests at God’s command executed justice upon the leaders in transgression, without regard to rank or kindred. Those who faithfully performed this painful duty, were approved and honored of the Lord.

{1.17}

Had not Eli’s love for his wicked sons surpassed his zeal for the honor of God, he would have pursued a similar course. He should have exercised his authority to repress crime and uphold righteousness, thus saying to all Israel, “Sin is sin, even if found in the sons of the high priest; and although a most painful duty devolves upon me as a father, God shall not be dishonored by my sons before the people. Holiness and iniquity shall not be confounded in the minds of Israel, because men in high position dare to sin.” But the aged priest loved ease and peace, and rather than endure the pain and strife of meeting and resisting wrong, he remained silent, and suffered the work on iniquity to go on and the clouds of divine wrath to gather above a guilty nation. {1.18}

### God’s Judgment Upon Sin

December 8, 1881

Unmerited mercy, no less than strict justice, were strikingly displayed in the Lord’s dealings with the house of Eli. Notwithstanding the Heaven-daring crimes of the ungodly sons, and the sinful neglect of the indulgent father, the Lord waited long for them to turn from their evil ways. Then he sent a prophet

to denounce their sins and to warn them of impending judgment. Without fear or favor, this chosen messenger of God set forth the high honors which the Most High had conferred upon them, and their base ingratitude in so degrading their holy office: {2.1}

“Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh’s house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? And did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering which I have commanded in my habitation; and honorest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever; but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” {2.2}

Except in his neglect to restrain and control his sons, Eli had faithfully performed the duties of his office. But his failure to maintain the honor of God by repressing sin with an impartial hand, gave rise to a long train of evils, bringing crime and anguish upon a whole nation. In the history of Eli and his sons is a solemn warning for all the ministers of Christ—an admonition to guard their own hearts with diligence, to keep holy all God’s requirements, that his blessing may rest upon the workmen, and that the work may bear the signet of Heaven. It should also impress upon them their duty to rebuke sin in the members of the church, be they high or low, rich or poor. Even our dearest friends are not to come between us and our allegiance to God. We need not expect to receive the divine blessing until all that has been left for man to do is done to correct error and repress sin. To neglect this duty, or to be slothful and careless in its performance, is to disobey God, to sanction sin, and to bring his wrath upon his people. {2.3}

The example of ministers should be such as to impress the people with reverence for God, and with fear to offend him. They should honor the Lord at all times, ever acknowledging that of themselves they can do nothing, that their strength and wisdom must come from God, and that all the glory belongs to him. Those who occupy responsible positions, where if connected with God they might do much good, yet who abuse these privileges by the gratification of appetite or unlawful passion, will be visited with the wrath of God according to the gifts which they have perverted. {2.4}

It is plainly written on the unrenewed heart and on a fallen world, All seek their own. Selfishness is the great law of our degenerate nature. Selfishness occupies that place in the soul where Christ should sit enthroned. Never does Satan more effectually accomplish his work than in controlling the minds and hearts of those who minister in sacred things. Transforming himself into an angel of light, his true character is not discerned. Alas, how many of the agents of the great deceiver are to be found in the holy office of the ministry! They may possess intellectual ability, they study, preach, and pray, and are looked upon

as pious men because engaged in a sacred work. Then, taking advantage of the confidence reposed in them, they lead souls to ruin and to death. There are men in holy office today who are similar in character to Hophni and Phinehas. They give loose rein to passion, and disguise their depravity under a cloak of religion. When at last their true character is detected and exposed, the faith of the people receives a shock that often destroys their confidence in religion. Imperceptibly there is left upon the mind a distrust of all who profess to teach the word of God. The message of the true servant of Christ is doubtfully received. The question constantly comes up, "Will not this man prove to be like the one we thought so holy and found so corrupt?" Thus the word of God loses its power upon the souls of men. These false shepherds are of the class who in the day of God will say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" It is to such men that our Lord will declare, "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." {2.5}

Said the great apostle, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." We live in an age when the spurious abounds; but, thank God, there is a true, or there would be no counterfeit. Let all who would be numbered with the faithful few, seek to follow the example of the self-denying apostle. {2.6}

The words of reproof to Eli are also a reproof to all parents who pursue a similar course. Indulgence of the wayward inclinations of the youth is registered in the books of Heaven as a sin. If a minister of the gospel neglect his duty as a parent, his guilt is as much greater than that of others as his position is more responsible. He is showing contempt for the authority of God. While teaching his word to others, he disregards it himself. That parent can have no true sense of the worth of souls, who permits his children to grow up without restraint, going out from his hearth with their hearts at enmity with God and his law, to infuse that enmity into the hearts of others. {2.7}

The very beginnings of evil, the first manifestations of insubordination, should be resolutely checked. The indulgence of appetite and passion should be restrained with earnestness and decision. When parents neglect this work, they permit thorns and briars to occupy the heart-gardens which God has commanded them to sow with precious seed, and to till with care, that a harvest may be brought forth unto eternal life. God will surely visit the transgressors with judgment. Both parents and children must reap the harvest sown. {2.8}

In the sons of Eli, we may see the sons of many professedly Christian parents. None are more stubborn and perverse, none less susceptible to the influence of the Holy Spirit, than are many of these victims of parental indulgence. There is no class that will exert a more pernicious influence than such ungodly youth. By their inconsistent course, they furnish the enemies of God with arguments against Christianity. There are skeptics and even atheists who are at times troubled, and almost persuaded to believe in the existence of God and the truth of the Scriptures. Satan fears to lose them from his ranks, and he calls their attention to the perverse and immoral children of professed Christians, as the fruit

of belief in God and the Bible. The careless find in their course an excuse for not giving themselves to Christ, and many who really desire to become Christians, are discouraged. These wayward youth are successful agents of Satan. Ungodliness and immorality follow in their path, and the crime of perverting and polluting many souls rests upon them, and upon the parents whose neglect of duty made them what they are. <sup>[2.9]</sup>

Professed Christians have by their inconsistent course done greater harm to the cause of Christ than can be done by open opposers. The world at large judge of Christianity by the course of its advocates. If this be evil, the system itself is rejected. When a missionary once urged an Indian chief to be a Christian, "the plumed savage drew himself up in the consciousness of superior rectitude, and with indignation quivering on his lip and flashing in his eagle eye, replied, 'Christian lie; Christian cheat; Christian steal, drink, murder; Christian rob me of my lands, and slay my tribe;' adding as he turned haughtily on his heel, 'I will be no Christian.'" Alas that this incident truly represents the course of some who are looked upon by the world as the representatives of Christ! <sup>[2.10]</sup>

Eli knew that the wickedness of his sons and the iniquity which by their influence had spread through all Israel, must call down upon his family and upon the nation the judgments of God. He remembered how promptly similar offenders had been punished in the past. In the days of Joshua, one man's sin brought disaster and defeat upon the whole nation. When, contrary to the command of God, Achan took of the spoils of their enemies, and concealed the coveted treasure in his tent, the divine presence was withdrawn from Israel, until the crime had been put away by the death of the offender. The Lord gave Joshua to understand that the sin of even one man would bring the divine wrath upon the whole congregation. <sup>[2.11]</sup>

There was work for both magistrate and people, to keep the camp free from iniquity. They must have vigilant care, not only for themselves, but for one another, lest sin should prevail, and the Lord's name be dishonored. <sup>[2.12]</sup>

God's character changes not. He was the same in Eli's time as in the days of Joshua. The iniquity signally punished in the early history of Israel could not be tolerated in later years. The crimes of Eli's sons were far greater than the sin of Achan. And their guilt was heightened by the greater light which they had received; they were acquainted with the history of his sin and its terrible punishment, and they had enjoyed superior advantages for religious education and training. Notwithstanding the Lord's forbearance toward them, they had stubbornly gone on in sin, and now the prophet of the Lord pronounced their fate: <sup>[2.13]</sup>

"And this shall be a sign unto thee that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. And I will raise me up a faithful priest that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind; and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever." <sup>[2.14]</sup>

Man may be deceived by the outward appearance; but the Lord looketh upon the heart. Those who steal the livery of Heaven that they may allure souls to

death, will as surely receive retributive justice as did Achan, Hophni, and Phinehas. Every man is sowing seed which will produce a harvest for him to reap by and by. We are all treasuring up stores for eternity. The righteous are laying up eternal riches; the wicked treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. While acquiring property on earth, the sinner is by his transgression of God's law gathering for himself anguish and bitterness. He may be honored of men, but, saith the Lord, "Them that honor me, I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." The record of every act of injustice, of cruelty, or licentiousness, is passing up to Heaven to be registered in the book of God's remembrance. Today the treasure of wrath is greater than it was yesterday; and tomorrow the sinner will add to the amount. Every soul whom his influence has helped to lead astray increases the treasure he has laid up, the vengeance of God, accumulating, deepening, darkening. {2.15}

In Eli's reproof to his sons are words of solemn and fearful import—words which all who minister in sacred things would do well to ponder. "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" Had their crimes injured only their fellow-men, the judge might have made reconciliation by appointing a penalty, and requiring restitution; and thus the offenders might have been pardoned. Or had they sinned ignorantly, the priest might have presented a sin-offering for them, and secured their pardon. But their sins were so interwoven with their ministration as priests of the Most High, in offering sacrifice for sin; the work of God was so profaned and dishonored before the people, that no expiation could be accepted for them. Their own father, though himself high priest, dared not make intercession for them; he could not shield them from the wrath of a holy God. Let those whose hearts are given to the service of sin and Satan, beware how they pollute the sacred office of the ministry. Let them beware how, while at heart agents of Satan, they dare to stand before the people as ambassadors for Christ. In the day of Judgment the doom of Hophni and Phinehas will be theirs. {2.16}

### Answer Hints

Section 1: | 1) 1.1 | 2) 1.2 | 3) 1.3–1.4 | 4) 1.5 | 5) 1.6 | 6) 1.16 | 7) 1.17–1.18 |

Section 2: | 1) 2.3 | 2) 2.5 | 3) 2.9 | 4) 2.10 | 5) 2.15 |

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