

PROPHETS & JUDGES

IN THE PROMISED LAND

“ ‘The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God;’
‘for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of
God.’ 1 Corinthians 2:11, 10. And the Saviour’s promise to
His followers was, ‘When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He
will guide you into all truth. . . . For He shall receive of Mine,
and shall show it unto you.’ John 16:13, 14.” {Steps to Christ, p. 109}

WEEK 11 - THE GLORY DEPARTED FROM ISRAEL

I. God’s Message to Samuel

1. Why did God call Samuel in such a way that he thought Eli was calling him?

2. In mercy to Eli, the Lord delayed His judgments. What should Eli have done? How did this forbearance of God affect Hophni and Phinehas?

3. Think about it! What do you think we can we learn from this today, as Jesus in mercy and forbearance delays the day of His coming?

4. Why does probation close early for some people?

5. As we see God's judgments in the past, what can we expect now?

6. As we see faith and devotion dwindling in people around us, what should we be doing and feeling?

7. Since God's perfect Law has been obeyed by Christ in our stead, what is our duty?

II. The Glory Departed from Israel

1. How did the sins of Hophni and Phinehas influence the surrounding nations?

2. Why did the Israelites send for the Ark of the Covenant after their defeat? What was wrong with their motives?

3. In what ways do many have the same wrong thinking today?

4. Instead of finding blessing and victory by bringing the ark to the battlefield, 30,000 Israelites were killed and the battle was lost. What lesson did God teach in this?

God's Message to Samuel**December 15, 1881**

While Eli's heart was filled with anxiety and remorse by the evil course of his sons, he found relief and comfort in the integrity and devotion of the youthful Samuel. His ready helpfulness and unvarying fidelity lightened the burdens of the careworn priest. Eli loved Samuel; for he saw that the grace and love of God rested upon him. It was not customary for the Levites to enter upon their peculiar services until they were twenty-five years of age. But Samuel had been an exception to this rule. Every year saw more important trusts committed to him, and, while yet a child, a linen ephod was placed upon him, as a token of his consecration to the work of the sanctuary. {1.1}

As Samuel grew older, the anxiety of his parents in his behalf became more intense. Many were the petitions offered that he might not be contaminated by the wickedness reported concerning the sons of Eli. "And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with the Lord and also with men." {1.2}

When but twelve years old, the son of Hannah received his special commission from the Most High. The circumstances of that call are best related in the simple and touchingly beautiful language of the sacred writer: "The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; and ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep, that the Lord called Samuel." Supposing the voice to be that of Eli, the child hastened to the bedside of the aged priest, saying, "Here am I, for thou calledst me." The answer was, "I called not, my son, lie down again." Three times Samuel was called, and thrice he responded in like manner; and then Eli was convinced that the mysterious call was the voice of God. What feelings must have stirred the heart of the high priest at that hour! God had passed by his chosen servant, the man of hoary hairs, to commune with a child. This in itself was a bitter yet deserved rebuke to Eli and his house. {1.3}

No spirit of envy or jealousy was awakened in Eli's heart. He humbly submitted to the will of God, and directed Samuel to answer, if again called, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Once more the child heard the mysterious voice, and answered, "Speak, for thy servant heareth." So awed was he at the thought that the great God should speak to him, that he could not remember the exact words which Eli bade him say. {1.4}

"And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house. When I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever." {1.5}

The Scriptures state that before receiving this message from God, "Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him." He was not destitute of a knowledge of God, nor he was a stranger to the

influence of divine grace; but he was not acquainted with such direct manifestations of his presence, as were granted to the prophets. It was the Lord's purpose, however, to reveal himself in an unexpected manner, that Eli might hear of it through the surprise and inquiry of the youth. {1.6}

Samuel had not been ignorant of the wicked course pursued by the sons of Eli, but he was filled with fear and amazement that the Lord should commit to him so terrible a message. He arose in the morning and went about his duties as usual, but with a heavy burden on his young heart. How earnestly did he long for the sympathy and counsel of his parents in that trying hour! The Lord had not commanded him to reveal the fearful denunciation to the priest or to his sons; hence he remained silent, avoiding as far as possible the presence of Eli. He trembled, lest some question would compel him to declare the divine judgments against one whom he so loved and revered. {1.7}

Eli was confident that the message concerned himself. He felt that some great calamity was about to fall upon him and his house. He called Samuel, and solemnly charged him to faithfully relate what the Lord had revealed. The youth obeyed, and when the venerable man heard the appalling sentence, he bowed in meek submission: {1.8}

"It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." Eli's faith in the wisdom and justice of God was unshaken. He confessed his own guilt and the guilt of his sons; and as he looked forward to the dread result, acknowledged that he deserved it all: "It is the Lord; who shall rise up in judgment against him? I have ever found him merciful, long-suffering, holy, and just. Let him do what seemeth him good." {1.9}

Year after year the Lord for Eli's sake delayed his threatened judgments. How much might have been done in those years, to redeem the failures of the past! But the aged priest took no effective measures to avert the doom that hung over himself and his house. The forbearance of God caused Hophni and Phinehas to harden their hearts, and to become still bolder and more defiant in transgression. But steadily and surely the day of retribution was approaching. Every warning slighted, every day of probation squandered, made their punishment greater, their doom more certain. {1.10}

God bears long with the perversity and stubbornness of men. By warnings and reproofs he shows them their true condition. Again and again he calls them to repentance. Though the multitudes wax bold in sin, trampling upon his mercy and defying his justice, still he pours his blessings upon them. Oh, how infinitely beyond human comprehension are the Lord's mercy and forbearance toward the children of men! Yet there is a limit, beyond which men may not go on in sin. When the fullness of iniquity is reached—as with the Amorites, and the children of Israel who fell in the wilderness—then the wrath of God is visited upon the transgressors of his law. {1.11}

There are many who teach that man may violate God's law with impunity. These men seek to conceal the hideous character of sin, by clothing it with garments of righteousness. They may observe all the forms of religion, but their hearts are at enmity with God. They look upon his law as a yoke of bondage,

because it forbids them to indulge their sinful desires. "Thou shalt not," placed at every avenue of sin, is the restriction of the just and holy One. Those who, like Hophni and Phinehas, disregard the commandments of God, and lead others to transgress, are Satan's agents to destroy souls. They say to the sinner, "It shall be well with thee," when God says, "I will punish the transgressor with my wrath, I will take him away in my hot displeasure." ^[1.12]

God may bear long with the sins of men, but in his own time he will vindicate his authority. Although the wicked may say, "My way is hid from the Lord," yet when his interposition is needed, he will show that he beholds all the works of the children of men. In the days of Noah, the wickedness of man became so great that it was necessary for God to assert his authority and punish the transgressors of his law. A crisis had come, and the Lord declared the limits of his forbearance toward that guilty race. He sent his faithful servant with a message of warning, giving them one hundred and twenty years in which to turn from their sins. They rejected and despised God's love, and when the measure of their iniquity was full; when the boundaries of divine mercy were passed, the Lord swept that wicked race from the earth by the waters of the flood. ^[1.13]

As men again increased, they departed from the Lord, and then Abraham was made the depository of God's law. When the Israelites, through their long bondage in Egypt, had to a great degree lost the knowledge of that law, the Lord himself proclaimed it from Sinai, in the hearing of all the people. The nations of the earth were given to idolatry; it was to preserve the children of men from total apostasy, that the Lord manifested his mighty power in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, and establishing them in the land of Canaan. ^[1.14]

When God's authority had been set aside, and his worship neglected and despised, it became necessary for him to interpose, that the honor of his name might be maintained in the earth. Such a necessity existed in the days of Eli. None but a divine power could free the worship and ordinances of God from the corruption and disorder produced by the course of Hophni and Phinehas. The hand of God must be distinctly recognized; the agents of Israel's apostasy must be destroyed, yet the nation must not become extinct. The service of God must be purged from sin and sinners, and the worship itself honored and exalted. ^[1.15]

God's people had been crying to him with humiliation and fasting, that the wickedness of the wicked might come to an end. And while he manifested his power as an avenger to the wicked, he would also appear as the protector of the righteous. Though their prayers might long have seemed unheard, yet in God's own time they saw that he had given ear to their supplications, and answered them by terrible things in righteousness. ^[1.16]

In every age, God's judgments have been visited upon the earth because men transgressed his law. What, then, have we to expect as we behold the wickedness which prevails at the present day? An ungrateful people, forgetful of God's care, his long forbearance, and his unnumbered blessings, are showing contempt for his holy law. Many of the acknowledged leaders in the church and in the nation, break, and teach others to break that law, as sacred to God as his own throne and name. It is time for the Lord himself to assert his authority in the earth. And he

is doing this, by fires, by floods, by tempests. He removes his protecting, providential care, and visits his judgments upon the children of men. {1.17}

In these days of peril shall we show less devotion to the truth of God, and less fervent attachment to his law, than in former years? The very condition of things exists which Christ declared would be, prior to his second coming in power and glory. The prevailing ungodliness tends to paralyze and even to destroy true faith and piety. But this is the very time when the gold of Christian integrity will shine brightest, in contrast to the dross of hypocrisy and corruption. Now is the time for Christ's chosen to show their devotion to his service—the time for all his followers to bear the noblest testimony for their Master by standing firm against the prevailing current of evil. {1.18}

As we see the results which have followed a disregard of God's law—dishonesty, theft, licentiousness, drunkenness, and murder—we are prepared to say with the psalmist, "I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold," "in keeping of them, there is great reward." When the divine law is set aside, the greatest misery will result, both to families and to society. Our only hope of better things is to be found in a faithful adherence to the precepts of Jehovah. Infidel France once tried the experiment of rejecting the authority of God. What scenes of horror followed! Men cast aside the divine law as a yoke of bondage, and in their boasted liberty they placed themselves under the rule of the veriest tyrant. Anarchy and bloodshed ruled that terrible day. It was then demonstrated to the world that the surest way to undermine the foundation of order and government, is to set at naught the law of God. {1.19}

Let us remember that "by the law is the knowledge of sin." The commandments of God convict the sinner of his guilt; but that perfect law has been obeyed by Christ in our stead, and through faith in him we are released from our great debt, and are placed where, in his strength, we can render obedience to God. Instead of feeling that we are now in the slightest degree excusable in further transgression, we shall realize as never before the justice of God's claims upon us, and the sacred character of his law, since Christ must die to maintain its authority. {1.20}

Ere long the obedient will see the blessed results that follow the keeping of all God's commandments and the transgressors of his law will reap the reward of their doings. The Judge of all the earth will vindicate his insulted authority. Already we see his judgments in the land. And the end is not yet. He will work until sin and sinners are destroyed from the earth. {1.21}

The Glory Departed from Israel

December 22, 1881

"Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." From one extreme of the land to the other, Samuel's claims to the prophetic office were established, and he received further revelations of God's will in the tabernacle at Shiloh. {2.1}

The messages of warning and reproof to the house of Eli were made known by him to the whole nation. By so doing he hoped to counteract, in some mea-

sure, the evil influence of his past neglect. But these warnings were disregarded by the people, as they had been by the priests. The surrounding nations also, who were not ignorant of the iniquities openly practiced in Israel, became still bolder and more determined in their own course of idolatry and crime. They felt no sense of guilt for their sins, as they would have felt had the Israelites preserved their integrity. ^[2.2]

Again the Philistines gathered their forces for war. And Israel, without asking counsel from the Lord, without the concurrence of Eli or Samuel, rashly went out to battle. But the hand of God was not with them, and in the first engagement they were defeated, with a loss of four thousand of their number. When the people returned disheartened to their tents, the elders of Israel said, "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines?" The nation was ripe for the judgments of God, yet so blinded by their unbelief and rebellion that they could not see in their disaster a token of the Lord's displeasure. ^[2.3]

Instead of confessing and forsaking the sins that had brought defeat upon them, they now set about devising some other means by which to obtain the victory. Then they thought of the ark of God. What wonders had been wrought when the priests bore it before the people into Jordan! How its waters parted, leaving a safe path for that vast company! They remembered also how it was borne about the city of Jericho seven days in solemn silence, and then as the trumpets pealed, and the people gave a great shout, the massive walls fell flat upon the earth. ^[2.4]

The recollection of these glorious triumphs inspired all Israel with fresh hope and courage, and they immediately sent to Shiloh for the ark, "that when it cometh among us," said they, "it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." They did not consider that it was the law of God which alone gave to the ark its sacredness, and that its presence would bring them prosperity only as they obeyed that law. While they talked of the "ark of the covenant of the Lord," they ignored the real significance of the title. A covenant is an agreement between parties, based upon conditions. If Israel would obey the divine law and thus fulfill the conditions of their covenant with God, he would verify his promises to them. But what presumption for them to expect a blessing while they were violating the conditions upon which alone it could be bestowed! ^[2.5]

Yet we see a similar blindness and inattention on the part of many at the present day. Having a knowledge of God's law, they are confident and boastful, as though especially favored of Heaven, while they are not from the heart obeying its precepts. God has given to modern Israel warnings, counsel, and reproof, to bring them to repentance and reformation of life. But too often these produce but a momentary impression. The persons warned soon return to their own ways. They flatter themselves that because they have a form of godliness they will be accepted of the Lord, and they go on presumptuously devising and executing plans in accordance with their own finite judgment, and giving little heed to the special manifestations of divine providence. It is one thing to acknowledge the claims of God's law, and quite another thing to render faithful and willing obedi-

ence to all its requirements. And let it be remembered that to the obedient alone will the promises of blessing, support, and guidance be fulfilled. {2.6}

The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, eagerly acceded to the proposal to bear the ark into the camp. Without the consent of the high priest, they ventured presumptuously into the holy of holies, and took from thence the ark of God. Filled with pride, and elated with the expectation of speedy victory, they bore it to the camp. And the people, beholding, as they thought the token of Jehovah's presence, "shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again." {2.7}

They overlooked the distinction between the divine presence vouchsafed to an obedient and believing people, and the ark, which was but a symbol of that presence. Hence they confidently looked to the ark for those blessings which God alone could bestow. They saw not the wide contrast between the condition of Israel when the Lord wrought so mightily in their behalf, and their present state. {2.8}

They were then walking in obedience to God. The ark was borne by holy men in accordance with his express command, and the Captain of the Lord's host went before the repository of his law. Then his arm brought deliverance for them. But they were now following their own plans, in opposition to the divine counsel and authority. The ark was borne by sons of Belial who were doomed to destruction. Yet the people were so infatuated by Satan as to imagine they could induce God to fight for them, when the law under the mercy-seat condemned them to defeat, disaster, and death! {2.9}

The Philistines looked upon the ark as the god of the Hebrews. All the mighty works which Jehovah had wrought for Israel, were attributed to its power. As they heard the shouts of joy and triumph at its approach, they said, "What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews?" "And they understand that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us, who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness." {2.10}

The Philistines feared for their nation; yet still they trusted to the power of Dagon their god, and sought to strengthen the courage of the people: "Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight." They well knew how bitter was the servitude which Israel had endured when in their power, and the thought of themselves becoming slaves to endure like oppression nerved them with the courage of desperation. {2.11}

A fierce assault upon Israel resulted in their defeat with great slaughter. Thirty thousand men lay dead upon the field, and the ark of God was taken, the two sons of Eli having fallen while fighting to defend it. {2.12}

The Lord sorely chastised his people Israel, revealing their hypocrisy and rebuking their presumption, and thus left upon the pages of history the testimony for all future ages, that the iniquities of his professed people will not go unpunished. The greater the knowledge of God's will, the greater the sin of those

who disregard it. God is not dependent upon men to cause his name to be feared and honored in the earth. He accepts the labors of those who walk in faithfulness and humility before him, but he will reject all who profess to serve him, and yet follow in the course of the unrighteous. God can carry forward his work in the earth without the co-operation of those who would pervert or disgrace it. {2.13}

While the army of Israel went out to battle, Eli, blind and old, remained at Shiloh. Seating himself at the gate of the tabernacle he anxiously waited for tidings from the field of conflict, “for his heart trembled for the ark of God.” Days of agonizing suspense followed. At last there fell upon his ears a sound of lamentation from the town. Soon a messenger drew near, his clothing rent and dust upon his head, and repeated to the high priest his sad tidings: {2.14}

“Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead.” Eli could endure all this, terrible as it was, for he had expected it. But when the messenger added, “And the ark of God is taken,” a look of unutterable anguish passed over his countenance. The thought that his sin had thus dishonored God and caused him to withdraw his presence from Israel, was more than he could bear; his strength was gone, he reeled upon his seat and fell, “and his neck brake, and he died.” {2.15}

The wife of Phinehas, notwithstanding the impiety of her husband, was a woman who feared the Lord. The death of her father-in-law and her husband, and above all the terrible tidings that the ark of God was in captivity, caused her death. She felt that now the last hope of Israel was gone, and she named the child, born in this hour of adversity, Ichabod, or inglorious; with her dying breath mournfully repeating the words, “The glory is departed from Israel; for the ark of God is taken.” {2.16}

Answer Hints

Section 1: | 1) 1.6, 1.3 | 2) 1.10 | 4) 1.11 | 5) 1.17 | 6) 1.18, 1.19 | 7) 1.20 |

Section 2: | 1) 2.2 | 2) 2.4, 2.5, 2.8 | 3) 2.6 | 4) 2.13 |

This lesson is from a 13-week (1-quarter) set of Sabbath School lessons for youth and young adults called *Prophets & Judges*, based on a series of articles by Ellen G. White in *The Signs of the Times*, 1881–1882.

Other youth/young adult lessons are available:

- Early Writings (2 quarters)
A look at the messages God gave especially to the SDA church. (Each class member will need a copy of Early Writings.)
- Tidal Waves (1 quarter)
A powerful series on the coming tidal waves of fanaticism. Learn how to recognize fanaticism and avoid becoming part of it.
- Redemption (4 quarters)
Taken from the series of six booklets by Ellen White on the life of Christ which include many insights not in The Desire of Ages.
- Deeper (1 quarter)
Based on the book Deeper by Eugene Prewitt, these Bible studies cover many important topics that must be understood today.

You may order printed copies of the complete set of lessons and teacher answer keys from Young Disciple Ministries.

509-722-4300
www.YoungDisciple.com

Copyright © 2013. All rights reserved.