

Series: Biblical Heroes and Zeros – week 14

CDOBC – beginning (Resuming) on 11/6/11

Title: “The Sanctuary of Sleaze”: Eli the High Priest

November 20, 2011

1 Samuel 1-4

OBJECTIVE: To help us realize how sin ruins life, and how God calls us to total commitment to Him.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- Oikos Class – begins today
- TKU Anita Coffey and others for Operation Christmas Child...126 boxes!
- Waypoint Theatre play – “Away With the Manger” – see bulletin annnc for details
- Thanksgiving Eve Service and Pie Fellowship – 6:30 p.m.
- Christmas door hanger packets – Oikos focus!

Today, we are looking at a Biblical Zero – Eli the High Priest. We are first introduced to Eli in 1 Samuel 1. Historically, the early chapters of 1 Samuel pre-date the monarchy in Israel. The first king – Saul – will be crowned in chapter 10.

So, as the book of 1 Samuel opens up, the nation is still operating under the leadership / rule of the Judges. In this time of Israel’s history, a judge who ruled was not only a political leader, but often a spiritual leader as well, and as the High Priest, Eli’s primary leadership role was as a spiritual leader.

But over the years, the nation had collectively moved away from God. There were certainly pockets of faithful people throughout the nation, but the spiritual health of Israel was at a low point...and this was due in part to Eli’s lack of spiritual faithfulness. Eli – was the High Priest – but he was a spiritual failure – he was a Biblical ‘zero’.

But just because I may label Eli as a Biblical zero, that doesn’t mean he was a total disaster.

Eli did some good things

1:12-18 – Eli seeks God’s blessing on Hannah

Eli was ‘sitting’ (vs. 9) – not sure if we should read into this that he was lazy and neglecting the work of the Tabernacle, but he misreads Hannah’s actions when he first observes her. He assumes the worst, but accepts her correction. He then realizes that she is earnestly seeking God in her pain, and he blesses her and asks that God would grant her request.

Little did he know how involved he would be if God answered her request for a son!

His counsel and blessing to her encouraged her so that she was able to eat and not be discouraged any longer. We see here a good ministry moment for Eli.

1:24-28 – Eli accepts Samuel into the Lord’s service

If your kids were already adults, as Eli’s were, would be excited if someone brought you a three year old?

Eli took Samuel into his care, and raised him from a toddler.

2:18 – Eli taught / trained Samuel to serve in the Tabernacle

No detail is given here, but Eli was obviously the one who had trained Samuel on how to serve at the altar and how to administer the sacrifices that people brought. He took Samuel under his tutelage, even

though this would have taken considerable time and energy.

2:20 – Eli blessed and ministered to Elkanah and Hannah

Every year when Elkanah and his family came to Shiloh to worship, Eli would bless them and ask God to bless them further – with more children since she had given up her firstborn to the Lord.

3:8-9 – Eli gave wise advice to Samuel

Eli figured out that God was talking to Samuel, and he gave Samuel some great direction. There is no jealousy in Eli over God speaking directly to Samuel – he helps Samuel further his progression and relationship with God – something he lacked in his own life.

3:18 - Eli accepted God's judgment

The details were not good for Eli. However, he doesn't cry 'foul' or say that God was being unfair. He accepts God's judgment and credits the goodness of God.

So we see some good things in Eli's life. In his role as High Priest, he helped Elkanah and Hannah, and he brought Samuel under his care and trained him in service to the Lord.

Illus. Modern-day churches – good ministry to help people, but pick and choose what parts of the Bible they will embrace. But God's expects so much more from his ministers. He is not satisfied with a few good things, but calls them to a higher standard...a standard that Eli never came close to!

Eli's sinful and damaging leadership

2:12-17; 22-25 - The sin and corruption of Eli's sons

Eli's sons and those who were worked for them were stealing from the offerings that people were bringing to sacrifice to God and they were raping women and sleeping with other women who were also serving at the Tabernacle.

Corruption in leadership has not changed much over the years. Using one's position for personal gain and for sexual amusement still makes the headlines today. What makes this so evil is: the location of the sins: the place of worship – the position of those perpetrating the sins – the priests – and that these sins were not just toward other people, but sins against God Himself (2:25)!

One small but important detail to note...Eli was the High Priest...he was in charge of the Tabernacle at Shiloh, yet he was unaware of what was going on. This was not that big of a place, but vs. 22 tells us that Eli "heard about everything his sons were doing..."

He didn't observe this or see this for himself, but others had to tell him about it! It even seems that the evil antics of Phinehas and Hophni were common knowledge with everyone but Eli! (2:23-24)

How could he not know?

His old age is mentioned (vs. 22), but I don't believe his ignorance was due to his age, but due to his lack of concern or care.

2:29 - He failed to uphold truth and holiness.

“Why do you scorn My sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for My dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than Me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by My people Israel?”

In the Hebrew, “you” is plural – even though Eli was not the one committing the sins, God judges him just as guilty as they were! This is not guilt by association, but guilt by passivity or by permission.

Eli failed to stop their stealing. His sons were taking more than their share of the sacrifice that people brought. This was more than stealing from people – it was actually stealing from God since the sacrifice the people brought was a sacrifice to God!

A modern day example of this would be if Pastor Joseph was passing the offering plate – and when you placed your offering in it, he would take some of it for himself!

Eli also failed to stop their sexual abuse and immorality. The stealing was bad enough, but the sexual crimes were devastating. Eli knew of these things, yet he failed to take corrective action.

2:12; 22 - He was complicit in the sin of his sons.

Hophni and Phinehas were stealing from those who brought their sacrifices to the altar, and they were no doubt raping some of the women – and sleeping with many others. They did this by taking advantage of their position of authority in the Tabernacle.

Eli knew about his son’s wicked and evil behavior, yet he did nothing about it.

Eli was not responsible for the sin of his sons, but he “failed to restrain them” (3:13) and was thereby just as guilty as they were. It was his duty – his job – to step into the fray and stop the abuses and bring justice to bear on the situation.

There was incredibly evil, wicked, abusive behavior occurring in a place that should have been a safe haven. A place that was dedicated to helping others – especially those who are disadvantaged, became a place of unspeakable crimes of abuse and sexual perversion. Instead of stepping in and stopping these atrocities the moment they became known, there was denial or simply unwillingness by those in authority to get involved and stop the horrific crimes.

Does this sound familiar?

Penn State officials knew about the evil in their midst – yet nothing was done to stop it!

Eli knew of the depravity of his son’s actions, he knew they were predators preying on the people who came to

worship, but he did nothing to stop them and to protect the innocent. He did tell his sons to stop, but when they refused, he allowed it to continue.

What Eli should have done was to stop them immediately – protect those they were abusing and stealing from.

In this he also failed as a father. They were his sons – and he failed to raise them according to the commands of God. Now he wasn't responsible for their faith – or lack of faith – but he should have known that they “had no regard for the LORD.” (2:12)

Even with this knowledge of their character and spiritual rebellion and rejection, he still allowed them to work in the Tabernacle – a job that was reserved for those who followed God. As their father and as the High Priest, he should have drawn a line in the sand and told his sons “NO – this job is not for you. You don't qualify for this job.”

Why were these things such a big deal? After all, haven't we seen countless religious leaders in our own day commit the same type of crimes and abuses?

- Embezzlement of funds
- Sexual infidelity and perversion
- Lying and hypocrisy
- Failing to stand for truth and holiness
- Taking advantage of those seeking spiritual truth and guidance.

Yes – these things continue to be a problem for a very small minority of unrepentant Christian leaders, and the offense they bring the Lord is still great!

The reason these are such heinous sins is because they not only damage the people involved, but they also damage the reputation of God Himself.

Results of Eli allowing his sons sinful activities:

- God's reputation is damaged in the eyes of many.
When leadership is unrepentant in their sin or their sin reaches a level of public awareness and severity, then people both Christian and non-Christian begin to doubt the goodness and holiness of God.
- The spiritual condition of the nation suffered – “In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.” 3:1b
The text does tell us that the spiritual condition at that time was feeble. There was no prophet for God to speak through since Eli was so far from God.
In 1 Samuel 4-9, the spiritual bankruptcy of the nation is seen in the actions of the nation as they lose countless battles to the Philistines and the decisions they make reveal that their faith in God had diminished into a mere belief in superstitions and religious symbols. Personal faith was on the decline because the spiritual leadership was corrupt and inept.
- God's judgment on Eli and his sons

2:34 – they would both die on the same day (fulfilled 4:11)
4:18 – Eli’s death

- God’s judgment on Eli’s *descendants*
2:30-36 – They would die young, and the priesthood would be taken from them.
- Did people stop bringing their offering to the Tabernacle at Shiloh because they were getting ripped-off by the priests?
The text doesn’t tell us – but I believe it’s a reasonable thing to think – that the sins occurring at the Tabernacle – at the place of worship had a negative effect on the eagerness of people to worship there!
- How many women lost faith in God because Eli’s sons were raping them? How many children were born as a result of these sins?
This has been the experience of women and children who have been abused and harmed by those in the church.
Men – we have a powerful testimony that goes much further than our own reputation. As a believer in Christ, our testimony reflects Him also! Live in a way that encourages people to have your faith.

Eli did some good, but he was a zero.

Application

Give your whole life to Christ.

Eli had some good things on his resume, but his negligent leadership and the sin he allowed defined his life as a failure. Today, it's popular to say "Love your neighbor as yourself" – but it's not popular to call people to "Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." Loving God means you obey Him – it means you live your life according to His design, not according to your desires.

Sin always has a high cost.

The sin that was occurring at Shiloh not only affected those directly involved, but also the spiritual life of the nation – and the descendants of Eli also paid a price.

Sin is never limited to those consenting to it...it always has a cost that others pay as well.

Honor God above all.

2:29 – "Why do you honor your sons more than Me...?"

It's easy to let things – and people – become more important than God.

This always leads to a life of sin and pain. God has designed us – and commanded us to keep Him as our highest priority – to honor Him above all else.

Close in prayer –

Transition to New Members