

# 1 Samuel 3-4 • Judgment on the House of Eli

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Chapter 3 of 1 Samuel begins by saying, *“Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare (that word in the Hebrew literally means precious, because it tells us) in those days; there was no frequent vision.” (ESV)*

Again, the Hebrew literally means, visions were not breaking through. It's an interesting sort of a term in the Hebrew to say that something isn't breaking through. It's not getting through. You know how you're talking to somebody and you're just not getting through to them. The visions of the Lord were just not getting through.

It's an interesting sort of a statement here as Samuel is now a young boy. He's growing, but he's still considered a boy, ministering before the Lord, but he's ministering at a time in Israel's history when prophecies and the words of the Lord were very rare. It just wasn't happening.

And again, that the visions were infrequent. Why do you suppose that was? I don't think it was for any reason of the Lord's doing in the sense that He didn't have anything to say. I think actually God has a lot to say to His children at pretty much any time, if we are just willing to listen. But during this time, there weren't very many, there weren't very many words of the Lord. There weren't very many visions.

I think the reason for this spiritual famine was no doubt because of the disobedience of the nation of Israel during this time. This was a dark time in the history of Israel. It was a time when, obviously we already know that the priesthood had fallen badly. The sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas were corrupt young men and God had already prophesied in one of the rare prophecies that did come forth.

God spoke to Eli and said, I'm going to judge your family. I'm going to judge your sons and I'm going to remove your family from their role in the priesthood. Your family will not serve after a time and so forth.

And so we know that God considers this judgment to be an important and very serious issue. And no doubt, because of Him being grieved by the way the people were living their lives, and the priests were functioning in their duties, there's very little to speak of as it relates to the words of the prophets, dreams or visions.

Verse 2 tells us that, *"At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see,..."* And that gives us a time stamp or a reference in the day meaning that it was probably in the early, what we would call the wee hours of the morning before sunrise. And Samuel were told here in verse 3, *"...Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was."* So Samuel was near the presence of the Lord.

And *"<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, 'Here I am!'" <sup>5</sup> and ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call; lie down again.' So he went and lay down.*

*<sup>6</sup> And the LORD called again, 'Samuel!' and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call, my son; lie down again.' <sup>7</sup> Now Samuel (this is very important, Samuel) did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him."*

And that's why he didn't know the voice of God, when God spoke. He had not heard the voice of the Lord, but now he's hearing an audible voice and he's thinking that it's Eli. Problem is he's the only one that can hear it apparently. So he continues to think that it's Eli.

Verse 8, it says, *"And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived (finally) that the LORD was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup> Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.' So Samuel went and lay down in his place."*

Eli gives good advice. By this time, Eli has to know that Samuel is his replacement. He's getting to be an old man, but he coaches the young boy very well in this situation. He says, when the Lord calls you, respond by saying, I'm listening. Your servant is listening. Go ahead and speak.

*"And the LORD came (verse 10) and stood, calling as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant hears.'" <sup>11</sup> Then the LORD said to Samuel, 'Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.'"*

That's something similar to you and I saying that I'm about to do something in your midst that will raise the hair on the back of your neck, sort of a similar statement

And He says, *“<sup>12</sup> On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end.”*

For those of you that are just jumping in on this study that may not be aware of what God had prophesied against the house of Eli. God had sent a prophet, an unnamed prophet to Eli. And He said, Eli, your sons are corrupt, and the Lord is going to judge you because you did not restrain them. And we know from the earlier two chapters that Eli spoke to his sons, but he took no action against them. We talked about that as it relates to parents. But he was the high priest.

Eli was the high priest in Israel. He had the power to remove his sons. He knew what they were doing. They were wicked. And one Bible translation says, *“worthless men.”* They were sleeping with women at the door entrance to the tabernacle. They were treating people's offerings to the Lord with complete disdain. And there was a whole lot more that was going on, but they were corrupt from the word go. And God said, you didn't do anything about your sons, and so I'm going to judge your house.

And now God is speaking to the young boy, Samuel, and He says, I'm about to carry it out. And when I do the ears of everybody who hear of it will tingle because it will be such a sensational thing that that he will do.

He goes on here verse 13. He says, *“And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.”*

There you're given from the mouth of the Lord exactly what was Eli's issue. His sons were blaspheming the Lord, and Eli did nothing to stop them, other than he talked to them. Boys, don't do that. But his boys were grown, and he could have had them removed, and he should have.

And so He says in verse 14, *“Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.”* That's the Lord's way of saying nothing is going to make any difference. This is just the way it's going to be. Judgment will happen.

Verse 15, *“Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli.”* This is a lot of

pressure to put on a young boy, as you can well imagine. We don't know exactly his age at this point, but he's still considered a boy. But the Lord has just told him that the man that has been mentoring him since about the age of 3, is going to be judged by the Lord. And he doesn't know what he's going to do.

*“But Eli (we see in verse 16, instigated the conversation. He) called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son.” And he said, “Here I am.”<sup>17</sup> And Eli said, “What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. (Eli seems to know that Samuel's going to be reticent about saying anything) May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you.”<sup>18</sup> So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, (and this is Eli speaking) “It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him.””*

This is the attitude of Eli. I've said when we first started talking about Eli, I like this guy. He's a lousy parent and he did not take action when he should have, when his sons were committing blasphemy against the Lord as priests under his high priestly rule. But other than that, I like this guy. He has a soft heart. He's done a pretty good job with Samuel. He coaches him when the Lord speaks to Samuel.

And when Samuel brings a hard word, I mean a really hard word, the attitude of Eli is complete surrender. He's like, He's the Lord. Let Him do what is fit, what is best in His own eyes, and so forth.

Verse 19 says, *“And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him (and look at this statement, this is very important) and let none of his words fall to the ground.”*

What it means there is that Samuel began a prophetic ministry in Israel and he spoke for the Lord. He spoke messages to the people from the Lord and it says here that God let none of what Samuel said fall to the ground. That's a euphemism for, He let none of his words be heard untrue. All right.

And here's the conclusion of that. The very next verse. Verse 20, *“And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba (that means from the north to the south) knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD.”*

How did they know that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord? Well, it tells us in the previous verse, God let none of his words fall to the ground. In other words, everything he ever prophesied came to pass. And that's how they knew, alright?

And it goes on to just simply say in verse 21, *“And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.”*

Now, I want to talk for just a minute, if I may, about this whole issue of false prophets and how to know the a true prophet. The Scripture gives us two specific ways to know whether we're dealing with someone who is a true prophet of the Lord or if that person is in fact a false prophet. Here's the first one which is given us in Deuteronomy and I'm going to put it up on the screen for you here. Chapter 18 it says,

**Deuteronomy 18:21-22a (ESV)**

*And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken...*

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He goes on to say, and I didn't include it there for you. But he basically goes on to say that *“the prophet has spoken it presumptuously*. In other words, out of his own flesh, out of his own thoughts, out of his own imagination, or worse, but it's not a word of the Lord. So it's pretty simple.

This is just echoing what we just read here in 1 Samuel, that if the guy says something and it, and he makes a prediction and it comes to pass, hey, you got a genuine prophet. But if he says something and it doesn't come to pass, guess what? You know, you have a false prophet. You know what's interesting about that? And I don't mean to be haranguing Mormonism, which I seem to have been doing lately. That's not my intention.

But have you ever Googled false prophecies? If you do, you're going to find that Joseph Smith was one of the most popular false prophets that people like to quote. And there were several prophecies that he, that you can read verbatim as he gave them, that did not come to pass. And it's there for anybody who wants to look into it.

The problem is, there are some people who just don't want to look into it, and that's their choice. But the fact of the matter is, it's all just out there. So if

somebody makes a prediction and it doesn't come to pass, then you know you got a false prophet on your hands.

Here's the question. Does prophecy still happen today? Oh, you bet it does. There's nothing in the Word that says that prophecy has ceased. It says prophecy will cease. It does say that in 1 Corinthians 13. Prophecies will cease, but they haven't yet. Prophecy is still going. Even predictive prophecy.

Remember I've told you, prophecy can involve both predictive elements and just statements of truth. Okay? Anything the Lord speaks through an individual, frankly, is a prophecy. It qualifies in that sense. But even predictive prophecies, I have been witness to some amazing, amazing predictive prophecies.

I was sitting in a large auditorium a number of years ago, had a little notebook in my hand, and I didn't know what I was going to hear. I was there with a friend, actually a colleague, who wanted me to go down and listen to some speakers in the Portland area. This is a number of years ago when I was living in Washington. We drove down to Portland.

And I didn't know the speakers. I really didn't know what to expect. And I walked into this auditorium. In fact, I remember that I was up in a balcony or something and I was looking down on the people. The place was just packed.

And there was a guy who got up and began to speak. And this during that time in the in the 80s for those of you guys that were around. And it was the time when the Soviet Union was basically breaking up, but it was before some of the nations had actually pulled away from what was then the Soviet Union. And so we were all clueless. We knew there were rumblings going on in that part of the world, but we were all clueless about what was happening specifically.

And one of the men got up and he said something that was so specific that I grabbed my pen and my pad and I wrote it down. And he said, thus says the Lord, I'm about to snatch three ribs out of the mouth of the bear. And he named them. And I don't remember, it was Estonia, there was another one, Lithuania, and there was one other, there was one other nation.

And I quickly wrote it down, dated it, put it away. Put it away and forgot about it. But it was very specific. The Lord saying, I'm about to snatch three ribs out of the mouth of the bear, which is, the bear is a symbolic animal for that region of the world.

A number of months went by, I don't recall how many. And I was reading the Seattle Times and there was a political cartoon of, I want to say it was Gorbachev at the time. Is that possibly right? Who, and the political cartoon was him holding a loaf of bread, cutting off slices, but he was getting to the point where he was actually cutting off some of his fingers in the— and the caption was, now it's beginning to hurt. And the three slices that he was now cutting off were the exact nations that this prophet had spoken of months before. I mean, literally months before.

And I saw that cartoon and immediately remembered this note that I had made and I went and rummaged through all my stuff, found my notes, put it alongside this political cartoon. Boom! There it was and God foretold it months before it was going to happen in specific detail. We're not talking about a false prophet here, guys, because that one came to pass. I mean, very clearly, it's just, there it was.

Now, for those of you that are uncomfortable with the idea of prophecy going on today, let me just say something. Revelatory prophecy that is bringing new revelation of truth is not happening. I do not believe that's happening today. And one of the reasons I don't believe that is because we're told to test prophecies. And how else could we test them if we didn't have a standard or a rule?

Can you imagine me telling you to measure a room, but then not telling you what to use to measure it with? That'd be ridiculous, right? You have to have something with which to measure something else, right? Whether it's a yardstick or a tape measure or whatever the case might be.

For us, what we measure things with is the Word of God. So we're told to test everything by the Word of God. And obviously, if we're supposed to test things with the Word, then this isn't going to change, and there isn't going to be this added revelation of stuff whereby we can't test it.

If God were adding revelation on top of what we already have, we wouldn't be able to test it. We would have no ability... Do you understand? There would be no ability. And that whole idea of testing things, testing all things would be really a ridiculous thing.

But that doesn't mean God can't speak. He can't speak about current events, or He can't speak about your life, or your past, or your future, or something like that. That's not adding to the revelation of Scripture. You see what I'm saying?

Now, if some yahoo stands up in a church service and starts to say, well, actually, it's not a trinity. There's actually five persons of the Godhead, correction everybody sort of thing, we're going to say, sorry, you're a false prophet. God..., that sort of thing. The revelation of Scripture is fixed, and that is the standard by which we judge.

But there is another way that we can actually judge a false prophet that the Scripture gives us apart from simply listening to what they say. And this is given us by Jesus. I'll put this one also up on the screen for you from Matthew chapter 7. It says,

**Matthew 7:15-16a (ESV)**

*“Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.”*

*“Beware of false prophets, (Jesus said) who come to you in sheep's clothing (meaning they look like a believer. Remember? Sheep are believers) but inwardly (what are they? They're like) are ravenous wolves. (ravenous meaning they're hungry and they want to eat the sheep. They want to consume or devour the sheep. So how are you going to know them?) You will recognize them by their fruits.”* That's how you know.

This is the second method that Scripture gives us for determining whether or not we're dealing with a false prophet. It says you'll know them by their fruits.

Now, the fruits are given to us in the Word of God. We have them in the Book of Galatians. We know what the fruit of the Spirit is. And if we aren't seeing that sort of fruit. If we're not seeing evidence of a person who has a changed life, then we're not to listen to that individual. That's one of the reasons we do not allow,... Well, if somebody walked up to me that I didn't know and they said, pastor Paul, I've got a message for your congregation.

I'd say, I'm sorry. I don't know you. You can't talk, not going to let it happen because I have to be able to judge your fruit. And if I don't know you from Adam, there's no way that I can do that. Now you want to stick around for a while, that's a whole different thing.

If a member of our body came to me and I knew the fruit of their life, and they said, I feel like the Lord's given me a message for the body. That's a very definite possibility. You see, because if I know that fruit and that individual is exhibiting the fruit of the Holy Spirit, hey, we're good to go.



This person is exhibiting what, what can only come about through God's Holy Spirit. That's a very, very good sign. So some important things to keep in mind related to prophecy and recognizing both a true and a false prophet.

Chapter 4. *“And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.”* All right, Samuel is now grown. Eli is still around. His sons are still around. But Samuel is now considered a man. And his word, meaning the prophecies the Lord has been giving him, have now come to all Israel. And they all recognize him for who he is and what he is.

*“Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. (a perennial enemy of Israel) They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek.<sup>2</sup> The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle.”*

Now, this is a serious issue in Israel is defeated by an enemy because God told them that as they walked in obedience to Him, they would never suffer defeat. But here they are being defeated so this is a serious thing. And they're going to ask a question here, which is a very good question. And I want you to take note of it here. It tells us here, and by the way, four thousand men, that's a lot of people to die.

Verse 3 says, *“And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?”* In other words, why has the Lord allowed a defeat against our enemy? Our enemy is a pagan nation and we've been defeated by a pagan nation.

How in the world could that happen? Man, that's a great question. That's a wonderful question. Why has this happened? Here's the problem. Nobody stands around or waits around for an answer to that. Nobody seeks the face of God related to that question. To get an answer, they just move right on with their own solution, and let's see what they do.

We're right in the middle of the verse and it goes on to say, *“Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.”* Stop there. This is the solution that they came up with.

They asked a great question. Why are we being defeated by our enemies? I know, let's do this. Let's send word to Shiloh. Let's get the Ark. Let's bring it back here and let's bring it into the battle with us. And then we'll be unbeatable.

Problem is they're looking at the ark of the covenant as someone would look at a rabbit's foot or a lucky charm. That's the way they're treating it. And here's the important part. This is the part that God probably cares the most about. They were trying to obtain victory apart from confessing their sin and getting right with God.

You see, they asked the question, why are we being defeated? Well, if they would have waited around for an answer, God would have said, there's sin in the camp. You have not walked with the Lord. You've thrown the Word of God behind your back. And you've gone on to just do your own thing. You guys are totally your own God. That's why you're being defeated by your enemies. But they didn't wait for that answer. Had they waited for it, they would have had an opportunity to repent or respond with a stiff neck.

They could have done that too. They had a history of doing that when prophets came along and told them that's what was happening. But instead they just came up with their own solution. Here's how we're going to fix it. So we're going to bring out the lucky charm.

Here's the thing. The ark of the covenant was never intended to be a lucky charm. It represented to the Israelites the presence of God. It was not the essence of the presence of God, but it represented the presence of God. It represented the throne of God. It represented approaching God. And the ark of the covenant was to stay behind a curtain. And that curtain represented the fact that apart from blood, they were not to approach God.

He is a holy God. That veil between The Holy Place and The Most Holy Place, that veil was a constant reminder to the Israelites, you cannot approach God on your own. In fact, only one person could go in and see that ark, and that was the high priest. And he could only go in once a year; one day out of the year. He'd actually go in two times, but one day he could go in on the Day of Atonement. But beyond that, no one was allowed behind that veil. No one was allowed to see or handle that ark.

God was trying to communicate something to His people. I am a holy God and you just can't approach Me. You can't just approach Me whenever you want, and you can't use Me.

You ever talk, or hear that idea about putting God in a box? The statement or the saying is used in reference to manipulating God, putting Him in a situation where He's containable, controllable, and usable for your purposes rather than

submitting to Him for His larger purpose. And this is the essence of putting God in a box, using Him, manipulating Him for what they want to do and so forth.

God will not be used that way. God is holy. God is righteous. I love that that, that line in the original, the Chronicles of Narnia in the first, the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. You remember when the kids are with the beavers and they're hearing about Aslan for the first time. Aslan is on the move, and they're like, who's Aslan? Well, he's the lion, he's the king of the wood. And they're hearing all about Aslan, and he sounds a little bit scary. And one of the kids asks the beavers, is he tame? And they laughed. Tame? No, he's not tame. He's a lion. He's a lion. But then they added this. But he's good.

C.S. Lewis was trying to convey something in his beautiful, poetic, and creative way about the fact that you can't put God in a box. You can't control God. You can't use Him. You can't manipulate Him, and so forth. And that is exactly what Israel is trying to do at this particular time. And God also wants to communicate that He is holy. They've forgotten that. They forgot that He was a holy God. He's more of a rabbit's foot now.

Verse 4 says, *“So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.”*

Oh boy, the priests are here, they brought the ark. We're going to win now. Remember something, though, the ark of the covenant was this beautiful golden box that contained the Ten Commandments; the tablets that Moses had brought down the mountain. Actually the second copy. He broke the first copy. Remember when he saw the people sinning?

But it contained these tablets that communicated the essence of God's covenant with them. And what the Israelites were also forgetting is that a covenant is a two way pact. There is an agreement and the covenant agreement between God and Israel.

Hear me, people. The covenant agreement between God and who? The church? No, Israel, was keep My law and I will bless you in the land. Your enemies will not be able to withstand you. You will have incredible abundance, being blessed in many ways. Your Children, your crops. You will have long life. Diseases that came upon the Egyptians will not come upon you, and on, and on, and on. But keep My covenant. That's their part of the pact. Keep my covenant and God said, here's what I'll do.

They forgot. They forgot about the covenant. They weren't even questioning, have we kept up? They forgot that this thing was the ark of the covenant. They weren't even thinking anymore about this idea of it being a covenant.

By the way, let me just add, let me stop here for a moment to add and say how thankful I am that you and I are not under that covenant. And so very thankful that we are under the covenant that Jesus inaugurated the night that He was betrayed, when He sat with His disciples, breaking bread, and passing the cup around. And when he passed the cup, you'll remember He said, this is the cup of the new covenant.

And what are the terms of the covenant of the new covenant? Is it keep my law? You look at some Christians. Do you think it's keep my law? Because you got people doing all kinds of rules and regulations, but the terms of the new covenant have nothing to do with the law. We're not under the law says the apostle Paul.

The terms of the covenant now are believe and you will be saved. To all who received Him, to those who believed on His Name, He gave the right to become children of God, right? (John 1:12) Those are the terms. Those are the terms. Believe, accept, receive. It's like, well, don't I have to, don't I have to do something grand, don't have to be a good person? No, it's not about being a good person. What if I've lived a really rotten life? It's not about the life you've lived. It's about what He did on the cross. That's the covenant.

Jesus says, I die for you. You accept it. I like that covenant by the way. That's the best offer you've had all day long. And so it's wonderful. It's glorious. But let's not mix up the covenants because the church has this terrible history of mixing up the covenants. And you find Christians who are enjoying some aspect of the new covenant, but they have introduced elements of the old, to the point where they have ruined the new.

And Paul—if you ever want to, if you ever want to read Paul's response to people who are trying to mix the covenants, just read the Book of Galatians. Because that's exactly what was going on in the region of Galatia. Here were born again believers who are now being convinced that they had to be circumcised and keep various other food laws. And consider one day better than another. And da, da, da, da, da. And they had to add all these things to accepting Jesus on the cross.

And you know what Paul said to them? He said, you've turned from the Gospel and the Gospel that you're now trying to keep is no Gospel at all. That's what

you end up when you take grace and you add to it the works of the flesh. You end up with no Gospel. Remember what Gospel means? Good news. And you start mixing the good news with works. It's not good anymore. It's not good news anymore. It's bad news because now the news is you got to do something to keep your end of the bargain.

Listen guys, that's the old covenant. The old covenant is you keeping the end of the bargain. The new covenant is believe. The new covenant says it's a gift. Remember what Paul said to the Ephesians? *"...by grace you've been saved through faith. And this not of...; (yourselves) it is the gift of God, ... (lest anyone should) boast."* (Ephesians 2:8-9) There's no boasting in the new covenant.

In the new covenant you can't say, here's what I did. It's impossible. Boasting is removed in the new covenant. It's a gift. Who of you have ever gotten a gift and had to pay for it? Gifts are always free, right?

Aren't you glad you're living under the new covenant? The free gift of God through Jesus Christ is salvation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. But it's the free gift of God. As soon as you start trying to do something to earn it, it's not free anymore. You've ruined it, so get rid of what you're trying to do and accept the free gift of God's grace.

Verse 5. *"As soon as the ark of the covenant (the rabbit's foot) of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded."* That's the ESV. Your Bible may say, *"the earth shook."* That is a heavy duty yell. I mean, these people are pumped about the ark of the covenant coming there. They're going to be disappointed, but they're excited for right now.

*"<sup>6</sup> And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, 'What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?' And when they learned (spies I supposed) that the ark of the LORD had come to the camp, <sup>7</sup> the Philistines were afraid, for they said, 'A god has come into the camp.' And they said, 'Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. <sup>8</sup> Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods?'"* Notice plural.

They're pagans, remember that. Pagans always think in multiplicities of gods, never in terms of a single god. That's the definition of pagan. A pagan means they believe in a multiplicity of gods, okay? That's the way they're relating it, and so forth. And they're even saying, *"These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness."* Actually, it was just one god, but they're confused.

But now they've got to give themselves a little pep talk. *“<sup>9</sup> Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight.”*

*<sup>10</sup> So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, (look at this) for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell.”* 30,000, that is huge.

*“<sup>11</sup> And (to make matters even worse) the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. (in the battle)”* Thus proving, that, remember, that was the sign that was given to Eli when the prophet came to him, he said, and this will be the sign that I'm going to carry out this judgment against your family. Your sons will both die on the same day.

So Eli is expecting this. He's living with an expectation. Imagine what Eli thought in his heart when he heard that they sent word to his sons, Hophni and Phineas, to bring the ark out into the battle. Imagine what he was thinking. Today's probably the day. He's an old man now. He's in his nineties. But just to think, today my boys will probably die.

What's interesting is that, is hearing that news isn't exactly what kills him, but let's go on. It says, *“<sup>12</sup> A man of Benjamin (meaning from the tribe of Benjamin) ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes torn and with dirt on his head. (and that's a sign of mourning and grief) <sup>13</sup> When he arrived, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. (notice that, his heart trembled for (what?) the ark of God) And when the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out.”*

But Eli, of course, he didn't see anything. His eyes are almost gone. But he *“<sup>14</sup> ...heard the sound of the outcry, (and) he said, “What is this uproar?” Then the man hurried and came and told Eli. <sup>15</sup> Now Eli was ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set so that he could not see. <sup>16</sup> And the man said to Eli, “I am he who has come from the battle; I fled from the battle today.” And he said, “How did it go, my son?” <sup>17</sup> He who brought the news answered and said, “Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great defeat among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, (and then listen to this) and the ark of God has been captured.” <sup>18</sup> As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for... (he) was old and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years.”* And thus passes Eli and his sons on the same day.

Now remember, Eli had been told that the sign of this prophecy would, to him, would be that his sons would die on the same day. He was not told the ark of the covenant would be taken captive, and he was not told that would be his day of reckoning in terms of death as well. But when he heard that his boys were dead, he did not actually respond until he heard the Ark had been captured. And then he fell back off his chair and broke his neck. Because it says he was a big man.

We know from the earlier prophecy that was given against him, while Samuel was still a young boy, when this unnamed prophet came to Eli, the Lord actually said to the prophet, why do you fatten yourself on the best of my offerings? (1 Samuel 2:29) Remember the fat of the animals was to be burned on the altar. But remember what was happening? His sons were grabbing the meat, their portion before the offering was even made, before the fat was cut away. Before it was burned on the altar, they wanted the fat on their meat, and Eli was participating in that.

He was complicit in that sense, and the Lord even said to him, you're fattening yourself on the offerings of the Lord. Now he's 98 years old. He's a big man. But when he hears of the ark being taken by the enemy, he dies.

*“He had judged Israel forty years. <sup>19</sup> Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth. And when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth, for her pains came upon her. <sup>20</sup> And about the time of her death the women attending her said to her, “Do not be afraid, for you have borne a son.” But she did not answer or pay attention. <sup>21</sup> And she named the child Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel!” (and you might notice that Ichabod means where is the glory or no glory) because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. <sup>22</sup> And she said, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.””*

As difficult as this passage is and frankly, as all difficult situations appear, God is going to, as we get into the coming chapters, which by the way, we're not going to do tonight.

We're going to see that God is actually going to use these very challenging circumstances to bring in a fresh work of His Spirit through Samuel, through Samuel's leadership. And He's going to bring a time of refreshing to Israel that they couldn't have seen at this time.

But in order for God to bring that time of refreshment, if you will, spiritual renewal into the nation of Israel, there needed to be this clearing away of the old so that God could begin the work of the new. And the appearance of the clearing away of the old can be very frightening and very, very stark. And even painful.

For you and I, the clearing away of the old so God can make a way for the new, is in the New Testament called, pruning. The Bible says that God prunes those whom He loves. He cuts away the dead branches, the old growth. Why? So He can make way for the new. The new branch, the new growth, the new work that God wants to do in your life. But when that pruning is going on, when the old is being cut away, that's scary. It's frightening and it's painful. And we look at it and it's easy to despair.

We see the daughter, or the daughter in law rather, of Eli here, who saw this pruning away and who gave up, just gave up. And she's giving birth to a son, which is a grand thing for a woman in that time. And the midwife even tries to encourage her, take heart! You've given birth to a son. She didn't even notice. She was so broken hearted. She was so hopeless because of the situation, the circumstances of the death of her father in law, and her husband, that even the birth of a son couldn't bolster her hopes. She gave in and she died.

And that is the picture for how people will often respond when the difficulty comes upon us of those old things being taken away. The old, the pruning away process that happens in our lives from time to time. Very, very hard, very difficult.

You ever looked at a prune tree? Scary. Looks dead. What's crazy is by the next year it's just in full bloom again. And you look at, you think this thing doesn't even appear like it did just a few months ago. It looked like a stick with nothing on it. You could have convinced me it was dead as a doornail. And what happens in the spring? Pop, pop, pop. All of a sudden buds and leaves and then it's this full, and it's bigger than it was. It's a crazy thing.

Israel under Samuel is going to become better than it was. But in order for that to take place, the old had to pass away. The old had to get out of the way. Judgment had to come.

In a very real sense, pruning in our lives is God's judgment, but it's the only judgment you're ever going to experience. And it's not a condemning judgment. God does not condemn believers. The Bible says that very clearly. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)



So any judgment God brings into our lives is never a condemning judgment. It is a loving thing, which God prefers to call, discipline. And He disciplines those whom He loves.

Are you being disciplined right now? Is God taking away some things in your life? Consider it the pruning of the Lord. And the Bible says that you and I are to actually rejoice when those things happen in our lives because God is treating us as His children and because we also know that there's coming a greater fruitfulness.

The pruning takes place so that we can be more fruitful to Him and for Him. That's why pruning happens. The fruit that you bear, that I bear, is not to make us look fruitful. It's to bear fruit unto God. That's why He's doing it. But it hurts. And then we might as well just admit it. And when we're going through a time of pruning in our lives, and a time things getting cut away, we might just as well just say so.

When somebody asks you, you walk into church, and somebody says, hey, how you doing? It's okay to say, going through pruning right now. Ouch. Hurts. It's not fun. That's okay. We've all been through it. Give us an opportunity to pray with you. Rather than doing what we normally do, which is to put on that facade of doing great, thanks, praise the Lord, and we're not.

And we can't really tell by looking at you necessarily. It'd be interesting if we could see you like that tree that just got pruned. We'd all go, huh! What in the world is God doing in your life? Good thing we can't see it. We'd probably scare you when we looked at you, but it's okay. It's okay.

If you're going through a time of pruning, listen, the enemy comes along at a time of pruning to tell you that you're being pruned because God hates you, because God's mad at you, and because you've fallen into disfavor with Him. And actually the opposite is true. Remember, Satan is a liar. He can't open his mouth, but he says a lie.

So the fact of the matter is, it is God's love for you that has brought along this pruning in your life. Do not, so do not forsake in your heart that time of pruning. Do not become hopeless over it, and whatever you do, don't listen to the voice of the evil one. He's a stinker. And he just loves to condemn. He loves to point at you and say, yeah, you're that big scumbag that God's been telling me about. And that's why you're going through all these hard times.

Fact of the matter is God loves you with an everlasting love and He will never let you out of his sight. He's doing a work in your life that you couldn't even begin to understand if He explained it to you. So don't even try to understand it, but just know this, He's forming Christ in you. That's about the most information we get, but that ought to just be enough.

He is forming Christ in you and He is using the circumstances of your life and yes, even the people in your life. And yes, maybe even your spouse to bring about this formation of Christ. And the difficulties that you are enduring and the hardships that you are experiencing are all the things that God uses in our life to form Christ in us. And He's doing a good work.

And you and I will see that work one day from the other side of the veil. And when we do, we will say, Lord, You've done a good thing. And all that the Lord does is perfect and good. But right now we don't see it.

It's funny. Corey Ten Boom used to use a patchwork quilt to illustrate this with people. She'd go into hospitals where people were paralyzed and people had been injured in wars and things like that. And she would show them a patchwork quilt or a— what's a knitting a thing? A crochet sort of a thing that, that creates a pattern on one side, but she'd flip it over.

She'd show them the other side of it, and she'd say, look at the at the design. Do you see any design here? And they'd say, no, there's nothing there. It's just an it's just a mess. She said, that's right, that's what you see right now. And then she'd flip the thing over and she'd show the perfection of the pattern and the beauty of the shapes and the harmonious images and colors. And she said, but this is what God is doing. You just can't see this right now. What you see is on the other side, it's a tangle and it looks like this is a mess. This is chaotic.

But God is doing something in your life that you and I can't begin to even visualize at this point apart from faith. Did you catch that? We can visualize it with faith. Now that's not these eyes. Those are different eyes. They're spiritual eyes.

They're eyes that see the promises of God and embrace them. Promises like, God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28) You have to see that with spiritual eyes to actually spiritually visualize it and then embrace it.

But you're not going to see it with your human eyes, so stop looking. And it's not going to make sense from a human perspective. It's only going to make

sense from a spiritual perspective. It's the only way you'll be able to see it and make any sense of it.

Little do the people of Israel know right now. I mean, right now, all they know is defeat by the Philistines. Ark of the covenant stolen. High priest and his sons dead. The daughter in law of the high priest died giving birth. And what they know is about 34,000 people are dead. 34,000 men of Israel are gone. And the Philistines are flexing their muscle again. That's all they know. That's all they know.

What they don't know, what they can't see, is how God is moving powerfully. And we're going to see it in the next couple of chapters. Apart from anything the people of Israel do, God is going to begin doing a number on the Philistines. And they're not even going to be aware of it. They're not even going to know until they hear later.

And you and I just have so little visual insight about what God is doing in our lives, we have to just embrace by faith. With the understanding that, and we're going to see these things in the next chapters.

With the understanding that God is working behind the scenes, doing a good work, forming Christ in you, dealing with your enemies in ways that you're not even aware.