

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter we have,

I. Hannah's song of thanksgiving to God for his favour to her in giving her Samuel (v. 1-10).

II. Their return to their family, with Eli's blessing (v. 11, 20). The increase of their family (v. 21). Samuel's growth and improvement (v. 11, 18, 21, 26), and the care Hannah took to clothe him (v. 19).

III. The great wickedness of Eli's sons (v. 12-17, 22).

IV. The over-mild reproof that Eli gave them for it (v. 23-25).

V. The justly dreadful message God sent him by a prophet, threatening the ruin of his family for the wickedness of his sons (v. 27-36).

<001>1 SAMUEL 2:1-10

HANNAH'S SONG

We have here Hannah's thanksgiving, dictated, not only by the spirit of prayer, but by the spirit of prophecy. Her petition for the mercy she desired we had before (<001>1 Samuel 1:11), and here we have her return of praise; in both *out of the abundance of a heart* deeply affected (in the former with her own wants, and in the latter with God's goodness) *her mouth spoke*. Observe in general,

1. When she had received mercy from God she owned it, with thankfulness to his praise. Not like the nine lepers, <2177> Luke 17:17. Praise is our rent, our tribute. We are unjust if we do not pay it.

2. The mercy she had received was an answer to prayer, and therefore she thought herself especially obliged to give thanks for it. What we win by prayer we may wear with comfort, and must wear with praise.

3. Her thanksgiving is here called a prayer: *Hannah prayed*; for thanksgiving is an essential part of prayer. In every address to God we

must express a grateful regard to him as our benefactor. Nay, and thanksgiving for mercies received shall be accepted as a petition for further mercy.

4. From this particular mercy which she had received from God she takes occasion, with an elevated and enlarged heart, to speak glorious things of God and of his government of the world for the good of his church. Whatever at any time gives rise to our praises in this manner they should be raised.

5. Her prayer was mental. *Her voice was not heard*; but in her thanksgiving she spoke, that all might hear her. She made her supplication *with groanings that could not be uttered*, but now her lips were opened to *show forth God's praise*.

6. This thanksgiving is here left upon record for the encouragement of those of the weaker sex to attend the throne of grace. God will regard their prayers and praises. The virgin Mary's song has great affinity with this of Hannah, ^{<0046>}Luke 1:46. Three things we have in this thanksgiving: —

I. Hannah's triumph in God, in his glorious perfections, and the great things he had done for her, v. 1-3. Observe,

1. What great things she says of God. She takes little notice of the particular mercy she was now rejoicing in, does not commend Samuel for the prettiest child, the most toward and sensible for his age that she ever saw, as fond parents are too apt to do. No, she overlooks the gift, and praises the giver; whereas most forget the giver and fasten only on the gift. Every stream should lead us to the fountain; and the favours we receive from God should raise our admiration of the infinite perfections there are in God. There may be other Samuels, but no other Jehovah. *There is none beside thee*. Note, God is to be praised as a peerless being, and of unparalleled perfection. This glory is due unto his name, to own not only that there is *none like him, but that there is none besides him*. All others were pretenders, ^{<0031>}Psalm 18:31. Four of God's glorious attributes Hannah here celebrates the glory of: —

(1.) His unspotted purity. This is that attribute which is most praised in the upper world, by those that always behold his face, ^{<0003>}Isaiah 6:3; ^{<0008>}Revelation 4:8. When Israel triumphed over the Egyptians God was praised *as glorious in holiness*, ^{<0051>}Exodus 15:11. So here, in Hannah's

triumph, *There is none holy as the Lord*. It is the rectitude of his nature, his infinite agreement with himself, and the equity of his government and judgment in all the administrations of both. At the remembrance of this we ought to give thanks.

(2.) His almighty power: *Neither is there any rock (or any strength, for so the word is sometimes rendered) like our God*. Hannah had experienced a mighty support by staying herself upon him, and therefore speaks as she had found, and seems to refer to that of Moses, ^{<1623>}Deuteronomy 32:31.

(3.) His unsearchable wisdom: *The Lord, the Judge of all, is a God of knowledge*; he clearly and perfectly sees into the character of every person and the merits of every cause, and he gives knowledge and understanding to those that seek them of him.

(4.) His unerring justice: *By him actions are weighed*. His own are so, in his eternal counsels; the actions of the children of men are so, in the balances of his judgment, so that he will *render to every man according to his work*, and is not mistaken in what any man is or does.

2. How she solaces herself in these things. What we give God the glory of we may take the comfort of. Hannah does so,

(1.) In holy joy: *My heart rejoiceth in the Lord*; not so much in her son as in her God; he is to be the gladness of our joy (^{<1624>}Psalm 43:4), and our joy must not terminate in any thing short of him: *“I rejoice in thy salvation; not only in this particular favour to me, but in the salvation of thy people Israel, those salvations especially which this child will be an instrument of, and that, above all, by Christ, which those are but the types of.”*

(2.) In holy triumph: *“My horn is exalted*; not only is my reputation saved by my having a son, but greatly raised by having such a son.” We read of some of the singers whom David appointed to lift up the horn, an instrument of music, in praising God (^{<1625>}1 Chronicles 25:5), so that, *My horn is exalted* means this, “My praises are very much elevated to an unusual strain.” *Exalted in the Lord*; God is to have the honour of all our exaltations, and in him must we triumph. *My mouth is enlarged*, that is, “Now I have wherewith to answer those that reproached me.” He that has his quiver full of arrows, his house full of children, shall not be ashamed to *speak with the enemy in the gate*, ^{<1626>}Psalm 127:5.

3. How she herewith silences those that set up themselves as rivals with God and rebels against him (v. 3): *Talk no more so exceedingly proudly.* Let not Peninnah and her children upbraid her any more with her confidence in God and praying to him: at length she found it not in vain. See ^{<370>}Micah 7:10, *Then she that is my enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her that said, Where is thy God?* Or perhaps it was below her to take so much notice of Peninnah, and her malice, in this song; but this is intended as a check to the insolence of the Philistines, and other enemies of God and Israel, that *set their mouth against the heavens,* ^{<370>}Psalms 73:9. “Let this put them to silence and shame; he that has thus judged for me against my adversary will judge for his people against all theirs.”

II. The notice she takes of the wisdom and sovereignty of the divine providence, in its disposals of the affairs of the children of men; such are the vicissitudes of them, and such the strange and sudden turns and revolutions of them, that it is often found a very short step between the height of prosperity and the depth of adversity. *God has not only set the one over against the other* (^{<2074>}Ecclesiastes 7:14), but the one very near the other, and no gulf fixed between them, that we may *rejoice as though we rejoiced not and weep as though we wept not.*

1. The strong are soon weakened and the weak are soon strengthened, when God pleases, v. 4. On the one hand, if he speak the word, *the bows of the mighty men are broken;* they are disarmed, disabled to do as they have before done and as they have designed to do. Those have been worsted in battle who seemed upon all accounts to have the advantage on their side, and thought themselves sure of victory. See ^{<370>}Psalms 46:9; 37:15, 17. Particular persons are soon weakened by sickness and age, and they find that the bow does not long abide in strength; many a mighty man who has gloried in his might has found it a deceitful bow, that failed him when he trusted to it. On the other hand, if the Lord speak the word, those who stumble through weakness, who were so feeble that they could not go straight or steady, are *girded with strength,* in body and mind, and are able to bring great things to pass. Those who were weakened by sickness return to their vigour (^{<370>}Job 33:25), and those who were brought down by sorrow shall recover their comfort, which will *confirm the weak hands and the feeble knees,* ^{<370>}Isaiah 35:3. Victory turns in favour of that side that was given up for gone, and even *the lame take the prey,* ^{<370>}Isaiah 33:23.

2. The rich are soon impoverished and the poor strangely enriched on a sudden, v. 5. Providence sometimes does so blast men's estates and cross their endeavours, and with a fire not blown consume their increase, that those who were full (their barns full, and their bags full, their *houses full of good things*, ^{<R218>}Job 22:18, and their *bellies full of these hidden treasures*, ^{<B714>}Psalms 17:14) have been reduced to such straits and extremities as to want the necessary supports of life, and to *hire out themselves for bread*, and they must dig, since to *beg they are ashamed. Riches flee away* (^{<R215>}Proverbs 23:5), and leave those miserable who, when they had them, placed their happiness in them. To those that have been full and free poverty must needs be doubly grievous. But, on the other hand, sometimes Providence so orders it that *those who are hungry cease*, that is, cease to hire out themselves for bread as they have done. Having, by God's blessing on their industry, got beforehand in the world, and enough to live upon at ease, *they shall hunger no more, not thirst any more*. This is not to be ascribed to fortune, nor merely to men's wisdom or folly. *Riches are not to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill* (^{<R211>}Ecclesiastes 9:11), nor is it always men's own fault that they become poor, but (v. 7) *the Lord maketh some poor and maketh others rich*; the impoverishing of one is the enriching of another, and it is God's doing. To some he gives power to get wealth, from others he takes away power to keep the wealth they have. Are we poor? God made us poor, which is a good reason why we should be content, and reconcile ourselves to our condition. Are we rich? God made us rich, which is a good reason why we should be thankful, and serve him cheerfully in the abundance of good things he gives us. It may be understood of the same person; those that were rich God makes poor, and after awhile makes rich again, as Job; he gave, he takes away, and then gives again. Let not the rich be proud and secure, for God can soon make them poor; let not the poor despond and despair, for God can in due time enrich them again.

3. Empty families are replenished and numerous families diminished and made few. This is the instance that comes close to the occasion of the thanksgiving: *The barren hath borne seven*, meaning herself, for, though at present she had but one son, yet that one being a Nazarite, devoted to God and employed in his immediate service, he was to her as good as seven. Or it is the language of her faith. Now that she had one she hoped for more, and was not disappointed; she had five more (v. 21), so that if we reckon Samuel but for two, as we well may, she has the number she promised

herself: the *barren hath borne seven*, while, on the other hand, *she that hath many children has waxed feeble*, and hath left bearing. She says no more. Peninnah is now mortified and crest-fallen. The tradition of the Jews is that when Hannah bore one child Peninnah buried two. There are many instances both of the increase of families that were inconsiderable and the extinguishing of families that made a figure, ^{<1822>}Job 22:23; ^{<1947>}Psalms 107:38, etc.

4. God is the sovereign Lord of life and death (v. 6): *The Lord killeth and maketh alive*. Understand it,

(1.) Of God's sovereign dominion and universal agency, in the lives and deaths of the children of men. He presides in births and burials. Whenever any die it is God that directs the arrows of death. *The Lord killeth*. Death is his messenger, strikes whom and when he bids; none are brought to the dust but it is he that brings them down, for in his hand are the *keys of death and the grave*, ^{<618>}Revelation 1:18. Whenever any are born it is he that *makes them alive*. *None knows what is the way of the spirit*, but this we know, that it comes from the *Father of spirits*. Whenever any are recovered from sickness, and delivered from imminent perils, it is God that bringeth up; for *to him belong the issues from death*.

(2.) Of the distinction he makes between some and others: *He killeth some, and maketh, that is, keepeth, others alive* that were in the same danger (in war, suppose, or pestilence), two in a bed together, it may be, one taken by death and the other left alive. *Even so, Father, because it seemed good in thy eyes*. Some that were most likely to live are brought down to the grave, and others that were as likely to die are brought up; for living and dying do not go by likelihoods. God's providences towards some are killing, ruining to their comforts, and towards others at the same time reviving.

(3.) Of the change he makes with one and the same person: *He killeth and bringeth down to the grave*, that is, he brings even to death's door, and then revives and raises up, when even life was despaired of and a sentence of death received, ^{<408>}2 Corinthians 1:8, 9. *He turns to destruction*, and then says, *Return*, ^{<318>}Psalms 110:3. Nothing is too hard for God to do, no, not the quickening of the dead, and putting life into dry bones.

5. Advancement and abasement are both from him. He brings some low and lifts up others (v. 7), humbles the proud and gives grace and honour to the lowly, lays those in the dust that would vie with the God above them

and trample upon all about them (^{<1802>}Job 40:12, 13), but lifts up those with his salvation that humble themselves before him, (^{<1840>}James 4:10). Or it may be understood of the same persons: those whom he had brought low, when they are sufficiently humbled, he lifteth up. This is enlarged upon, v. 8. *He raiseth up the poor out of the dust*, a low and mean condition, nay, from the dunghill, a base and servile condition, loathed, and despised, *to set them among princes*. See (^{<1837>}Psalm 113:7, 8). Promotion comes not by chance, but from the counsel of God, which often prefers those that were very unlikely and that men thought very unworthy. Joseph and Daniel, Moses and David, were thus strangely advanced, from a prison to a palace, from a sheep-hook to a sceptre. The princes they are set among may be tempted to disdain them, but God can establish the honour which he gives thus surprisingly, and make them even to *inherit the throne of glory*. Let not those whom Providence has thus preferred be upbraided with the dust and dunghill they are raised out of, for the meaner their beginnings were the more they are favoured, and God is glorified, in their advancement, if it be by lawful and honourable means.

6. A reason is given for all these dispensations which obliges us to acquiesce in them, how surprising soever they are: *For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's*.

(1.) If we understand this literally, it intimates God's almighty power, which cannot be controlled. He upholds the whole creation, founded the earth, and still sustains it by the word of his power. What cannot he do in the affairs of families and kingdoms, far beyond our conception and expectation, *who hangs the earth upon nothing?* (^{<1837>}Job 26:7). But,

(2.) If we understand it figuratively, it intimates his incontestable sovereignty, which cannot be disputed. The princes and great ones of the earth, the directors of states and governments, are the *pillars of the earth*, (^{<1973>}Psalm 75:3). On these hinges the affairs of the world seem to turn, but they are the Lord's, (^{<1973>}Psalm 47:9). From him they have their power, and therefore he may advance whom he pleases; and who may say, *What doest thou?*

III. A prediction of the preservation and advancement of all God's faithful friends, and the destruction of all his and their enemies. Having testified her joyful triumph in what God had done, and is doing, she concludes with joyful hopes of what he would do, v. 9, 10. Pious affections (says bishop

Patrick) in those days rose many times to the height of prophecy, whereby God continued in that nation his true religion, in the midst of their idolatrous inclinations. This prophecy may refer,

1. More immediately to the government of Israel by Samuel, and by David whom he was employed to anoint. The Israelites, God's saints, should be protected and delivered; the Philistines, their enemies, should be conquered and subdued, and particularly by *thunder*, ^{<1970>}1 Samuel 7:10. Their dominions should be enlarged, king David strengthened and greatly exalted, and Israel (that in the time of the judges had made so small a figure and had much ado to subsist) should now shortly become great and considerable, and give law to all its neighbours. An extraordinary change that was; and the birth of Samuel was, as it were, the dawning of that day. But,

2. We have reason to think that this prophecy looks further, to the kingdom of Christ, and the administration of that kingdom of grace, of which she now comes to speak, having spoken so largely of the kingdom of providence. And here is the first time that we meet with the name *Messiah*, or *his Anointed*. The ancient expositors, both Jewish and Christian, make it to look beyond David, to the Son of David. Glorious things are here spoken of the kingdom of the Mediator, both before and since his incarnation; for the method of the administration of it, both by the eternal Word and by that Word made flesh, is much the same. Concerning that kingdom we are here assured,

(1.) That all the loyal subjects of it shall be carefully and powerfully protected (v. 9): *He will keep the feet of his saints*. There are a people in the world that are God's saints, his select and sanctified ones; and he will keep their feet, that is, all that belongs to them shall be under his protection, down to their very feet, the lowest part of the body. If he will keep their feet, much more their head and hearts. Or he will keep their feet, that is, he will secure the ground they stand on, and establish their goings; he will set a guard of grace upon their affections and actions, that their feet may neither wander out of the way nor stumble in the way. When their feet are ready to slip (^{<1973>}Psalm 73:2) *his mercy holdeth them up* (^{<1948>}Psalm 94:18) and *keepeth them from falling*, ^{<1912>}Jude 1:24. While we keep God's way he will keep our feet. See ^{<1972>}Psalm 37:23, 24.

(2.) That all the powers engaged against it shall not be able to effect the ruin of it. By strength shall no man prevail. God's strength is engaged for

the church; and, while it is so, man's strength shall not prevail against it. The church seems destitute of strength, her friends few and feeble, but prevalency does not go by human strength, ^{<19316>}Psalm 33:16. God neither needs it for him (^{<19170>}Psalm 147:10) nor dreads it against him.

(3.) That all the enemies of it will certainly be broken and brought down: *The wicked shall be silent in darkness*, v. 9. They shall be struck both blind and dumb, not be able to see their way nor have any thing to say for themselves. Damned sinners are sentenced to utter darkness, and in it they will be for ever speechless, ^{<19212>}Matthew 22:12, 13. The wicked are called *the adversaries of the Lord*, and it is foretold (v. 10) that they *shall be broken to pieces*. Their designs against his kingdom among men will all be dashed, and they themselves destroyed; how can those speed better that are in arms against Omnipotence? See ^{<19197>}Luke 19:27. God has many ways of doing it, and, rather than fail, from *heaven shall he thunder upon them*, and so, not only put them in terror and consternation, but bring them to destruction. Who can stand before God's thunderbolts?

(4.) That the conquests of this kingdom shall extend themselves to distant regions: *The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth*. David's victories and dominions reached far, but the *uttermost parts of the earth* are promised to the Messiah for his *possession* (^{<19118>}Psalm 2:8), to be either reduced to his golden sceptre or ruined by his iron rod. God is Judge of all, and he will judge for his people against his and their enemies, ^{<19115>}Psalm 110:5, 6.

(5.) That the power and honour of Messiah the prince shall grow and increase more and more: *He shall give strength unto his king*, for the accomplishing of his great undertaking (^{<19121>}Psalm 89:21, and see ^{<19243>}Luke 22:43), strengthen him to go through the difficulties of his humiliation, and in his exaltation he will *lift up the head* (^{<19117>}Psalm 110:7), lift up the horn, the power and honour, of his *anointed*, and *make him higher than the kings of the earth*, ^{<19127>}Psalm 89:27. This crowns the triumph, and is, more than any thing, the matter of her exultation. Her *horn is exalted* (v. 1) because she foresees the horn of the Messiah will be so. This secures the hope. The subjects of Christ's kingdom will be safe, and the enemies of it will be ruined, for the anointed, the Lord Christ, is girded with strength, and is able to save and destroy unto the uttermost.

<021>1 SAMUEL 2:11-26

SAMUEL IN THE SANCTUARY

In these verses we have the good character and posture of Elkanah's family, and the bad character and posture of Eli's family. The account of these two is observably interwoven throughout this whole paragraph, as if the historian intended to set the one over against the other, that they might set off one another. The devotion and good order of Elkanah's family aggravated the iniquity of Eli's house; while the wickedness of Eli's sons made Samuel's early piety appear the more bright and illustrious.

I. Let us see how well things went in Elkanah's family and how much better than formerly.

1. Eli dismissed them from the house of the Lord, when they had entered their little son there, with a blessing, v. 20. He blessed as one having authority: *The Lord give thee more children of this woman, for the loan that is lent to the Lord.* If Hannah had then had many children, it would not have been such a generous piece of piety to part with one out of many for the service of the tabernacle; but when she had but one, an only one whom she loved, her Isaac, to present him to the Lord was such an act of heroic piety as should by no means lose its reward. As when Abraham had offered Isaac he received the promise of a numerous issue (^{<0226>}Genesis 22:16, 17), so did Hannah, when she had presented Samuel unto the Lord a living sacrifice. Note, What is lent to the Lord will certainly be repaid with interest, to our unspeakable advantage, and oftentimes in kind. Hannah resigns one child to God, and is recompensed with five; for Eli's blessing took effect (v. 21): *She bore three sons and two daughters.* There is nothing lost by lending to God or losing for him; it shall be repaid *a hundred-fold*, ^{<0229>}Matthew 19:29.

2. They returned to their own habitation. This is twice mentioned, v. 11, and again v. 20. It was very pleasant to attend at God's house, to bless him, and to be blessed of him. But they have a family at home that must be looked after, and thither they return, cheerfully leaving the dear little one behind them, knowing they left him in a good place; and it does not appear that he cried after them, but was as willing to stay as they were to leave him, so soon did he *put away childish things* and behave like a man.

3. They kept up their constant attendance at the house of God with their *yearly sacrifice*, v. 19. They did not think that their son's ministering there would excuse them, or that that offering must serve instead of other offerings; but, having found the benefit of drawing near to God, they would omit no appointed season for it, and now they had one loadstone more in Shiloh to draw them thither. We may suppose they went thither to see their child oftener than once a year, for it was not ten miles from Ramah; but their annual visit is taken notice of because then they brought their yearly sacrifice, and then Hannah fitted up her son (and some think oftener than once a year) with a new suit of clothes, *a little coat* (v. 19) and every thing belonging to it. She undertook to find him with clothes during his apprenticeship at the tabernacle, and took care he should be well provided, that he might appear the more decent and sightly in his ministration, and to encourage him in his towardly beginnings. Parents must take care that their children want nothing that is fit for them, whether they are with them or from them; but those that are dutiful and hopeful, and minister to the Lord, must be thought worthy of double care and kindness.

4. The child Samuel did very well. Four separate times he is mentioned in these verses, and two things we are told of: —

(1.) The service he did to the Lord. He did well indeed, for he *ministered to the Lord* (v. 11, 18) according as his capacity was. He learned his catechism and was constant to his devotions, soon learned to read, and took a pleasure in the book of the law, and thus he *ministered to the Lord*. He ministered before Eli, that is, under his inspection, and as he ordered him, not before Eli's sons; all parties were agreed that they were unfit to be his tutors. Perhaps he attended immediately on Eli's person, was ready to him to fetch and bring as he had occasion, and that is called *ministering to the Lord*. Some little services perhaps he was employed in about the altar, though much under the age appointed by the law for the Levites' ministration. He could light a candle, or hold a dish, or run on an errand, or shut a door; and, because he did this with a pious disposition of mind it is called *ministering to the Lord*, and great notice is taken of it. After awhile he did his work so well that Eli appointed that he should minister with a *linen ephod* as the priests did (though he was no priest), because he saw that God was with him. Note, Little children must learn betimes to *minister to the Lord*. Parents must train them up to it, and God will accept them. Particularly let them learn to pay respect to their teachers, as Samuel to Eli.

None can begin too soon to be religious. See ^{<BIB>}Psalm 8:2, and ^{<BIB>}Matthew 21:15, 16.

(2.) The blessing he received from the Lord: He *grew before the Lord*, as a tender plant (v. 21), *grew on* (v. 26) in strength and stature, and especially in wisdom and understanding and fitness for business. Note, Those young people that serve God as well as they can will obtain grace to improve, that they may serve him better. Those that are planted in God's house shall flourish, ^{<BIB>}Psalm 92:13. *He was in favour with the Lord and with man*. Note, It is a great encouragement to children to be tractable, and virtuous, and good betimes, that if they be both God and man will love them. Such children are the darlings both of heaven and earth. What is here said of Samuel is said of our blessed Saviour, that great example, ^{<BIB>}Luke 2:52.

II. Let us now see how ill things went in Eli's family, though seated at the very door of the tabernacle. The nearer the church the further from God.

1. The abominable wickedness of Eli's sons (v. 12): *The sons of Eli were sons of Belial*. It is emphatically expressed. Nothing appears to the contrary but that Eli himself was a very good man, and no doubt had educated his sons well, giving them good instructions, setting them good examples, and putting up many a good prayer for them; and yet, when they grew up, they proved *sons of Belial*, profane wicked men, and arrant rakes: *They knew not the Lord*. They could not but have a notional knowledge of God and his law, a form of knowledge (^{<BIB>}Romans 2:20), yet, because their practice was not conformable to it, they are spoken of as wholly ignorant of God; they lived as if they knew nothing at all of God. Note, Parents cannot give grace to their children, nor does it run in the blood. Many that are sincerely pious themselves live to see those that come from them notoriously impious and profane; *for the race is not to the swift*. Eli was high priest and judge in Israel. His sons were priests by their birth. Their character was sacred and honourable, and obliged them, for their reputation-sake, to observe decorum. They were resident at the fountain-head both of magistracy and ministry, and yet they were *sons of Belial*, and their honour, power, and learning, made them so much the worse. They did not go to *serve other gods*, as those did that lived at a distance from the altar, for from the house of God they had their wealth and dignity; but, which was worse, they managed the service of God as if he had been one of the dunghill deities of the heathen. It is hard to say which dishonours

God more, idolatry or profaneness, especially the profaneness of the priests. Let us see the wickedness of Eli's sons; and it is a sad sight.

(1.) They profaned the offerings of the Lord, and made a gain to themselves, or rather a gratification of their own luxury, out of them. God had provided competently for them out of the sacrifices. *The offerings of the Lord made by fire* were a considerable branch of their revenue, but not enough to please them; they served not the God of Israel, but their own bellies (^{<5168>}Romans 16:18), being such as the prophet calls *greedy dogs that can never have enough*, ^{<2561>}Isaiah 56:11.

[1.] They robbed the offerers, and seized for themselves some of their part of the sacrifice of the peace-offerings. The priests had for their share the *wave-breast* and the *heave shoulder* (^{<8073>}Leviticus 7:34), but these did not content them; when the flesh was boiling for the offerer to feast upon religiously with his friends, they sent a servant with a flesh-hook of three teeth, a trident, and that must be stuck into the pot, and whatever that brought up the priest must have (v. 13, 14), and the people, out of their great veneration, suffered this to grow into a custom, so that after awhile prescription was pleaded for this manifest wrong.

[2.] They stepped in before God himself, and encroached upon his right too. *As if it were a small thing to weary men, they wearied my God also*, ^{<3073>}Isaiah 7:13. Be it observed, to the honour of Israel, that though the people tamely yielded to their unwarrantable demands from them, yet they were very solicitous that God should not be robbed: *Let them not fail to burn the fat presently*, v. 16. Let the altar have its due, for that is the main matter. Unless God have the fat, they can feast with little comfort upon the flesh. It was a shame that the priests should need to be thus admonished by the people of their duty; but they regarded not the admonition. The priest will be served first, and will take what he thinks fit of the fat too, for he is weary of boiled meat, he must have roast, and, in order to that, they must give it to him raw; and if the offerer dispute it, though not in his own favour (let the priest take what he pleases of his part) but in favour of the altar (let them be sure to *burn the fat* first), even the priest's servant had grown so very imperious that he would either have it now or take it by force, than which there could not be a greater affront to God nor a greater abuse to the people. The effect was, *First*, That God was displeased: *The sin of the young men was very great before the Lord*, v. 17. Nothing is more provoking to God than the profanation of sacred things, and men

serving their lusts with the offerings of the Lord. *Secondly*, That religion suffered by it: *Men abhorred the offerings of the Lord*. All good men abhorred their management of the offerings, and too many insensibly fell into a contempt of the offerings themselves for their sakes. It was the people's sin to think the worse of God's institutions, but it was the much greater sin of the priests that gave them occasion to do so. Nothing brings a greater reproach upon religion than ministers' covetousness, sensuality, and imperiousness. In the midst of this sad story comes in the repeated mention of Samuel's devotion. *But Samuel ministered before the Lord*, as an instance of the power of God's grace, in preserving him pure and pious in the midst of this wicked crew; and this helped to keep up the sinking credit of the sanctuary in the minds of the people, who, when they had said all they could against Eli's sons, could not but admire Samuel's seriousness, and speak well of religion for his sake.

(2.) They debauched the women that came to worship at the door of the tabernacle, v. 22. They had wives of their own, but were like *fed horses*, ~~218~~ Jeremiah 5:8. To have gone to the harlots' houses, the common prostitutes, would have been abominable wickedness, but to use the interest which as priests they had in those women that had devout dispositions and were religiously inclined, and to bring them to commit their wickedness, was such horrid impiety as one can scarcely think it possible that men who called themselves priests should ever be guilty of. *Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and tremble, O earth!* No words can sufficiently express the villany of such practices as these.

2. The reproof which Eli gave his sons for this their wickedness: *Eli was very old* (v. 22) and could not himself inspect the service of the tabernacle as he had done, but left all to his sons, who, because of the infirmities of his age, slighted him, and did what they would. However, he was told of the wickedness of his sons, and we may well imagine what a heart-breaking it was to him, and how much it added to the burdens of his age; but it should seem he did not so much as reprove them till he heard of their debauching the women, and then he thought fit to give them a check. Had he rebuked them for their greediness and luxury, this might have been prevented. Young people should be told of their faults as soon as it is perceived that they begin to be extravagant, lest their hearts be hardened. Now concerning the reproof he gave them observe,

(1.) That it was very just and rational. That which he said was very proper.

[1.] He tells them that the matter of fact was too plain to be denied and too public to be concealed: “*I hear of your evil dealings by all this people, v. 23. It is not the surmise of one or two, but the avowed testimony of many; all your neighbours cry out shame on you, and bring their complaints to me, expecting that I should redress the grievance.*”

[2.] He shows them the bad consequences of it, that they not only sinned, but made Israel to sin, and would have the people's sin to answer for as well as their own: “*You that should turn men from iniquity (^{<3016>}Malachi 2:6), you make the Lord's people to transgress, and corrupt the nation instead of reforming it; you tempt people to go and serve other gods when they see the God of Israel so ill served.*”

[3.] He warns them of the danger they brought themselves into by it, v. 25. He intimates to them what God afterwards told him, that the *iniquity* would not be *purged with sacrifice nor offering*, ^{<0014>}1 Samuel 3:14. *If one man sin against another, the judge* (that is, the priest, who was appointed to be the judge in many cases, ^{<5719>}Deuteronomy 17:9) *shall judge him, shall undertake his cause, arbitrate the matter, and make atonement for the offender; but if a man sin against the Lord* (that is, if a priest profane the holy things of the Lord, if a man that deals with God for others do himself affront him) *who shall entreat for him?* Eli was himself a judge, and had often made intercession for transgressors, but, says he, “*You that sin against the Lord,*” that is, “*against the law and honour of God, in those very things which immediately pertain to him, and by which reconciliation is to be made, how can I entreat for you?*” Their condition was deplorable indeed when their own father could not speak a good word for them, nor could have the face to appear as their advocate. Sins against the remedy, the atonement itself, are most dangerous, *treading under foot the blood of the covenant*, for then there *remains no more sacrifice*, ^{<3806>}Hebrews 10:26.

(2.) It was too mild and gentle. He should have rebuked them sharply. Their crimes deserved sharpness; their temper needed it; the softness of his dealing with them would but harden them the more. The animad-version was too easy when he said, *It is no good report*. he should have said, “*It is a shameful scandalous thing, and not to be suffered!*” Whether it was because he loved them or because he feared them that he dealt thus tenderly with them, it was certainly an evidence of his want of zeal for the honour of God and his sanctuary. He bound them over to God's judgment, but he should have taken cognizance of their crimes himself, as high priest

and judge, and have restrained and punished them. What he said was right, but it was not enough. Note, It is sometimes necessary that we put an edge upon the reproofs we give. There are those that must be saved *with fear*, <1023>Jude 1:23.

3. Their obstinacy against this reproof. His lenity did not at all work upon them: They *hearkened not to their father*, though he was also a judge. They had no regard either to his authority or to his affection, which was to them *an evident token of perdition*; it was *because the Lord would slay them*. They had long hardened their hearts, and now God, in a way of righteous judgment, hardened their hearts, and seared their consciences, and withheld from them the grace they had resisted and forfeited. Note, Those that are deaf to the reproofs of wisdom are manifestly marked for ruin. The Lord has *determined to destroy them*, <1256>2 Chronicles 25:16. See <1901>Proverbs 29:1. Immediately upon this, Samuel's tractableness is again mentioned (v. 26), to shame their obstinacy: *The child Samuel grew*. God's grace is his own; he denied it to the sons of the high priest and gave it to the child of an obscure country Levite.

<1027> 1 SAMUEL 2:27-36

ELI AND HIS HOUSE THREATENED

Eli reproved his sons too gently, and did not threaten them as he should, and therefore God sent a prophet to him to reprove him sharply, and to threaten him, because, by his indulgence of them, he had strengthened their hands in their wickedness. If good men be wanting in their duty, and by their carelessness and remissness contribute any thing to the sin of sinners, they must expect both to hear of it and to smart for it. Eli's family was now nearer to God than all *the families of the earth, and therefore he will punish them*, <1082>Amos 3:2. The message is sent to Eli himself, because God would bring him to repentance and save him; not to his sons, whom he had determined to destroy. And it might have been a means of awakening him to do his duty at last, and so to have prevented the judgment, but we do not find it had any great effect upon him. The message this prophet delivers from God is very close.

I. He reminds him of the great things God had done for the house of his fathers and for his family. He appeared to Aaron in Egypt (<1027>Exodus

4:27), in the house of bondage, as a token of further favour which he designed for him, v. 27. He advanced him to the priesthood, entailed it upon his family, and thereby dignified it above any of the families of Israel. He entrusted him with honourable work, to offer on God's altar, *to burn incense*, and to wear that ephod in which was the breast-plate of judgment. He settled upon him an honourable maintenance, a share out of *all the offerings made by fire*, v. 28. What could he have done more for them, to engage them to be faithful to him? Note, The distinguishing favours we have received from God, especially those of the spiritual priesthood, are great aggravations of sin, and will be remembered against us in the day of account, if we profane our crown and betray our trusts, ^{<16316>}Deuteronomy 32:6; ^{<16317>}2 Samuel 12:7, 8.

II. He exhibits a high charge against him and his family. His children did wickedly, and he connived at it, and thereby involved himself in the guilt; the indictment therefore runs against them all, v. 29.

1. His sons had impiously profaned the holy things of God: “*You kick at my sacrifice which I have commanded; not only trample upon the institution as a mean thing, but spurn at it as a thing you hate to be tied up to.*” They did the utmost despite imaginable to the offerings of the Lord when they committed all that outrage and rapine about them that we read of, and violently plundered the pots on which, in effect, *Holiness to the Lord* was written (^{<3840>}Zechariah 14:20), and took that fat to themselves which God had appointed to be burnt on his altar.

2. Eli had bolstered them up in it, by not punishing their insolence and impiety: “*Thou for thy part honourest thy sons above me,*” that is, “*thou hadst rather see my offerings disgraced by their profanation of them than see thy sons disgraced by a legal censure upon them for so doing, which ought to have been inflicted, even to suspension and deprivation *ab officio et beneficio* — of their office and its emoluments.*” Those that allow and countenance their children in any evil way, and do not use their authority to restrain and punish them, do in effect *honour them more than God*, being more tender of their reputation than of his glory and more desirous to humour them than to honour him.

3. They had all shared in the gains of the sacrilege. It is to be feared that Eli himself, though he disliked and reprov'd the abuses they committed, yet did not forbear to eat of the roast meat they sacrilegiously got, v. 15. He

was a *fat heavy man* (^{<0018>}1 Samuel 4:18), and therefore it is charged upon the whole family (though Hophni and Phinehas were principally guilty), *You make yourselves fat with the chief of all the offerings*. God gave them sufficient to feed them, but that would not suffice; they made themselves fat, and served their lusts with that which God was to be served with. See ^{<0018>}Hosea 4:8.

III. He declares the cutting off of the entail of the high priesthood from his family (v. 30): *“The Lord God of Israel, who is jealous for his own honour and Israel’s, says, and lets thee know it, that thy commission is revoked and superseded.” I said, indeed, that thy house, and the house of thy father Ithamar (for from that younger son of Aaron Eli descended), should walk before me for ever.* Upon what occasion the dignity of the high priesthood was transferred from the family of Eleazar to that of Ithamar does not appear; but it seems this had been done, and Eli stood fair to have that honour perpetuated to his posterity. But observe, the promise carried its own condition along with it: *They shall walk before me forever*, that is, “they shall have the honour, provided they faithfully do the service.” *Walking before God* is the great condition of the covenant, ^{<0171>}Genesis 17:1. Let them set me before their face, and I will set them before my face continually (^{<0412>}Psalm 41:12), otherwise not. But now the Lord says, *Be it far from me.* “Now that you cast me off you can expect no other than that I should cast you off; you will not walk before me as you should, and therefore you shall not.” Such wicked and abusive servants God will discard, and turn out of his service. Some think there is a further reach in this recall of the grant, and that it was not only to be fulfilled shortly in the deposing of the posterity of Eli, when Zadok, who descended from Eleazar, was put in Abiathar’s room, but it was to have its complete accomplishment at length in the total abolition of the Levitical priesthood by the priesthood of Christ.

IV. He gives a good reason for this revocation, taken from a settled and standing rule of God’s government, according to which all must expect to be dealt with (like that by which Cain was tried, ^{<0047>}Genesis 4:7): *Those that honour me I will honour, and those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*

1. Observe in general,

(1.) That God is the fountain of honour and dishonour; he can exalt the meanest and put contempt upon the greatest.

(2.) As we deal with God we must expect to be dealt with by him, and yet more favourably than we deserve. See ^{<1985>}Psalm 18:25, 26.

2. Particularly,

(1.) Be it spoken, to the everlasting reputation of religion or of serious godliness, that it gives honour to God and puts honour upon men. By it we seek and serve the glory of God, and he will be behind-hand with none that do so, but here and hereafter will secure their glory. The way to be truly great is to be truly good. If we humble and deny ourselves in any thing to honour God, and have a single eye to him in it, we may depend upon this promise, he will put the best honour upon us. See ^{<1226>}John 12:26.

(2.) Be it spoken, to the everlasting reproach of impiety or profaneness, that this does dishonour to God (despises the greatest and best of beings, whom angels adore) and will bring dishonour upon men, for those that do so shall be lightly esteemed; not only God will lightly esteem them (that perhaps they will not regard, as those that honour him value his honour, of whom therefore it is said, *I will honour them*), but they shall be lightly esteemed by all the world; the very honour they are proud of shall be laid in the dust; they shall see themselves despised by all mankind, their names a reproach; when they are gone, their memory shall rot, and, when they rise again, it shall be to everlasting shame and contempt. The dishonour which their impotent malice puts upon God and his omnipotent justice will return upon their own heads, ^{<1792>}Psalm 79:12.

V. He foretels the particular judgments which should come upon his family, to its perpetual ignominy. A curse should be entailed upon his posterity, and a terrible curse it is, and shows how jealous God is in the matters of his worship and how ill he takes it when those who are bound by their character and profession to preserve and advance the interests of his glory are false to their trust, and betray them. If God's ministers be vicious and profane, *of how much sorer punishment will they be thought worthy*, here and for ever, than other sinners! Let such read the doom here passed on Eli's house, and tremble. It is threatened,

1. That their power should be broken (v. 31): *I will cut off thy arm, and the arm of thy father's house*. They should be stripped of all their authority,

should be deposed, and have no influence upon the people as they had had. God *would make them contemptible and base*. See ^{<3418>}Malachi 2:8, 9. The sons had abused their power to oppress the people and encroach upon their rights, and the father had not used his power, as he ought to have done, to restrain and punish them, and therefore it was justly threatened that the arm should be cut off which was not stretched out as it should have been.

2. That their lives should be shortened. He was himself an old man; but instead of using the wisdom, gravity, experience, and authority of his age, for the service of God and the support of religion, he had suffered the infirmities of age to make him more cool and remiss in his duty, and therefore it is here threatened that none of his posterity should live to be old, v. 31, 32. It is twice spoken: “*There shall not be an old man in thy house for ever;*” and again (v. 33), “*All the increase of thy house, from generation to generation, shall die in the flower of their age, when they are in the midst of the years of their service,*” so that though the family should not be extinct, yet it should never be considerable, nor should any member of it come to be eminent in his day. Bishop Patrick relates, out of some of the Jewish writers, that long after this, there being a family in Jerusalem none of which commonly lived above eighteen years, upon search it was found that they descended from the house of Eli, on which this sentence was passed.

3. That all their comforts should be embittered.

(1.) The comfort they had in the sanctuary, in its wealth and prosperity: *Thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation*. This was fulfilled in the Philistines' invasions and the mischiefs they did to Israel, by which the country was impoverished (^{<9139>}1 Samuel 13:19), and no doubt the priests' incomes were thereby very much impaired. The captivity of the ark was such an act of hostility committed upon God's habitation as broke Eli's heart. As it is a blessing to a family to see *peace upon Israel* (^{<1885>}Psalm 128:5, 6), so the contrary is a sore judgment upon a family, especially a family of priests.

(2.) The comfort of their children: “*The man of thine whom I shall not cut off by an untimely death shall live to be a blot and burden to the family, a scandal and vexation to his relations; he shall be to consume thy eyes and grieve thy heart, for his foolishness or his sickliness, his wickedness or his poverty.*” Grief for a dead child is great, but for a bad child often greater.

4. That their substance should be wasted and they should be reduced to extreme poverty (v. 36): “*He that is left alive in thy house shall have little joy of his life, for want of a livelihood; he shall come and crouch to the succeeding family for a subsistence.*”

(1.) He shall beg for the smallest alms — *a piece of silver* (and the word signifies the *least* piece) and *a morsel of bread*. See how this answered the sin. Eli's sons must have the best pieces of flesh, but their sons will be glad of *a morsel of bread*. Note, Want is the just punishment of wantonness. Those who could not be content without dainties and varieties are brought, they or theirs, to want necessaries, and the Lord is righteous in thus visiting them.

(2.) He shall beg for the meanest office: *Put me into somewhat belonging to the priesthood* (as it is in the original); *make me as one of the hired servants*, the fittest place for a prodigal. Plenty and power are forfeited when they are abused. They should not be able to pretend to any good preferment, not to any place at the altar, but should petition for some poor employment, be the work ever so hard and the wages ever so small, so they might but get bread. This, it is probable, was fully accomplished when Abiathar, who was of Eli's race, was deposed by Solomon for treason, and he and his turned out of office in the temple (^{<1K26>}1 Kings 2:26, 27), by which it is easy to think his posterity were reduced to the extremities here described.

5. That God would shortly begin to execute these judgments in the death of Hophni and Phinehas, the sad tidings of which Eli himself should live to hear: *This shall be a sign to thee*, v. 34. When thou hearest it, say, “Now the word of God begins to operate; here is one threatening fulfilled, from which I infer that all the rest will be fulfilled in their order.” Hophni and Phinehas had many a time sinned together, and it is here foretold that they should die together both in one day. Bind these tares in a bundle for the fire. This was fulfilled, ^{<9011>}1 Samuel 4:11.

VI. In the midst of all these threatenings against the house of Eli, here is mercy promised to Israel (v. 35): *I will raise me up a faithful priest*.

1. This was fulfilled in Zadoc, of the family of Eleazar, who came into Abiathar's place in the beginning of Solomon's reign, and was faithful to his trust; and the high priests were of his posterity as long as the Levitical priesthood continued. Note, The wickedness of ministers, though it destroy

themselves, yet it shall not destroy the ministry. How bad soever the officers are, the office shall continue always to the end of the world. If some betray their trust, yet others shall be raised up that will be true to it. God's work shall never fall to the ground for want of hands to carry it on. The high priest is here said to *walk before God's anointed* (that is, David and his seed) because he wore the breast-plate of judgment, which he was to consult, not in common cases, but for the king, in the affairs of state. Note, Notwithstanding the degeneracy we see and lament in many families, God will secure to himself a succession. If some grow worse than their ancestors, others, to balance that, shall grow better.

2. It has its full accomplishment in the priesthood of Christ, that merciful and faithful high priest whom God raised up when the Levitical priesthood was thrown off, who in all things did his father's mind, and for whom God will build a sure house, build it on a rock, so that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.