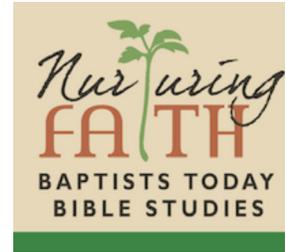


# Adult Teaching Resources

December 27, 2015



## Hope Waits

A Time for Praise — Luke 1:68-79

A Time for Joy — Zephaniah 3:14-20

A Time for Peace — Micah 5:2-5a

## Season of Christmas

**A Time for Growth — 1 Samuel 2:18-26**

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# A Time for Growth

1 Samuel 2:18-26

## FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Before the Lesson:** Prepare equipment need to listen to the poem on the Poetry Foundation website for the Transformational Exercise.

## Fellowship Question

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Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

What is one important characteristic you look for in your minister?

Why did you choose to wear what you wore today? (Not ALL you are wearing. Choose one article of clothing to answer the question.)

## Information

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There are many very good ministers who have upright characters, impeccable morality, deep spirituality, and great people skills. However, there are others whose lust for money, sex, and/or power disgrace the Church and the role of a Christian leader.

Today, we are going to look at a couple of priests who were in the latter camp. This was before Jesus came and before the Church was established. Still, they brought disgrace on the role of a religious leader of the Jewish people.

Before we read our passage, we need to understand that the Jewish religion at this time was largely built around the idea of sacrifice, including literal animal sacrifices. Actually, because the priests did not have “paying jobs,” they were to receive their food as a portion of the offerings offered by the people.

[Have class members read Leviticus 7:28-36 and Deuteronomy 18:3.]

The fat was to be burned because it was a sweet aroma. It was thought that this aroma would be noticed by God and that God would be pleased.

[Have a class member read Leviticus 1:7-9.]

We can only imagine the sounds and sights surrounding all the ritual of sacrificing animals. But maybe we (who are meat eaters, anyway) can relate to the scent of a grilled meal and the good feelings that stirs up within us.

## Information *continued*

Now, let's look at the two priestly brothers and how they performed the sacrifices.

[Have a class member read I Samuel 2:12-17.]

How does your translation describe these priests in verse 12?

“Scoundrel” (NRSV) is not a word we want associated with our minister!

THE BIBLE LESSON notes: “The word ‘scoundrels’ translates the phrase ‘sons of belial.’ The word ‘belial’ means ‘worthlessness’ or ‘wickedness,’ and was such a strong word that the Qumran community used it as their primary word for the devil.”

What was their relationship with the Lord? (“no regard for the Lord” v. 12; “contempt” v. 17, etc.)

These men had been raised by their godly mother and their father, also a priest. Why do you think they had such cynical and self-centered attitudes?

Not only did these priests disregard the law and the intention of the law, they threatened with violence anyone who tried to stand in their way of getting what they wanted.

“Violence” is not a word we want associated with our ministers, either!

You may remember that Eli, these priests' father, was the priest who watched Hannah praying desperately for a child. Eli watched her as she mouthed words and cried. He assumed she was drunk, so he reprimanded her. She explained her emotions and her prayer. Eli then blessed her. Hannah later had a son, Samuel, who she returned to God as a servant in the temple. Samuel lived in the temple with Eli and with these two scoundrels. (I Samuel 1.)

[Have a class member read I Samuel 2:18-21.]

We do not know exactly what this “linen ephod” was. We do not have drawings of it and there are no religious garment catalogs of the day available to us. We can assume it was a cover that priests wore. Samuel wore one, not because he was a priest, but maybe he was a “priest in training.” Or, maybe people just thought it was cute to see a small child dressed in costume. Either way, Hannah made an annual visit and presented her son with a robe, probably to be worn under the ephod.

Imagine for a moment Hannah's situation. She prays for a son, promising to give him over to God. She has a son. She raises him for a short while, then delivers him to the priest, Eli. Now, she sees Samuel once a year. Between those visits, she creates another robe. What do you imagine went through her mind as she did that?

[Have a class member read I Samuel 2:21.]

Samuel grew up in the presence of Eli and his corrupt sons. But he also grew up “in the presence of the Lord.” What does this say about our spiritual lives?

If you think things couldn't be worse regarding Eli's sons, wait until you hear this next

## Information *continued*

passage.

[Have a class member read I Samuel 2:22-26.]

What do you think of these priests?

Eli's sons made choices. So did Samuel. As Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death."

## Transformational Exercise

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We have choices of how we will live. As we approach a New Year, we might think about how we can choose one path or another.

Robert Frost wrote a poem that is good for reflection as we think about the paths we might choose.

[Read "The Road Not Taken." You may find the poem at this site. It also has a very good reading of the poem which you may want to play: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173536> ]

"Knowing how way leads on to way" — As we travel life's path, we move further from the choices we did not make. Eli's sons made choices that abused God's law and God's people. Samuel was on a different path.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Colossae. He used a clothing image. It was not a robe or an ephod. Paul speaks to them — and to us — as if we are standing in our closet, choosing what to wear for the day.

[Have class members read Colossians 3:8-10 and Colossians 3:12-14 and Colossians 3:17.]

These are our choices — to live as scoundrels or as servants, to robe ourselves in anger and violence and abusive power or to choose robes of patience and forgiveness and love.

In a brief moment of silence, I invite you to offer this New Year to God. Ask God to help you in your choices and your lifestyle.

[After a moment of silence, close in a prayer something like this: *Cloth us in love, God. As we enter a New Year, make us trendsetters of your design. Help us to make spiritual fashion statements that bring honor to your name and to your people. Amen.*]

**Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan?** You may send comments to the lesson plan author at [rjordan@cbfnc.org](mailto:rjordan@cbfnc.org). Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Both sides of the equation** — If we slavishly followed the Revised Common Lectionary, we’d miss half of the story in today’s text. The writer/editor who put 1 Samuel together was careful to interweave stories of Eli’s wicked sons (2:12-17, 22-25) with a contrasting account of Hannah’s upright boy (2:18-21, 26). If we simply pull the story of Samuel’s early childhood from its context, we miss a large part of the writer’s intent. So, although the RCL’s Old Testament reading for the Sunday after Christmas is 1 Sam. 2:18-21, 26 (intended, no doubt, to compare the good child Samuel to the good child Jesus), we’ll honor the author’s intent by including the bad with the good.

**No guarantees** — A God-honoring name did not guarantee a God-honoring child. Though Samuel’s sons were given theophoric names, they also turned out to be dishonorable men, using the office to which Samuel appointed them for selfish gain. According to 1 Sam. 8:1-3, “When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. Yet his sons did not follow in his ways, but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice.”

**More than their share** — In a rather convoluted account, the narrator describes the practice of eating what was offered for sacrifice at Shiloh and how the two priests abused it: “Now it was the practice of the priests with the people that whenever anyone offered a sacrifice and while the meat was being boiled, the servant of the priest would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand. He would plunge it into the pan or kettle or caldron or pot, and the priest would take for himself whatever the fork brought up. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh” (vv. 13-14).

Here we have biblical evidence for the first “pot luck” dinner — but the priests saw to it that they had more luck than the people, who were apparently expected to boil the meat rather than roasting it over the fire, perhaps to avoid offending God by cooking their meat in the same way sacrifices to Yahweh were burned. Instead of accepting what offerings the people might freely give to the priests, the two bullies took matters into their own hands — or trident-shaped forks.

The Levitical code, which probably originated later and may or may not have been in place at Shiloh, allowed for the priests to have the “breast” and the “right thigh” from each sacrifice of well being as their portion (Lev. 7:32-38), while the Deuteronomic code allotted priests the shoulder, jowls, and stomach (Deut. 18:3).

The practice at Shiloh appears to have been different, though the priest’s practice of taking meat with a large fork may have been a form of double dipping. Instead of being content

## Digging Deeper *continued*

with their share, they insisted on having more.

**Raw, not trimmed** — In addition to extorting more boiled meat than they were allotted, the two brothers reportedly demanded additional meat, uncooked and untrimmed. The underlying language of sacrifice is that the ancients thought of it as a means of offering a pleasing gift to God (thought to dwell in the heavens) by sending skyward the delicious aroma of fat dripping onto the coals on the altar. Just as we (most of us) love the smell of barbeque cooking on the pit, the Hebrews thought it was a glorious smell, and the only way they could think of to send a gift into the heavens. For this reason, fat was considered to be for God alone, not for human consumption. Consider these instructions from Leviticus: “All fat is the Lord’s. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, in all your settlements; you must not eat any fat or any blood” (3:16b-17). “You shall eat no fat of ox or sheep or goat. The fat of an animal that died or was torn by wild animals may be put to any use, but you must not eat it. If any one of you eats the fat from an animal of which an offering by fire may be made to the LORD, you who eat it shall be cut off from your kin (7:23b-25).

Whether or not these rules were fully known at Shiloh, it was clearly customary for the fat to be trimmed and burned as an offering to Yahweh — but Hophni and Phinehas cared little for following the rules: “But even before the fat was burned, the servant of the priest would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, ‘Give the priest some meat to roast; he won’t accept boiled meat from you, but only raw.’ If the man said to him, ‘Let the fat be burned up first, and then take whatever you want,’ the servant would then answer, ‘No, hand it over now; if you don’t, I’ll take it by force’” (vv. 15-16).

The two priests not only demanded what was not rightly theirs: like Mafia dons they had servant-henchmen willing to abuse the people in order to get what they wanted.

**Ephod, anyone?** — We learn from v. 18 that Samuel “ministered before the LORD” — that is, served in the temple — “a boy wearing a linen ephod.” The ephod was a standard part of priestly dress. The high priest wore an elaborate and bejeweled ephod for ceremonial occasions (Exodus 28; 39), but ordinary priests wore a plainer shift of white linen (1 Sam 22:18). This appeared to serve as a symbol of office, as a clerical collar functions some denominational traditions today.

We don’t know exactly what the ephod looked like: it seems to have been a sort of short shift or apron when intended for outer wear, or a simpler garment over which other clothes could be worn, such as the new robe Hannah brought Samuel each year.

The word could also refer to a basic undergarment worn by men: when David “danced before the LORD” clad only in a linen ephod, his wife Michal grew furious and criticized him for exposing himself before the young women as he leaped about (2 Sam 6:14, 20).

**Great sin, and great growth** — Careful reading of the Hebrew text reveals a clever rhetorical device used by the narrator to sharpen the contrast between Samuel and the Eli’s profligate progeny. In v. 17 he describes the sin of Hophni and Phinehas as “very

## Digging Deeper *continued*

great” (*gedôlâh meôd*). When he asserts in v. 21 that Samuel was “growing up,” the actual term he used was “becoming great,” *yigdal*, from the same root). Then, in v. 26 he again pictures Samuel as growing up (*gādēl*). The flexibility of the root *gd* allows the narrator to contrast the greatness of the Elides’ evil with the greatness seen in Samuel’s growth physical and spiritual maturity.

**The bad, the good, and the lessons** — When I wrote the commentary on 1-2 Samuel for the Smyth & Helwys Commentary series, I noted three possible connections deriving from this story.

First, the sons of Eli showed a lack of reverence for God and for God’s temple. The temple at Shiloh no longer exists, nor the one in Jerusalem. Paul spoke of our own bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). This challenges us to ask if we are showing proper respect — and taking proper care — of the bodies God has given us, or whether we are treating them as poorly as the Elide priests treated the people.

Secondly, Hophni and Phinehas showed disrespect for the offerings people had brought to God, taking more than their share for selfish use. We no longer offer animal sacrifices, but we still have a responsibility to support God’s work through our tithes and offerings. How much of our income do we contribute to support the work of God through our church or through charitable organizations? Do we keep more than our share for personal use?

Finally, the sons of Eli were experts at wrecking relationships. They treated worshipers poorly, abused the women who served at the temple, and refused to honor their father. Samuel, on the other hand, served faithfully and grew “in favor with the LORD and with the people.” The priests’ primary work was to facilitate the encounter between God and people: what are we doing to recognize the sacred nature of our relationships with others? In what ways do we strive to be a bridge between God and the people God brings into our lives?

The narrator of 1 Samuel 2 has drawn a clear picture. When we look at it closely, can we find ourselves? (*1-2 Samuel*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Smyth & Helwys, 2001], pp. 56-58).

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Does God kill people?

Readers of 1 Samuel 2 can easily resonate with the narrator's distaste for Hophni and Phinehas, two incorrigible priests who abused worshipers and did nothing to arouse our sympathies. We may not, however, be prepared for the narrator's claim that the sons continued in their disobedience because "it was the will of the LORD to kill them" (2:26b).

What? God allowed the impenitent priests to continue in their decadent ways so there would be good reason to kill them? The author's assertion seems harsh to modern ears, an act unworthy of God. This was not a problem to the ancients, who attributed all causality to God. The writer, moreover, believed firmly in the Deuteronomistic theology of blessings and cursings: God blesses the obedient, but curses the rebellious — even with death.

Keep in mind that the writer was telling this story long after the fact. He knew that Hophni and Phinehas would die in a foolish attempt to carry the Ark of the Covenant into battle with the Philistines (4:11), and he believed that their death represented God's judgment on the house of Eli. Thus, just as the writer of Exodus claimed that God "hardened Pharaoh's heart" in order to intensify the lessons of the plagues leading to the Exodus, so the writer behind 1 Samuel asserted that Yahweh allowed Eli's sons to persist in their wicked ways so their deaths would be clearly interpreted as divine judgment. He did not consider judgment to be out of character for God, but consistent with the prevailing theology of his age.