

Eli's daughter-in-law *and grandson**1 Sam. 4:5-11*

**4:5** And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again. **4:6** And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the LORD was come into the camp. **4:7** And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. **4:8** Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? these are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. **4:9** Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight.

**4:10** And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. **4:11** And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of **Eli**, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.

*1 Sam. 4:12-21*

**4:12** And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head. **4:13** And when he came, lo, **Eli** sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out. **4:14** And when **Eli** heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told **Eli**. **4:15** Now **Eli** was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see. **4:16** And the man said unto **Eli**, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son? **4:17** And the messenger answered and said, Is-

**another mother & son**

The story of Hannah, Samuel's mother, and his birth is well known, but another lesser-known, but important mother and son are the subject of this study. The elderly father-in-law, Eli, is a key character as well.

rael is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. **4:18** And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that **he [Eli]** fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for **he [Eli]** was an old man, and heavy. And **he [Eli]** had judged Israel forty years.

**4:19** And **his [Eli's] daughter in law, Phinehas' wife**, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that **her father in law** and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her. **4:20** And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. **4:21** And she named the child **Ichabod**, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. **4:22** And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.

## negatives

The “A” lines below list various points that seem to show that Eli’s daughter-in-law was unimportant. On the other hand, she and her son were included in a prominent way in the record. For some reason, chapter four did not end with the death of Eli.

As the daughter-in-law of the judge and priest who was ruling in Israel at the time (4:18), many people would probably have heard about her. Surely they knew Phinehas, her infamous husband. The record about him in chapter two contrasts greatly with hers in 4:19-22.

As a result, one wonders why she ever married Phinehas in the first place. She probably was not one of the immoral women mentioned in 2:22, since she seemed to be more like Eli than like her promiscuous husband.

Even so, being like Eli—who failed to take decisive action against his sinful sons (3:11)—was not good either. In her defense, however, we must remember that she lacked the authority that Eli had as judge and Phinehas’ father. Therefore God held Eli responsible rather than his daughter-in-law.

*Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).*

<b>A</b>	<b>( ) Eli’s daughter-in-law has no clear independent identity.</b>
A-1	( ) Her name is never mentioned (4:19-21).
A-2	( ) First, she was “his [Eli’s] daughter-in-law” (4:19).
A-3	( ) Second, she was called the wife of Phinehas (4:19).
A-4	( ) Eli is mentioned in chapter four far more than she is.
A-5	( ) Her death is closely connected to Eli’s death (4:18-22).
<b>B</b>	<b>( ) We should feel sorry for Eli’s daughter-in-law and her son.</b>
B-1	( ) Her husband was wicked (2:12-17, 22-25) but . . .
B-2	( ) She is not presented as a wicked woman (4:19-22).
B-3	( ) The future of her son, Ichabod, is totally unknown (4:20, 2:33).
B-4	( ) She died because of sins committed by others (2:31-34, 3:11-13).
B-5	( ) She was like Abigail, the wife of selfish Nabal (1 Sam. 25:2-38).
B-6	( ) Many people died because of Eli and Phinehas (2:29, 4:4-11).
B-7	( ) Her death was like the death of Rachel in Gen. 35:16-20.
B-8	( ) Ichabod was as innocent as the blind man in John nine.

## positives

The one-after-another deaths of Eli's sons, Eli himself, and Eli's daughter-in-law were shocking to people at the time. (See 3:11.) Nevertheless, the positive side of this sad story for us is that there is much that we can learn from it all.

What did all these deaths and the loss of the ark of the covenant mean? Did they show that God had forsaken his people or just Eli's priestly line? Perhaps they indicate both. Eli's line was rejected permanently (13:14), and the people suffered great loss because of sin within the nation. (Cf. Josh. 7:1-26.)

If the main point of chapter four is to show the fulfillment of the prophecy against the house of Eli given in chapter three, how does the naming of Eli's grandson, Ichabod, fit in? His mother's last words in 4:21-22 can be understood in various ways.

Was Eli's daughter-in-law primarily thinking about the loss of the ark and God's glorious presence when she named her son Ichabod? Verse 22 seems to say so, but the death of Eli and her husband are also mentioned as factors in verse 21. *(Verse 18 shows that the ark's loss impacted Eli greatly.)*

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

<b>C</b>	( ) <b>There is much to learn from the loss of the ark and from Ichabod.</b>
C-1	( ) His name shows that the ark was important (4:17-18, 21-22).
C-2	( ) It is good to compare Ichabod's name with Samuel's (1:20).
C-3	( ) Ichabod's name was changed after the ark returned (6:13).
C-4	( ) The ark was lost because it was used like an idol (4:2-8).
C-5	( ) Eli's sons were responsible for the loss of the ark (4:3-4).
<b>D</b>	( ) <b>There is much to learn from Eli's family about sin and judgment.</b>
D-1	( ) Eli did not discipline his sons (2:27-31, 3:11-14).
D-2	( ) Eli's daughter-in-law shows that sin leads to tragedy.
D-3	( ) She shows that sin within a family affects the whole family.
D-4	( ) She helps show how serious her husband's sin was (3:13-14).
D-5	( ) Many people in Israel probably heard about her death (3:11-14).
D-6	( ) People were probably shocked far more by her death than by Eli's.
D-7	( ) Their deaths were like those of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).
D-8	( ) God always quickly judges those who sin (1 Sam. 2:22-25, 3:19-20).

## worksheet answers

Nearly all lines are correct or partly correct. The few lines which are clearly incorrect, however, are very important.

Ichabod's future was somewhat known (B-3) because of the prophecies in 2:33 and 3:14. Ichabod probably did not live to be an old man (2:33), and the idea that his name was changed to a more positive one after the ark was returned has no biblical basis (C-3). The rejection of the line of Eli was permanent. Jacob was able to change Benjamin's name (Gen. 35:18), but for that to have been done for Ichabod would have contradicted God's judgement of Eli.

That said, is there reason to feel sorry for Ichabod and his mother? In a way, yes (B). It was primarily the sins of Eli's two sons and Eli himself which led to judgment (B-4, B-6). Yet personal sin also caused trouble for other family members (D-3).

Eli's family was not just an ordinary family. As the leading priest of his day, his sons would have succeeded him as worship leaders. So the judgement of Eli and his sons had long-lasting results. (The same was true regarding the sons of Solomon.) Judgement came years after it was first announced, (3:11-14, 19), but when it came, it came quickly (4:11-22, Rev. 2:16, D-8).

## So what?

First Samuel chapters two through four and Acts chapter five show that God regards sin—at the tabernacle or in the church—very seriously (D-4). Ananias and Sapphira were judged, but there was no clear continuation of the judgement to following generations, to their children or grandchildren. That is one of the main differences between the incident in Acts chapter five and the judgement of Eli and his family in First Samuel. (Line D-7 is only partly correct.)

The most obvious application of this study on Eli's daughter-in-law is that sin within any group (the nation, the family, or the church) must always be taken seriously. Though God and most governments today do not punish children for the sins or crimes of their fathers, the affects of sin still naturally spread out to others within the group. Therefore, family members, even children, still suffer greatly because of the sins committed by other family members.

Even so, thankfully God has provided redemption and hope. In the Old Testament, this was demonstrated by the acceptance of Ruth, a Moabitess, into the faith community in Bethlehem. (See the previous study.) In the New Testament, Jesus himself directly accepted saved individuals like the Samaritan woman and the man born blind (B-8).

## applications

*Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.*

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