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### The Life of Eli

Eli the priest had many dividing character qualities. In one respect he was a servant of God, who seemed to have a concern for others and the things of God, but on another hand, he displayed fatal character flaws, namely enabling and not reprimanding his son's for their wickedness.

Eli first appears in 1 Sam 1, in which he is mentioned as the acting high priest at that time. He is mentioned as a person involved in the story of Hannah, and in the larger picture, the birth of Samuel. He initially appears to be presumptuous, assuming that Hannah was drunk due to her prayer, and tried to rebuke her (1 Sam 1:14). This could be seen both as a good and bad quality. One can interpret this as Eli being self-righteous in him championing the cause of keeping the tabernacle holy, but not because he cares but because he is concerned with legalism. However, it could also characterize his zeal for the things of God and could reflect his love for Yahweh, in a limited context. Nevertheless, when Hannah clarifies that she was praying, Eli retracts his statements and offers his support for her, saying "May the God of Israel grant you your petition" (1 Sam 1:17). This is a good quality to have as it shows that he is interested in the activity of God in people's lives and would like those who are in need, to be supplicated by God. Eli is then seen again as he becomes the guardian of Samuel once he comes of age to live in the tabernacle. Eli

then is seen blessing Hannah during one of her annual visits to the tabernacle blessing her with many children (1 Sam 2:20).

Eli displays many fatal character flaws, and much of them involve his parenting and his lack of zeal to uphold the sanctity of the service of God. It is mentioned in 1 Samuel 2:12-17 that the sons of Eli were wicked, extorting people of their korban and offerings because of their greed. They intentionally told people to give them the choice of meat from their sacrifices, when normally it is supposed to be whatever survives the sacrificial process. Upon resistance from those who knew the law, they threatened to do it by force (1 Samuel 2:16). It even states that the sons abhorred the offering of the Lord, hating the holiness of God (1 Sam 2:17). They also fornicated with women by the tabernacle doorpost (1 Samuel 2:20-22). Eli upon hearing this rebukes them, which is a responsible thing to do. However, he just leaves it at that. And the sons continued to defile the tabernacle and be an abomination towards God. This exposed Eli's compromised stance on upholding the sanctity of God's house. God sends a prophet to inform Eli of his sin. After Samuel grows into a young boy, he hears the message of God which relays the judgement on the house of Eli. God states it is because of his reluctance to rebuke his sons and restrain them from sinning. Rather than punishing his sons, Eli sat back and let it happen. That is why God judged his household and gave it to Samuel. What is also disturbing is Eli's reaction to Samuel, first threatening him if he does not speak the word which was given to him, perhaps out of paranoia or jealousy, and then his apparent dismissal of God's rebuke stating "Let the Lord do what is good in his own eyes". The fact that he didn't repent and turn from his ways, shows that Eli was not only stubborn but arrogant in his walk. He basically said, "Well if you

think that way, do what you have to do”. Not taking accountability, be abdicating the responsibility by relegating it to be an instance of God’s “strictness”.

In my life, I see the life of Eli as a strong lesson against compromising beliefs and acting on part of Nepotism. Ministry is to the one true God, a holy God, who we are obligated to serve. To compromise upholding the holiness of God’s service because of personal sentiments about an issue is to put yourself above God. I pray that God keeps me in his will, that I might be able to responsibly represent him and honor him no matter how difficult or personally involved it may be.