

# GOD PORTRAYS MORE WOMEN

by

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### MRS. PHINEHAS

(I Samuel 2:12-36; 4:2-22)

HANNAH USED TO COME UP to the feasts to worship and to see her growing little son Samuel; each year she had in her satchel a larger sized robe that she had enjoyed making. It was a great occasion of renewing friendships and meeting those who had been kind to her little boy. Any favor to him was counted a kindness to herself. Hannah was like Anna in the New Testament who came into the Temple when Mary brought the baby Jesus there. Those who loved the Lord looked forward to the contact with her because she warmed their heart toward the Lord, for she spake of Him to all that looked for redemption in Israel. I think we would find Hannah and Mrs. Phinehas doing the same type of service.

We are not told much about Mrs. Phinehas, but what we are informed of her leads us to know that what concerned the Lord's honor was supreme in her heart. Hannah could not help but know her because she was so closely associated with the high priest's family in whose care and under whose tutorship Samuel lived.

Perhaps Mrs. Phinehas was glad to meet an understanding heart, one who had been sorely tried in her own domestic family relationships and yet had come out with such a cheerful countenance. Was she glad to pour into Hannah's ears the story of her marriage? Her parents had wanted the best for her, for in those eastern lands the weddings are arranged entirely by the father and the mother. They wanted her married into a religious, influential, and prosperous family, and where could they find these conditions better than in the home of the high priest and judge of Israel.

She expected to find in the son of the high priest one whose life would be ruled by piety, considerateness and purity. It is true he wore the garb of the sacred office, and perhaps she had to prepare these garments by cleaning and laying them out. Did she pray as she worked that her husband might wear such garments worthily and keep himself unspotted from the world? Did she cry out as David did in a later day: "**Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy**" (Psalm 132:9)? Holiness and happiness go together. What use are priestly garments over an unsanctified heart? It is quite possible for anyone to be in the sanctuary, pronouncing holy words, keeping the tune, but the mind and heart are in the market or kitchen; or one might even be preparing a sermon to deliver to someone else, or raising funds for Christian work, and the Lord receives not one response in the way of worship. Have you not found it so?

All too soon Mrs. Phinehas, who carried her husband's name so proudly at first, found herself blushing to be associated with him. What disillusionment was hers when embarrassing reports reached her of his greed even in the sanctuary! One can picture her seeking out her amiable old father-in-law, asking him to use his influence with Phinehas. But it is so natural to be blind to the faults of one's own children. We too are priests. How are we executing our priestly office? Is it a case of me first? Later she had the humiliation of learning that her husband was not only robbing the altar, but using violence to obtain extra portions and was guilty of shocking infidelity to her, while all the time officiating at the altar. I suppose he would use violence with her on every occasion she sought to remonstrate with him. **"Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord"** (2:17).

Eli had to say to them, **"Ye make the Lord's people to transgress"** (2:24). A priest should **"turn many to the Lord,"** but their misdemeanors **"caused many to stumble"** and brought reproach on the name of the Lord and on His sanctuary. They would have been expelled from any decent society. Grief over the death of a child would be sweet in comparison to the grief caused by the evil conduct of a bad son. **"He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy"** (Proverbs 29:1). **"A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother"** (Proverbs 10:1).

In contrast to the vile surroundings in which the youth Samuel grew, he remained as a lily among the thorns, learning to know the Lord, responding to His voice which to him sounded so human, yet so divine. He kept the linen ephod he wore unspotted, while God prepared him to succeed Eli who was to be punished because he did not dismiss his sons from office when they were guilty of gross wickedness. God gave Eli notice first through a man of God, then through the child Samuel. Some would claim nothing distressing should be told to a child. Yet Samuel early learned that God would not tolerate evil in those that drew near to Him, and that holiness became His house. The Scriptures say: **"Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord"** (Psalm 34:11). If there were more **"fear of the Lord,"** there would be less juvenile delinquency. It was with **"tears in his voice"** that Samuel told God's message to Eli when he constrained him to tell what the Lord had said. **"The Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel"** (3:21-4:1).

Very soon after this, the Philistines came up to attack Israel. But there was no seeking the Lord or the man of God for counsel. They went out to meet the Philistines and were smitten before them. Humiliated, they called the elders of Israel for a council of war. They said, **"Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines?"** (4:3).

They recognized that they had sinned against God. Someone had a bright idea to which they all agreed. **"Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies"** (4:3).

Some may have suggested the precedent of the walls of Jericho falling when the ark was carried with the army, also that the Jordan rolled back before it. This was done without consulting the Lord himself. There was no confession of sin or humiliation of soul. They demanded the outward symbol of His presence to accompany them to battle. **"It may save us,"** not, "God may save us."

The ark was used as a charm or talisman like the heart of Robert the Bruce which was carried into battle. A rite or ceremony is a poor substitute for Christ, yet many trust in the perfunctory performances of ordinances believing them efficacious. Salvation is not in lifeless objects, not in a gold-and-shittim-wood ark, not in a brazen serpent nor in bread and wine. Salvation is of the Lord. It certainly added no value to the ark to be told Hophni and Phinehas were with the ark of the covenant of God (4:4). Poor old Eli protested against the removal of the ark from the sanctuary and **“his heart trembled for the ark of God.”** It was carried forth by unholy hands. One can visualize their overriding the objections of Eli.

The heathen Philistines had a superstitious fear of the ark and fear stimulated them to unprecedented courage. Israel was smitten again, and the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain. A train of evil was sure to follow the departure from God, the wickedness of the priests, and demoralization of the people. A man of the tribe of Benjamin ran with the evil tidings; as he ran he rent his clothes, throwing dust on his head as evidence of his grief. Eli was seated by the wayside watching for the return of the ark, trembling in anxiety. The ensuing tumult at the report alarmed the ninety-eight-year-old high priest. The messenger was brought to him. He reported a great slaughter of the people, **“thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken”** (4:17).

When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli **“fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died; for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years”** (4:18).

**“And his 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”** (4: 19). She named the child Ichabod saying, **“The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken.”** She repeated, **“The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken”** (4:22). She had no desire to live when God’s glory had departed. She couldn’t face the forsaking of God. His honor was more to her than her personal and family advantages. Someone has said, “God has a profound sympathy for a mother who is compelled to sacrifice her own life for the sake of the child she is giving to the world.” It reminds one of the passage in Isaiah: **“When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed . . . He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied”** (Isaiah 53:10, 11). The price of atonement is compared with the travail of a mother.

For Christian parents there is a promise that **“she shall be saved in childbearing, if they [the father and the mother] continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety”** (I Timothy 2:15). Mrs. Phinehas was a remarkable woman, greatly wronged by her husband, yet she retained her own integrity, and saintliness, and devotedness to God. God has preserved her memory as one of His noble women. Let us walk worthy of the calling wherewith we are called.

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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