Faithful God, Unfaithful People

Numbers 25:10-13; 1 Samuel 2:30-36
SS Lesson for 11/05/2017

Devotional Scripture: 2 Tim 2:10-15

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

Key Verse: 1 Sam 2:35
Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary
Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND
From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

GOD’S FAITHFULNESS DISPLAYED (NUM 25:10-13)

Faithful mercy (10-11)
- God's mercy keeps God from putting an end to the wicked (Neh 9:29-31)
- God's mercy endures forever (Ps 106:1)
- God's mercy sometimes causes Him to relent (Ps 106:45)
- God's mercy empowers perseverance (James 5:11)
- God's mercy makes Christians a people of God (1 Peter 2:10)
- God's mercy is great (Ps 5:7)
- God's mercy for the wicked who have forsaken their ways (Isa 55:7)

Faithful covenant promises (12-13)
- God is faithful to His promises because He does not violate His covenants (Ps 89:33-36)
- God is faithful to His promises regardless of our rebellion (Ps 106:43-45)
- God is faithful to His promises by continuing to redeem His people (Ps 111:9)
- God is faithful to His promises by upholding His people (Isa 42:6)
- God is faithful to His promises through Jesus' blood (Matt 26:28)
- God is faithful to His promises because He cannot lie (Heb 6:13-19)

PEOPLE’S UNFAITHFULNESS CONSEQUENCES (1 SAM 2:30-36)

Consequence of God’s wrath (30-32)
- Wrath is a consequence because it is the punishment for the ungodliness and wickedness of man (Rom 1:18)
- Wrath is a consequence because man's stubbornness and unrepentant heart stored it up (Rom 2:5)
- Wrath is a consequence because God says that it comes on those who are disobedient (Eph 5:6)
- Wrath is a consequence because it is part of my sinful and earthly nature (Col 3:5-6)
- Wrath is a consequence as a response to unrighteousness (Rom 3:5-6)
- Wrath is a consequence as a response to detestable conduct (Ezek 7:8)

Consequence of death (33-36)
- Death is a consequence for sin (Gen 2:17)
- Death is a consequence because the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23)
- Death is a consequence because it entered man's destiny through sin (Rom 5:12)
- Death is a consequence because the sinful nature reaps death (Gal 6:8)
- Death is a consequence because when sin is full grown, it is the punishment (James 1:15)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH
Understanding the Priesthood
Where's the Beef? (2:12-17)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY
HEART OF THE LESSON FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR COMMENTARY
PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR COMMENTARY
Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews the truth of God’s faithfulness when there is a Faithful God and Unfaithful People. The study’s aim is to realize that our responses to God’s faithfulness to us is to be faithful to Him. The study’s application is to increase our faithfulness to God in an area where we have not been faithful.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: 1 Sam 2:35

Then I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before My anointed forever.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Num 25:1-9. Though Balaam had been unsuccessful in cursing the people of Israel, he evidently managed to play a role in their seduction by the Baal cult at Peor (cf. 31:16; Rev. 2:14). When Israel was in Shittim, immediately east of the Jordan River where they camped before crossing the river (Josh. 2:1), Israelite men engaged in sexual immorality with Moabite women. This was an integral part of the Canaanite fertility rites (cf. Deut. 23:17-18; 1 Kings 14:22-24) and was practiced in connection with the regular services of their temples (Num. 25:2). The physical, carnal aspects of this idolatry tempted the Israelites and led them into the spiritual apostasy of worshiping... Baal. So serious was this breach of covenant, especially when Israel was on the threshold of the land of promise, that the LORD commanded Moses to take serious action—all the guilty individuals involved must die. While Moses was delivering this verdict, an Israelite man (Zimri, v. 14) was brazen enough to bring a Midianite cult prostitute (Cozbi, v. 15) right into the camp. Phinehas son of Eleazar, a priest, was so incensed at this bold and open sin that he took a spear... followed the Israelite into his tent, and impaled both the man and his partner with it. This stopped the plague, evidently implied in the statement about God’s anger (v. 3), but not before 24,000 people died. This incident at Baal of Peor is also referred to in Deuteronomy 4:3-4; Psalm 106:26-29; Hosea 9:10; 1 Corinthians 10:8. First Corinthians 10:8 says 23,000 people died in this incident, whereas Numbers 25:9 has 24,000. This apparent discrepancy can be explained by Paul’s mention of “one day,” with the understanding that another 1,000 may have died on another day or days. Or 24,000 may have included the leaders, whereas 23,000 did not.

Num 25:10-13. The LORD then told Moses that because Phinehas had been courageous in stemming the evil and had manifested great zeal on behalf of the Lord, he and his descendants would receive a covenant of peace. This is defined as a lasting priesthood. Such a promise had been made to Aaron and his sons (Ex. 29:9) but not specifically at that time to Aaron’s grandson Phinehas. This suggests that the office of priest would now be channeled through Phinehas and not any other grandson of Aaron (cf. 1 Chron. 6:4-15).

Num 25:14-18. The names of the Israelite and Midianite culprits, Zimri (a Simeonite) and Cozbi, appear here probably to emphasize that the matter was public and careful investigation was made of the particulars. Another reason might be to explain the great reduction in the Simeonite male population between the first census (59,300, 1:23) and the one after this incident (22,200, 26:14). If mainly Simeonites had been involved in the immorality and idolatry it would account for much of the difference in the totals. Also the identity of the woman is stressed in order to explain Israel’s subsequent action of decimating the Midianite population (25:16-18; cf. 31:1-24).

1 Sam 2:12-17, 22-25. The human reason for the birth of Samuel had been recounted. He came in response to a godly mother’s prayer. Now it was important to see the divine reason. The Book of Judges asserts, “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (Judges 21:25). This was also true of the priests. Eli, though apparently a moral man himself, had lost control of his priestly sons who went so far as to appropriate for themselves the choice meat of the sacrificial animals which rightfully belonged to the LORD as His offering (1 Sam. 2:12-17). Moreover, they engaged in ritual fornication in the very precincts of the tabernacle at Shiloh in accord with Canaanite cultic practice (vv. 22-25).

1 Sam 2:18-21. As though to show the contrast between the ungodly and the godly about which Hannah had sung, the narration now contrasts the family of Samuel with that of Eli. Though Samuel’s mother had given Samuel to the LORD, she retained her maternal love and responsibility. She came yearly to Shiloh to
attend to the needs of her son. Nor did the LORD forget Hannah. As is so often the case, He gave her not only what she had prayed for but much more—in her case, three sons and two daughters (cf. the example of Rachel, Gen. 30:22-24; 35:16-18).

1 Sam 2:27-36. It is no wonder that God rejected the priesthood of Eli and his sons. After reviewing the circumstances of the selection of Eli’s ancestors to be priests of the LORD over Israel (vv. 27-28), an unnamed man of God announced to Eli that his priesthood would end because it had violated the conditions for its ongoing existence (vv. 29-33). Yet the LORD would not terminate the office of priest altogether for He would raise up... a faithful priest (v. 35) whose line of succession (house) would be firmly established and who would minister before His anointed one (i.e., the king) forever. In human terms this was fulfilled when the priesthood was taken from Abiathar, descendant of Aaron’s son Ithamar, and given to Zadok, descendant of Aaron’s son Eleazar (1 Kings 2:27, 35). But in the ultimate sense the “faithful Priest” and “Anointed One” are One and the same, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is both Priest and King (Ps. 110; Heb. 5:6; Rev. 19:16).

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

The Old Testament priest was charged with the duty of representing the people to God. He was different from the prophet, who spoke to the people on behalf of God. The priest spoke on behalf of the people to God. It was a holy office and an intercessory role. Through teaching, the sacrifices, and the rituals, the priests brought the people before God and were a vital part of the people's walk before Him. Given that it was an office occupied by fallen humans, its duties were not always executed faithfully. Embedded in the Old Testament priesthood was the promise of an ultimate priest—an eternal priest. This fact has messianic implications. The prophetic Scriptures indicated that there would come One who would represent the people before God perfectly and provide atonement for their sins (cf. Isa. 53). One of the first things we see in the Bible is the inadequacy of a merely human priesthood. Sinful human priests were not always faithful to God and could not bring the people to God in any ultimate or perfect sense. This truth is displayed in a dark episode back in the days of Israel's history just before they entered the Promised Land. Israel joined in the sins of the people of Moab. Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron the priest, put a stop to it, which brought forth a prophetic word that Phinehas's family line would continue in the priesthood (Num. 25:13). God's grace remained at work even amid the continuing moral frailty of His people. As we move ahead to 1 Samuel 2:27-36, we see another bleak situation: the failed priesthoods of Eli and his sons. Eli's sons were wicked; they abused their sacred obligations as God's priests. Throughout the Old Testament, we witness this struggle to find a faithful priest. But here again there is a note of hope. God's promise remained consistent and faithful, that one day there would be a truly holy priesthood. Our text outlines what the faithful priest would look like. He would be faithful to God. He would do what was in God's mind and heart, not whatever he wanted to do, as so many earthly priests had done. God promised that this priest would have a sure house, that is, a sure people formed by His Word who would walk before the king forever. No doubt many hearts hungered to receive this promise from a faithful God, a promise of a priest who would not fail, who would be pleasing to God, and who would be established always as a helper to needy, sinful people. As it turned out, the record of Israel's priesthood over their long history was pretty spotty. Men are often unfaithful; only God is completely faithful, and only the faithfulness of God could fulfill the priestly role perfectly. In truth, our text points toward the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "a priest forever" (Heb. 5:6). He represents the people to God, provides atonement for them, and teaches them how to walk with God. The Lord Jesus is our High Priest, erasing all the unfaithfulness of our lives through His atoning work. He walks before God forever on our behalf.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Since 1977, Gallup has been asking people to rate the trustworthiness of various professions. Clergy have usually ranked near the top in these polls. For example, in the 1980s about two of every three Americans agreed that ministers have “high” or "very high" moral standards. In 2013, however, fewer than half of those polled responded in that way. “The Catholic priest abuse stories from the early 2000s helped lead to a sharp drop in Americans’ ratings of clergy, a decline from which the profession has yet to fully recover,” wrote one analyst. There are some people we instinctively trust and others we do not. When those in vocational ministry misuse their authority, it is not only they who suffer. There is collateral damage when trust is violated. The Bible shows
that some of God’s priests were trustworthy, while others were not. As is true today, this made difference in lives other than their own.

Numbers 25:1-9 gives the background to the story of a certain man’s zeal for God and commitment to the covenant of Mount Sinai (the law). The Israelites were camped at Shittim, the final stopping place before crossing the Jordan (Joshua 2:1; 3:1) and before Moses’ death on Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 32:48-52). Shittim was about 10 miles east of Jericho. But tragedy struck when a plague killed 24,000 Israelites because of disobedience to God’s covenant laws (Numbers 25:9). The idolatrous worship of Baal, the main fertility cult of Canaanites at the time, was the context. The vicinity was probably the foot of the mountain of Peor (23:28). Such worship was an attempt to influence a pagan god and goddess to have sexual encounters so that the land and its inhabitants would be productive. The accompanying sacrifices and feasts (Numbers 25:2) were an abomination to God in combining what today would be considered forms of pornography, idolatry, sexual immorality, and worship of nature. Of the Ten Commandments broken, that episode violated at least the first (no other gods), the second (no idols), and the seventh (no adultery). No wonder God’s wrath was poured out against the leaders who encouraged God’s people to yoke themselves to Baal of Peor! (See Numbers 25:4, 5; Deuteronomy 4:3; Hosea 9:10). God’s wrath was withdrawn only when Phinehas intervened in a deadly way. That background has its own background in the form of Balaam’s oracles in Numbers 22-24. Having failed at cursing the Israelites—blessing them instead in four oracles (Numbers 22:16; Revelation 2:14). The year was about 1407 BC. The second part of the lesson jumps ahead about 340 years to consider another man by the name of Phinehas. He, his brother Hophni, and their father Eli were priests (1 Samuel 1:3). The brothers were corrupt, and they are called “scoundrels” (2:12), indicating that they were wicked. Their actions in taking advantage of worshippers was a great sin in God’s sight (1 Samuel 2:17). They added to their sin by seducing women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting and by ignoring their father’s rebuke (2:22-25); they therefore knowingly broke at least the fifth, seventh, and eighth of the Ten Commandments, probably others as well (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:7-21).

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

God’s Faithfulness Displayed (Num 25:10-13)

10 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:
11 "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal.
12 Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace;
13 and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.'"

Faithful mercy (10-11)

God's mercy keeps God from putting an end to the wicked (Neh 9:29-31)

29 "You warned them to return to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, by which a man will live if he obeys them. Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. 30 For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples. 31 But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

God's mercy endures forever (Ps 106:1)

1 Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

God's mercy sometimes causes Him to relent (Ps 106:45)

45 for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented.
God’s mercy empowers perseverance (James 5:11)
11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

God’s mercy makes Christians a people of God (1 Peter 2:10)
10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

God’s mercy is great (Ps 5:7)
7 But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple.

God’s mercy for the wicked who have forsaken their ways (Isa 55:7)
7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

Faithful covenant promises (12-13)

God is faithful to His promises because He does not violate His covenants (Ps 89:33-36)
33 but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. 34 I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. 35 Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness — and I will not lie to David — 36 that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun;

God is faithful to His promises regardless of our rebellion (Ps 106:43-45)
43 Many times he delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin. 44 But he took note of their distress when he heard their cry; 45 for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented.

God is faithful to His promises by continuing to redeem His people (Ps 111:9)
9 He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever — holy and awesome is his name.

God is faithful to His promises by upholding His people (Isa 42:6)
6 “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,

God is faithful to His promises through Jesus’ blood (Matt 26:28)
28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

God is faithful to His promises because He cannot lie (Heb 6:13-19)
13 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, 14 saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.” 15 And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. 16 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain,
People's Unfaithfulness Consequences (1 Sam 2:30-36)

30 Therefore the Lord God of Israel says: 'I said indeed that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever.' But now the Lord says: 'Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.

31 Behold, the days are coming that I will cut off your arm and the arm of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house.

32 And you will see an enemy in My dwelling place, despite all the good which God does for Israel. And there shall not be an old man in your house forever.

33 But any of your men whom I do not cut off from My altar shall consume your eyes and grieve your heart. And all the descendants of your house shall die in the flower of their age.

34 Now this shall be a sign to you that will come upon your two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die, both of them.

35 Then I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before My anointed forever.

36 And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left in your house will come and bow down to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and say, "Please, put me in one of the priestly positions, that I may eat a piece of bread.""

Consequence of God’s wrath (30-32)

Wrath is a consequence because it is the punishment for the ungodliness and wickedness of man (Rom 1:18)

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

Wrath is a consequence because man's stubbornness and unrepentant heart stored it up (Rom 2:5)

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

Wrath is a consequence because God says that it comes on those who are disobedient (Eph 5:6)

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

Wrath is a consequence because it is part of my sinful and earthly nature (Col 3:5-6)

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming

Wrath is a consequence as a response to unrighteousness (Rom 3:5-6)

5 But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) 6 Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?

Wrath is a consequence as a response to detestable conduct (Ezek 7:8)

8 I am about to pour out my wrath on you and spend my anger against you; I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices.

Consequence of death (33-36)

Death is a consequence for sin (Gen 2:17)

17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

Death is a consequence because the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23)

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Death is a consequence because it entered man’s destiny through sin (Rom 5:12)

12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—

Death is a consequence because the sinful nature reaps death (Gal 6:8)

8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Death is a consequence because when sin is full grown, it is the punishment (James 1:15)

15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Understanding the Priesthood

We must know more about the Levitical priests to fully grasp what is going on with the sons of Eli. It is Aaron and his sons who are first designated by God to serve as priests. Nadab and Abihu, the two oldest sons of Aaron, are put to death for failing to exercise their priesthood correctly. They offer “strange fire” and are put to death for it. They are then replaced by Aaron’s other sons, Eleazar and Ithamar (Leviticus 10:1-3; Numbers 3:4; 26:60-61).

The priests have various duties. They are to maintain and operate the tabernacle (Exodus 27:21; Leviticus 24:1-7; Numbers 18:1-7). Included in these duties is the maintaining of the altar. They are to keep the ashes removed and the fire burning (Leviticus 6:8-13). God promises to be with them in a special way at the doorway of the tent of meeting (Exodus 29:42-46). Because of their privileged position and close proximity to the Holy God, they are to be meticulous about not defiling themselves in any way that hinders their service. This includes avoiding strong drink (Leviticus 10:8-11), which may have been a contributing factor in the “strange fire” of Nadab and Abihu (10:1-3). They must not defile themselves by contact with the dead, by taking a harlot as a wife, or by having a daughter who is a harlot (Leviticus 21:1-9). A priest must not have any physical defect or conduct his priestly duties while ceremonially unclean (Leviticus 21:10—22:9). The Levitical priests are responsible for inspecting various medical maladies to determine if they are leprous, infectious or defiling (see Leviticus 13-16). Levitical priests are to blow the trumpets which signal the Israelites (Numbers 10:8). The priest’s duties are even more extensive than this, for they are to teach the people of Israel the Law of Moses, and they are to judge them (Deuteronomy 17:8-13; 33:8-11). The priests’ failure to do these things brings severe judgment upon them (Malachi 2:1-10). Their garments, which include a tunic and a robe, are also symbols of the sanctity of their office and duties (Exodus 28:40-43).

God does not give the priests an inheritance like the other tribes (Numbers 18:24). Instead, He provides for them in a special way. They are given a portion of the meat which they offer on behalf of the Israelites, and they are given the remainder of the tithes and offerings of the people which the people bring as an offering to God (Numbers 18:8-32). They are also given the bread that is set out in the sanctuary to eat (Leviticus 24:8-9). God specifies the portion of the sacrificial animal the priests are given: the breast and the right thigh, but this is only after the fat has been burned on the altar (Leviticus 7:31-34; see also 3:3-5, 14-17; 7:22-25).

Where’s the Beef? (2:12-17)

12 Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the LORD 13 and the custom of the priests with the people. When any man was offering a sacrifice, the priest’s servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand. 14 Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. 15 Also, before they burned the fat, the priest’s servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, “Give the priest meat for roasting, as he will not take boiled meat from you, only raw.” 16 And if the man said to him, “They must surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as you desire,” then he would say, “No, but you shall give it to me now; and if not, I will take it by force.” 17 Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the LORD.
We have already seen how God provides for the needs of the priests. When they offer a sacrifice, they must first offer up the fat as an offering to God. The one making the sacrifice receives a portion of the sacrificial meat to be eaten with his family (see 1:5). The priest is given the breast and the right thigh (see above). This is the way the Law of Moses spells it out, but it is not the way it is done by the priests. These men “did not know the Lord,” and neither did they know “the custom of the priests” (verses 12-13). These sons, who “did not know the Lord,” are called here the “sons of Belial” (literally), or “worthless men” (verse 12). It is very interesting to note that while Eli’s sons are called “sons of Belial,” Eli’s hasty assessment and rebuke of Hannah suggests to him that she is a “daughter of Belial” (see 1:16), a charge she denies.

What do these “worthless sons” of Eli actually do that is so wrong? The writer tells us. First, they refuse to take the portions assigned to them and insist on a “pot luck” approach to the selection of their meat. When the meat is boiling in the pot and someone comes to offer a sacrifice, the priest sends his servant with a three-pronged fork to take out whatever portion he stabs (2:13-14). This portion of meat is then taken to the priest as his portion of the sacrificial animal.

I must confess that I am a cynic. I do not believe the meat the servant obtained was really a matter of chance. When I was growing up, we used to have fried chicken – one fried chicken usually. I really liked the white meat, and I didn’t care for the drumsticks or thighs. My dad was always served first, and he used to say that he took “whatever Evalyn (my Mother) gives me” “Give him a back or a neck, Mother,” I would plead, but she never did. Somehow, my Dad always ended up with the biggest piece of white meat. The piece of chicken my Dad got was not a matter of chance at all, and we all knew it.

I do not think that what the priests were given to eat was a matter of chance either. The breast portion or a piece of thigh did not represent T-bone steaks for them because that was from the loin -- round steak, yes, rump roast, yes, but filet mignon, no -- unless, of course, the priest’s servant “just happened” to pull it out of the kettle. I doubt if these fellows made many mistakes about what piece of meat was taken for the priest. There would be no chuck steaks for these fellows and no neck bones either. In the way they selected the meat, the priests cast aside the law, satisfying their tastes by obtaining the most select cuts.

The priests seem to find boiled beef too bland, wanting barbecued (or broiled) beef instead. The priest’s servants approach those offering their sacrifices before the meat is cooked, even before the fat is offered to God, and demand a prime cut of select beef for the priests. Godly Israelites, like Elkanah and Hannah, know the fat must first be burned on the altar. When these folks urge the servant of the priest to wait at least until the fat is burned, the servant becomes more forceful. He demands the priest’s meat on the spot, threatening to take it by force if necessary.

One can only imagine the negative impact of all this on the worship of God at Shiloh. Godly Israelites making the annual trek to Shiloh to worship God at the tabernacle do not find devout priests who facilitate their worship, but devouring priests who frustrate worship. Either willfully or by ignorance (this will be evident in one’s translation of verses 12 and 13), the priests function in a way which completely disregards the sacred office of the Old Testament priest, and which may cause some Israelites to give up entirely their attempt to worship at the tabernacle. In these days, there is no king in Israel, and each man does what is right in his own eyes, including the priests who are supposed to teach and judge Israel according to God’s law.

God’s assessment of the priests’ conduct is given to us in verse 17: “Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the Lord.” Translators handle this verse in different ways. Some render the verse to indicate that, as a result of the corruption of the priests’ ministry, the people likewise begin to follow their leaders in disdaining the sacrifices:

17 Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD (King James Version).

Others translate it to indicate that the priests’ sin was very great, because they (the priests) abhor the offering of the Lord:

17 Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD; for they treated the offerings of the LORD with contempt (New Revised Standard Version).

I suspect both are true. The priests do not esteem the sacrifices and offerings which they offer on men’s behalf at Shiloh, and as a result, many people come to disdain them as well. This is indeed a very grave sin, for the
priests who lead others into sin and for those who follow them as well. This indeed is a very sad day in Israel’s history. How well these later words of Malachi apply to the days of the Judges:

1 “And now, this commandment is for you, O priests. 2 “If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name,” says the LORD of hosts, “then I will send the curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart. 3 “Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it. 4 “Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi,” says the LORD of hosts. 5 “My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him as an object of reverence; so he revered Me, and stood in awe of My name. 6 “True instruction was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity. 7 “For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. 8 “But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,” says the LORD of hosts. 9 “So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways, but are showing partiality in the instruction (Malachi 2:1-9).

(Adapted from URL: https://bible.org/seriespage/3-samuel-and-sons-belial-1-samuel-211-36)

**Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

In the Old Testament, every Israelite was obligated to keep the covenant. Likewise, Christians everywhere are obligated to keep the new covenant. But keeping commitments can be difficult. The apostle Paul used Israel’s experience in the wilderness as a warning against failure in this regard (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-10). He exhorts his readers to avoid “setting [their] hearts on evil things as they did” (10:6). In other words, Christians are to avoid idolatry, sexual immorality, grumbling against God’s will, etc. When we commit such sin, we are in danger of losing it all! Since we are the ones “on whom the culmination of the ages has come” (10:11), the stakes could not be higher. The third and fourth chapters of the book of Hebrews make a similar point as the author repeatedly quotes from and otherwise alludes to Psalm 95:7-11.

Today, if only you would hear his voice, “Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me; they tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’"

God rewards those who are faithful to his covenant, and he punishes those who are unfaithful. Let us be aware of our continuing need to examine ourselves in this regard and repent when necessary.

**Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

The desires of the flesh are strong. When people around us have no shame about their actions, it can be even more tempting for us to follow in their footsteps. When we do, we remove ourselves from God's umbrella of protection. However, when we choose to do what is right, especially when it is hard, God will bless us.

*Covenant of peace (Num. 25:10-13)*. The Israelites had done evil in the sight of the Lord. The Israelites were camped near Shittim, and the men of Israel began to have intimate relations with Moabite women. Their desires for the women caused them to choose to worship Baal-peor. The Lord's anger burned, and a plague was allowed to enter the camp. God told Moses to kill in broad daylight those who had yoked themselves to Baal so that God would cease His anger. In the middle of the repentance prayer service, an Israelite brought a Midianite woman through the camp to have his way with her. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, saw this and killed them both. This pleased the Lord. Because of Phinehas's desire to honor the name of the Lord, God made a covenant of peace with him and his descendants. One act of obedience and zeal for God by one person protected a family line for future generations.
The deal breaker (1 Sam. 2:30-33). When a family experiences blessing and favor from the Lord for generations, it is easy to begin to feel invincible. The sons of Eli the priest had defiled the house of the Lord. They did as they pleased with young women even while supposedly serving at the tabernacle (vs. 22). Because of the unfaithfulness and dishonor of Eli’s sons, God declared that He would judge Eli’s family. "Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (vs. 30). Instead, the Lord advised Eli that his two sons would die in the prime of their lives.

God will find another (1 Sam. 2:34-36). Our God is a jealous God. His name is holy, and He will not be mocked. God advised Eli that his two sons who defiled the house of God would die on the same day. The Lord told Eli that the rest of his family would be begging for priestly offices simply to have something to eat. God would find another who wanted to uphold and honor His holy name. "And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed forever." Because we live under grace, we sometimes act under a false belief that we can do as we please. We know that God will forgive us, and He will. Nevertheless, our God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. What we often fail to recognize is that our actions today can affect the generations after us. If we choose to obey God, our descendants can begin with blessing and favor from God. On the other hand, if we choose to dishonor God, our children, grandchildren, and grandchildren’s children may begin as beggars like Eli’s family. Maybe we need to be a bit more introspective and reflective and consider the consequences of our choices. Future generations are depending on us to wholeheartedly follow God.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. Christians must be passionate about issues of righteousness and justice (Num. 25:10-11)
2. God remembers those who stand for what is right amid opposition (vss. 12-13)
3. God’s plans and promises succeed even as the disobedient exclude themselves from the benefits (1 Sam. 2:30)
4. Tolerance of sin and wickedness leads to judgment by God (vss. 31-33)
5. God’s mercy and love do not cancel His holiness and discipline (vs. 34)
6. God rewards those whose hearts are faithful to Him (vss. 35-36)