

The Glory Is Departed from Israel

Text: I Samuel 4:1-22

I. THE FALLACY OF GOD'S PEOPLE

- a. Israel battles against the Philistines- v. 1-2
 - i. Guzik tells us in his commentary- During this time there was no great world power (such as Egypt or Assyria) seeking to dominate the region. So, Israel's battles were waged against her near neighbors, such as the Moabites, the Ammonites, or as here, the Philistines.
 - ii. Philistines had Greek military equipment (such as helmets, shields, chain mail armor, swords and spears) making the Philistines formidable opponents. The Philistines were the first people in Canaan to process iron and they made the most of it.
 - iii. 4000 Israelite soldiers are killed
- b. The right question is asked- v. 3
 - i. They rightly discerned that their defeat came from God's hand
 - ii. They clearly did not remember God's previous warnings- Deut 28:15, 25
 - iii. They had been a disobedient people (Judges), culminating with the sin of the priesthood (Eli's two wicked sons)
- c. The wrong answer is given
 - i. Instead of taking time to ponder their question (repent), they quickly brainstorm an idea of bringing the ark into battle
 - ii. 1Sa 4:3-4-The elders of Israel respond with a superstitious trust in the ark.
- d. What is the Ark of the Covenant?
 - i. The Ark of the Covenant was the representation of the throne of God in Israel. It was a sacred wooden box or vessel covered in gold, which was located behind a thick veil kept in the most holy place of the Tabernacle,

so the people never saw it. Only the high priest entered and saw the ark, and only once a year. The Ark contained the 10 Commandment, and a lid called the Mercy Seat. The ark pictures God's throne which is now a throne of mercy and grace through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. (Heb 4:16). The blood sprinkled on the ark once a year is a type/picture of Christ's atonement for our sin. Jesus' blood perfectly satisfies God's wrath and God's Law just as the mercy seat perfectly covered the ark and the ten commandments contained inside.

1. The ark implies God's rule- (throne surrounded by cherubim)
 2. God's revelation (10 commandments)
 3. God's plan of reconciliation (mercy seat)
- ii. The ark had gone into battle before. The ark went in front of the marchers around the city of Jericho (Joshua 6:6-8). Moses told the priests to lead the ark into battle against the Midianites (Numbers 31:6). Later, Saul brought the ark into battle (1 Samuel 14:18), as did David (2 Samuel 11:11).
- e. The problem: **"It** may save us out of the hand of our enemies": They regarded the ark as the ultimate "good luck charm" and believed they could not lose with it there. They looked to the ark to save them, not to the Lord.
- f. But their plan did not work- The Ark is captured- v. 10-11
- g. Rabbit foot theology
- i. Dale Ralph Davis- They had God's furniture, but not His power- illustr- idols, trinkets, bible verses, etc.
 - ii. Superstition vs. faith. We can be guilty of trying to use God instead of truly seeking God and obeying God. Illustr- salvation (sinner's prayer), giving, prayer, serving
 - iii. "Thou art worthy" vs. "Thou art useful!"
 - iv. So, we prefer religious magic over spiritual holiness; success over repentance

“There are homes in which Bibles are kept, not to be read, but because their presence is supposed to surround the home with a certain sanctity and protection. But are we not prone to use these symbols and means as the Israelites used their ark, to obtain a sort of magical protection from physical peril, and not deliverance from the captivity of sin? And is not the divine purpose of prayer sometimes forgotten, and is it not often employed as a spell to save us from poverty and loss of danger, but not from sin?”- John H. Jowett.

II. THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD’S THREAT

- a. The Ark is captured- The ark goes into battle and Israel is defeated worse than before.
 - i. 30,000 soldiers died: Not only did Israel lose, they lost far worse than they did before taking the ark into battle.
 - ii. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died: The priests who were supposed to supervise the ark were killed in the battle. God promised the two sons of Eli would die on the same day as proof of His ultimate judgment on the house of Eli (1 Samuel 2:34). Now the proof of God’s judgment came.
- b. Israel is defeated
 - i. V. 6-11- But it probably appeared to the Philistines that they not only defeated the Israelites...they had also defeated God. What were the headlines?
 - ii. Interestingly, we see that God was more concerned with teaching His people a lesson than His reputation **at this time**.
 - iii. On this day that seemed to bring dishonor and shame to God, we must be reminded that on the basis of the predicted judgment in Chapter 2, God was actually starting to protect his honor and restore it. Philistia may scoff at God on this day, but the Israelites in Shiloh would no longer do so!
- c. God’s grace in preparing the way for Samuel
 - i. He is removing false shepherds who were leading the people astray

- ii. He would allow Samuel to rise up and lead the nation in a revival in chapter 7. Illustr- Israel was a drifting ship that needed a captain

III. THE FLIGHT OF GOD'S GLORY

- a. Eli dies- v. 12-18
 - i. A runner brings the news of his sons' death and the ark being captured.
 - ii. The ark of God being taken broke his heart more than losing his sons- v. 18, 13
- b. Death of Eli's daughter in law- v. 19-22
 - i. She has a similar reaction as Eli!
 - ii. She gives birth before dying- Ichabod- "where is the glory?"
- c. The Glory is Departed- The glory of God had departed in one sense. But the glory left when Israel stopped repenting and trusting God and started superstitiously trusting in the ark itself. "The glory of God had indeed departed, but not because the ark of God had been captured; the ark had been captured because the glory had already departed." (Ellison)
- d. Why was Israel defeated? Why was Samson overcome? The presence of God had departed.

Conclusion:

- This was a sad day in Israel's history. God warns His people that sometimes judgment must begin with us! I Peter 4:17- "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God..."
- Sadly, Ichabod could be written over many Churches, and over many Christian's lives
- A lesson on sincerity- Are we truly honoring God as we should? Are we seeking His presence regularly? Or are we content without it?
- Barnes- "When the glory of holiness departs from what should be a holy community, the glory of God's presence has already departed, and the outward tokens of His protection may be expected to depart soon likewise."