

Samuel 4 - The Glory Is Gone

As we continue looking at the preparation for Israel's monarchy, we are presented with another critical moment. We have seen three so far. First, there was God's blessing of Hannah, a devout mother, who had a deep appreciation for how God created her. Next, God gave His judgment on the deplorable spiritual condition of Israel and the irresponsibility of its high priest. Up to that time, the high priest was the highest political power in the administration of the Theocratic Kingdom. With great power comes great judgment. Then, we saw how God called Samuel to be a prophet whose character was excellent to replace him. You might remember this will be the same pattern when David replaces Saul. Today, In 1 Samuel 4, we will note the inauguration of a period of over twenty years where the glory of God has departed from Israel. There will still be battles where God will graciously keep Israel. Also, Samuel will prophesy and judge in Israel. But the Ark of the Covenant, which represents the presence of the Lord, will not be housed in the Tabernacle. This chapter, and the chapters that follow, chronicle the building of the desire for a king. We will see later that even when they do get a king, they will get the king that reflects their degraded condition. He will be given for the sake of comparison so that we can appreciate the Golden Age under the reigns of David and his son, Solomon.

1. When God becomes a good luck charm -

1 Samuel 4 opens up with what had been common in the Middle East. The Philistines went up against Israel to attack it. While by God's grace Israel was not destroyed, neither did they always win every battle. We are used to well established boundaries and international law. Up until very recently in human history, rule over any territory was determined by what power could maintain the control by force. Even in our modern times, we still witness the tendency to claim territory by force in spite of boundaries and laws.

1Sam 4:1-2 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek.
2And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men.

When the Israelites lost the battle, they exercised their human reasoning and half-heartedly turned to God. They went and got the Ark of the Covenant that represented God's presence in the Tabernacle. They took it into the battle with the expectation that God, being in their midst, would fight their battle. The idea of God fighting our battles is good, but turning to God is not exactly what they were doing. There was no prayer and supplication, no inquiry made, they just moved according to what seemed like a good idea.

1Sam 4:3-11 And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? 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.

4So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth *between* the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, *were* there with the ark of the covenant of God.

5And 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.

6And 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.

7And 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.

8Woe 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.

9Be 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.

10And 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.

11And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.

The Ark of the Covenant wasn't exactly an idol representing God. It was a box. It was *perceived* by the Philistines to be some kind of good luck charm. The Jews were not any better than the Philistines. They took the Ark into battle and presumed that God would then fight for them. This is the result of our religious nature applying spiritual power to forms. There is a two step process to this.

The first step does not start off with any problem. We create forms for streamlining our jobs. For example, time-management consultants will examine an assembly line and ergonomically determine how to place machines and workers to get the fastest and safest production. We use office automation to free us up for the primary work of the church. However, the forms that we create for productivity represent the most *common* way of doing things assuming that nothing out of the ordinary pops up. A skilled worker knows when the usual way of doing things needs to give way to special circumstances. These are the types of rules that are made to be broken as needed. Whether you are teaching, working in the kitchen, cleaning in the church, the procedures that we set up are there for the *usual* work that needs to be done. We need to adapt to the out of the ordinary problems you encounter. Getting locked into a form is the first step to superstition.

People then take the second step and make the mistake of depending on forms as if *they* have the power. It becomes superstition when people assume that there is some *mystical* power in the form itself. They might or might not treat the power as some personal force, but the spiritual connection is there. This most often happens when people assume that the success of the church depends on programs, canned presentations, and cliches. "God helps those who helps themselves" is not only not in the Bible, but it is bad advice. Yet, people will attribute their success to such a philosophy. More accurately, God will empower the work that people do for His glory; sometimes it looks like success by the world's standard and sometimes it doesn't.

Paul warned about people trusting in the *form* of godliness and not the *power* of godliness.

2Tim 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

The second battle was fought in their human strength and not in God's power. They had a clue already that they did not have the strength because they lost the first battle. The only conclusion is that they were doing things in their own strength. If God truly were there when they appealed to Him, they would have won. The fact that they lost again demonstrated that there was no power in just having the Ark in their midst. Left alone by God, their strength proved to be insufficient. The end result is that the glory of God departed from Israel.

1Sam 4:12-22 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. **[The runner came mourning with bad news.]**

13And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God. **[Eli knew how great the stakes were for this battle]** And when the man came into the city, and told *it*, all the city cried out.

14And 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.

15Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see.

16And 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?

17And the messenger answered and said, Israel 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, **[That was strike 1]** and the ark of God is taken. **[That was strike two.]**

18And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from 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. **[That was strike 3]** And he had judged Israel forty years.

19And 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; for her pains came upon her.

20And 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*.

21And 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

22And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken. [Strike One, Two, Three...You're Out]

On hearing that her father-in-law had died, her husband was killed in battle, and also that the Ark of the Covenant had been taken, Phinehas' wife went into labor. Names were often given that would mark a great event or other notable things like a prophetic statement or an outstanding characteristic. Sometimes a name would be changed later in life to reflect such notable characteristics. On this occasion, her child was named *Ichabod*, which means *no glory*. There are several ways in which the glory was gone.

For Phinehas' daughter, there was a personal loss of social and economic security that come with family.

For Eli, the prophecy that was given in 1 Samuel 2 was beginning to unfold. Immediately, his sons died in battle. The prophecy of the end of the priestly line of Eli began. The death of Phinehas removed *him* from the line. When David set the divisions of the priesthood, the descendants of Ithamar from Eli were in the minority. The last descendant of Eli to serve as high priest was ousted by Solomon.

For Ichabod, son of Phinehas, he does not have any known role as a priest. There is no mention of Ichabod again except as a footnote later on.

For Israel, the Tabernacle would not hold the Ark of the Covenant until the glory of Israel is restored. This would happen at the end of the carnal kingdom of Saul and the beginning of the righteous reign of David.

All through history we hear the sad report of great church movements that end up spiritually gutted and empty of the power of God. They become fossilized remnants of revival, religious forms with no power, religious museums, and spiritual graveyards operated by ghosts who don't know that they are dead.

However bleak that is, there is also good news. History is filled with church movements that are reborn out of those graveyards. Ichabod was pronounced upon Israel as part of a larger metaphor of the principle of failure and revival. For the believer, we experience Ichabod periods, but revival is always possible!

2. The way to strength -

We need to ask, "What could the Israelites have done *differently*?" A quick answer would be a problem. When people get in trouble, they want a quick answer. In fact, even when we are not in trouble we want a quick answer. It wasn't just the case that they should have inquired of the Lord. Sometimes God graciously answers quickly, but there are other times in the Scriptures where we see that He delayed for a *purpose*. Many times it is for the purpose of testing. We will see that with Saul especially. Then there are times when God says no to teach us something important like He did for Paul.

2Cor 12:7-9 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

8For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

- Wait and trust

Ps 27:13-14 *I had fainted*, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

14Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

Prov 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

- Learn patience

Patience is a function of time. There is no way to learn patience without taking time.

Rom 5:3-5 And not only *so*, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Critics of Christianity have no patience to understand it. Christians don't mature because they don't exercise the patience it takes to grow spiritually. This is a problem more associated with children who need to learn delayed gratification. Delayed gratification is the practice of resisting the temptation for an immediate reward in favor of a larger reward that comes after a period of waiting or effort. We want boiled down answers. Many answers won't be understood completely until you experience them in the context of the problems of life.

- Work at growth

Peter tells us that we must be *diligent* about getting to our spiritual growth.

2Pet 1:5-11 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue [**excellence**]; and to virtue knowledge;

6And to knowledge temperance [**self control**]; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness [**reverence**];

7And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity [**gracious love**].

8For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

10Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

11For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This is what I always refer to as *deliberate* Christianity. There is *almost* no such thing as *accidental* Christianity. You certainly get *saved* by a deliberate decision to accept Christ. You *might* grow accidentally because you are forced by the difficulties of life to pay attention. But, people valiantly resist learning.

Prov 17:10 A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool.

It would be far better to choose to grow.

3. All to the glory of God -

This Scripture is a good time to remind us of the ultimate significance of our time here on earth. Of all the things that went wrong in this chapter, the glory of God is the one thing that is identified as the important thing. Hophni and Phinehas are dead. The high-priestly line of Eli was ending. Eli is dead. The ark is captured. The Israelites lose to the Philistines and are routed in a comeback battle. None of those things are mourned in the end. What is mourned is that the glory of God is gone.

The whole chapter is dour and depressing. However, the one positive thing that we can learn from this is how significant the *glory of God* is.

Our attention is called to the fact that of all the things we are busy about doing in the Lord, what is important is His glory. Whether it be evangelism, discipleship, or fellowship, the most important aspect of church and anything else is that God be glorified.

- Our salvation, which we personally get to enjoy, is actually for God's glory.

Rom 15:7 Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

- The smallest aspect of our lives is for God's glory.

1Cor 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

- God's faithfulness which blesses us is to His glory. He has made promises and they are all yea and amen, He will not change His mind and say no.

2Cor 1:20 For all the promises of God in him *are* yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

- All the blessings he bestows are for His glory, not just for our enjoyment.

2Cor 4:15 For all things *are* for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

- In the end, *all* will praise the glory of God in His greatest work, the work of Christ in salvation.

Phil 2:9-11 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth;

11And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the

Father.

Does your life glorify God? Or, are you at the center of your universe. Are you working hard at taking care of your amusement and survival but neglecting your eternity? You might live life apart from God with apparent worldly success, but you will also go into eternity without God with unmistakable failure. You will spend a dark Christless eternity in Hell. Today you can change all of that to the glory of God and reap the blessings that come from being an obedient child of God.

If you are saved already, do you feel like your name should be Ichabod? This can be the moment when you get your life back on track yet again. There will be Ichabod moments ahead, but, praise God, that He is faithful to restore and uphold us. There are many things we mentioned that can strengthen us so that we don't fall into a life that has the form of Godliness but not the power of Godliness. Patiently working at growth as we learn to wait on the Lord will help protect us from the glory of God departing. Do you need to commit yourself to the glorifying God in all that you do? This church is not here by accident, but by the deliberate choices of God's people.

- Are you hit or miss in attendance?
 - Are you haphazard in your financial support? If you want the church to always be here for you, then you have to make sure of it.
 - Do you care enough about your church to attend the business meetings, or do you not mean business for God?
 - Do you care enough to join together in prayer?
 - People don't trip and fall into church and accidentally hear the Gospel. It takes deliberate decisions to go out and share the Gospel with the world. Don't wait for your friends to ask you about church.
1. When God becomes a good luck charm - 1Sam 4:1-2,3-11, 2Tim 3:5, 1Sam 4:12-22
 2. The way to strength - 2Cor 12:7-9, Ps 27:13-14 , Prov 3:5-6, Rom 5:3-5, 2Pet 1:5-11, Prov 17:10
 3. All to the glory of God - Rom 15:7, 1Cor 10:31, 2Cor 1:20, 2Cor 4:15, Phil 2:9-11