

Week 3 - The Glory Departed

I Samuel 4:1-7:2

Introduction

Last week, we looked at Eli and his two “good for nothing” sons, Hophni and Phinehas.

Eli’s sons were treating worship, and the temple, with contempt. Which is the same as treating God Himself with contempt. Eli was unwilling to stop them, even though he knew it was happening.

God sent a prophet to Eli to tell him that as a result, his two sons would die on the same day and there would never be an old man in his household again. The Levites would no longer be blessed with strength.

In contrast, we see Samuel sleeping near the ark of God, in His presence, being audibly called by God. Samuel’s first prophecy is the reiteration of what the nameless prophet had just told Eli.

Now we will see that what was happening inside the temple, is a microcosm of what was happening across the nation. The consequences are unimaginable.

Israel Tries to Use God

READ I Samuel 3:19-4:5

They fight the Philistines and loose 4,000. They rightly understand that God had not blessed them. But they wrongly diagnose why that is. They had mixed worship of Yahweh with pagan idol worship. And Hophni and Phinehas were blaspheming God every day in the temple. But they thought the answer was to go get the Ark of God.

This is the same ark of God that resides on the holy of holies. The same ark of God that the high priest is afraid to be near in case he dies. This is the resting place of the glory of God.

And they have brought it out, among them, to bring to the battlefield. With wicked Hophni and Phinehas in charge.

This shows an unspeakable contempt for God. They are attempting to use God as a good luck charm. They think they can control God by forcing Him to bless their battle.

Not only that, but the blasphemous irony of Hophni and Phinehas being there, with all of their contempt for God and the temple, trying to use something that belongs in the temple to make them winners is astounding.

God Can’t be Controlled

They bring the ark of God into the camp, and everyone cheers. **“Yay! We’re going to win now!”**

The Philistine army hears their shouting, and realizes what they have done. They freak out because they have heard what God did to Egypt. But their fear does not cause them to flee, instead it causes them to fight harder.

What they don't understand is that God is far more concerned about their holiness and their worship than He is with their battle against the Philistines.

It is equally ironic that (we will find out soon) the Israelites are also worshipping other gods. But who do they call on when a real threat comes along?

READ I Samuel 4:10-11

They lose 30,000 soldiers, and Hophni and Phineas die. They all retreat back home.

God With Me, Or Me With God?

What Israel is doing here should not be all that surprising. We do a form of it all the time. We expect God to come down and help us with our thing, to come alongside us and help us accomplish our will. We have this problem, or that crisis, and suddenly we want God to come fix it. We ask God to join us in our mission, treating His presence like a talisman against the chaos of life.

It's a wonder that God so often obliges us in our idolatry!

Instead, what we should be doing is opening our hands regarding our plans, our will, our problems and asking God if He will allow us the blessing of being part of what He is doing. This is fundamentally what we mean by "Jesus is Lord".

This story shows us that at least one symptom of a heart that wants God to do our will, is how we act when "the wolf is at the door" - when bad news comes. How do we handle the threat?

One of the things I have observed in all the Godly people I know that suffer well is that all of them have refused to allow their suffering, or fear of suffering, to become the defining aspect of their existence. The illness, or pain, or tragedy, doesn't define their purpose. They continue to follow Jesus in their calling. They say in their hearts, "I'm going to keep following Jesus. If that takes me through hell, so be it. But I'm going to keep following Him, because He is worth all the pain in the world if I still get to be with Him."

This is a very different attitude than the person that comes into hardship and tries to conjure up God with a prayer or a Bible verse as if they work like incantations against the darkness. They send their money in to the evangelist, attend more church services, and say their prayers, and listen to Christian radio hoping that God will fight off their enemies.

Meanwhile, they don't want to face their contempt for God, or their idols. **Hard times reveal our idols, and our true motivations.**

The Death of Eli and Sons

A messenger hikes the 18 miles back to Shiloh and reports what has happened. Everyone weeps loudly.

So loudly that Eli hears and comes to ask. Eli is now 98 years old, blind and quite heavy.

The messenger reports the news to him.

READ I Samuel 4:16-22

Ichabod literally means "glory departed"

So now 34,000 are dead. The high priest, and his two sons, are dead. And God's glory has literally departed Israel. This is what God's judgement looks like, and it's brutal.

God Defeats the Philistines

Chapter 5 tells the amazing, and sometimes hilarious, story of the time that the Philistines had the ark of God.

They started with it in their temple. But the next morning the pagan priests come into their temple and find their main god Dagon had fallen face down in front of the ark. It looked like he was bowing down on his face before God.

They put him back. The next morning, Dagon is not on his face before God but now his head and hands have been cut off leaving nothing but a torso to bow down to Yahweh.

Then a plague breaks out in the city, people start dying. And those that don't die, get giant tumors growing on their bodies. There is also a plague of mice destroying the land.

So they send the ark to the town of Gath. Same thing happens.

So they send the ark to the town of Ekron:

READ I Samuel 5:10-12

In chapter 6, they make a cart pulled by two cows. They put the ark on it, with some gold offerings made to look like tumors and mice. They send the cows with no Philistine to lead them, towards the nearest town in Israel.

There are a few Jews there who see the ark coming along the path pulled by a couple milk cows. They take the cart apart and make a fire, and sacrifice the cows to God.

Conclusion: A New Priest

READ I Samuel 6:19-7:2

Israel ordained a new priest to keep the ark safely. Thankfully, we have a once and for all high priest Jesus who has given us the privileges of His priesthood. This is why we can be carriers of the presence of God and not die!

Jesus did this to make you holy, and to make you a worshiper, not so that you can conjure Him up when you need Him to win a battle and then go back to your idols.