

Ichabod – The Limits of Self-sufficiency

1 Samuel 4:1-22

I. Israel Misplaced Its Trust

A. When Israel went to war with the Philistines in its own national strength disaster followed. 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. And 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.*** (1 SAMUEL 4:1-2)

B. After the fact, Israel transferred blame to God and trusted in His symbol rather than in Him. 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.*** (1 SAMUEL 4:3)

C. The people trusted the symbol when the institution around it had failed. So ***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.*** (1 SAMUEL 4:4)

D. Israel made a great show of confidence in the ark of the covenant. And ***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. (1 SAMUEL 4:5)

E. Relying on their human resources, the Philistines were terrified but determined to do their best against impossible odds. And 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. ***And 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. Woe 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. ***Be 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.*** (1 SAMUEL 4:6-9)

II. Misplaced Trust Yields Death

A. Disaster struck Israel. And 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.*** And ***the ark of God was taken***; and the two sons of Eli, ***Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.*** (1 SAMUEL 4:10-11)

B. Bad news travels fast. 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. And when he came, lo, ***Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God.*** And when the man came into the city, and told *it*, all the city cried out. (1 Samuel 4:12-13)

C. Everything came out quickly. And 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. Now ***Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim***, that he could not see. And 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? (1 SAMUEL 4:14-16)

D. What ever could go wrong did go wrong. And 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, and **the ark of God is taken**. (1 SAMUEL 4:17)

E. Eli understood what had taken place. And 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. And he had judged Israel forty years. (1 SAMUEL 4:18)

III. God's Glory Left Israel

A. The shock did not stop on the battle field or at the Tabernacle gate. 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**; for her pains came upon her. (1 SAMUEL 4:19)

B. Pious platitudes do not help in difficult times. And 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*. (1 SAMUEL 4:20)

C. When the men had not done their job, the daughter in law took the prophet's office, interpreting Providence. And **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. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: **for the ark of God is taken**. (1 SAMUEL 4:21-22)

D. It is a terrible thing when judgment falls on the church. **If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.** If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; **if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy**. (PSALM 137:5-6)

E. Note the dreadful contrast with the investment Jesus made in the church. And his disciples remembered that it was written, **The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up**. (JOHN 2:17)