

## INTRODUCTION

It is foolish to assume on the Lord; that is the great lesson that the opening 11 verses of this chapter teaches us. Israel thought that by taking the Ark of God into the battle with the Philistines that God would have to act in order to honour his name. But Israel did not consult with the Lord about the battle or the tactics used and therefore the Lord in order to teach them and us a vital lesson allows Israel to win the battle.

It is actually worst than that for it is the Lord that brings defeat upon Israel and grants victory to the Philistines (v 3). The problem with Israel at this time in its history was that they assumed that God would give them success even though they were unconcerned about their sinful condition and the abuses that were taking place in Shiloh.

But God is interested in dealing with sin He cannot look upon it or tolerate it and therefore He acts in this chapter in order to honour his name by forcing Israel into thinking about their sin. The only way this would happen is if God brought defeat upon them. That is exactly what happened, Israel was routed and Eli's two sons were killed in the battle but worst of all the Philistines captured the Ark of God (v 11). Disaster above all disaster, how much worst could things become? The section that we are looking at today teaches us two important lessons about God.

### 1. GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS WORD (12-18)

The scene quickly shifts from the Philistines back to Shiloh and to Eli in particular. Eli is now blind; he is overweight probably because of his family's abuse of the sacrificial system (2:29) and Eli is sitting on his throne by the side of the road (v 13). Now this throne would probably be a backless chair and the reason he is sitting by the roadside is that he is concerned about the Ark of God (v 13).

Eli knew it should never have gone into battle without the express command of God. But Eli's leadership has been so poor now for years that even if he did protest and the text does not tell us if he did, no one would have listened to him anyway. His sons did what they liked at Shiloh and Eli was powerless to correct them and likewise he was powerless to stop the Ark from being taken from Shiloh into battle.

This is surely a warning to all leaders in our modern world. If our political leaders fail to act in order to deal with wrongdoing and bring justice then they will soon become powerless to act when the country is morally if not politically out of control. Likewise there is a warning here for leaders in God's church to act in order to deal with sin otherwise they will become powerless to act when sin is dominate in the church.

If leaders in God's church lose their moral authority by failing to deal with sin then the result will be a church where sin is rampant and where God's wrath is being revealed.

Now as Eli was waiting for news from the battlefield a Benjamite came from the battlefield with the news of Israel's defeat. Eli of course could not see him coming but the rest of the town could see him coming. But poor Eli's heart must have been trembling as he waited for the news. Eli knew that his two sons had gone into battle and he knew what God had said would happen to them (2:34); therefore no doubt he feared the worst.

But his greatest fear was not his son's fate but as I have already said it was the fate of the Ark. The messenger comes into the town and gives his account of the battle; those who could see knew it was not good news as the messenger ran towards them with his clothes torn and dust on

his head, which was a symbol of lamenting (v 12). But just how bad was it and poor old Eli who could not see had no idea what was happening until someone told him.

When the people of the city heard what had happened in the battle they began to wail (v 13) and when Eli heard the wailing he asked what was the meaning of such lamenting (v 14)?

The Benjamite told Eli that he has just come from the battlefield that very day and Eli asked what happened (v 16). Then Eli is told the bad news Israel has been slaughtered with many thousands dead, his own two sons have been killed and then comes the crunch the Ark of God has been captured (v 17). How would an old overweight blind man who was the leader of Israel respond to such tragic news?

The news was more than old Eli could bear, national defeat and disgrace was bad enough and the loss of his two sons tragic; but both of those pieces of bad news were trifling compared to the final hammer blow of the Ark being captured and by their enemy of all people. Poor Eli is overcome with grief he loses his balance falls of the chair backwards and breaks his neck and dies (the cause of such an action may have been a stroke or a heart attack v 18).

The concluding comment sums up his life he led Israel for forty years (v 18). However sadly he did not lead Israel; his sons were leading Israel because poor Eli failed to discipline his sons and deal with their sins or the sin of the people and consequently he too faced the wrath of God.

The lesson is clear Eli and his dynasty despised the Lord and therefore they are disdained (2:30). God had predicted that there would not be an old man in Eli's family (2:32-33) that Eli's reign would come to an end and that God would raise up a faithful priest in his place (1 Samuel 2:35). You see God is fulfilling his word in these events because God is faithful to his word. In particular God is fulfilling his word concerning judgement.

Now if ever we needed to be reminded of this truth it is in our own day. We live in an age when judgement from God is rarely believed and is even played down by his church. How often have we heard the name hell mentioned in sermons; or in the media by the religious leaders in our country? Who really believes that God judges today? When was the last time we told anyone about the wrath and judgement of God?

I am not saying this to make us feel guilty but I think that the world has very subtly influenced the church to tone down our language about the wrath and judgement of God. Many Christians rightly fear being seen as being hard or harsh or judgemental but we have to be real and understand that the word of God proclaims the coming judgement of God (Matthew 24:36-51).

Therefore we must likewise proclaim this truth and do so in a loving and gracious way but also in a truthful way. God will judge our families and He will send unbelievers in our families to hell and He has promised to do that and will see to it that He fulfils his word concerning his just judgement.

We love to think about the promises of God about his presence and his power and his unfailing love towards us but how often do we mediate upon his promise of judgement and justice. It is a wonderful comfort to God's people to know that sin will not win, it is wonderful to know that Satan will be put in his place one day and to know that God's justice will win the day.

God promised his judgement upon the house of Eli and this section tells us that judgement fell. God promised that Jesus would come back as Judge and one day He will come back. Therefore are we looking for that day and rejoicing in that coming day? You may say it is hard to rejoice in judgement but God is glorified in judgement for his perfect justice is being meted out and his glorious holiness is being displayed in his just judgment of sinners.

Therefore we must speak truthfully about hell and warn sinners to flee from God's coming wrath for we can be assured that his wrath is coming because this chapter shows us God is faithful to his word. But I must plead with any who are not trusting in Jesus Christ today to flee from their sin and to flee to Jesus Christ who is God's provision for sinners.

Jesus Christ lived and died so that all sinners who turn from their sin can escape his coming wrath. For that to happen God's justice has to be done and so God the Father poured out his wrath upon God the Son who died in the place of sinners so that all who believe in him can be saved from the coming wrath of God.

We know for sure that what Jesus did has indeed satisfied God's demand for justice because Jesus was raised from the dead and thereby He demonstrated his victory over death which is the wages of sin. I urge you to flee to Jesus and flee from God's coming wrath for his wrath is certainly coming on all who fail to repent. So repent and trust in Jesus who saves sinners from the dreadful wrath of a holy and just God.

## 2. THE DANGER OF LOSING THE GLORY OF GOD.

But the story gets worst for Phinehas' wife was pregnant and near the time to give birth when she hears the news about Eli and her husband and brother in law and about the ark of God the shock was too much for her. She went into labour managed to give birth to a son but was overcome with the labour process and sadly died (v 19-20).

However just before she died while others were trying to comfort her in her grief and showing her the new child she paid no attention to them and instead decided to name the child Ichabod (no glory) because by capturing the ark the glory of God has departed from Israel (vs. 21-22).

You see the ark of the Lord was a symbol of his presence with his people. Back in Exodus 40:34-36 we are told that a glory cloud known as the shekinah glory covered the tabernacle as a sign that God was in that place that God himself with all his weightiness (which is what glory means) was present with his people. Without his presence the tabernacle and in particular the Ark was meaningless, they only symbolised the reality.

Whenever God wanted Israel to go on their travels this glory cloud would lift and when it did not lift the people were to stay put. This glory cloud symbolised God majesty and holiness and stopped people from treating him and his tabernacle lightly.

But now with the capture of the Ark of God by the Philistines God has symbolically withdrawn his presence from his people, God in all his majesty and holiness and awesomeness has withdrawn from his people Israel because of their sin and rebellion. Phinehas' wife understood what this meant for the people and the fact that modern Christianity never thinks about God's glory says more about our age and condition of the church than anything else.

Do we ever think if God's presence is with us; if God in all his glory and majesty is in our midst? Do we ever wonder if God has withdrawn his presence from us because of our sin? If not why not? Does it not concern us that God may not be present? Do we desire his presence more than anything else? Have we come to church to meet with God or is there another reason and motive for coming today?

How many churches could have the name Ichabod written across them because although there is much activity; but there is no presence of God for God's glory has departed? You see there are times when God withdraws his felt presence from us because of our sin. He does it in order to teach us the need to deal with sin and the need to seek him earnestly.

It is a tragedy if God's presence no longer abides with his people. It means that all our activity is meaningless and all our evangelism is useless. What the church needs more than anything else is a sense of the glory and wonder of God. We need to have a sense of his presence in the church. For that to happen we need to search our hearts confess our sins and plead for God to come to us and show us something of his glory.

We need to seek him for who He is and not because of what He can do for us and then our worship will be reverent, meaningful and inspiring.

Let us search our hearts let us look at our church and ask is it a church where the glory has departed if so let us repent and seek God again. But let us also praise and thank God for those occasions when we sense something of the awesome glory of Almighty God, let us reverently fear this God and pray that God in all his glory may be with us and working within us and giving us a greater understanding of the God that we worship, the God who is all glorious.

Amen