

“THE GLORY HAS DEPARTED”

I. Introduction

- A. We are living in an age in which there is a great deal of sensitivity over the possibility of giving offense to various groups of people.
1. One example of this would be the ongoing debate over the mascots of certain sports teams, such as the mascot of the Washington Redskins, which many people see as insulting to Native Americans.
 2. Another example would be the politically correct atmosphere on college campuses, which has caused comedian Jerry Seinfeld to decide that he will no longer give performances on college campuses.
 3. According to Seinfeld, every subject that is potentially humorous also has the potential to offend people these days.
 4. To be sure, we should treat all people with dignity and respect.
 5. But it is sadly ironic that for all of the attention that is given to protecting various groups of people from being offended, most people give no thought at all to the danger of offending God.
 6. In the verses that we have just read, we see the people of Israel offending God.
 7. They offended God by taking the ark of the covenant, the supreme symbol of God’s presence in the midst of his people, and turning it into a mascot.
- B. The first three chapters of 1 Samuel set the stage for Samuel’s important ministry in Israel.
1. As we saw in the text that we studied last Sunday evening, the Lord established Samuel as a prophet in Israel and Samuel began to

deliver God's word to the people.

2. After all of that build up, it is a little surprising that there is no mention of Samuel for the next three chapters.
3. The focus shifts entirely to the story of the ark's capture and eventual return.
4. The point of this interlude seems to be that although Samuel was speaking God's word, the people's failure to listen led to the tragic events that are recounted in chapters 4-7.
5. This passage gives us a picture of what happens when those who profess the true religion ignore and offend God.

II. Misplaced Confidence (1b-11)

- A. The passage begins by telling us that Israel went out to battle against the Philistines.
 1. The Philistines had come to Canaan from across the Aegean Sea.
 2. They occupied the land to the west and south of Israel.
 3. They were mortal enemies of God's people in the latter half of the judges period and in the early years of the monarchy, so they are frequently mentioned in the books of Samuel.
 4. The Philistine's intractability eventually resulted in the land being called Palestine, a word that is derived from the name 'Philistine.'
- B. In the first battle that is mentioned in our text, Israel suffered a terrible defeat.
 1. Four thousand Israelite men were killed by the Philistines.
 2. To put that number in perspective, it is about a thousand more than the total number of people who were killed in the September 11

attacks.

3. After this devastating defeat, as Israel's elders met to assess the situation, they rightly attributed the defeat to the Lord.
4. They asked each other, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?"
5. That was the correct question.
6. Unfortunately, they did not answer the question correctly.
7. They should have considered whether they had offended the Lord in some way.
8. If they had done that, they would have remembered that the nation's spiritual leaders were the "worthless men" Hophni and Phinehas, men who treated the Lord's offerings with contempt, men who were widely known to be sexually immoral.
9. The elders also should have remembered these words of warning from Deuteronomy 28: "if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today... The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them." (Deut. 28:15, 25)
10. Instead of thinking about those things, the elders remembered the role that the ark of the covenant had played in Israel's great victory over Jericho.
11. They concluded that the reason for their defeat at the hands of the Philistines was that they did not have the ark with them.
12. They looked upon the ark as a talisman, a good luck charm.
13. They thought that if they had the ark, they were assured of God's help.

- C. Of course it is true that the ark was an important symbol.
1. It was God's symbolic throne.
 2. It was a sign of God's presence in Israel's midst.
 3. The testimony inside the ark symbolized the Lord's claim to his people's obedience and service.
 4. The ark's lid, the mercy seat that was placed over the testimony and sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, foreshadowed how the Lord would provide satisfaction for his people's sins.
 5. The Israelite elders were not wrong to think that the ark had special significance.
 6. They were wrong to think that they could use it to bind and control God.
 7. They thought that bringing the ark into battle with them would guarantee victory.
 8. Surely God would not let anything happen to something as important as the ark.
 9. But they were gravely mistaken, and their mistake cost the lives of 30,000 Israelite soldiers.
 10. This tragedy demonstrates that God will not let us think that we can use and manipulate him.
 11. He was even willing to let the ark be captured in order to make this point to the Israelites.
- D. When the Philistines learned about the arrival of the ark in the Israelite camp, they too took a superstitious view of things.

1. They saw the ark itself as Israel's gods.
2. They trembled as they recalled the stories of deliverance that they had heard about these gods.
3. At least they did display greater reverence for the Lord than the Israelites did.
4. The Israelites let Hophni and Phinehas accompany the ark.
5. At least the Philistines bewailed the fact that they were going to have to face such a mighty god in battle.
6. But they pulled themselves together, and after rallying themselves for the fight that lay ahead of them, they routed Israel's army, killed Hophni and Phinehas, and captured the ark.

III. Shattered Hopes (12-22)

- A. The remainder of the chapter tells us about the effects that this defeat had upon Eli and his family.
 1. When the messenger arrives to give Eli a report about the battle, he relays four facts.
 2. Israel's army is in retreat.
 3. There has been a great slaughter.
 4. Eli's two sons are dead.
 5. And the ark of the Lord has been captured by the Philistines.
 6. The writer is careful to emphasize that the thing that was of greatest concern to Eli was the ark.
 7. The thing that made his heart tremble was not the danger that his sons faced but the danger that the ark faced.

8. The thing that caused him to fall over and die was not the news of his sons' deaths but the news of the capture of the ark.
 9. Eli understood what this meant for Israel.
 10. He realized that the Lord had brought his judgment upon his wayward people.
- B. The final paragraph of the chapter tells us what happened with Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, when she learned of these events.
1. She was pregnant and near the end of her term, and the shock of this news caused her to go into labor.
 2. She gave birth to a son, but she did not survive the delivery.
 3. As she was dying, she named her son "Ichabod", a name that means, 'where is the glory?' in Hebrew.
 4. This tells us that this woman looked upon the loss of the ark as a terrible tragedy.
 5. It meant that the Lord, the one whose presence in the midst of his people made Zion glorious, had departed from Israel.
- C. The years of the ark's absence must have been dark years for the people of God.
1. They must have felt much the same way that the prophet Ezekiel felt when he was given a vision of the glory of the Lord departing from the temple.
 2. What could be worse than to have the Lord depart from you?
 3. This is something that can happen to those who profess the true religion.

4. In Revelation 2 we see Jesus warning the church in Ephesus that it could happen to them.
 5. He tells them, "I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent." (Rev. 2:5)
 6. There are many churches in the world today that have had their lampstand removed from them.
 7. There are many churches where the gospel used to be preached but is no longer preached.
 8. The signs of such churches may identify them as 'Christian', but their true name is 'Ichabod.'
- D. While this is true, we always need to remember that 'Ichabod' is not the last word for the people of God.
1. Another son has been born, a son called by the name "Immanuel", the name that means 'God with us.'
 2. And this Son has promised that he will build his church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
 3. That promise cannot fail.
 4. Though there are occasions when the glory departs from particular expressions of Christ's church, there will always be a true church on the earth.
 5. Every one of us is unworthy of even being a doorkeeper in the house of our God, but by his grace those of us who come to Christ in faith are being built up as a spiritual house for the Lord.
 6. We have Christ's word that he will be with us to the end of the age.
 7. We have his promise that whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.