

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 4 Issue 46

November 13, 2005

Heavy People in a Light Church, Part 2

God Humbling the Proud

It seems that every kingdom has a golden age of wealth, success, influence, and power. And Babylon was no different.

Nebuchadnezzar was the king who reigned during the golden age of Babylon. Under his regency, Babylon became the most powerful nation in the world.

Now as the monarch who oversaw the captivity of the Judah, he also was the King of who sought to kill Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.¹ He also beheld the pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ in the fire.² And he consequently blessed the God of Israel.³

The Bible also identifies him as “God’s servant” on numerous occasions.⁴ Clearly he had a relationship⁵ with God such that he worshipped and served the Lord.⁶

At one point in his life Nebuchadnezzar looked out over his kingdom, and great pride welled up in his heart on account of what he had created.⁷ The a voice from heaven declared these words:

Daniel 4:31-32, “While the word was in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.”

Sure enough, Nebuchadnezzar spent seven years living like an animal on account of his pride!

Now it has been 2,600 years since God humbled Nebuchadnezzar, and yet we can still ask these

¹ Compare Daniel 3:8-18

² Compare Daniel 3:24-27

³ Compare Daniel 3:28-20

⁴ Compare Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6; 43:10

⁵ This is not suggesting that it was salvific.

⁶ Compare Daniel 4:34

⁷ Compare Daniel 4:30

questions:

- Could God do this today with you and me?
- Could God humble one of His own children?
- Could God — no doubt in love — bring us down to the point of a beast on account of our pride?

Brothers and sisters, He not only could, but He has throughout redemptive history!

- He brought low Israel as they refused to trust God when they came to the Promised Land.
- He brought low David and made him flee from Jerusalem.
- He gave Paul a thorn in the flesh.
- He humbled Laodicea — one of the churches in the book of Revelation — because of their pride.⁸
- He humbled Jacob.
- He humbled Korah.
- And in our passage God is humbling His people.

In our introduction to this text we saw the concept or the pun that is being utilized throughout the opening chapters of Samuel and is here brought to a head — heavy/light.⁹ We also saw the comparison that clearly is made between Eli and Phinehas' wife — two heavy people. Eli was heavy because of his self-centeredness. Phinehas' wife was heavy because of her association with Phinehas. Finally we looked at the core issue that makes a man heavy or light — and that was and is what they do with the Ark which, to the people of God at this time, was Christ.

The Self-Centered Heavy's Collapse

As we continue our look at this passage we will find the collapse of the heavy people.

1 Samuel 4:12, “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.”

Three things stand out in this verse. First, this man ran from the battle line to Shiloh a distance of twenty miles, uphill. Secondly, his clothes were torn and he had dust on his head. This indicates he was in deep mourning. Anyone who saw him would have known that the battle hadn't gone well. Thirdly, this man

⁸ Compare Revelation 3:17

⁹ Recall that in 1 Samuel 1 Hannah was lightly esteemed by her contemporaries yet her God was heavy in her eyes. As a result she became heavy with child.

In 1 Samuel 2 Hophni and Phinehas have made themselves heavy by robbing from God. This resulted in God being lightly esteemed by the nation. Furthermore in chapter 2, Eli bowed to the weight of his son's such that he was afraid to rebuke them. Because of this, he became lightly esteemed in God's eyes.

In 1 Samuel 3 Samuel was lightly esteemed by the nation — no one knew of him. But by the close of the chapter, his name had become heavy in Israel as now everyone knew that he was a prophet of the Lord.

In 1 Samuel 4 God's people have a light presence amongst the nations such that they endeavor to make themselves heavy by taking the Ark into battle. Yet because they were heavy in their own eyes, God made them even lighter before the Philistines such that over 30,000 men were slaughtered on the battle field.

Now, it is this pun which is utilizing the concept of heavy/light that is brought to a head in our passage.

was from the tribe of Benjamin.¹⁰ This is significant because it prepares us for the bad news that soon would arise from the tribe of Benjamin in the form of Saul.

1 Samuel 4:13, “**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.”

Even though Eli is blind,¹¹ nevertheless this aged priest has stationed himself as watchmen for news of the Ark. Even his advanced age of ninety-eight could not detour him from his duty.

1 Samuel 4:13, “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.**”

We do not know the words that this herald proclaimed throughout the city. It could have been the simple news of the Ark and the failed battle. Or perhaps his message also contained the warning that the Philistines were coming to attack Shiloh. We do not know.¹² Whatever his message, it sent the city in an uproar.

1 Samuel 4:14-15, “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.”

Though he was blind and aged, Eli did not lack his wits. He knew that such an uproar could mean only one of two things, either the battle had gone extremely well and the city is shouting and crying out in a sense of victory and relief or the battle was a rout. From his distance Eli couldn't discern between the two and so he is left to ask and worry until the messenger came to him.

The Sickening News

1 Samuel 4:16-17, “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 [Eli] said, What is there done, my son? 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.”

The news is presented in Hebrew fashion in four successive waves.

- The First Wave — “Israel has fled before the Philistines.” This is the first wave crashing on the sea shore.
- The Second Wave — “There has also been a great slaughter among the people.” This second wave is greater than the first.
- The Third Wave — “Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead.” Oh such devastation!
- The Fourth Wave — “The ark of God has been taken.” With this, we are undone.

Each wave builds upon another climaxing with the unutterable and unthinkable news that the “vessel of

¹⁰ Tradition holds that this man is Saul.

¹¹ Compare 1 Samuel 4:18

¹² 1 Samuel 4:17 gives us some idea as to what he most likely told the people.

fellowship” given to the people of God — THE ARK — has been taken.

Brothers and sisters, in a very true way the mind was not designed to process so much ill-news at one time. Shock would have been a mild reaction as the text indicates.

Eli's Death

1 Samuel 4:18, “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.”

Eli was incapable of processing the information. When the final blow was issued — news of the Ark — he fell backward off his seat. He fainted.

Now the cause of Eli's death here is not in doubt; the text is quite explicit. On account of his advanced years and on account of his size, when Eli fell backward his neck was snapped in two and he died.

And with his death came the completion of forty years of service in the Kingdom of God as a judge.

And with this we read of the demise of a self-centered Christian. Yet the text is not finished, because it also shares with us the fate of a Christian whose rebellion was fueled by her associations.

Heavy by Associations

1 Samuel 4:19, “**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.”

We are introduced here to another casualty of war, Phinehas' wife. She was heavy with child because of her association with Phinehas.

As the camera pans her direction we are privy to the demise of another large person.

1 Samuel 4:19, “**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.**”

Similar to the impact that the news had on Eli, the message of her father-in-law and Phinehas' death and the loss of the Ark forced her into labor.

Again brothers and sisters, the mind was not created to process such devastation in one sitting. And so we read of her death.

1 Samuel 4:20, “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.”

The text is rather interesting at this point. The death of Phinehas' wife is a given. There is no shock here. (Now we are going to return to this in a moment under the heading, “The Catalyst.”) Notice that Ebenezer has claimed yet another victim.

In the midst of what should have been this woman's finest hour, the birth of a son, the future High Priest — at least that could have been the hope — she is beside herself such that she did not answer nor did she pay attention. Truly, she is at death's door with this mantra on her lips, “Ichabod!... Ichabod!” — which translated means, “No glory!”

This is a “heavy” passage as it details the demise of two key people in the kingdom of God. It shows us the demise of the self-centered heavy and the heavy on account of association. Now as both of these servants of Israel did not actually fight, we are left with important questions:

- What actually killed them?
- Why did they die?

The Catalyst

And that brings us to the catalyst.

On the surface the answer is that it was on account of their physical size — they were in some way heavy. Eli was heavy on account of his self-indulgence. Phinehas' wife was heavy with child on account of her marital relationship.

Yet the text indicates that the question is more complicated than that.

Three scenes ought to be before our mind's eye as we consider chapter four.

1. The Battle of Ebenezer.
2. The Demise of Eli.
3. The Death of Phinehas' wife.

Each of these are inseparably linked as they revolve around the same theme, “heavy/light.” We are left asking with each: Why the failure? Why the death?

Now let me warn you, the answer in each case becomes less clear as we look at each account, and yet more obvious as we look at the passage as a whole.

The Battle of Ebenezer

Consider the demise of each.

There is no question that the people of God fought and lost the battle of Ebenezer on account of their refusal to give God the glory. At this time Redemptive History, everyone was doing that which was right in their own eyes.¹³ The offering of God was despised — which means it was taken lightly.¹⁴ God's priests ruled on their own authority.¹⁵ The glory of God and His worship was replaced by an icon.¹⁶ And

¹³ Compare Judges 21:25.

¹⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 2:17

¹⁵ Compare Jeremiah 5:30-31

¹⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 4:3

so God's people are left with trusting in a wooden box to save them.¹⁷

In fact if there was any question, notice with me the difference between this battle and the next in which Israel was powerfully delivered by God.

1 Samuel 7:3-4, “And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only.”

When God's people served God alone, they knew victory. But when they served themselves — embodied in the Ashtaroth and the Baals — they knew only discipline as in our passage.

Therefore the battle of Ebenezer was lost on account of Israel's refusal to serve God, give Him the glory, and treat Him as holy. In other words, they were heavy and God was light!

Demise of Eli

Diagnosing Eli's death in this text isn't as easy as diagnosing the cause of Israel's loss at Ebenezer — it is not as obvious. However that's not to say that it is not discernable.

We are told that Eli died because of his weight — he was heavy. But the text also indicates that he was old. The fact that he was old meant that he was more fragile.

But the text indicates that if Eli wasn't heavy he wouldn't have died.

Yes, his age factors in. But the primary factor in his death was his weight.

Yes we say that Eli died because he was fat! Yet this too is open to interpretation.

The word rendered *heavy*¹⁸ can reference physical size and/or moral size. One can be heavy on account of physical size and heavy with child. Or you can be heavy with yourself such that you do not live for God but for your own glory. In each situation we would use the same word *heavy* to describe the person.

Now what do we know about Eli?

Heretofore we really have not been informed as to his physical characteristics — it hasn't been important. However, we have been told that Eli was morally heavy.

1 Samuel 2:29, “Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat [heavy] with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?”

When we considered this passage that Eli was not necessarily being accused of being fat here. Yet he definitely was accused of serving his own interests and so making himself fat with himself!

¹⁷ Compare 1 Samuel 4:3

¹⁸ כבד kabad

Why did Eli die? Was he literally fat?

Yes, Eli was most likely fat, but it is clear that this was not his undoing. Rather he died because for the greater portion of his ministry he lived unto himself. When given the choice to honor God or honor his children, he chose his children. He had made himself heavy by taking God's portion of the sacrifice. This was his undoing and his primary weight problem! Robert Bergen explains:

“The writer notes at the time of Eli's death he was 'heavy' (v. 18). The Hebrew word employed here (kabad) is aptly chosen, for its spectrum of meaning — 'honored,' 'heavy,' 'burdensome'— applies broadly to the man... As high priest at Shiloh, Eli was a man with much social 'weight'/'significance'; because of his practice of eating unauthorized sacrificial portions... he was also 'heavy'; finally, as a result of the sins he permitted in his own life and household, Eli was a burden that weighed down and ultimately brought disaster upon Israel.”¹⁹

The battle of Ebenezer was fought and lost. Eli was killed on account of a self-centeredness which led the people to live for themselves rather than for God. They were heavy and God was light!

Demise of Phinehas' Wife

What about Phinehas' wife?

This section is the most difficult of the three.

The entire chapter revolves around the theme of God humbling the proud. God brings to naught the arrogance of His people. It shows us heavy people in a light church.

So is this guilt by association? Are we suspicious of Phinehas' wife on account of Phinehas? Are we indicting Phinehas' wife simply because God chose to include this account here?

While the text does not say that Phinehas' wife was heavy with herself, yet on account of the placement of this anecdote with the demise of the nation and Eli we are left with no other conclusion. The context leads us to this conclusion.

1 Samuel 4:20, “**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.”

This text is odd. It does not state that Phinehas' wife was going to die, it simply assumes it. It is a given.

And thus in a section in which God is dealing with people made heavy on account of their sin, the inclusion of this passage with the assumption that she is going to die indicates that her weight-problem far exceeded her pregnancy. She too is guilty!

There were a lot of women with child in that day that didn't die. Because Phinehas' wife dies tells us something about her.

- Would Phinehas' wife have died if she were married to a godly man like Elkanah?
- Would she have named her son Ichabod had she understood that her child was a gift to the Lord

¹⁹ Robert Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, NAC, page 94.

— like Samuel?

- Would she have died had her hope been in Christ?

She died because of her association with Phinehas! She died because she was heavy with his child. She died because — this is the conclusion — she too lived for herself.

Behold that which will “Undo” the child of God, ruin our service, destroy our children, and compromise our witness. Learn from this chapter brother and sisters!

It is not primarily the things that we do or even our shortcomings as Christians. Rather it is being heavy before God, claiming His glory as our own glory, living not for the Lord but ourselves, being arrogant, and exalting our cause and our will above the Lord's.

God always will oppose this sin.

Passages²⁰

Matthew 23:12, “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”

Behold a principle that always will be upheld in the Kingdom of God. Proud people are always humbled! Humble people are always exalted!

1 Peter 5:5-6, “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”

Listen to this text. It makes the point of 1 Samuel 4 clear. Live to please yourself, and God will humbles you for He is opposed to you. Ah, but when you live to honor and glorify God, the Lord will exalt you.

This is what God Himself promised in our text. It is a promise that serves ultimately as the rationale for the devastation of Ebenezer. Listen to what God told Eli through the unnamed prophet.

1 Samuel 2:30, “Them that honour me I will honour and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.”

We therefore must labor and strive in our walks with God to be empty before Him. We must strive to have an open hand, one that is not grabbing for this or that worldly prize. We must endeavor not to have an eye for ourselves in what we do. We must not grasp for glory, honor, fame or attention. Christ must be the pinnacle of our every desire. We must confess with John that, “He must increase and we decrease.”²¹

Humility must be the grace which adorns each and everyone of us — for truly then we shall be exalted! Lest we too go into exile, this must be our passion, priority, and plea!

²⁰ See also James 4:9-10, Proverbs 3:31-35, and Psalm 138:6

²¹ Compare John 3:30

The Contrast

And yet we cannot close this text without considering an important contrast.

The core issue around which this entire text revolves is Christ. Christ was what the Ark was all about!

Thus when the people of God grew tired of Christ, despised Him and rejected Him for a religious icon, God gave them their request but sent leanness into their soul.²²

However let it be known that while God's people did some horrible things nevertheless they were not pagans, nor were they lost! The fact that Eli was fat and therefore lived for himself does not mean he was lost. Neither was Phinehas' wife lost, even though she was heavy on account of her associations. When push came to shove, they still had a heart-beat for Christ.

1 Samuel 4:13b, "Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God."

1 Samuel 4:18, "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."

Yes Eli was self-centered, but to his credit we read that the last straw was news that the Ark had been lost and that God's people were severed from Christ's benefits.

In spite of all that Eli did, we conclude that he still cared about the Lord. He was concerned for God's kingdom. He had such a great concern that when the ark was forfeited, so also was his life!

And we can say the same thing about Phinehas' wife.

1 Samuel 4:21-22, "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."

If there is anything that should be gleaned from this text it is this: Though Phinehas' wife evidently loved herself, nevertheless the loss of Christ was the severest of all blows. And so she too died when the glory of God went into exile!

Our Generation

These two fat individuals humble our generation.

Three thousand years ago, Christ — by virtue of the ark — was taken from the people of God, and the main perpetrators of compromise died of a broken heart. Yet today, Christ has been taken from our worship services. His message has been far removed. The message of grace has been replaced with "How to" sermons. And our worship has become entertainment. And few have noticed!

Looking at our passage and the current church scene I believe Christ's message to this generation would

²² Compare Psalm 106:15

be this: “except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:2).

In fact, notice the word that Phinehas' wife used when she spoke of God's glory.

1 Samuel 4:20-21, “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. And she named the child Ichabod²³, saying, The glory is departed²⁴ from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband.”

The word *departed* literally means exiled. In fact, the word for *departed* here is the same word used for the exile(s) of God's people in 722, 605, 597, and 586 BC.

It is on account of this word and the dating of 1 Samuel that scholars believe that our passage was written to bring a message of warning to Israel, Judah, and all servants of God who live in pride, are arrogant and puffed up, have become heavy with themselves, and are in danger of going into exile.

And thus we see that our text is God's message for when His people are proud!

Family of God, how ought we to respond to this text?

Paul gives the answer.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”

First we must be moved by “the Love of Christ.” We cannot be moved by what we can get or our own personal agenda. Rather Christ's love for us and our love for Him must be what compels us in this life.

Second we must understand that we have been saved for a very specific purpose: that we might live for Christ. This is the life worth living. It is a life lived unto Christ.

Thus out of love for Christ, let us live for the Lord!

²³ אִי-כַבּוֹד 'Iy-kabowd

²⁴ גָּלָה galah

Subscription Information

A subscription to the *Broomfield Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is on a free basis. To subscribe or unsubscribe send a post card to *Broomfield Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word*®, Post Office Box 691, Windsor, Colorado 80550. Or you may send your request by email to [Nels Nelson](mailto:Nels.Nelson@broomfieldopc.com)
The Broomfield Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Broomfield Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Broomfield Presbyterian Church is located at Kohl Elementary School, 10th Street and Kohl, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Broomfield Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. There recording for this sermon can be found at [Heavy Christian, Light Church #2](http://www.heavychristian.com/sermons/lightchurch2) . The web address for all sermons at Broomfield can be found out as follows: <http://broomfieldopc.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 13, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.