The Judgment of Eli's House and the Ark in Captivity

1 Samuel 4:1b – 5:12

I. INTRODUCTION

a. ***Leadership***: God is removing apathetic and corrupt leaders and replacing them with leaders who fear God and humbly depend on Him

i. The promised judgment on Eli's house takes place; God removes His glory

ii. The removal of Shiloh as the place of God's dwelling and worship center

b. ***Judgment/Repentance***: The beginning of a judgment unto repentance for national Israel

i. Beginning of the transition period from judges to kingly leadership, as Samuel was both the final judge and king-anointer of Saul and David

c. A brief commentary of these events is given in Psalm 78:58-68

II. GOD'S GLORY IS NOT A GOOD-LUCK CHARM: 1 Sam. 4:1-11

a. ***Geography****:* Shiloh was located approx. 20 mi N of Jerusalem in the hill country of Ephraim; Ebenezer approx. 20 mi W of Shiloh; Aphek 2 mi further W

b. ***Judgment Begins:*** Spiritually-dull elders call for the "*ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned upon the cherubim*" (v.3); they did not first seek God's will nor fear His Holiness; instead they treated it as a good luck charm

i. Foolish attempt to "twist God's arm," assuming the Lord would not suffer having His name dishonored before the enemy (Psalm 78:60, 61 – He "*delivered His power to captivity, his glory to the hand of the foe*.")

1. ***"Yahweh will suffer shame rather than allow you to carry on a false relationship with him; and Yahweh will allow you to be disappointed with him if it will awaken you to the sort of God he really is."*** [1]

ii. In a hypocritical show of godliness, Hophni and Phinehas bring the ark into the camp, the weapon of their own destruction, as it were

iii. The Philistine response (v.7,8) is a misunderstanding about Israel's "gods."

1. This misconception is partly Israel's fault. ***Does our behavior and worship accurately display the attributes of God to our neighbors and/or opponents?***

c. ***Judgment Fulfilled****:* the plan backfires, and Hophni and Phinehas are killed. Their final show of false devotion in bringing out the ark only served up their own death sentence.

i. Humanly-speaking – the Philistines were scared into fighting more courageously

ii. Divinely-speaking – the Lord intended this for judgment, not victory

III. THE FALL OF ELI: 1 Sam 4:12-22

a. Historic Transition Point: A serious judgment and an event of historic magnitude in Israel's history. *"Eli's fall from his chair literally dethroned the Elide dynasty in Israel."* [2]

b. Ichabod: A derivative of Hebrew kbd translated heavy or weighty. *"The Hebrew word employed here (kbd) is aptly chosen, for its spectrum of meaning – 'honored,' 'heavy,' 'burdensome' – applies broadly to [Eli] (perhaps a play on words)."* [3]

i. God physically removed His manifest special presence in the ark of the Covenant in judgment; delivering over "his glory to the hand of the foe" (Ps 78:61)
ii. Ichabod's name is symbolic; Eli's priestly line was not completely extinguished until Solomon removed Abiathar the priest for his treachery (1 Kings 2:27)

c. ***Tribe of Ephraim:*** Representative tribe of Joseph's line loses the honor of hosting the worship center, ark, priestly headquarters, and governance capital – that honor goes to the Tribe of Judah

d. ***Shiloh's Destruction Prefigures Later Jerusalem Destruction:*** per Ps 78:60 and Jer 7:12-14, 26:6,9 - Shiloh was destroyed and burned.
i. "Tingling ears" metaphor (1 Sam 3:11) also used for the Babylonian judgment (Jer 19:3)
ii. "The glory has departed" prefigures the later removal of God's manifest glory from Solomon's temple (Ez 10:18) and Jerusalem (Ez 11:23): "*Not until the glory departed from the temple in the days of Ezekiel would an event of similar magnitude occur again.*" [4]

e. ***Judgment Unto Repentance:*** *"…Ichabod and I Samuel 4 teach us that sometimes* ***God must depart from us in order that we might seek him rightly."*** [5]

IV. THE FALL OF DAGON: 1 Sam 5:1-12

a. ***Judgment of Israel's Enemies***: "*that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other*" (1 Kings 8:60).
i. The Philistines attribute their success to their god Dagon and place the ark in Dagon's presence to honor him, but Dagon instead honors Yahweh.
ii. A second attempt to display Dagon's sovereignty results in his execution (head and hands cut off) in his own house. This is the second time Dagon has been destroyed in his own house (recall Samson's final act) when attempting to display dominance over Israel's God.
iii. The Philistines are afflicted with the "plagues of Egypt" that were promised to the Israelites for disobedience (see Deut 28:27, 35). The Philistines' fears of 4:7-8 come to fruition.
1. Possibly a form of the bubonic plague, since mice were involved (6:4)
2. Dagon was not able to deliver from the hand of Yahweh
3. Their "cry went up to heaven" (v.12), and God shows compassion and gives their leaders wisdom for how to return the ark of the Lord. They understood in some sense that these things had come upon them from the hand of Israel's God.

V. PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

a. The Lord graciously cares for us, but He does not serve our will. We serve His will.
b. Judgment begins with the house of God. At times, judgment and grace are simultaneous.
c. God at times withholds His hand in judgment until the right time, in His sovereign wisdom.
d. Salvation's joy and blessings accompany growing awareness of His holiness.
e. We should put God on display correctly, not confuse the world about His character.
f. Let us avoid a display of false piety ("*Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them*," Matt 6:1). Not ungodliness, but true godliness, rooted in a heart that loves God and seeks to please Him.

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[1] Davis, Dale Ralph. *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*. Christian Focus Publications Ltd, p.55

[2, 3, 4] Bergen, Robert D. *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, 1, 2 Samuel, Vol.7*. B&H Publishing Group. p.94

[5] Davis, Dale Ralph, p.57