

INTRODUCTION

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Hannah didn't answer that question, [see 1 Samuel 1:8] because more than anything else she wanted children. So, one year when they went to Shiloh to worship, everybody else was celebrating and Hannah was so burdened that she fell on her face before Eli, the prophet. She was weeping and crying and groaning but no noise was coming out. She was just moving her lips. Eli looked at her and said, "What are you doing woman? You're drunk." She says, "No, I'm not. I just really want God to bless me with a son. Well God heard her prayer and she gave birth to a son. She named him Sam-u-el, which is Hebrew for "heard of God." In other words, "God heard my prayer."

She had other children after that, but because Samuel was her first child and God heard her prayer, she dedicated Samuel to the Lord and to the service of the Lord. When Samuel was just a little boy, she took him back to Eli at Shiloh and she allowed him to be a servant at the tabernacle. They didn't have a temple yet but that's where the Ark of the Lord was and Eli was the priest. You've heard the story about when Samuel was just a little boy and one night in the middle of the night he heard "Samuel!" and he got up and ran into Eli's room and said, "Eli, yes, sir what do you want?" "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." Samuel goes back into his room and hears "Samuel!" He thinks it's Eli so he goes back into Eli's room and says, "Yes, sir. What do you want?" "I didn't call you." Finally, of course, Eli realizes that it's God speaking. So, he says to little Samuel. "The next time you hear someone call you just say, "Speak, Lord. Your servant is hearing." So, that's what happened. God spoke to Samuel and he responded in obedience and in service. Samuel grew up in the Tabernacle of the Lord. There was a real problem there with Eli. Eli had two rebellious sons. Their names were Hophni and Phinehas. Because they were the spiritual leaders of the nation, their own moral lifestyle represented spiritual decay and spiritual decline and so it led to a time of spiritual decay and decline in the entire nation of Israel. Tonight I want to talk to you about "when the glory of God departs." How it happens and how you can overcome it.

I. THE MISTAKES THEY MADE

1. They robbed God

The first thing I want to talk about is Eli and his two sons and the mistakes they made that led to the glory of God departing. Number one, when it came to the offerings, they robbed God.

1 Samuel 2:17, 29. "This sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt...[God said] 'Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people, Israel?'"

In the Old Testament there was a special offering prescribed called "the meat offering." It is rather strange. They would take a piece of meat, for example a big pot roast, and they would take

that roast and put it in a big pot and boil it. Then they would take that meat and it was an offering to the Lord. Then what would the people do? Would they just pour it out? No, they ate it for themselves. The priests could take a three-pronged fork and after that meat, which had a lot of fat in it had been boiling for a long time, could stick the fork into the boiling pot and whatever came up on the fork the priests could keep. That was a kind of payment. You can imagine a piece of meat that has been boiling for a long time is really tender and has a lot of fat and if you put a fork in it, you may get a little bit of meat, but you may not get very much. So Phinehas and Hophni decided they were not content to do it God’s way. So, they began to demand when people were bringing their meat for the offering, “No, we don’t want you to boil it! We want you to cut us off a big part of it before you cook it! We’re not content with that little old fork full we want a big part of it. If you don’t do that, we’re going to take it from you by force!” This was the same thing as robbing God and God was upset about that. God had been offended and insulted by them robbing him.

I am telling you about this even though we don’t have a “meat offering,” because it is still possible today to rob God. The Bible says in Malachi 3:8, “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. ‘But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ ‘In tithes and offerings.’” The Bible says everything we have comes from God. He is the owner of everything. To show his ownership over everything that we have, we are to return to him at least a tithe—ten percent—of all that we receive. The Bible says if we don’t, we are robbing God! Did you know the glory can depart from your life, from your family if you do not take God’s requirement for offerings seriously? God said in 1 Samuel 2:17. “...they were treating the Lord’s offering with contempt.” They weren’t taking it seriously. That’s the first thing they did. They robbed God.

2. They used God for their gain

The second mistake they made is they used God for their own gain. In the midst of this story there are some great truths and some great principles. After God warned Eli that his sons were about to make some big mistakes, He makes a positive promise.

1 Samuel 2:30. “Therefore the Lord, God of Israel, declares: ‘I promise that your house and your father’s house would minister before me forever.’ But now the Lord declares: ‘Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained.’”

Most of you have seen the movie “Chariots of Fire” about Eric Liddel, a sprinter from England who went to the 1924 Olympics. His event was the hundred meter dash. That was what he was good at and he was predicted to be the Gold Medal winner at the 1924 Olympics. One of the qualifying heats was held on a Sunday and because Eric Liddel was such a committed Christian, to him it would have comprised a commitment he had made to the Lord earlier, so he said, “I’m not going to run.” He went all the way to the Olympics and he wasn’t even going to qualify for the event he was the best in. He backed away and said, “I’m not going to do it!” Eric Liddel would have been happy to not even run anymore. As you remember he was allowed to run in the four hundred meter race that wasn’t even his main event. As he was lining up in the starting blocks for the four hundred meter race, there was an American runner who handed him a piece of paper. On that paper was written, “God says ‘He who honors me I will honor him.’” That

come from 1 Samuel 2:30. Eric Liddel took off and started running. He was used to running the hundred meter dash so he got out in front of all the runners, but after about one hundred and fifty or two hundred meters, he was getting tired and the other runners passed him. If you have ever read his biography, you know Eric Liddel ran with the spirit and power of God in his life. He threw back his head and began to run in a way that was not the best running posture but he just said, “He became full of the presence of God and God came all over him” and he ran and won the race! Where does that principle come from? “He who honors me I will honor him.” It comes from 1 Samuel 2:30. What’s the context? The context is not running a race, although it applied to Eric Liddel. The context is “making an offering to the Lord.” If you do what the Bible says in Proverbs 3:9, if you honor the Lord with the firstfruits of your income, God will honor you! It doesn’t work if you try to use God, if you try to make God your servant or tool. That’s the second mistake they made, they tried to use God for their own gain.

At this time the Israelites were always fighting against the Philistines. They did for several hundred years. They were in a battle and said, “We are losing the battle; we are desperate! What are we going to do?”

1 Samuel 4:3. “When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, ‘Why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the Lord’s covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.’”

The Israelite army went into battle and was defeated by the Philistines. They came running back to Shiloh. They said, “What are we going to do?” Somebody came up with a bright idea but it was a terrible idea. “Let’s take the Ark of the Lord!” This was a rectangular box, pretty well depicted in “Raiders of the Lost Ark.” It had a top with figures of cherubim bending over with their wings almost touching. Inside the Ark was a bowl of manna and Aaron’s rod. They thought God’s power was wherever the Ark was. So, they picked up the Ark and carried it into battle thinking the Ark would be their good luck charm. “Let’s use God to help us out!”

That’s like people who put a plastic Jesus on their dashboards. They’re using Jesus as some kind of superstitious symbol. It’s like somebody who uses the Bible as some kind of superstitious good luck charm. They never read it, but they carry it around with them or they put it up on the dashboard of their car. What they did not know and what some people don’t know was it was not the “Ark of God” who was their protection—it was the God of the Ark. It is not the word of God that is your protection; it is the God of the word who is your protection. They tried to use God as their own little good luck charm. Be careful that you don’t try to use God for your own gain.

II. THE MISERY THEY FACED

1. They were defeated in battle

That’s the mistakes that they made. Let’s talk about the misery they faced. Because they did these things, some bad things happened. The first thing that happened was they were defeated in battle. When they carried the Ark of God as a good luck charm out into the battle, 34,000 Israelites were killed. They thought, “If we can only carry this box out into the battle,” because

they had the mentality of "God in a box," "If we can just get the box out there, God will be there and God will protect us." What happened?

1 Samuel 4:10. "So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. The ark of God was capture, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died."

Wait a minute didn't they have the Ark of God right out there in the middle of the battle? Yes! Didn't they have God in a box? NO! You can't confine God to a box. Some people think God is in this building. They come into church and they think, "Well, God is here." Yes, he is here! But they think, "When I leave this box, I leave God. I can use a different vocabulary. I can do different things because I've left the box." They made the mistake of trying to stuff God into a box. If you rob God and if you try to use God for your own gain, you will experience spiritual defeat.

2. They were deserted by the presence of God

Here's the second thing that happened. What's worse than defeat? Desolation. They were deserted by the presence of God, by the glory of God! Word comes back to Eli. "Eli, your two sons have been killed in battle." That did not surprise Eli, because an angel had already told him that was going to happen and Samuel had also prophesied it. So Eli wasn't surprised but when the messenger told Eli that the Philistines had captured the Ark of God, the Bible says Eli, who at this time was 98 years old and very fat, was so shocked when he heard the Ark had been captured, he fell over backward and broke his neck and died. But that wasn't the end of the story. Meanwhile, Phinehas' wife who was pregnant when she heard number one, that her husband was dead and number two, her father-in-law had just died and number three, that the Ark of God had been captured, she immediately went into premature labor. In giving birth to the child she died. The Bible says her labor pains were so difficult that she died. She gave birth to a son and just as she was dying, she said, "Name my son, Ichabod," because Ichabod means "the glory of God has left." The presence of God, the power of God and the glory of God are no longer here. He's deserted us. We are left desolate! Everywhere Ichabod went they said, "There's Ichabod. The glory has departed." And every time they saw him or called his name they were reminded that the glory and presence of God was gone out of that place. I can't imagine anybody naming anybody Ichabod!

"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is the story about Ichabod Crane written by Washington Irving. I can't imagine anybody really named Ichabod, but do you know that even today in 1999, there are some churches God has written "Ichabod" over? They are still churches but there is no glory there. The presence of God is not there. It's sad to say, but there are some families God has written, "Ichabod" over and there are probably some individual Christians who if they were honest they would bear the label "Ichabod." Have you ever been in an Ichabod church? Have you ever been in a church where the glory of God is just not there anymore? How do you identify an Ichabod church?

1. An Ichabod church has a form of godliness, but no power of God

Number one. They have a form of godliness but no power. They go through the motions. They have a form of godliness, but the power of God is not there. I hate to say this, but sometimes the more "formal" churches are, the more they try to substitute ritual for the reality of God. I like what the old Methodist evangelist, Sam Jones, used to say. "Some churches have confused dignity with deadness." The most dignified a person ever gets is usually when they are in a coffin. He says, "Some people try to be so dignified in worship and they confuse dignity with deadness." They have a form they go through the motions but the power of God is not there.

2. An Ichabod church is committed to a system but not to the Savior

Number two. An Ichabod church is committed to a system but not to the Savior. In other words, they have a system of running programs and running ministries and it's the same thing over and over and over again. Every year it's the same thing; every Sunday it's the same thing; every week it's the same thing; every month it's the same thing. They are committed to a system and maintaining that system rather than surrendering to Jesus.

3. An Ichabod church works to maintain, not to minister

Number three. An Ichabod Baptist church always works to maintain not to minister. They just want to maintain things the way they are. They don't want to change anything they don't want to step out in faith they don't want to expect God for great things. They just want to maintain things exactly as they are.

How tragic it was that the glory of God departed from the people who call themselves, "the children of God," the Israelites. The glory of God was departed for a number of months and it's sad to see that sometimes there in a church. There may be an individual that the presence of God has seemingly left them desolate. What happened to the Ark? We don't have time to read it, but I will tell you what happened. The Philistines captured the Ark. Have you ever heard the expression, "grabbing a tiger by its tail?" They grabbed the "creator of the tiger by its Ark." First, they took the Ark to a place called Ashdod, which was their capitol. They had this big idol this "small g" god named Dagon and they said, "Where are we going to put the Ark?" "I don't know. Let's put it in there in front of Dagon." The next morning they went in and the statue of Dagon had fallen over on its face. They said, "Boy, the wind must have been blowing hard last night!" So, they picked the statue up. The next morning they went in and not only was the statue of Dagon down, but his head and hands were broken off and Dagon was lying over the threshold of the door broken in pieces. The Bible says, "And that's why today the prophets of Dagon never step on a threshold. They always step over a threshold." You've heard that superstition, "Step on a crack and break your momma's back" Something started happening to the people of Ashdod. The Bible says they suddenly had a profusion of deadly rats; tumors infected their bodies until people started dying. They finally said, "We don't want this Ark any more!" So, they took it down to Gath, which is also called the city of Gad, and the people in Gad had heard about all the things that happened to the people in Ashdod and they said, "We don't want the Ark either! No, thank you!" But they said, "We don't care whether you want it or not, you're going to take it!" They put the Ark in Gad for a while and the same thing happened: rats, tumors, people dying. So, they picked it up and said, "We're going to take it to Ekron." The people of that city said, "We don't want it either!" But they put it there anyway. The same thing happened: rats, tumors,

people dying Finally, they decided. "We don't really want the Ark."

So, they put it on a new cart and got two cows that had never been hitched to a cart before and said, "If these two cows take the Ark back to the Israelites, it's not us doing it." They also took the calves of those two momma cows and put them in a pen. They hitched up those two cows and what do momma cows usually do, especially if they have never pulled a cart before? They're going to go to their babies, but not these two cows. They took off straight back to the territory of the Israelites. So the Ark was back on the Israeli territory and then for several years it stayed in one place, because people were afraid of it. It stayed there for more than twenty years. Later, at a place called Mizpah, an older and more mature Samuel was the final judge, the first prophet, the transitional character from Judges to Kings. Samuel said, "It's time for us to repent!"

IV. THE MIRACLE THEY EXPERIENCED

Number three notice the miracle they experienced. The Ark was at Kiriath Jearim for twenty years and finally Samuel says, "It's time for us to get right with God." Look what happened when they repented of their sins together as a group.

1 Samuel 7:3-4. "And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, 'If you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. So the Israelite put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only.'"

1. They repented of their sins

Do you know what they did? Not just one individual, but as a group, they repented of their sins. What does it mean to repent of your sins? It not only means you confess it to the Lord, but it means you get rid of some of the junk in your life. I'll never forget a man who came to me and said, "I have been leading a private life that is not pure." This was a man who was enslaved to pornography. He said, "I want to get right with God. In order to show how I want to get right with God, I brought all of this." He opened a suitcase. It was full of magazines and pictures and dirty, filthy tapes. He said, "Pastor, I want us to go outside and burn these!" So we found a 55-gallon drum, dumped all that filth in there, poured kerosene over it and lit a match and stood around there singing "Amazing Grace." He was getting rid of his Baals. He was getting rid of his Ashtoreths. He was visibly repenting of his sins.

I'll never forget another time I was taking a youth group from our church on a retreat and God did some amazing things in the lives of some of those teenagers. This was during the time of some of the "heavy metal rockers." Some of these kids got really right with God and they spent a whole weekend away from this music that had really been messing up some of their minds. One of those boys went back into his room and turned on his cassette player and he turned on some of that music he had been listening to and he said, "God screamed out at him and said, 'That is wrong!'" This kid said, "Pastor, I just want to burn some of these tapes and some of these records." Some of his friends did the same thing. On a Sunday night after church we had about 30 or 40 teenagers around a big pile of some of their heavy metal stuff they were getting rid of

and we burned it! They were getting rid of their Baals and their Ashtoreths. Repentance always results in you getting rid of some things in your life which shouldn't be there. Do you have any Baals? Any Ashtoreths? Anything that's keeping you from being all God wants you to be? Get rid of them. That is true repentance.

2. God helped them after they repented

The second thing that happened was God helped them after they repented. While they were worshiping God Mizpah the Philistines said, "Hey, it's a good time to attack them again!" So they came down on them to attack and the Bible says God thundered and the Philistines panicked and were routed, massacred, and the enemies of God were destroyed. In 1 Samuel 7:12, the Bible says Samuel set a stone up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, which means, "The Lord has helped us!" So the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again.

There is a verse in the song, "Come Thou, Fount of Every Blessing" that says, "Here I raise mine Ebenezer; hither by Thy help I'm come." When I was kid I used to sing that song, and I said, "Here I raise my what? What in the world is an Ebenezer?" Well, an Ebenezer was a stone Samuel set up that simply said, "God has helped me and he has delivered me from my enemies."

Has God helped you? Has God delivered you from some of your enemies? Maybe you need to set up some kind of an Ebenezer, some symbol or sign, something tangible and visible. It may be a piece of Christian art or it maybe a book you read that's meant a lot to you—just something you can look at and say, "This is my Ebenezer!" It's not a good luck charm. It has no power. It is simply a reminder that God has helped you and so here I raise my Ebenezer and I know that when trouble comes again, my God will help me.

God is real! If you make the mistake of robbing him in an offering and trying to use him for your own gain, you are going to experience misery but when you repent that's when God will be there to help you!

OUTLINE

I. THE MISTAKES THEY MADE

1. They robbed God
2. They used God for their gain

II. THE MISERY THEY FACED

1. They were defeated in battle
2. They were deserted by the presence of God

How to identify an Ichabod church:

1. It has a form of godliness, but no power of God
2. It is committed to a system but not to the Savior
3. Works to maintain, not to minister

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1. They repented of their sins
2. God helped them after they repented



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes