**THE TRAGEDY OF ICABOD**

AND DOES IT RELATE TO US TODAY

In 1 Samuel Chapter Four we read about a tragic story in Israel’s history that stands as a warning that needs to be understood and heeded because of the horrible outcome.

The following is a simple outline of what happened in Israel back when the nation was ruled by judges. The high priest Eli served as Judge over Israel at this time. He had two sons, Phinehas and Hophni who were priests but did not know God and were very corrupt.

1 Samuel 2:12 &17 –*Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord. herefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.*

Moreover, Eli failed to correct his sons and allowed them to continue in their office of priest while persisting in their corruption and defiance of God’s ordinances. For this God sent a prophet to Eli saying that the priesthood would be removed from his family and his sons would be eliminated. The same message was again delivered to Eli by the young child Samuel who was now in his service.

1 Samuel 3:12-13 – *In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.*

Chapter Four begins with the Philistines going into battle against Israel which suffered a significant defeat with four thousand men slain. Since Israel had no real spiritual leadership they depended on their own corrupt and misguided resources. After that first day of battle going poorly they devised a scheme for the next day’s battle. They would call for the Ark of the Covenant of God to be brought into the battle. They thought this would bring them the victory as the Ark represented God’s presence to Israel.

The priests, Phinehas and Hophni were willing accomplices in this scheme and they brought the Ark to the battle ground the next day. When the Ark arrived, the Israelites broke out in a great cheer thinking they now had the secret weapon that would win the battle for them. The Philistine camp heard the triumphant shout from the Israeli camp and began to fear because they knew Israel’s historic triumph over their past enemies because God was with them. But then they came to their senses and encouraged themselves saying they were not going to become slaves to the Israelis.

Meanwhile, Eli, having knowledge of God, yet not properly living by it, began to fear for the Ark knowing it was being wrongly used. Sure enough, when the battle ensued, Israel was soundly defeated, the Ark was captured by the enemy, and Phinehas and Hophni were killed. One survivor of the battle returned to Shiloh to report the defeat which set the town to mourning. When Eli heard the noise of mourning he asked what it was about. The man then gave his report to Eli who then fell backwards off his seat and broke his neck and died.

Then the next tragedy occurred:

1 Samuel 4:19-22 – *Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas’ wife, was with child, due to be delivered; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and gave birth, for her labor pains came upon her. And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, “Do not fear, for you have borne a son.” But she did not answer, nor did she regard it. Then she named the child Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel!” because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.”*

ICHABOD means “The Glory of God is Departed”. This was a very serious matter that was the result of the steady spiritual decline of Israel in its relationship with God. First note that the priesthood was not living up to its responsibility. This left the people without a proper representation to God for their sins and also without representation of God to the people of the knowledge of His Holiness and covenant promises. The people were left to their own resources, of which were very deficient in the time of need.

Israel’s main source of God’s presence was the Ark of the Covenant. Their lack of true spiritual guidance left them with the wrong ideas concerning the Ark; they thought to use it a weapon in battle.

1 Samuel 4:3 – *And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies.”*

What a great error to think of the Ark as a weapon; they misrepresented it; desecrated and defamed it. The Ark was “The Mercy Seat” of God; it represented God’s divine mercy, grace and forgiveness and the way of righteousness – it was not a weapon of war, judgment and destruction. Misapplying the means of the mercy and grace of God caused Israel to lose the ARK because it lost its meaning and representation to the people. They no longer deserved to have God’s presence manifest among them because they forsook Him; all because the priesthood failed in their responsibility.

How does this tragic story relate to conditions in the church and our nation today? We need to realize that the condition of our society is a direct reflection of the effectiveness and influence of the church. It is a sad state of affairs showing that the church, with few exceptions, is nothing more than a social or fraternal organization of man. The manifest presence of God by His Spirit has departed and is no longer evident. ICHABOD now applies to the church in general!

A serious and close look at the church today clearly shows that the Holy Spirit has left what is recognized as the church, with few exceptions. Why? Look at the results! The churches today may be making a lot of noise but are not making a positive impact on society. In fact, much of society sees the church as a mockery with TV preachers pitching for money and making phony claims. Add to this the watered-down messages that embrace all manner of social issues that were in the past considered immoral and sinful.

How does society view the church? They see it seriously divided by doctrines and dogmas and various practices by which they oppose one another. We see false doctrines; traditions which are not Biblical; worldly behavior (as foretold by the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-5); materialism, selfishness and pride (as identified by the Laodicean church of Revelation 3); dependence on man rather than the leading of the Holy Spirit; even including idolatry, (the worship of people such as entertainers, sports personalities, and other things that occupy their time, attention, devotion and money).

There is also another parallel between the church today and Israel at the time of Eli and Samuel. This is in regards to the Ark of the Covenant back then and God’s Word containing the New Covenant today. Much of the church today does not have proper regard for God’s Word – the Bible, which explains the blessings of the New Covenant. Some disregard it completely; some have perverted it; some use it to justify their sins; others abuse it and use it as a weapon against other Churches or Christians; some use it to justify their pursuit of worldly possessions, carnal appetites, wealth and prosperity. Still some hold fast to the Bible and its truth, but to a limited degree, not accepting all the truth provided, saying these things are not for today, this is because we are too educated or sophisticated to believe in the supernatural, the Gifts of the Spirit, etc.

Since Christ is no longer properly represented in the church, His Spirit has withdrawn which leaves us with ICHABOD! With so many churches misrepresenting Christ it becomes time for God to deal with it:

1 Peter 4:17 – *For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

What is missing in these churches where the Glory of God has departed? … truth, discernment, righteous separation, the ability to hear God, Godly leadership, humility and meekness, the Fruit of the Spirit (which is the character and nature of God), Godly compassion (love), and selflessness, just to name some of what is missing..

The issue of false doctrines, which includes doctrines of man and demons, cause people to believe things that are not of God, are not true, and cause them to be misled and go in wrong directions and engage in false practices.

1 Timothy 4:1 – *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,*

The following is a vision the Lord gave me several years ago when I was praying about the state of the church. This was a vision of a dust cloud, the dust being the false doctrines in the churches.

I saw a dust cloud covering the church. This dust cloud obscures the glory of God so that His glory cannot not be seen in or by the church. Where did all the dust come from and what causes it? The wind blows the dust into, upon and throughout the church so that the dust covers everything; (every housekeeper knows how this works). Man is made from the dust of the earth. The dust is the traditions and doctrines of man that forms the cloud that the wind has blown into the church and enveloped it. This cloud of dust keeps us from seeing and experiencing the glory (the full revelation and manifestation, dignity and character) of God:

Ephesians 4:14 - *“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every* ***wind of doctrine****, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;”*

What settles dust and clears it from the air? ... RAIN, as in the later rain!

James 5:7 – *Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts* (in Him and in His Word)*, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

The true and proper outpouring of the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Truth revealing God’s Word) as rain coming down will remove the dust from the air and cleanse the church of false doctrines. However, the rain of the Holy Spirit can only come where His rain is prayed for, sought after and allowed to be poured out. Note: you don't want an umbrella when this rain begins to fall - you want to be fully soaked by this rain; it will wash out the garbage that is in the church/believer.

What is the result of the Glory of God not being in the church?

2 Timothy 3:5 – *having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!*

God’s power to forgive, deliver, heal and manifest in the lives of believers is not happening. With the Word of God (His New Covenant) negated by the church, then His glory departs. If the glory of God has departed, what is left? Lifeless, dead doctrines of man! A powerless church, unable to effect or influence society! This is where we are now and it needs to change.

How? As in the case with ancient Israel, since the priesthood failed in their task, God went outside the priesthood and brought in His prophets and teachers, even a couple kings, who restored God’s Word which also brought His presence back to His people when they repented.

The following is an excerpt from Carter Conlon’s book, The 180 Degree Christian, published by Regal 2012, that addresses the same problem.

There is a season where the selfishness of those who are God’s own people is so consuming that it obscures His glory. We are called to stand for Him. The Holy Spirit should be able to point to us and say, “This is My Church, and this represents Christ. If you want to know what Jesus Christ was like, look at My Church.” Yet there comes a point when the only way that Christ can be brought to reputation is to bring divine judgment (chastisement) so that others will know the behavior of “His people” is not a true manifestation of who is the real Christ. It is when God says, “Enough! I can no longer walk with this. I can no longer allow My Name to be proclaimed through the nation like this and let people think this represents Me!”

Yes, much of the church today is misrepresenting Christ, so much so that the glory of God has departed. What will it take to restore His Glory to His Church? We need a genuine spiritual awakening and revival and it must begin at the house of God – THE CHRUCH! We need God’s servants, His special army, going forth with His Word of Truth to be declared with boldness and power, the demonstration of the Holy Spirit, to bring conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment. This is His Work and it is by His Spirit working through His servants.

John 14:7-11 – *Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper* (Holy Spirit) *will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.*