

## *Israel's Legacy of Unfaithfulness - The Sanctuary at Shiloh*

### **I. Introduction**

1. Israel's inheritance of Canaan demonstrated God's covenant faithfulness – He'd fulfilled His oath to bring Abraham's offspring to dwell with Him in His sanctuary land.
2. But the circumstance was very different with the covenant "son." From the moment Yahweh liberated Israel from Egypt they complained against Him and disbelieved His word to them. And their triumphal settlement in Canaan didn't change their attitude and orientation; *indeed, their unfaithfulness only increased to the point that Yahweh's covenant son became indistinguishable from the pagan nations around them.*

### **II. Israel's Legacy of Unfaithfulness – The Sanctuary at Shiloh**

Israel's early life in Yahweh's sanctuary land was marked by infidelity that expressed itself in alienation, enmity and calamity. Moses and Joshua had warned and exhorted their countrymen to embrace life, but they had chosen death (cf. Deut. 30:15-20; Joshua 24:1-28). Israel's unbelief and unfaithfulness touched every dimension of its existence, including the ministration of the sanctuary, which was the very marrow of the nation's relationship with its covenant God.

#### **A. The Defilement of the Sanctuary (1 Samuel 2:12-25)**

When the land was being divided under Joshua's leadership, the tabernacle was installed at *Shiloh* near Bethel in the region of Ephraim (Joshua 18:1). (*Shiloh* is derived from the verb *shalah*, "to be at ease," suggesting both Israel's covenant goal of secure, prosperous rest in the land and Yahweh's settled presence with them.) The tabernacle was a portable sanctuary, and yet it remained at Shiloh for more than three centuries throughout the period of the Judges.

The book of Judges details Israel's pervasive corruption, but doesn't address that corruption as it reached to the ministration of Yahweh's sanctuary. That task falls to *1 Samuel*, which traces the transition from the era of Israel's judges to the Israelite monarchy. *Samuel* was the key figure in that transition, being Israel's final judge and the man who installed Saul as Israel's first king. *1 Samuel* (the first half of the book of Samuel in the Jewish scriptures) opens with Samuel's birth and consecration to serve Yahweh in His sanctuary (1 Samuel 1:1-28), and this circumstance introduces Eli and his sons as the ministering priests at that time. Their priesthood is the means the text uses to show that Israel's corruption had reached to its most sacred institution.

#### **1. The Sin of Eli's Sons (2:12-17)**

Eli's two sons are the focal point in the text's treatment of the corrupt priesthood, and it describes them succinctly as *worthless men who didn't know Yahweh*, though they were ordained to serve Him on Israel's behalf. They're depicted as vile and callous men who were brazen and shameless in their self-indulgence. They abused God's sacrifices and defrauded Him of them, even openly mocking Him by using their office to gratify their sexual interest.

#### **2. The Sin of Eli (2:22-25, 29, 3:13)**

Though Eli knew of his sons' outrageous conduct, he allowed it, even benefiting from it. He ultimately confronted them, but refused to hold them accountable. As so often happens, *Eli honored his sons more than he honored God.* \* ref. 2:27-29, 3:10-13; cf. Matt. 10:32-37

## B. The Lord's Response (2:27-3:18)

1. Yahweh responded by sending one His prophets to rebuke Eli and pronounce His judgment upon him and his household. *In a fitting irony, Eli's house would continue to serve in the priesthood, but only for the sake of its own distress under the Lord's punishing hand.*
2. Beginning with Eli himself, his family's priestly legacy was to be one of sorrow, suffering and premature death (vv. 31-34). Eli's own life would soon come to an end, but not before seeing Yahweh take his sons' lives and deliver His ark into the hands of a pagan enemy.

*Nevertheless, this wouldn't be the final word for Aaron's priesthood; indeed, God was going to raise up a faithful priest whose household would endure before Him forever – a priestly house to whom Eli's once exalted house would grovel in deprivation and desperate need.*

3. Yahweh then confirmed this word of judgment through the young boy Samuel, even as Eli encouraged him that the Lord was reaching out to him in order to speak to him.
4. As to the Lord's promise of a future faithful priest and priestly house, *Zadok* (not Samuel) is the first clear fulfillment of it. Zadok was a descendent of Aaron through Eleazar (Eli was a descendent of Ithamar), and Solomon appointed him as chief priest in the place of Abiathar, who was of Eli's household (1 Kings 2:26-35). After this, Zadok's house held the priesthood perpetually up until the destruction of the temple and Judah's exile (2 Chron. 31:10).

*But this pledge, as all of Yahweh's promises, looked beyond Zadok, and even the Aaronic priesthood itself, to a greater and final priest of a different order. Yahweh would establish this high priest and his priesthood forever, giving him priestly descendents, not through natural generation, but by sharing in His life by His Spirit. \* Jer. 33:14-22 with 1 Peter 2:1-10 and Rev. 5:1-10, 20:6; cf. also Ezek. 40:1-44:16, esp. 40:45-47, 43:18-19, and 44:9-16*

## C. The Lord's Fulfilled Word (4:1-18)

1. The initial fulfillment of the Lord's word to Eli and his house came in the form of a Philistine military triumph. When the Israelite forces were routed on the battlefield, Israel's elders decided to send for Yahweh's ark, believing it would turn the tide of war in their favor. The ark's presence in the Israelite camp frightened the Philistines, but their fear only strengthened their resolve to fight harder, so that they went on to win a massive victory, slaughtering the Israelite fighters and taking Yahweh's ark as booty after killing Eli's two sons.
2. When this news reached Eli, he fell backward in his seat in shock and broke his neck. So also the news caused Phinehas' pregnant wife to go into labor, resulting in her death. But before she died, she named her new son *Ichabod* ("no glory"); brought forth in tragedy and death, this child would be a perpetual reminder that Yahweh's glory had departed from Israel.
3. And the departure of Yahweh's glory signified the departure of Yahweh *Himself*. From the day the tabernacle was consecrated at Sinai, God had manifested His presence by His glory-cloud – His *Shekinah* – residing between the wings of the cherubim in the Holy of Holies (cf. Exodus 25:17-22, 40:33-35; Leviticus 16:2). The ark of the covenant was the ark of the Lord's presence, *and thus the capture of the ark meant Yahweh had gone into exile.*
  - a. But since God's dwelling was inside the veil, it wasn't the ark's capture that initiated the condition of *ichabod*; *that condition began with the ark's removal from the sanctuary.*

- b. In effect, Yahweh's glory began its departure from Israel the moment the priests carried the ark from its appointed place, *repeating the idolatry of the golden calf episode by believing that Yahweh could be manipulated into coming to His people's aid. What transpired on the battlefield, then, only made the Lord's departure painfully obvious.*
4. Yahweh had promised desolation and degradation to Eli's house and distress upon His own dwelling, and those parallel judgments implicated the priesthood and its ministration. *The death of Eli and his sons meant that there was no one to minister before the Lord, but it really didn't matter, because the tabernacle was now just a religious shrine. Israel had exiled Yahweh from His sanctuary, and He'd affirmed that exile by the capture of the ark.*
5. The ark would eventually be restored to Israel, but the judgment associated with its departure would continue in some form until the temple was destroyed in 586 B.C., *thus bringing to a climax the Lord's word that His dwelling place would see distress.* \* ref. 1 Sam. 2:30-32

#### **D. The Return of the Ark (5:1-7:2)**

Following its capture, the ark remained in Philistine hands for seven months, being moved from place to place as the Lord fiercely punished those who possessed it. Finally, the Philistines consulted their priests and diviners, who exhorted them to return the ark to Israel and its God with a guilt offering in the hope of turning away His wrath and bringing healing to their nation.

1. Thus the Philistines loaded Yahweh's ark on a new cart and sent it away toward Beth-shemesh along with a box containing five gold tumors (images of boils) and gold mice as a guilt offering on behalf of the five Philistine princes and their cities. \* 6:1-12
2. The Israelites in Beth-shemesh rejoiced when they saw the ark approaching, but Yahweh struck the city with a great slaughter when some dared to open it and look inside. This provoked the townspeople to immediately send the ark to Kiriath-jearim, where it was placed in the house of a man named Abinadab, where it remained for twenty years. \* 6:13-7:2

*The text gives no explanation for why the ark wasn't returned to Shiloh and its rightful place in the Holy of Holies, but it clearly wants the reader to understand that "ichabod" continued, even though the ark of Yahweh's presence was again within Israel's borders.*

### **III. Conclusion**

1. The ark of Yahweh's presence continued in exile from His sanctuary for twenty years, and it was *David* who finally ended this exile and restored Yahweh's ark to His dwelling place.
  - a. And he did so as Yahweh's anointed *king* – a son of Judah whom the Lord set apart as a man "after His own heart" to rule His covenant people in His name and authority.
  - b. David reunited Yahweh's ark and sanctuary as His chosen king, but most importantly as His *triumphal* king. David completed Israel's triumph by conquering Jerusalem as the last remaining Canaanite stronghold, and it was there that David brought the ark.
2. David secured the kingdom promised to Abraham, and the climax of His triumph was his regal and priestly action in enthroning Yahweh on Mount Zion, thus ending His long exile. David was Israel's uniquely great and glorious king, and yet he – in his person as well as his deeds – was to find his own destiny and ultimate glory in the son Yahweh promised to him.