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The Birth of Ichabod

4: 19-22

The Birth of Ichabod DIG: How was Phinehas' wife different from her husband or father-in-law? Why didn't she respond to the birth of a son? Compare Hannah's naming of her child with that of Phinehas' wife. Why did the glory depart from Isra'el? What is the Sh'khinah glory? What eventually happened to the Ark?

REFLECT: What is the purpose of God withdrawing His blessing (not your salvation) from you, as a result of violating His commandments? What is God's proof of His grace for those who have fallen away? When have your sins cried out "Ichabod?" What did you do about it? How can we move from Ichabod to Immanuel?

The Sh'khinah glory of the LORD departed from Isra'el; no longer her strong defense and sure ally.

The chain of tragic events in 'Eli's family was not yet completed. **'Eli's daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was pregnant and was about to give birth (4:19a). She** had more spiritual insight than **her father-in-law ('Eli), her husband (Phinehas), and her brother-in-law (Hophni)** put together. **The two brothers** used **the Ark** as a good-luck-charm, and **'Eli** was only concerned with the safety of **the Ark**, but **she** was burdened for **God's glory**.¹²⁴



The dark beginning of a new era: When she heard the news that the Ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and husband were dead ([to see link click Bc - The Death of 'Eli](#)), she went into premature labor, bent over and gave birth. That sudden delivery proved fatal to her, and realizing what was happening, the mid-wife standing by her tried to console her, saying: **Don't be afraid, because you have given birth to a son.** To a Jewish woman, bearing a son was the high point of her life. But she was not consoled. **She didn't respond or pay attention**, because she was preoccupied with the divine judgment that had fallen on Isra'el (4:19b-4:20).¹²⁵

She named the child Ichabod [without glory]. One cannot help but note the contrast between Hannah's naming of her child and Phinehas' wife. One child was named with hope and gratitude because **"I have asked ADONAI for him"** (1:20b), while the other with apathy and despair, for **the glory has departed (4:21a).**¹²⁶ However, the fact that the child lived is a reminder to us that 'Eli's family was not entirely wiped out at this time (1 Sam 2:31-33 and 36). There are further references to 'Eli's family in First Samuel 14:3 (also see 1 Sam 22:9; 2 Sam 19:11; 1 Kings 2:27). The death of the grandfather is balanced by the birth of a grandson, but the cheerless event brought no hope because, as these references show, the family failed to prosper.¹²⁷

Phinehas' wife declared, "The glory has departed from Isra'el," because the Ark of God had been captured, and because of the death of her father-in-law and husband (4:21b). The term **glory** represents the visual manifestation of the glory of God, dwelling (Hebrew: *skn*) in the Tabernacle (Psalm 26:8; Exodus 25:8 and 29:44-46), giving rise to the Hebrew term *s'kina*, which is referred to as the **Sh'khinah glory**. Hebrews 9:5a clarifies the connection between the Ark and the divine Presence.¹²⁸ **Above the Ark were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the Mercy Seat** (see the commentary on Exodus

Fs - The Mercy Seat in the Most Holy Place: Christ at the Throne of Grace). With tears flowing down **her** face, **she** cried, “**The Sh’khinah glory of Isra’el has gone into exile, because the Ark of God has been captured**” (4:19b-22).

After **the Tabernacle** was initially set up at Mount Sinai, **His glory filled the Sanctuary** (see the commentary on **Exodus Hh** - **The Glory of the LORD Filled the Tabernacle**), and **the cloud** covered it (see the commentary on **Numbers Bk** - **The Pillar of Cloud and Fire**). When **King Solomon** dedicated **the Temple**, **the Ark** was brought in and **the glory of God** returned from **exile** (see **the Life of Solomon Bo** - **Fire from Heaven**). However, before the destruction of **Jerusalem** in 70 AD, the prophet **Ezeki’el** saw **the Sh’khinah glory** leave **the Temple** and **the City** (**Ezeki’el 8:4, 9:3, 10:4 and 18, 11:23**). **The glory of ADONAI** didn’t return to this earth until the birth of **Yeshua Messiah, the Savior** of the world (**Luke 2:8-112; John 1:14**). Today, **God’s glory** dwells in **His people** individually (**First Corinthians 6:19-20**) and **His Church** collectively (**Ephesians 2:19-22**). **Ezeki’el** also saw the future Messianic **Temple** and return of **the glory of God** (**Ezeki’el 43:1-5**).

The capture of **the Ark** was so tragic that Asaph, the psalmist, included it in one of his **psalms** (**Psalms 78:60-61**). But he tells us much more happened than the capture of **the Ark** by **the Philistines**, for **ADONAI** also abandoned **the Tabernacle** at **Shiloh** (see **Ae** - **The Tabernacle at Shiloh**) and allowed the enemy to destroy it (**Jeremiah 7:12-24, 26:6 and 9**). **The Philistines** eventually returned **the Ark** and it remained first in **Beth-Shemesh** and then **Kiriath Jearim** (**First Samuel 6:13-21**). **The priests** must have constructed some kind of **Tabernacle** at **Nov**, (**First Samuel 21:1**), but in **Solomon’s** day, it was a **Gibeon** (**First Chronicles 21:29**). Eventually, **Solomon** incorporated **the Tabernacle** layout into **the Temple** which **he** built (**Second Chronicles 5:5**). **The wicked sons** of **’Eli** thought **their** scheme to bring **the Ark** onto the battlefield against **the Philistines** would save **God’s glory**, but it only took it away.¹²⁹

In an important sense, **Phinehas’ widow** was right, for **the Ark** was gone and **God’s** judgment was falling heavily on **the Israelites**. But in a greater sense, **the glory of ADONAI** had not truly departed. **The LORD** had given great promises to **Isra’el** that could never be broken: **I will take you as My people, and I will be your God** (**Exodus 6:7**). Likewise, **the Word of God** declares to us: **I will never leave you or abandon you** (**Hebrews 13:5**, quoting **Joshua 1:5**); it testifies that nothing in all creation **will be able to separate us from the love of God in Messiah Yeshua our Lord** (**Romans 8:39**). **Yeshua Himself** declares: **I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand** (**John 10:28**). Therefore, just as subsequent events would reveal that **YHVH** had not finally abandoned **His** people, we, too, always have

access to **the glory of God**, even in the darkest night, by holding fast to **His Word** on our **lips** and in our **hearts**. For, **Paul** concludes: **If you confess with your mouth that Yeshua is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9)**. Our challenge during trials, then, is to believe **the Word** that is in our **mouths** and in our **hearts**. If this challenge can be met with faith, then we will have strength to endure any trials that come our way.¹³⁰

When the glory departs: As Richard Phillips relates in his commentary on **1 Samuel**, still, the loss of **the Ark** to **Isra'el's** enemies did signal a time of divine discipline. **The dying woman** spoke the truth when **she** wrote **Ichabod** over the scene **she** was leaving. For **ADONAI** was *temporarily* removing **His** blessing and protection from **the people**. **Shiloh** would soon be destroyed, and **the Philistines** would once again place **Isra'el** under **their** hated yoke. The TaNaKh shows that when **God's people** persist in rebellion, walking in ways of wickedness and bowing down to the idols of the world, **Ha'Shem** will inevitably withdraw **His glory** - that is the power and blessing of **His Presence** - from **His people**. The greatest instance of **God's glory** departing was not the loss of **the Ark** in **'Eli's** time, but rather the removal of **the Sh'khinah glory** before the fall of **Jerusalem** over four hundred years later. The prophet **Ezeki'el** saw a vision of **the Sh'khinah glory**, the visual manifestation of **the glory of God**, departing from **the Temple**. **Now the glory of ADONAI left the doorway of the Sanctuary and halted above the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings and rose off the earth . . . and they paused at the entrance to the east gate of the Temple compound, with the glory of the God of Isra'el over them (Ezeki'el 10:18-19)**. As **ADONAI's** glory departed from **Jerusalem**, the word "**Ichabod**" was written all over **her** doomed walls. Now there was nothing to protect **God's people** from the Babylonian army, and shortly afterward **the City** and **Temple** were destroyed and **the people** who were not slaughtered were sent off in chains (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Gu - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule](#)).

What causes **Ha'Shem** to remove **His glory**? The example of **'Eli** and **his sons** shows that **YHVH** is angered by the sins committed by **His** people, as **the wicked sons** stole from the Peace Offerings brought to **the LORD** (see [Ar - 'Eli's Wicked Sons](#)), and committed sexual sins at the entrance to **the Tabernacle (First Samuel 2:12-17 and 22)**. **Isaiah** would later level a similar charge against the worship in **Jerusalem**, "**The people draw near Me with their mouths and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me**" (**Isaiah 29:13**). Rather than allow **His** own **people** to despise **His** holy **Presence** in corrupt worship, **ADONAI** sent **the Ark** into the hands of **the Philistines** to be despised by pagans instead. Therefore, false worship that despises **God's** holiness was a cause for the removal of **God's glory**.

Around a hundred years ago, mainline churches concluded that the Bible is not really **God's Word** and began teaching the heresies of evolution and secular humanism in place of the Gospel. As a result, **the Lord** wrote "**Ichabod**" across liberal churches, so that their spiritual power evaporated. Today, we may wonder whether the same thing is happening to the evangelical movement, which once spoke and acted with such power from **God**. We witness great spiritual vigor elsewhere on the globe, with masses of converts and holy boldness in withstanding persecution. Meanwhile, in the West, not only is our cultural influence waning, but evangelical believers are not even persuading their own children to remain in the faith. A recent study by the Southern Baptist Convention showed that 88 percent of evangelical children abandon the Church after age eighteen. It is hard to account for such a failure with a removal of **God's Presence** because of worldliness, heresy, idolatry, and sin. How urgent is the need of the Church in the West to repent of sin, to return to the truths of the Bible and to regain a burning passion for **Messiah** and **His** Gospel.¹³¹

From Ichabod to Immanuel: This leaves a final question about **God's** departed **glory**. Once **the Lord** has written "**Ichabod**" over a nation or church, or even an individual, is there anything we can do to see a return of **God's glory** and power? The answer is given through the prophet **Zechariah**, "**Return to Me, says the LORD of heaven's angelic armies, and I will return to you (Zechariah 1:3). ADONAI's** purpose in withdrawing **Himself**, causing **His glory** to depart, is to spur **His people** to seek **His glory** once again. That is what subsequent events will reveal in **First Samuel**. **Jeremiah** wrote something similar to **the Jews** who had gone into the Babylonian Captivity, assuring them of **God's** returning grace if only **they** would **seek His** face in true faith. "**When you call to me and pray to me, I will listen to you. When you seek Me, you will find Me, provided you seek for me wholeheartedly; and I will let you find Me,**" says ADONAI. "**Then I will reverse your exile. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have driven you,**" says ADONAI, "**and bring you back to the place from which I exiled you**" (Jeremiah 29:12-14).

The greatest instance in the TaNaKh of **God's** removing **His** glory was the fall of **Jerusalem** in the time of **Jeremiah** (see [Jeremiah Ga - The Fall of Jerusalem](#)). But a later and greater instance when the dreadful name of **Ichabod** might well have been spoken, furnishes proof of **God's** saving grace for those who are lost; the death and resurrection of **Yeshua Messiah** on the cross. **John** explains **Yeshua's** coming in these words: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us; and the Word was with God, and we have seen the glory of the one and only Son of God who came from the Father; and the Word was God, full of grace and truth**

(John 1:1 and 14). If ever **the glory of God tabernacled among us**, it was in the life and ministry of **Messiah**. Yet, many despised **Him** because **they loved the darkness instead of the light because their deeds were evil (John 3:19)**, and **they put God's glory to death on the cross** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ [Lv](#) - Jesus' Second Three Hours on the Cross: The Wrath of God**).

Reflecting on **Yeshua's** atoning death, we should remember **Phinehas' widow's** cry of **"Ichabod!"** and do the same. We should lament that **God's glory** (blessing) is rightly removed from us because of our sins (see the commentary on **Hebrews [Cz](#) - God Disciplines His Children**). But if we look up from our despair and see **Messiah** as our **Savior** who died to put away our shame and reproach, and then who rose again, we see a new beginning as a result of **His** grace. Our sin cries out, **"Ichabod, the glory has departed,"** but **God's** grace replies, **"Immanuel, God is with us."** Though we would be rightly abandoned by **Ha'Shem** because of our many sins, the Gospel assures us of forgiveness and acceptance in **Messiah**. Paul put it this way: **For God, who said, "Let the light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Yeshua Messiah (Second Corinthians 4:6, quoting Genesis 1:3).**¹³²

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise you always. It is such a comfort to know that **You** are always in control. To those of us on earth, we see problems and we experience trials and all around us things seem to not be going the right way. However, **You** see our lives from a different perspective, for **You** are looking down from your heavenly throne on high and see the future outcome of our trials. **You** see the glory that **You** will receive when earth's problems are resolved and **You** will reign during your one-thousand-year Messianic Kingdom (**Revelation 20**). Please help me to remember that my troubles will be over soon, and that I will spend eternity with **You** in heaven. **For I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18)**. May **Your Spirit** help me to be wise, and use my time wisely before **You** return. Help me reveal **You** to others as I live my life. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*