

Is the Glory of God Departing From US?

First Samuel 4 tells the story of one of Israel's darkest hours. Israel had been defeated by the Philistines. The priests of God were dead. The ark of the covenant had been captured. After hearing the news of the ark and the death of her father-in-law and husband, Eli's daughter-in-law (and wife of Phineas, the priest) named her newborn son Ichabod, meaning "the glory of God has departed."

What was it that led to this dark hour? How did it come to be that the **presence of God** departed the land? And what can we in the church today learn from this sobering time in Israel's history?

The Tabernacle at Shiloh

Recently, my wife and I were in Israel as guests of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During our time there we visited an excavation site where the tabernacle once stood in Shiloh, as told in 1 Samuel chapters 1-4. While standing in the very location where Hannah would have cried out to God, Lisa and I began to **pray** from the depths of our hearts. As I prayed, the Lord gave me a renewed perspective of the significance of what happened there.

There were two significant events unfolding in the days leading up to Israel's defeat and the loss of the ark—the first of which should serve as a sober warning to the church today, and the other as a message of hope in a dark time. The first thing was the dimming of the lamp of God due to the disobedience and compromise of the nation's leadership. Specifically, it was the wickedness of the priests Hophni and Phineas, and the apathy of their father, Eli, who did nothing to correct his sons, which led to "Ichabod" and the glory of God departing from the nation.

Scripture tells us that Hophni and Phineas “had no regard for the Lord.” They engaged in temple prostitution and took advantage of the **worshippers** who came to sacrifice at Shiloh. Moreover, they neglected their priestly duties, one of which was to keep the lamp in the Holy Place filled with oil so that the flame would not burn out.

As this tragedy was unfolding, however, there was another part of the story developing, which serves as a message of hope. Despite the wickedness of the priests, God was still working his plan of redemption. In 1 Samuel 1, a barren woman cried out to God for a son, pledging to dedicate his life to the Lord if her request was granted. The Lord answered her cry and Hannah’s son, Samuel, came to Shiloh as a young child to serve in the house of God. Out of a humanly impossible situation, the Lord brought forth a new generation, a righteous prophet and judge.

First Samuel 3:3 tells us that “the lamp of God had not yet gone out” (NIV) when the Lord first called to Samuel. Though the Lord intended to bring **judgment** to Hophni and Phineas, he also promised to raise up “a faithful priest” who would follow His commands.

Private Disobedience and Public Powerlessness

As I reflected on all that had happened in Shiloh, I was struck with this sobering truth: Private disobedience causes public powerlessness. Hophni and Phineas were engaged in private disobedience. They were profaning the holy things of God, neglecting their responsibilities to steward that which was entrusted to them. They abused their priestly authority and took advantage of the people. It is likely these sons of Eli thought they could continue in their sin with no repercussions.

Though what they did in secret may not have been known or spoken of in public, God saw it. And the repercussions of their private sin impacted the entire nation. In 1 Samuel

4:1-3, the Israelites suffered a defeat at the hands of the Philistines. As a result, they decided to call for the ark of the covenant to go with them into their next battle, thinking it would save them. They didn't realize God's presence had already left them and the ark would not bring them the victory they sought. Sadly, they were defeated again, the ark was captured, and Hophni and Phineas died on the day of battle.

Like Israel, many in the church are just going through the motions, relying on traditions and practicing an institutional Christianity. But God's presence is no longer there and our institutions are powerless. We have been fooled into thinking our private sin goes unnoticed, but what we do in private has a public, corporate effect. The enemy continues to win battles and take ground in our nation, largely while the church goes about our business as usual. We blame our losses on the government, politicians or those who disagree with us, with little understanding of the role we've played in our own defeat.

The key to victory is not the ark, nor our Christian institutions, but obedience. Disobedience causes the lamp to go out and the presence of God to depart. Without His presence, there can be no victory.

In Search of the Faithful

Ezekiel 22 describes a disobedient Israel that reminds me of much of what I see in our culture today. It describes five kinds of people—the five Ps, I call them—who had turned from the ways of the Lord. The Lord calls out the Princes, the Politicians, the Prophets, the Priests (pastors), and the People for turning from the Lord and allowing the shedding of innocent blood in the land, allowing corruption and unrighteousness to prevail. Many overlooking what was going on around them for personal preference and profit.

Sound familiar? In verse 30, the Lord says, "So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap

before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one" (NKJV). God was looking for a faithful priest, **prophet** and judge who, like Samuel, who would follow His commands.

I believe God is issuing this same **warning** to us today. Like Israel before us, we are unaware that the lamp of God is growing dim, the oil is about to run out and the presence of the Almighty is departing the land. God is looking for a **righteous remnant** who will follow His commands and honor His word. Our politicians and princes are corrupt. Our prophets and priests lack moral clarity. The people are drowning in a sea of iniquity and perversion. What can we do?

Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

For those who will heed God's warning, there is a call to prepare for the days ahead. There is a three-fold call—to prepare the Bride, to prepare the Ark, and to prepare the way of the Lord.

One man who heeded God's warning and prepared was Noah. Hebrews 11:7 tells us that "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear [and] prepared an ark for the saving of his household." Noah lived in dark days full of corruption and **immorality**. But he heeded God's warning that judgment was coming and prepared accordingly. As a result, his household was saved, as were all the living things that came with him on the ark.

Likewise, God wants His church to prepare for the days ahead and be an ark of refuge in times of trouble. By preparing and getting in alignment to God's kingdom principles, both individually and corporately, we can be ready to be a help to others. When disaster strikes, we will have an opportunity for our testimony (Luke 21:13).

Trimming Our Lamps with Oil

Revelation 19:7 says, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him

glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready" (NIV). As those awaiting the coming of the Bridegroom, we must prepare and make ourselves ready.

How can the bride prepare herself? One clue we have in Scripture is the parable of the 10 virgins in Matthew 25. The parable says that there were five wise virgins and five foolish virgins. The wise virgins were prepared for the arrival of the bridegroom by having their lamps filled with oil. The foolish virgins had allowed their oil to run out, and when the bridegroom came they had no light by which to see. Like Hophni and Phineas, these foolish virgins neglected to keep the lamp filled with oil, and as a result they were left behind when the bridegroom arrived.

Sadly, much of the church today is like the five foolish virgins. We have become apathetic in our approach toward the things of God. We have not kept the oil—representing the presence and anointing of the **Holy Spirit**—in our lamps. We have grown accustomed to the darkness around us and are unprepared for the days ahead.

God is calling His people to wake up and shake loose from their apathy and lethargy. He is calling us to hear the **divine warning** about the days to come and to prepare, prepare, prepare. We must prepare ourselves for His coming by trimming our lamps with oil. We must prepare the church as an ark of refuge for those who are perishing. We must prepare the way of the Lord!

Hope in Dark Times

The times we are facing are truly difficult times. Everything around us is being shaken, so that only that which cannot be shaken will remain (Hebrews 12:27). Many foresee a great economic collapse. Fires, floods, earthquakes and natural disasters abound. The **moral failure** of our leaders and decline of our culture continues.

These challenging times should cause us to heed the warnings of a God who loves us and wants to save us from the day of trouble. But they should also cause us to rejoice in the hope that remains. God desires to redeem and restore us. He is looking for the faithful with whom he can change a nation.

In the midst of Hophni and Phineas' private disobedience, God was already preparing to raise up Samuel out of what seemed to be an impossible situation. Hannah cried out to God in desperation for a miraculous fulfillment of promise. God had not forsaken Hannah, nor had he forgotten Israel. He had a perfect plan and perfect timing. Samuel represented a new, **prophetic voice** that would rise in the land. He represented a righteous generation to replace that which was profaned.

A Samuel Generation

I believe that in America, God is going to raise up a new, **prophetic voice** of courage. I believe He will replace the unjust judiciaries and raise up righteous judges. But it is critical that we realize the true state we are living in instead of engaging in business as usual. If the oil runs dry and the lamp goes out in the church, it's possible to continue going through the motions of institutional Christianity, but in reality it's just cosmetic.

Cosmetic Christianity is much like costume jewelry: lots of luster and shine without real substance. One of my spiritual fathers, the late Dr. Edwin Louis Cole called it "High Gloss—cheap merchandise." We must not be content with a compensatory facade—compensating on the outside for a lack on the inside. Because without the **presence of God**, our public celebrations and display are powerless.

When the time comes to go to another depth of **spiritual battle**, the very soul of our nation will crumble if the church does not take its rightful place. Our lamp must be full with the oil of the **Holy Spirit**. We can speak the Christian lingo and make public declarations but without the presence and the

power of God, there is no Upper Room experience.

The late **Leonard Ravenhill**, who embraced me like a spiritual grandson, used to say, "Many want an Upper Room experience like on the day of Pentecost, but they're unwilling to humble themselves on their knees at the cross of Christ." You see, many want the presence and power of God, yet forget that we cannot circumvent the place of humility, holiness and honesty that comes on our knees.

We need a fresh **revelation** of the work of the cross and the power of the Resurrection in a place of authentic humility—**dying to self**. One of the highest forms of **worship** is simple obedience to God. He provides for us public power rather than public powerlessness. Our **prayerlessness** in private has become powerlessness in public.

We need courageous voices of **prophetic clarity** to resound from the pulpits of America as well as righteousness to permeate through the halls of politics. We have a renegade judiciary and need a new generation of righteous judges raised up in the land.

We need princes, politicians, priests (pastors), prophets and people who love God and others more than they love themselves. From preachers to politicians, from pulpits to political offices ... and all in between, we need A REVIVAL OF CHARACTER!

We need a new generation of Samuel to arise! God wants to reconfirm His covenant promise and commitment, so that He can restore the Nation ... before the lamp of the Lord goes out and the glory of God departs in the land.

Doug Stringer *is the founder and president of Somebody Cares America/International. You can find him online at .*