International Bible Lesson
International Bible Study Commentary
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The LORD Did Not Abandon Israel
1 Samuel 4:12-22

And 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" (1 Samuel 4:21—ESV).

After Eli had judged Israel forty years and Samuel was old enough to take his place, the LORD enabled the Philistines to conquer Israel and capture the Ark of God. The Israelites had cherished this sacred symbol of the LORD's presence in their midst since Moses had received its design from the LORD and had it constructed. As punishment for their turning away from God to worship the detestable idols of their neighbors, the LORD enabled their enemies to defeat them. For many, the Ark had become an enchanted box that contained the LORD in all His power and whose magical power enabled them to defeat their enemies. Even today, it is easy to begin thinking that something we wear around our neck or carry in our pocket or purse has some magical power to protect us, save us, or enrich us, even though we may not consciously think about it in quite that way.

When the wife of Phinehas learned her father-in-law and her husband had died and the Ark of the LORD had been captured, she gave birth and named her son "Ichabod," which means "The glory" and "departed," which is difficult to translate from the Hebrew language. In colonial America, some named their children "Ichabod," perhaps without thinking what the name might imply. However, she was mistaken, because the true Glory and Presence of the LORD did not reside in a beautiful box, and the LORD had not departed from Israel. We need to remember that only the Ark, a symbol of God's glory, had departed from Israel. The LORD had not abandoned Israel. The LORD was still with Israel to be loved, honored, and obeyed. Perhaps the best example of the LORD's presence in Israel is the presence of the prophet Samuel himself. He served the LORD his entire life. The LORD had prepared Samuel from childhood to take the place of Eli, to be filled with the LORD's Spirit, to proclaim the truth from and about the LORD, and to declare what people needed to do to have a relationship with the LORD even though the Ark was gone. He set the right example and judged Israel justly according to the Law of God. Today, we must never confuse a sacred object with the personal relationship we can have with God by His grace through our faith in Jesus Christ. He will never forsake us, but He expects us to love and obey God.

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