

4. Ichabod

November 7, 2013

The pagan nations around Israel had everything that she had – temples, priests, religious laws, and sacrifices. But they DID NOT have the presence of God, because their so-called gods could not see, could not hear, and could not speak. Only the nation of Israel had the glory of the true and living God dwelling in their midst.

When Moses dedicated the tabernacle, God's glory moved in according to Exodus 40, but the sins of the Israel were rampant, and it caused His glory to depart as 1 Samuel 4 recorded. When Solomon dedicated the temple, once again God's glory filled the sanctuary so much that the priests could not stand and they fell on their faces. But again centuries later, the prophet Ezekiel watched that glory was leaving the temple. Then the glory of God returned with Jesus' birth.

Without the presence of the glory of God, His people are just another religious crowd, going through religious motions to appease their vacuumed minds.

When you check out the definition of the word 'Ichabod' from a dictionary, you will find this definition: a male given name: from a hebrew word meaning "without honor." Actually, it is far more than 'honor.'

The origin of the word comes from 1 Samuel 4:19-22:

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. 20 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. 21 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. 22 And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

That's one sure way to ruin the boy's future with the name like that, don't you think?

In chapters 8 through 11, we will learn that Ezekiel had a vision from the Lord that showed His glory departing from Jerusalem because the remnants of the Jewish people continuously disobeyed Him and followed after their pagan idols to the extreme. The Jewish people still refused to repent and obey the Lord after the first and second invasion by Babylon. They thought that God would never permit His holy temple to fall into the hands of pagan Gentiles, but they proved to be wrong.

A. THE TEMPLE DEFILED

Ezekiel 8:3-18 He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the image of jealousy was, which provokes to jealousy. 6 Furthermore He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary? Now turn again, you will see greater abominations." 7 So He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall. 8 Then He said to me, "Son of man, dig into the wall";

and when I dug into the wall, there was a door. 9 And He said to me, "Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there." 10 So I went in and saw, and there--every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed all around on the walls. 11 And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan. Each man had a censer in his hand, and a thick cloud of incense went up. 12 Then He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, 'The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.'" 13 And He said to me, "Turn again, and you will see greater abominations that they are doing." 14 So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the Lord's house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz. 15 Then He said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Turn again, you will see greater abominations than these." 16 So He brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house; and there, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east. 17 And He said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger. Indeed they put the branch to their nose. 18 Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."

Ezekiel was not physically transferred to the temple in Jerusalem like it happened to Philip from Gaza to Azotus after he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, rather he saw the entire thing in a vision from his house in Babylon.

It was bad enough for the Israelites to worship the worthless idols in their homes or countryside. But it was a brazen presumption of their part to bring those idols to the temple so that they could worship them along with the worship of Jehovah God. To them, the Lord was downgraded to one God among many, not the Lord of lords. In other words, they did not have fear of the Lord. That is where all the sins start.

There was not one single godly king in the northern kingdom Israel and they were destroyed. The southern kingdom Judah should have gotten a hint from this disaster and repented from their wicked ways. But the Bible tells us that they went from bad to worse in pagan idol worship. It is no wonder that God was about to remove His glory from the temple. Without the presence of God, the temple was just another building.

In v11, we see the seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel. These were the ranking elders of Israel. When Moses couldn't handle all the government affairs due to lack of time, his father-in-law Jethro suggested him to appoint faithful and godly men to take the majority of his work off from him. So Moses chose seventy men. It became the tradition to choose seventy elders to handle daily affairs in Israel. These were the leaders and they became leading idol worshippers. It is no wonder that the whole country went down the drain.

Their notion was, "The Lord does not see us". What a joke! But then again, that is the typical thought of every sinner. While we sin against the Lord, we somehow think that God doesn't know anything, nor can He see anything about our sins. We are only kidding ourselves. Yes, the joke is on us when we think that way.

Psalm 139:7-12 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? 8 If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. 9 If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10 Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me; 12 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.

While Christian believers today may not have grotesque idols to bow down, we must still beware of idols. Because an idol is anyone or anything that takes priority over our God.

1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

B. THE WICKED ARE SLAIN AND THE REMNANT SPARED

Ezekiel 9:1-7 Then He called out in my hearing with a loud voice, saying, "Let those who have charge over the city draw near, each with a deadly weapon in his hand." 2 And suddenly six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his battle-ax in his hand. One man among them was clothed with linen and had a writer's inkhorn at his side. They went in and stood beside the bronze altar. 3 Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side; 4 and the Lord said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it." 5 To the others He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. 6 Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the temple. 7 Then He said to them, "Defile the temple, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!" And they went out and killed in the city.

I believe that these six men were the angels who had charge over the city of Jerusalem. These angels were appointed to execute God's judgment in the city. The seventh angel was wearing linen and had a scribe's inkhorn. That would be equivalent to our pens that we carry.

He was commanded to mark the people who lamented and grieved because of the sins of the city. No matter how dark the day, the Lord always has His faithful remnant who obey His will and trust Him for deliverance. Believers today are 'marked' by the Spirit of the Living God and should be 'marked' by holy living that glorifies Christ.

Often in Scripture we find God sending judgment, not because unbelievers have sinned, but because His own people have disobeyed His law. For two times Abraham brought judgment on innocent Gentiles because he lied about his wife in Genesis 12 and 20; Aaron the high priest led Israel into idolatry and 3,000 people were slain in Exodus 32; David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband, Uriah, and his sins brought years of trouble to his family and the nation; A crew of Gentile sailors almost drowned because of the disobedience of God's prophet Jonah.

God's people are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. If there were more salt in this world, there would be less decay, and more light would mean less darkness. Our good works glorify the Lord, but our sins invite His discipline. Judgment begins at the household of God.

Ezekiel 10:18-19 Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. 19 And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

At this point, the shekinah glory that had been on the throne moved from the throne to the threshold of the temple, and to the east gate of the temple. I don't believe that the rebellious people knew what was going on and they could care less about it. Once again, the Lord was making 'Ichabod' over Jerusalem and Judah.

I wonder when 'Ichabod' happened in America. I know that we don't have the same privilege like Israel, but the Lord certainly extended His grace and goodness toward America at the beginning, because her people honored Him. Just as the Great Britain went down the drain from the "empire on which the sun never sets" to a little island because she turned her back on God. Now the born-again believers in England is about 10% or less.

C. WICKED LEADERS JUDGED

Ezekiel 11:8-12 You have feared the sword; and I will bring a sword upon you," says the Lord God. 9 "And I will bring you out of its midst, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and execute judgments on you. 10 You shall fall by the sword. I will judge you at the border of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord. 11 This city shall not be your caldron, nor shall you be the meat in its midst. I will judge you at the border of Israel. 12 And you shall know that I am the Lord; for you have not walked in My statutes nor executed My judgments, but have done according to the customs of the Gentiles which are all around you.""

In chapter 8, the Lord showed Ezekiel 25 men at the eastern door of the temple, worshipping the sun. They were giving wicked advice to the king and other leaders in Jerusalem and their counsels were not from the Lord even though they were using His name for their creditability.

These evil people insisted that Jerusalem was as safe for them as a piece of meat in a cooking pot. This metaphor was that the people in Jerusalem were choice cuts of meat while the exiles in Babylon were just the scraps and rejected pieces.

Ezekiel 11:16-17 Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone."' 17 Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel."'

The self-confident Jews in Jerusalem thought they were secure as long as they had the temple, but the true temple already was with the exiles in Babylon. Long before there ever was a tabernacle or a temple, the patriarchs had God as their refuge and strength, their sanctuary, and their abiding place. Wherever Abraham pitched his tent, he also built an altar to the Lord, because he knew that God was with him. The New Testament equivalent of this experience is to abide in Christ.

John 15:1-4 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

D. APPLICATION

1) Without the presence of God, whatever we have is empty .