

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Twenty-Ninth Week - Sunday

ICHABOD

"Now his [Eli's] 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. 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. 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. And she said, 'The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured'" (1 Samuel 4:19-22).

We have seen Eli fall to the ground and die when he heard that the ark of God was taken. The same tidings worked another death in that same family. The unnamed wife of Phinehas is worthy of being held in lasting remembrance, this woman who was with child and near to be delivered when the doleful tidings of Israel's overthrow and the capture of God's ark came to Shiloh.

Her husband's death, her father-in-law's death, the ruin of Israel, and the capture of God's ark threw her into such distress that her pains came suddenly upon her and ended her life. She appears to have been a woman of great tenderness of spirit and of still greater piety. She felt deeply (how deeply we may judge from the effects) the successive calamities that had taken place. But, like Eli himself, she felt most of all the capture of the ark. Her father-in-law was dead, it is true; but his death was to be expected soon in the course of nature, and his position of high priest in the house of God would be filled. Her husband lay dead on the battlefield his priestly raiment defiled in dust and stained with blood, it is true; but his offenses were most revolting, and some of his sins had not only been public wrongs but private wrongs against her. But still in the deep caverns of her womanly heart, there must have lingered much love to the husband of her youth, the father of her children. Under even ordinary circumstances this loss would have been a devouring grief. Nevertheless, it is clear that the capture of the ark was the occasion for her greatest grief, alongside which the others became pale.

The women around her sought to rouse her by giving the most glad tidings a Hebrew woman could hear: "Do not fear; for you have borne a son!" But it is emphatically added, "She did not answer, nor did she regard it." As her last moment came, she named the child Ichabod,

meaning *without glory*, thus making him a living memorial of her despairing grief.

This is a noble and refreshing example of deep concern, manifested even at death, for the glory of God and the well-being of his people. It is refreshing, because any experience of this sort has become rare in these latter days in which the supreme anxiety of men is to get on, to do well in the world, and to thrive. The glory of God calls forth very little of that burning ardor, that restlessness of zeal and labor which are pursued today in following the world. Now there is no doubt a certain kind of zeal for the glory of God, but in how few does that zeal reign paramount. In whom do we find that zeal which burns like fire shut up in the bones, that zeal which allows no man to rest until the Lord's great name is glorified and his cause prospered.

Look at this woman. If an example of real patriotism be needed, behold it here! Let a just admiration for her teach us that it is not proper, far less is it godly, that the chief of our care should be over our private condition, the affairs of our party, our sect, or our town. We have among us God's spiritual ark! Dangers often threaten it, clouds often obscure the luster of its most fine gold, and at times it seems as if it were gone into the hands of the Philistines. Where, then, is the exceeding great and bitter cry for God's glory, such as arises when some great reverse of temporal fortunes comes, when some plague reaps the life of the land, when one of our chief of men is smitten suddenly in the noontide of his honors?

Alas, we have a different standard for the measurement of the relative importance of things than did that nameless woman of Israel. Amid the most cruel death agonies and in the severest reverses we can be called to suffer, she called her newborn son Ichabod, "because the ark of God was taken."