LESSON 10
November 8, 2026

Unit III: Samuel: Prophet, Priest, Judge, and King Maker

Leadership Run Amuck

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 29
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 1 Samuel 4:2–7:2
PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Samuel 4:12-22

KEY VERSE

And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken. (1 Samuel 4:22, KJV)

. . . . .

She said, "The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured." (1 Samuel 4:22, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- **Understand the importance of following God and His will.**
- **Gain insight of God from reading about His teachings.**
- **Work to have a right relationship with God.**

*Key Terms

Battle (verse 16)—Hebrew: *ma'ărâkâh* (mah-ar-aw-kaw'): battleline; rank; military array; "army" (KJV). The messenger that came to Eli had escaped the battlefield to deliver the message.

Eyes (verse 15)—Hebrew: *'ayin* (ah'-yin): sight; appearance; gaze. In this context, the word *eyes* is used to describe Eli's poor eyesight because of his age.

Heart (verse 13)—Hebrew: *lêb* (labe): the inner person, mind, will, thoughts, inclinations, and emotions; not just the physical organ—in Hebrew thought, it is the center of your being, where decisions, desires, and understanding come from.

Messenger (verse 17)—Hebrew: *bâsar* (baw-sar'): one who brings news, announces, proclaims; "the man who brought the news" (NIV). One man made it out of the battle against the Philistines, and he came and told Eli the fate of the Ark of the Covenant and his sons.

Torn (verse 12)—Hebrew: *qâra'* (kaw-rah'): ripped; made wide or large; "rent" (KJV). The messenger that left Shiloh came to Eli with his clothes torn, a symbol of overwhelming grief and intense sorrow or shock.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



The Biblical Context

First Samuel 4 describes a period of moral and spiritual decline. Eli served as priest and judge, but his sons abused their authority and showed contempt for God's offerings. Though religious structures remained, spiritual leadership was compromised (Coogan & Chapman, 226-227). Perhaps, Eli failed to correct his sons because he did not want to "fall out of favor" with them. However, to fall into disobedience with God is far worse and has more intense consequences.

After Israel suffered defeat by the Philistines, the elders sought a solution that did not involve repentance or prayer. They brought the Ark of the Covenant into the battlefield, believing it would force God to act on their behalf. This reveals a misunderstanding of God's presence. The Ark symbolized God's covenant and holiness, not a guarantee of success (Keck, 706-707).

The Philistines feared the Ark but fought anyway and defeated Israel. Eli's sons were killed, and the Ark was captured. These events signaled that God's glory could not be manipulated. God's presence cannot be reduced to an object or ritual.

Introduction

Many adult students know what it feels like to be let down by leadership. Trust that was once strong can slowly weaken when leaders begin making choices shaped by fear, pride, or personal gain. The shift is often subtle. Outwardly, everything may appear stable and well-intentioned, yet beneath the surface motives become tangled, and the absence of wisdom and faithfulness eventually shows. When leadership falters, the impact rarely stops with one individual. Entire families, organizations, and communities can feel the weight of those failures.

Israel encountered this reality during a tense conflict with the Philistines. After suffering an early defeat, the elders made a critical decision: they brought the Ark of the Covenant into battle, assuming its presence would secure victory. Rather than seeking God's direction, they relied on a sacred object as if it were a guarantee of success. Their choice revealed a deeper spiritual issue—trust had shifted from God Himself to something merely associated with Him.

This passage challenges adults to examine the difference between genuine trust in God and misplaced confidence in religious symbols, traditions, or familiar routines. True faithfulness is not rooted in objects or rituals. It grows from obedience, humility, and a sincere dependence on God's guidance.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Mistaking Sacred Symbols for God's Presence *(1 Samuel 4:12-18)*

KJV

12 And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head.

13 And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out.

14 And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli.
15 Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see.
16 And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son?
17 And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken.
18 And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

NIV

12 That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dust on his head.
13 When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry.
14 Eli heard the outcry and asked, "What is the meaning of this uproar?"
The man hurried over to Eli,
15 who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes had failed so that he could not see.
16 He told Eli, "I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day."
Eli asked, "What happened, my son?"
17 The man who brought the news replied, "Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured."
18 When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man, and he was heavy. He had led Israel forty years.

The messenger's report is devastating. Israel has been defeated, many have died, Eli's sons are dead, and the Ark has been captured. Eli's reaction reveals where his deepest concern lies. He trembles for the Ark of God, not simply for his sons. He is aware the sacred object has been mishandled. The elders believed that bringing the Ark into battle would ensure victory. Instead of seeking God's will, they relied on a symbol. This mistake exposes the danger of treating sacred things as substitutes for obedience. Religious objects and rituals are meaningful only when they point to genuine faithfulness (Brueggemann, 153-154). Eli's fall and death mark the end of a failed era of leadership. Though Eli loved the Ark, he failed to restrain his sons or correct their abuse of authority. Leadership that tolerates corruption cannot protect God's people.

Careful reflection produces valuable lessons from Eli's story. Faithfulness requires obedience, humility, and reverence, not control over sacred things. God's presence cannot be manipulated. The story warns that misplaced trust leads to loss, even when intentions seem religious. Overall,

the passage reveals the tragic consequences of confusing God's presence with control over sacred objects. Israel's defeat exposes a deeper spiritual failure rooted in disobedience. This event serves as a sobering reminder that true faithfulness demands wholehearted obedience to God's will.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What religious practices or symbols might you rely on more than genuine obedience and faithfulness? How can you refocus your trust on God rather than routines?

The Cost of Faithless Leadership *(1 Samuel 4:19-20)*

KJV

19 And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her.
20 And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it.

NIV

19 His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor pains.
20 As she was dying, the women attending her said, "Don't despair; you have given birth to a son." But she did not respond or pay any attention.

Phinehas's wife responds to tragedy with a prophetic declaration. She names her son Ichabod, meaning "no glory," declaring that the glory has departed from Israel. Her words capture the spiritual reality of the moment. The loss of the Ark is not simply military defeat. It is the consequence of broken leadership and ignored warnings (Buttrick, 173-174). This section emphasizes that leadership failure affects the most vulnerable. Women, children, and future generations bear the weight of decisions made by those in power. The naming of Ichabod reflects grief, but also clarity. When God's presence is dishonored, loss follows. Even as she dies in childbirth, this woman speaks truth about the spiritual condition of her people. She does not acknowledge the birth of her son because the loss of God's glory overwhelms everything else.

The passage calls for sober reflection on responsibility. Leadership is not merely about authority. It is about stewardship. Those entrusted with influence shape the spiritual health of the community. When leaders fail to honor God, others suffer the consequences of their unfaithfulness. This section also reminds readers that God's glory is not tied to objects. The Ark symbolized God's presence, but God is not contained by human actions. God allows loss in order to expose misplaced trust and call people back to faithfulness. The name Ichabod becomes

a powerful warning and an invitation. The text challenges readers to consider how leadership decisions affect those who depend on faithful guidance.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does leadership failure affect those beyond the leader in the faith community? Where have you seen the consequences of misplaced trust or ignored responsibility?

When God's Glory Is Taken for Granted *(1 Samuel 4:21-22)*

KJV

21 And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband.
22 And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.

NIV

21 She named the boy Ichabod, saying, "The Glory has departed from Israel"—because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband.
22 She said, "The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

The repeated statement "the glory is departed" reveals the heart of this passage. God's glory represents God's active presence among the people. When the Ark was treated as a tool rather than a sign of covenant relationship, God allowed Israel to experience loss. This loss was not abandonment; it was correction (Longman III & Dillard, 168-169). Taking God's glory for granted leads to spiritual numbness. The elders believed they could summon God without repentance. This assumption reflects a broader danger. Faith can become routine when obedience fades. When reverence is lost, worship becomes hollow. The people had reduced God's presence to an object they could carry into battle rather than a relationship requiring faithfulness and daily obedience.

This passage serves as both a warning and an invitation. God's presence is a gift, not a guarantee to be controlled. Faithfulness requires humility and repentance, not reliance on symbols. When people return to obedience, God restores direction and purpose. The text also points forward with hope. God does not leave Israel in despair. God raises Samuel and later establishes leadership that honors God's will. The departure of glory creates space for renewal. This story calls readers to examine how seriously they treat God's presence. Reverence, obedience, and humility protect communities from spiritual loss and guides them toward restoration. The passage reminds us that God's correction opens the door to new beginnings for all those who are willing to return.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Where might reverence for God have faded into routine in your life? What would it look like to seek renewal through repentance and obedience this week?

A Closing Thought

First Samuel 4 reveals the danger of leadership that relies on symbols rather than obedience. Israel's defeat, the capture of the Ark, and the sobering meaning of the name Ichabod expose the cost of misplaced trust. God's glory cannot be controlled or taken for granted. This lesson invites believers to pursue faithful leadership rooted in humility, repentance, and reverence. When God's presence is honored, communities are protected from spiritual loss and guided toward renewal.

Your Life

Identify a place where routine has replaced reverence in your faith. Choose one practice this week that restores your attentiveness to God, such as confession, Bible reading, or an intentional time of prayer. Pay attention to how your renewed reverence reshapes your attitude and choices.

Your World!

When your trust in leaders or institutions is shaken, avoid despair. Speak honestly about the difference between reverence for God and reliance on symbols or power. Encourage humility and accountability where you have influence. Help others to rediscover faith through obedience to God rather than by rituals.

Closing Prayer

Lord, forgive us when we take Your presence lightly. Restore reverence, obedience, and humility in our lives. Shape our leadership to honor You and guide others faithfully. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

The lesson topic for Sunday, November 15, 2026, is "A Virtuous Leader." The Devotional Reading is 1 Corinthians 15:50-58, the Background Scripture is 1 Samuel 7:3-17, and the Printed Passage is 1 Samuel 7:3-11, 15-17.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, November 9	"Though We Sin, God is Patient"	(2 Peter 3:9-13)
TUESDAY, November 10	"Avoid Worldly Entanglements"	(Colossians 2:8-15)
WEDNESDAY, November 11	"The Lord Gives You Victory"	(Deuteronomy 20:1-9)
THURSDAY, November 12	"Remain Steadfast under Trial"	(James 1:1-12)
FRIDAY, November 13	"God Hears and Rescues"	(Psalm 34:15-22)
SATURDAY, November 14	"God Will Hear and Forgive"	(2 Chronicles 7:12-16)
SUNDAY, November 15	"Cry to God for Deliverance"	(1 Samuel 7:3-11, 15-17)