

# SHILOH: 1 Samuel 4

by C. C. Morris

**S**hiloh! The very name inspires those who hear it, yet relatively few know its full import.

Shiloh! From its root word, Shiloh means *peace, tranquil, secure, successful*. The name Shiloh implies to *prosper, to be happy, to be in safety*. Such was the beginning of this town where Joshua first pitched the tent of God's tabernacle after conquering the Promised Land.

Yet, before Shiloh's history was complete, Jehovah had forsaken Shiloh, and its beautiful name had become a watchword, warning of corruption of the priesthood's ministry, and the turning of worship into empty formalism, the trust in earthly relics. Worst of all, Shiloh tells us that no matter how sacred and how revered a man, a place, or an institution might be, the Lord will not tolerate man's elevating the Lord's own institutions higher than the worship of Himself.

"Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water? (Job 15.1516.)" The institutions God has placed among men are not to be thought of as ends in themselves; they only point to the living and true God. When men pervert God's institutions above the Lord Himself, they become as abominable as any other sin.

*To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed*

*feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; lam weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands. I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood (Isaiah 1.11-15).*" The sacrifices, burnt offerings, blood, incense, observations of new moons and Sabbaths, calling of assemblies, appointed feasts, and all the rest of what the Lord itemizes here are all part of the worship He required under the Levitical law. Yet in Isaiah's day their outward observance, in practice, had become mere ritualism, conducted by casually unconcerned wicked men in sacred offices.

## **SHILOH IN THE U.S.A.**

The fall of Israel's Shiloh in Old Testament times has not impeded its name's popularity. In the U.S.A. alone, there are many towns, cities, and other communities bearing its name. There is, or has been, a Shiloh in Florida, Georgia, and Illinois. There are unincorporated villages named Shiloh in Indiana and Kentucky, and a borough named Shiloh in New Jersey. A Shiloh is in Richland County, Ohio.

The US Census Bureau has a 28-page list of "census-designated places" which are not legally named as incorporated entities; among them are Shilohs in Montgomery County, Ohio; York County, Pennsylvania; and Sumter County, South Carolina. Four communities called Shiloh in Arkansas are found in Columbia, Howard, Lafayette, and Pope Counties.

Nothing much now remains of Shiloh, Mississippi, except a forest in Issaquena county extending down to what was once Shiloh Landing on the east bank of the Mississippi River.

There are three unincorporated Shilohs in West Virginia, six in Virginia, and three in Texas.

**Shiloh** is the name of six places in the State of Tennessee in Bedford, Carroll, Hardin, Hawkins, Montgomery, and Rutherford Counties. **(Source: various governmental web sites on the Internet.)**

The fact the name of Shiloh is so popular is a good thing. Curiosity calls the attention of untold thousands of people to the name's origin, and that in turn focuses our attention on what Shiloh once represented and why Jehovah abandoned it.

## **SHILOH THE BIBLE TOWN**

The first biblical mention of Shiloh is in Genesis 49.10: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." From ancient times this has been understood to be a prophecy of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, "the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9.6)." Only when He assumes His rightful place on the throne of David, will the world have universal peace, and not until then. "'There is no peace,' saith my God, 'to the wicked' (Isaiah 57.21)."

Then, according to His promise, "The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Psalm 37.11)." Christ quoted this verse in what is called the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5.5)." Anything less than His people's inheriting the earth in peace would not be a fulfillment of these two prophecies, the first one from the Old Testament, and the one from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself when He quoted this Psalm in the New.

Then "He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people(s): and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Isaiah 2.4; see also Micah 4.14; see also Joel 3.9-21)."

I can scarcely read these Scriptures without remembering the sarcastic mocker of this verse who wrote, a few years ago: "*What of the millions of jobs related to war? Gone, or will they simply start producing plow shears without number?*" That writer was comfortable circulating many other

derisive comments about these sacred Scriptures. Such mockers and scoffers shall see, **in that day**. He is not merely mocking those who believe, according to the Scriptures, that Christ will yet reign on this earth literally for a thousand years (millennium); he is mocking God and His word, which we trust and believe. Job said to similar mockers, "Is it good that He should search you out? or as one man mocketh another, do ye so mock Him? (Job 13.9)" To paraphrase Job in this instance: "Is it good, O mocker, that God should search you out? Or as a Romish A-millennialist mocks a Premillennialist, do you also mock God?"

In the meantime, if he has nothing better to do, he might check the Bible passages he does not believe and find out it is **plowshares**, not **plow shears**. We are made to wonder: If he cannot read and understand the difference between **plowshares** and **plow shears**, how could he be expected to understand the difference between Roman Catholicism's a-millennialism and biblical truth?

In Joshua 18, the town of Shiloh comes to us evidently already named, with no previous history given. It was here that the tabernacle was pitched and stayed for over four centuries, during the remainder of Joshua's life, the entire period of the Judges, into the time of Samuel's ministry, and on for many years. It was at Shiloh that Joshua divided the conquered Canaanite land to the tribes of Israel by lot (Joshua 18, 19.51, etc.): "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD (Proverbs 16.33)." The tabernacle in Shiloh became central to Israel through the rest of Joshua, Judges, and the early chapters of 1 Samuel, until David eventually brought the ark to Jerusalem after its capture and return.

## **THE FALL OF SHILOH**

In previous articles we have already seen the weakness of Eli, the depravity of his sons, the curse Jehovah put upon Eli and his descendants, and the ascendancy of Samuel in his role as prophet and priest.

Now—at this time, as recorded in 1 Samuel 4.1—*Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the*

*Philistines pitched in Aphek.*

In the days of Eli and Samuel, Israel was warring with their perpetual enemies the Philistines. (Nowadays Philistines call themselves *Palestinians*, from the same root word.)

Many names are common. Like the Shilohs in the U.S.A., Israel had at least three places named **Aphek**: this one in Judah, another in Asher's territory, and one near Jezreel.

In the first skirmish with the Philistines, verse 2, Israel lost about four thousand men.

The priests, headed by Eli and his sons, were not the only problem. The people and their elders were as superstitious and idolatrous as the priesthood was wicked. Note exactly what the elders said when Israel regrouped to assess their losses: *And when the people were come into the camp, the **elders of Israel** said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten **US** to day before the Philistines? Let **us** fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto **US**, that, when **IT** cometh among **US**, **IT** may save **US** out of the hand of our enemies* (verse 3).

Now, the elders were no longer looking to the Lord Jehovah to fight their battles and grant deliverance, but they were making an idol-god out of the ark of the Testament, made of wood and gold, as if IT had some intrinsic power, in and of itself, like some lucky charm, to deliver them, "*that, when IT cometh among us, IT may save us out of the hand of our enemies.*"

*So **the people** sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubim: and the two sons of Eli, **Hophni and Phinehas**, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.* (1 Samuel 4.4).

First it was the **priests**, then the **elders**, and then it was the **people** who actually encouraged and participated in the apostasy. "And there shall be, **like people, like priest**: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings (Hosea 4.9)."

Woe unto any people whose priests or elders succeed in leading them astray. This is serious business.

In Jeremiah's day, Judah thought they had the only true form of worship in the Jerusalem temple. They boasted, "The temple of the LORD are these," as though that was all there was to it. The modern counterpart would be any church or church group, or denomination that thinks that only they are right, correct, orthodox.

Jeremiah's rebuke was straightforward: "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these (Jeremiah 7.4)." Don't take it for granted that God will always bless an institution He founded (and at one time blessed), even after it has knowingly gone into error and willfully continues in it.

At the start of the second battle, Israel cheered and shouted for joy, thinking their lucky charm would save them. The Philistines, hearing the noise and fearing the worst, were determined to fight for their lives. The result was

1. the slaughter of another thirty thousand men of Israel;
2. Hophni and Phinehas were among the dead; and
3. the Philistines captured the ark.

*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 (verse 12).* The runner's message to Eli was fourfold:

1. Israel is fled before the Philistines, and
2. there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and
3. thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and
4. the ark of God is taken.

It is to Eli's credit—only by the grace of God—that, as bad as the news was about the defeat of Israel's army, the tremendous loss of life, and the

deaths of his own two sons, the event that concerned Eli most, causing him to fall and die, was "**the ark of God is taken**" by the Philistines. *And it came to pass, when he [the runner] made mention of the ark of God, that he [Eli] 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.*

**When Jehovah instituted the tabernacle, the ark, and the mercy seat, it was the holiest place on earth. When He delivered the ark into Philistine captivity, it had become an idol, and Israel thought of it as a lucky piece.**

People still do much the same, of sorts. We often see yard signs that say, "Pray for America. America's Only Hope!" Wrong! America's only hope is NOT our "prayer"! See how **men** take a divine, God-given institution (like prayer) and turn it into an idol, with which they say, it is men who must take the initiative in order to make it work.

Our only hope, of course, is the Living and True God to whom, we hope, our prayers are directed! In the eyes of men in general, their prayers are the key to their deliverance, more than the God to whom their prayers are supposedly directed. In the eyes of **His people**, God only is their refuge in time of trouble. "My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth (Psalm 121.2)."

## **SHILOH IN LATER YEARS**

For years after that sad day of defeat, Shiloh continued to be the center of worship, but it was an empty shell of what it once was. Tradition: the foe of true worship.

Shiloh itself was not actually destroyed. It remained there as a nominal center of worship until Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem almost a century later. Like the church at Sardis, Shiloh had "a name that thou livest but art dead (Revelation 3.1)."

Like the church in Laodicea it could have been said of Shiloh, "Thou, sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and

knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked (Revelation 3.17)." The Lord can and does visit His judgments on a fallen church or a denomination much as He sent on Shiloh.

In Ezekiel's day, the glory of the Lord, which rested upon the temple above the ark and the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies (Ezekiel 8.4), moved away, first to the threshold of the house (Ezekiel 9.3, 10.4); later it removed to the east gate of the Lord's house (Ezekiel 10.18-19), then still later it removed to the Mount of Olives (Ezekiel 11.22-23), before His glory disappeared completely. (**Ichabod**: *The glory is departed.*) None of Jerusalem's religious leaders seems to have noticed or cared.

Remember, too, in addition to the sins and problems mentioned earlier, Israel had these additional troubles:

1. When Samuel was old, he made his sons, Joel and Abiah, judges over Israel. "And his sons walked not in his [Samuel's] ways, but turned aside after lucre [unjust, dishonest gain], and took bribes, and perverted judgment (1 Samuel 8.1-3)." You have heard it said that our governmental system in the USA is derived from the Bible; perhaps this is a case in point: Our legal and judicial system in the USA is all too often dominated by unjust judges, crooked policemen, criminally ruthless District Attorneys, lawyers, and other prosecutors who (to further their own financial and political ambitions) knowingly send innocent men to prison and to death row. These criminals, wearing badges and judicial robes, are the lowest sediment of depraved humanity. Operating unlawfully in the name of the law, they are merely following the biblical examples set by Eli, Hophni, Phinehas, and Samuel's sons.

2. Then all the elders of Israel said to Samuel, "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: **now make us a king to judge us like all the nations** (1 Samuel 8.45)." Thus the problems compound when God's people want to be like the other peoples of this world rather than to "come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing (2 Corinthians 6.17)."



3. "But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD (1 Samuel 8.6)." The Samuels who are displeased by the ungodly drift within today's nominal "church" are, as always, in an extreme minority. "**Thou hast a few names** [like Samuel] **even in Sardis** which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white (Revelation 3.4)."

4. The Lord tells Samuel the root of the sin: "And the LORD said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for **they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.**" Those who will not heed the word of God's prophets openly show they reject the word of God Himself. Fair warning is given in Psalm 138.2: "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for **thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.**"

5. The Lord Jehovah continues His indictment: "According to all the works which they [Israel] have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith **they have forsaken me, and served other gods**, so do they also unto thee (1 Samuel 8.7-8). "

Of course, the Rome-influenced A-millennialists, knowing no better, stir their bowlful of mixed truth and error with the spoon of confusion, telling us that "Israel is the church and the church is Israel." Perhaps in this case they are not so very far from the truth. Their wise men are all too willing to take the blessings God promised to Israel and apply them to the church, but they as quickly apply to Israel and the Jews, (of course) what the Lord says about Israel's punishment, chastisement, and captivity and never apply it to the church. "**The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools** (Proverbs 26.7)." If there were an honest man among them, he would explain, scripturally and plainly, why the punishment, chastisement and captivity would not apply to an apostate church, and he would do so without trying to sweep the church's sin under the rug of sovereign grace.

6. All the while, Israel continued maintaining the outward form of godly worship at Shiloh. ("Having **a form of godliness**, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away (2 Timothy 3.5).") The Philistines soon returned the captured ark to Beth-shemesh; it was later moved to Kirjath-jearim, from whence (after a twenty-year sojourn there) David moved it to Jerusalem, where it was eventually placed in Solomon's temple.

"Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than He?" (1 Corinthians 10.21-22) The Corinthian church did, in essence what Israel had done with their worship at Shiloh: Corinth church maintained an outward form (the Lord's table) while partaking of meat sacrificed to idols.

The Lord made Shiloh a perpetual picture of a church or any other institution that once worshiped the Lord in spirit and in truth, valuing His word more highly than life itself, but later they only conducted a formal empty ritual; such organizations may maintain the letter of being orthodox, going through the outward motions, all the while denying, contradicting, or misapplying His word, making it of none effect. "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition (Matthew 15.6, Mark 7.13)."

We can scarcely emphasize this fact enough: **Shiloh remained for years as a place of nominal worship, even though God had forsaken it!**

When the Philistines returned the ark, it was never returned to Shiloh. Years later, the Psalmist Asaph recorded this part of Israel's and Shiloh's history: "*Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies: But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: **So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among***

**men** (Psalm 78.56-60)."

The curse of God on Eli's family continued, as He had said. Abiathar bare the ark and cared for it during David's reign, and was loyal to David. Abiathar was a direct descendant of Eli. When David died, he passed the throne of Israel to his son Solomon. Another of David's sons, Adonijah, Solomon's [half-] brother, being older than Solomon, thought he would take the kingdom and throne for himself. He formed a conspiracy and garnered a following. Abiathar's sin was that he supported Adonijah rather than Solomon.

For Abiathar's treason, Solomon removed him from serving any more as a priest. "And unto Abiathar the priest said the king, Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou art worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord GOD before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted. So, Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the LORD; **that he might fulfil the word of the LORD, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh** (1 Kings 2.26-27)." "Be sure your sin will find you out (Numbers 32.23)."

### **In Later Years...**

We cannot forget about Shiloh, easily dismissing its unsavory history and going on to other things. When God gives an object lesson, it is forever. Over nine hundred years after Joshua, almost six hundred years after Samuel, over five hundred years after King David, apostate *Israel* had already been carried into Assyrian captivity, and idolatrous, sinful *Judah* was on the verge of the Babylonian invasion and captivity. It was then, around 626 B.C., that the Lord raised up the prophet Jeremiah to warn Judah of the coming judgment. "The prophets prophesy falsely," the Lord said through this faithful prophet, "and **the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so:** and what will ye do in the end thereof? (Jeremiah 5.31)"

What are we to think of such a text? Are we to believe that we as a

people are somehow better than Israel was, that we are somehow above all that? The leftward drift of entropy carries everything with it, including the most orthodox of Baptists. Some among them are now denying the biblical doctrine of "double predestination" (some of them a bit cautiously, others more brazenly), and are now promoting Romish doctrines, such as advocating the "gospel regeneration" theory of the "means" Baptists, to name no other errors for now. I know for a fact that in the 1960s and before, such false doctrines would not have been tolerated among absolute predestinarian Primitive Baptists.

The Lord sent His word to Judah: "Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house [the temple in Jerusalem], which is called by my name, and say, "**We are delivered to do all these abominations**"? (Jeremiah 7.8-10) (These were apparently the ones of Jeremiah's day who were obsessed with the "*God is the author of sin*" error.)

The Lord God continues: "Is this house [the Jerusalem temple], which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it. saith the LORD. But **go ye now unto my place which WAS in Shiloh**, where I set my name at the first, and **see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel**. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; Therefore **will I do unto this house** [the temple], **which is called by my name**, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, **as I have done to Shiloh**. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim [into Assyrian captivity]. Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee (Jeremiah 7.8-16)." This has its application to the individual, a religious organization or church, and any nation that forgets the Lord.

The last record of Jeremiah's mention of Shiloh when prophesying

against the rulers of Jerusalem is in chapter 26, where the Lord said, "And thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD; If ye will not hearken to me, to walk in my law, which I have set before you, To hearken to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you...but ye have not hearkened; **Then will I make this house** [the temple] **like Shiloh**, and will make this city [Jerusalem] a curse to all the nations of the earth (Jeremiah 26.4-6)."

When Jeremiah had spoken all that the LORD had commanded him to say unto all the people, the **priests** and the **prophets** and **all the people** took him, saying, "Thou shalt surely die." In verse 9 they said: "Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, "**This house shall be like Shiloh,**" and **'this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant'**? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD."

When men prefer their own agenda to the word of the Lord delivered to them by His servant, they can expect nothing but God's judgment, and they should not be surprised when it comes. Remember: "And there shall be, **like people, like priest:** and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings (Hosea 4.9)."

The last time Shiloh is mentioned in the KJV Scriptures is in Jeremiah 41.5: "There came certain from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, even fourscore men, having their beards shaven, and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves, with offerings and incense in their hand, to bring them to the house of the LORD." The beards shaven, the torn clothes, and the cutting of themselves all show that these eighty men were in deep mourning for their country's sad state of affairs. The Lord had not completely forsaken Shiloh, for, like Lot in the condemned city of Sodom, He had a remnant in Shiloh according to the election of grace, somewhat reminiscent of the Sardis church: Christ told them, "Thou hast a few names **even in Sardis** which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy (Revelation 3.4)."

May the Lord bless His remnant to remember what He did to Shiloh and why and grant them to see how God has ordained that history repeats itself in every age, including the one in which we are blessed to live.

—CCM

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