

I SAMUEL

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to I Samuel chapter 4 as we continue our study through the Word of God. Keep in mind that we are in the timeframe of the Judges, probably during the Judge Samson. And the nation as a whole is moving away from God. And thus, God has raised up a young boy by the name of Samuel who will lead the people back to God and transition them from the Judges who ruled locally to the kings who were over the entire nation.

As we saw last week, at the age of around 3 or so little Samuel was dedicated to the Lord and his parents left him with Eli the high priest to train him up in the ways of God. He served the Lord even at this young age. And last time we saw God speak to Samuel and give him a prophecy of what would happen to Eli's sons, who were wicked, and the descendants of Eli because he did not deal with his sons properly.

And as we left off last time, we were told, **“So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord. Then the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.”** I Samuel 3:19-21. With that said, let's begin reading in I Samuel chapter 4, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word this evening.

I SAMUEL 4

VERSE 1

1. The Philistines were Israel's perennial enemy and they were a strong force. As we have seen, during the time of Abraham they arrived in small numbers from the island of Crete. But now their numbers had grown and they occupied five city-states along the Mediterranean coast: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath and Ashdod. And According to Smith, "Never did time seem more hopeless than when Samuel arose. The Philistines, strengthened not merely by a constant influx of immigrants, but by the importation of arms from Greece, were fast reducing Israel to the condition of a subject race." (Smith, Pulpit Commentary).

2. And please understand that Samuel did not lead them in this battle, in fact, in some of the manuscripts it seems that it is the Philistines that initiated this conflict with Israel and they were defending themselves.

VERSES 2-4

1. Here in this first battle we see the Philistines defeat Israel, killing some four thousand men! And how does Israel respond to this defeat? They blame God for this defeat, "**Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?**" They did not consult the Lord in this battle, they did not even seek the wisdom of Samuel, but they blame God and then they come up with their own solution to their problem. They would get the Ark of the Covenant and bring it into battle as a kind of good luck charm.

The Ark represented the presence of God and yes; we do see the Ark brought into battle at times. We saw Joshua have the Ark lead the way as they marched around the city of Jericho, Joshua 6:6-8. Also, Moses told the priests to have the Ark lead them into battle against the Midianites in Numbers 31:6. But in those instances it was the Lord directing them to do this, and here it is their own plan. Instead of seeking direction from God they were looking to the Ark of God to save them.

Spurgeon made these remarks regarding this situation, “Instead of attempting to get right with God, these Israelites set about devising superstitious means of securing the victory over their foes. In this respect most of us have imitated them. We think of a thousand inventions; but we neglect the one thing needful . . . They forget the main matter, which is to enthrone God in the life, and to seek to do his will by faith in Christ Jesus.”

It is as the worship song goes,
 One thing is needful, O my Father,
 One thing is needful, O my God;
 That I sit at your feet and pour out my love,
 This thing is needful, O my Lord!
 I sit and worship You, my Father;
 I sit and worship You, my God;
 Lord, I sit at your feet and pour out my love,
 I sit and worship You, my King! (repeat)
 I lift my hands to You, my Father;
 I lift my hands to You, my King;
 Lord, I sit at your feet and pour out my love,
 I lift my hands to You, my King!

May we learn to sit at His feet and pour out our love to Him, worship Him and He will show us where to walk, what to do. He will make His will known to us and He will work in us to conform our will to His will!

2. How many Christians blame God for their problems and then they use good luck charms to solve their problems instead of repenting, instead of bringing their problems before God and allowing God to direct them in the solution. What do I mean by good luck charms? Many wear medals, or look to statues or buildings or sayings or books or whatever to save them from their problems instead of the Lord. And yes, we still do that today. I was channel surfing and came across the Catholic station and there in New Orleans they have this saint they worship, this statue. And talk about bizarre; they carry him in the streets, playing, "When the saints come marching in." And people place money on him; they lift their babies up to kiss this pathetic statue. And I wonder what God thinks of all this? I guess I don't have to guess; it is an abomination before Him.

3. And yes, the children of Israel had the priests carry the Ark but they were doing the wrong thing even if they were doing it in the right way. And who were these priests that were carrying the Ark? It was the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas as Eli was too old to do this and these men were wicked, they did not even know God.

VERSE 5

1. Picture what is going on here. The Israelites were defeated in this first battle and thus, they blame the Lord, and they come up with this plan to get the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh and have Hophni and Phinehas bring it into the camp. And when they arrive with the Ark, everyone is shouting and jumping up and down and things look and sound great but they are far from being great! The people were far from God; it was an empty shell of faith.

2. There are many church services that resemble this and yet, they are far from God in faith! If you are not obedient to the Lord, if you are not following His Word, it does not matter how much noise is made, how pumped up you are, it is just emotion and not devotion! Spurgeon once again wrote regarding this issue, “Now, beloved, when you are worshipping God, shout if you are filled with holy gladness. If the shout comes from your heart, I would not ask you to restrain it. God forbid that we should judge any man’s worship! But do not be so foolish as to suppose that because there is loud noise there must also be faith. Faith is a still water, it flows deep. True faith in God may express itself with leaping and with shouting; and it is a happy thing when it does: but it can also sit still before the Lord, and that perhaps is a happier thing still.” I think that is important for us to understand!

VERSES 6-9

1. Now this is interesting to me. As the Philistines are in their camp they hear all this noise going on in the camp of Israel, more than what was usual. And they figure out that the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the camp and they are fearful. They have heard what the God of Israel had done to the Egyptians and even though they recognized the superiority of the God of Israel, they refused to turn to Him. Instead the battle cry was, **“Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Conduct yourselves like men, and fight!”** I wish more Christians would respond to the battles we face like men and not like pacifists. We are in a battle and we need to fight the good fight of faith, not give up!

2. Do you think people are still superstitious today? You bet they are. Listen to this article from the New York Post. We are told:

The three-day quasi-nightmare for-superstitious Yankees fans is over: The Red Sox jersey buried in cement by a Yankee-hating construction worker along the third base line at the new Yankee Stadium has been found and will be removed today in an “extraction ceremony.”

At first, the thought of Red Sox jersey buried in the new stadium seemed like a joke, but yesterday the NY Post published photographs worker Gino Castignoli claimed he took while after placing a David Ortiz jersey under the concrete. Yesterday, two workers remembered where Castignoli worked (he was only on the site for day) and told a construction manager:

They led the manager to a service corridor near the site of the planned Legends Club restaurant, behind home plate and toward the third base side.

After the hardhats pointed to the spot, workers brought out jackhammers and dug furiously for five hours, creating a 2-foot- by-3-foot, gravel-filled pit in their search for the tainted threads.

They spotted the jersey at 3:25 p.m. and called Yankee brass. The cursed shirt was about two feet deep in cement.

Yankees spokeswoman Alice McGillion said, “We want to thank The Post for raising the issue. The [two] workers were terrific in coming forward. They wanted the shirt out of there.”

- New York Post

We laugh at how superstitious they were in the Bible times and yet, we do the same things today! May we focus on the Lord and understand that He is in control, not some mumbo jumbo, hocus pocus garbage that people are still caught up in today!

VERSES 10-11

1. Why was Israel defeated again, this time losing thirty-thousand men, the Ark of the Covenant and Hophni and Phinehas were also killed in this battle? First of all the Philistines fought as hard as they could. Secondly, the children of Israel had the Ark of the Covenant so why fight that hard, we have this good luck charm. Thirdly, God was not in it, they did not seek God's help. And the Philistines captured the very thing they thought would bring them victory, the Ark of the Covenant! What an important lesson for us to learn from this.

2. Did this battle actually take place and the Ark captured? You bet it did. Back in the 1970's archeologists found a five-line inscription on a grain silo in the ruins of Izbet Sarteh. When they deciphered it, they found the account of this battle, the capture of the Ark, and even the mentioning of Hophni!

3. Now please understand that the death of Hophni and Phinehas being killed in one day is just what God told Samuel would happen and it has now come to pass! In I Samuel 2:34 we see this spoken by the Lord to Samuel, “**Now this shall be a sign to you that will come upon your two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die, both of them.**” It is not that God is evil or mean or revengeful, but He was getting rid of two men who were suppose to represent Him before the people and they were not doing it. They were making people stay away from the tabernacle because of the way these men were ripping them off as they came to worship God! So God took them out of the picture, they did not repent, they did not turn to the Lord, in fact, we were told that they did not even know the Lord!

VERSES 12-13

1. Here comes a man of Benjamin, bringing news from the battle. And it was a good 20 miles from Aphek to Shiloh and the route was predominantly uphill, for it was in mountainous country. And as he approached Shiloh he looked like a man in mourning, and he was. And as he told the people of the city what had happened, a great cry of mourning went up from the people. And Eli was waiting to hear what had happened in battle, but what troubled him the most was what had happened to the Ark of God. His son's took the Ark and Eli knew that it was wrong to bring the ark into battle. But he allows his sons to do it anyway. Eli, it seems, was a man who could not discipline his sons.

VERSES 14-18

1. Why did Eli die? It was not that the news of his two sons were killed in battle. He knew that was going to happen for the Lord told him through Samuel. It was that the Ark of God was captured and he could not take, it broke his heart and he died! I like what Trapp said regarding this incident. He wrote, “No sword of a Philistine could have slain him any more powerfully; neither can you say whether his neck or his heart were broken first.”

VERSES 19-22

1. Just when you think it could not get any worse for this family, it does! Here we see the wife of Phinehas, in hearing of the death of her husband, the death of her father-in-law and the capture of the Ark of God, goes into premature labor. And as the baby is being born she names him Ichabod, which means, “the glory has departed.” Not a great name for a child or an adult. You know, “Here comes the glory has departed!” And as she gives birth to this son, she dies in labor, she dies as she gives birth to Ichabod! What a sad day it was and yet, it did not have to be this way. They could have repented, they could have gotten right with God, they could have called upon God, but they didn’t and judgment came upon the nation and this family! But here’s the thing. Poole said, “Thus as God was no loser by this event, so the Philistines were no gainers by it; and Israel, all things considered, received more good than hurt by it, as we shall see.” God always has a reason and with His people He is trying to draw them back and He will use whatever means it will take!

2. Tragically, there are many churches today that should have “ICHABOD” or “the glory has departed” etched into their doors. They have compromised to public pressure and have allowed all kinds of ungodly doctrine to enter into their doors. God’s presence will leave where it is not wanted. And I believe, since God holds His Word above His name, above all that He is, that if churches are not teaching His Word, He has departed from there! And as churches become obedient to the pressures of society instead of God, they will wake-up one day finding Jesus on the outside of the church pleading with them to open the door and let Him in!

I SAMUEL 5

VERSES 1-5

1. I love this story; God does have a great sense of humor! The Philistines take their prize of this victory, the Ark of God back home to Ashdod, which was about 50 miles southwest of Shiloh. And they place it next to their god, Dagon, who was a half man half fish god! Why did they do this? Because they believed that if you were victorious in battle that your god was stronger than the enemies god. Thus, this was a kind of trophy that was placed in the temple of their god, Dagon!

2. The next morning the people got up and they found Dagon flat on his face and, I guess, he had fallen and couldn't get up! So the people help their god back up, put him in place, maybe bolt him down this time. Why did this happen? Because every knee will bow to the true and living God and we see this false god flat on his face, bowing down you might say before the Lord!

The next day he is back on his face but he is all broken in pieces and all the kings' horses and all the kings' men couldn't put Dagon back together again! The hands and head are broken, why? Poole lets us in on the reason God did this. He wrote, "The head is the seat of wisdom; the hands, the instruments of action: both are cut off, to show that he had neither wisdom nor strength to defend himself nor his worshippers. Thus the priests, by concealing Dagon's shame before, make it more evident and infamous." What is amazing is that the priests didn't turn to the true and living God but they prevented others from seeing the frailty, they weakness of their god. That their god, Dagon was nothing! And many do that today. They would rather stand up and glue their Dagon back together again rather than turning to the true and living God!

VERSES 6-8

1. These people of Ashdod refused to listen to the Lord and thus, the Lord tried to get their attention. Now I know that in my Bible and in most Bibles we are told that the people were struck with tumors, but that is not the correct meaning here. They were struck with **HEMORRHOIDS!** You might not see this as a big deal, but they didn't have Preparation H back then, not even Preparation A! It was very bad. Listen to how some commentators describe this and it is not good at all!

According to the Rabbins, swellings on the anus.” (Keil and Delitzsch) “Beating Dagon upon his own dunghill, and smiting his worshippers on their hinder parts, paying their posteriors, as men used to deal with puny boys.” (Trapp) “The word *apholim*, from *aphal*, to be *elevated*, probably means the disease called the *bleeding piles*, which appears to have been accompanied with dysentery, bloody flux, and ulcerated anus.”(Clarke) “*Emerods*; a disease mentioned only here and Deuteronomy 28:27 it was in the hinder parts. It is needless to inquire into the nature of it. It may suffice to know that it was a very sore disease, and not only very vexatious and tormenting, but also pernicious and mortal.” (Poole). I think you get the picture and I see some of you squirming in your seats right now!

2. You have to love these people. They continue to refuse to turn to God, they know where this is coming from and thus, they need to get rid of this Ark that is bringing all this trouble. So what are they going to do with it? Send it to their brethren in Gath!

Wow, with friends like that you truly don't need enemies!

VERSE 9

1. So here in Gath, the same thing is happening and people are dying from these hemorrhoids! It was even worse than it was in Ashdod! What are they going to do? They must see the power of the living God and turn to Him, right? Not exactly. Look at what we are told next.

VERSE 10

1. The people of Gath send it to their brethren in Ekron and when the people of Ekron saw what was coming, they lost it. “We’re doomed! We are going to die! I have to fill out my organ donor card! Grab the Preparation H!” The Ark of God is like a hot potato. “We don’t want it you take it! No, we don’t want it you take it!” And it goes on! All they had to do was submit to God but they refused!

VERSES 11-12

1. The solution to this problem was to send the Ark of God back to Israel, let them deal with it!

2. In II Corinthians 2:15-16 Paul tells us, **“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?”** The Living Bible puts these verses like this, **“As far as God is concerned there is a sweet, wholesome fragrance in our lives. It is the fragrance of Christ within us, an aroma to both the saved and the unsaved all around us. To those who are not being saved, we seem a fearful smell of death and doom, while to those who know Christ we are a life-giving perfume. But who is adequate for such a task as this?”**

Like with these Philistines, people have choices to make. And as the Ark of God was like a fragrance to them, if they turned to the Lord it would be a fragrance of life and if they rejected Him it would be a fragrance of death. It is no different for us today. We will emanate a fragrance from our lives and if we are close with Jesus it will be His fragrance that touches the lives of others. Some will receive it, others will reject it, but there is that choice for them!

3. And here's the thing. Did the glory depart? Not really. You see, Israel may have turned from the Lord. The Philistines may have rejected the Lord. But the glory of God is still around for God would glorify Himself. You can't take it from Him but you can enjoy it in your life!

I SAMUEL 6**VERSES 1-6**

1. Think about this for a minute. Seven months earlier they captured the Ark of God and they paraded it around as a trophy, placing it in the temple of Dagon. That did not work too well and then they started getting these really bad Hemorrhoids, not tumors and there was an infestation of rats in the land also! And the Philistines recognized that this was from the Lord. That which was a trophy ended up being a terrible burden to them. Now why did it take so long for them to return the Ark of God? First of all it was a trophy to them and they did not want to get rid of it. Instead, they brought it from one city to another until all the land of the Philistines; all five of its city-states were affected by this judgment of God!

2. Now I am going to tell you what they did, and I can't imagine how they did it, but they did. They were going to try to appease the true and living God like they would appease the god's they worshipped, with a trespass offering. And this offering consisted of five golden hemorrhoids, and five rats, to match the number of the Philistine city-states! I can't imagine what they looked like and not the rats!

3. What is also interesting is that they had heard how Pharaoh hardened his heart and they don't want the same fate as Pharaoh had. They had not only heard what the God of Israel could do, they themselves were experiencing it and thus, they were trying to appease Him by returning the Ark of God with this bizarre trespass offering! You would think that after all of this they would turn away from Dagon and turn to the true and living God, but they refused. That was not wise and yet, people do it all the time today. Look at the hand of God on those nations that have come against Israel and that same God who defended Israel back then is doing the same today. Don't fight against Him; receive Him into your life by faith!

VERSES 7-9

1. Yes, the Philistines believed it was the hand of God, the God of Israel that was against them, but just in case, they put forward this little test. They would take two milk cows that were never yoked to pull this cart back to Israel and to even make it harder, they took their calves away from them. First of all, a cow that was never yoked would wander all over the place and secondly, when they heard their young ones calling to them, their maternal instinct would draw them back home and not to Israel. Thus, if this was really of God, then God would have to do this miraculous sign to prove it! And on this cart would be placed the Ark of God, the five golden hemorrhoids and the five golden rats. What a sight to see!

VERSES 10-12

1. Again, this should not have happened, but God orchestrated this, He directed these cows to Beth Shemesh. And it says that the cows were “**lowing**” all the way. That does not mean they were singing, but this word speaks of an intense aversion to what they were doing. They did not want to be yoked. They longed to return to their calves, and yet God was directing them all the way!

2. How does this relate to us? Think about it. As we look at things we see how many times it looks hopeless, but don't give up because God has a plan and He has a purpose and He will fulfill it. Nothing is going to stop Him. It is as Meyer wrote, “As we go forth into the world, let us believe that the movement of all things is towards the accomplishment of God's purpose.” That should take away any fear, any doubt or as Paul tells us in Romans 8:28, “**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.**” The Amplified Bible puts it like this, “**We are assured and know that [God being a partner in their labor] all things work together and are [fitting into a plan] for good to and for those who love God and are called according to [His] design and purpose.**” And The New Living Translation puts it like this, “**And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.**” May we not forget that because if we do we will be anxious, we will be afraid, we will be miserable people with no hope! But our hope is in the Lord and He does not fail us!

VERSE 13

1. The people of Beth Shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest, sometime in May or June, and even maybe into July and as they were working here comes this cart with the Ark of God upon it and they rejoiced! For seven months the Ark of God was in enemy hands but now it is back in Israel. Keep in mind that Beth Shemesh was located about 15 miles west of Jerusalem and about 10 miles from Philistine city of Ekron and yet, God directed these cows with the cart perfectly.

VERSES 14-15

1. Keep in mind that Beth Shemesh was a Levitical city, spoken of in Joshua 21:16. And it is here that they made a sacrifice to the Lord. And the Levites took the Ark of God down off this cart, that is what was to happen.

VERSES 16-18

1. These lords of the Philistines made this plan to see if these afflictions they were suffering were the result of God and it was! The tragedy is that they returned home seeing the power of the God of Israel, that He is real, and yet they did not turn to Him!

VERSE 19

1. I don't know how many of you remember the movie by Steven Spielberg, starring Harrison Ford in Raiders Of The Lost Ark. At the end of the movie the bad guys look into the Ark of the Covenant and they are consumed in fire, they basically melt! Nice story line but that is not what happened here. The men of Beth Shemesh looked into the Ark of God and they died! Now there is a discrepancy here. We read "**fifty thousand and seventy men**" but many feel that is not a correct translation. They say that the way the Hebrew grammar is, it can mean that out of fifty thousand men, seventy were killed because they looked into the Ark of God! I am not sure I buy that one because it says that there was "**a great slaughter.**" Yes, seventy people killed is bad but I don't think it is a great slaughter. I lean more towards the fact that it was "**fifty thousand and seventy men**" that were killed as they looked into the Ark of God. You see, it was a great slaughter! But in either case, whichever way you look at it, it was not a good thing for the people of Beth Shemesh!

2. Why was God so angry? Did He have to kill anyone? It should have been a joyous time, the Ark of God was returned to Israel. The reason God responded in this manner is that He had said in the Law how the Ark was to be dealt with, and they broke those laws. They were not to look upon it nor touch it. The families of the Kohathites were to care for it. When it was time to move they would walk backwards into the Holy of Holies and cover the Ark with a sheet, not looking upon it. When they carried it, they were to use poles and not to touch it with their hands. You see, they could not approach God anyway they wanted, nor can we. We can approach God only through the blood of Christ, for any other way leads to death. ***GOD'S HOLINESS IS DEADLY TOWARDS SINNERS!***

And here's the thing. God did not dwell in this box; we never see that spoken of in the Scriptures. What we are told is that God dwelt above the mercy seat between the cherubim, above the Ark. Then what was the issue here? Inside the Ark was the Law of God and man cannot stand before God in his own righteousness. He must be washed with the blood. You see, on the Day of Atonement the high priest would sprinkle the blood of the lamb upon the mercy seat and thus, as God looked down upon the Ark He was able to extend mercy because the blood of the lamb covered the broken Law that was in the Ark! The same is true today; we can't approach God in our own righteousness, only in the righteousness that has been imputed into our lives by faith in Jesus!

VERSES 20-21

1. That is a great question, “**Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?**”

Again, it is only those that have been washed in His blood, cleansed of their sins! And instead of them dealing with their sin before God, they came to the conclusion that they needed to get rid of the Ark of God, give it to someone else. Sounds like what the Philistines did, except these were the people of God, they should have known better. They should have known what they needed to do!

2. Like I have said, because of what happened, the people of Beth Shemesh did not want the Ark of God with them, so they sent it over to Kirjath Jearim, where Eleazar watched over the Ark, and it remained there in Kirjath Jearim for some 20 years. Kirjath Jearim was located about 10 miles northwest of Jerusalem.

3. As I close this evening, may we understand that the only reason we can stand before God is because His judgment against us has been paid in full. It is because of Jesus Christ and that we have received Him into our lives by faith and it is now His righteousness that we are clothed with, not our own filthy righteousness! You see, in Christ the Father does not look upon us as we have broken the Law, but now His mercy is extended to us as the blood of the Lamb covers the broken Law and we are clean! Praise the Lord for His love for us!