

I SAMUEL 4-6

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 three 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.

What we are going to see over the next three chapters is that the Ark of the Covenant is mentioned some thirty-five times.

Why is this such a focus?

Some would say that it was important because, in the Tabernacle, in the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant was placed. On the top of the Ark was the Mercy Seat and the Lord rested between the Cherubim.

That is very true but what we will see is that this Ark of the Covenant will become a good-luck charm, and we will deal with that as we get into this chapter. But just keep that in mind, because that is how far from God the people were.

If you remember from our last study, we closed with these words, **“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

Keep in mind that in I Samuel and II Samuel the Philistines are mentioned some 150 times.

Why is that?

Because 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).

Also, we need to 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

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.

Not only that, but the main issue is that they did not repent of their sins!

Their solution to this problem, this defeat by their enemy, is that 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.

Again, 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!*

*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!

But good luck charms and superstitions play a big role in people's lives today, just as the Ark of the Covenant did here.

For instance. After Giants' infielder, Jim Davenport, hit two home runs in one game, he noticed he'd missed a button on his shirt.

Guess what?

For the rest of his career, he left the same buttonhole empty.

Why did he do that?

Because the way he buttoned his shirt became a superstition.

Then there is the lucky rabbits' foot that people carry. I don't know about that one, it didn't bring the rabbit that much good luck!

And we can laugh at that but 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 situation that they are in.

Now, what do I mean by good luck charms?

Many wear medals or look at 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.

Several years back 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.

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.

Not only that but 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

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.

Yes, there was a lot of noise, a lot of shouting, a lot of excitement, but God was not with them. So this was an empty faith!

There are many church services that resemble this and yet, they are far from God in faith as well!

You see, 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

Now this is interesting to me. The Philistines were just as superstitious as the children of Israel.

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 Samuel 4:9.

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!

Not only fight the good fight of faith but do it in the power of God and not in our own flesh. If we try to do it on our own, we will fail. We need the Lord and thus, we must seek His will for the battles we are facing!

VERSES 10-11

Of this Warren Wiersbe wrote,

When Hophni and Phinehas appeared in the camp carrying the Ark of God, the soldiers and elders shouted enthusiastically, but their carnal self-confidence was just the prelude to another defeat.

The Ark may have been with them in the camp, but the Lord was against them. Their joyful shout may have bolstered their spirits, but it was no guarantee of victory. All it did was motivate the Philistine army to determine to fight harder and win the battle, which they did, killing 30,000 Jewish soldiers.

God will not be *“used”* just to make sinful people achieve their own selfish purposes. God’s promise is, *“Them who honor me I will honor”* (2:30).

- Warren Wiersbe, The Wiersbe Bible Commentary – OT, p. 501

Again, think about why Israel was defeated. The reason is simple, and it cost them thirty-thousand men, the Ark of the Covenant and Hophni and Phinehas were also killed in this battle!

As Warren Wiersbe said, the Philistines fought as hard as they could.

We also see that the children of Israel had the Ark of the Covenant so why fight that hard, we have this good luck charm. That could have been in their minds as well. But that is not why they lost this battle.

But here is the real reason that they lost this battle. God was not in it; they did not seek God's help.

Apart from God, we can do nothing! (John 15:5)

Keep in mind that the children of Israel thought that the Ark of the Covenant was the good luck charm that would give them the victory, not God and as the Philistines captured the very thing they thought would bring them victory, the Ark of the Covenant, was gone!

What an important lesson for us to learn from this. Again, apart from God we can do nothing!

Now here is a good question.

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!

Now what about the death of Hophni and Phinehas in one day?

This was just the fulfillment of what God spoke to Samuel back in I Samuel 2:34. The Lord said, "**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.**"

What God had spoken came to pass.

Now please understand that God is not evil or mean or revengeful, but He was getting rid of two men who were supposed 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!

Because of that 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! In I Samuel 2:12 we are told, **“Now the sons of Eli were corrupt (sons of Belial); they did not know the LORD.”**

VERSES 12-13

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 a mountainous country.

And as he approached Shiloh he looked like a man in mourning, and he was.

He then told the people of the city what had happened and a great cry of mourning went up from the people.

Keep in mind that Eli was waiting to hear what had happened in this battle. What is interesting to me is the thing that really troubled him. To Eli, this High Priest, the thing that troubled him the most was what had happened to the Ark of God. Not his sons dying!

Remember that his sons took the Ark and Eli knew that it was wrong to bring the Ark into this battle. But he allowed his sons to do it anyway.

Eli, it seems, was a man who could not discipline his sons.

VERSES 14-18

Why did Eli die?

It was not that the news of his two sons that were killed in battle.

He knew that was going to happen for the Lord told him through Samuel.

Then what was it?

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.”***

But Eli is not going to be the only one troubled by this news.

VERSES 19-22

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!

How does this apply to Christians and churches today?

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.

A few years back, the host of the Christian radio show ***Cross Talk*** read some letters she had received on this subject.

This is what she read. "Our church is changing, something's happening, our church is moving away from a biblical Christ centered approach to ministry. The meaty sermons have disappeared and we're getting entertainment. Our small group is memorizing large portions of the Purpose Driven Life instead of memorizing Scripture. Something's changing in our church, we can't put our finger on it, but it seems that our voices are being ignored. When we try to speak out in our small group people shout us down. ***We are viewed as Bible-thumpers in our own church.***"

The Word of God has been taken captive by the enemy and is being systematically removed from many churches across our country and all that's left is "*Ichabod.*"

Can you imagine being called a "*Bible-thumper*" in your own church!

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!

Not only that, but many have allowed sin to infect the church and as they allow these things to come in because they no longer have a plum line to guide their lives – ***THE WORD OF GOD OPENED UP BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD!***

As we read on into I Samuel chapter 5, keep in mind that the Philistines have the Ark of the Covenant.

I SAMUEL 5

VERSES 1-5

Keep in mind that Ashdod was the capital of the Philistines, located about 50 miles southwest of Shiloh.

And in their victory, they captured the Ark of the Covenant, and they bring it back to Ashdod to gloat over their victory and in doing so they are mocking the God of Israel!

Keep in mind that in these battles they believed that their god was fighting for them and thus, if you gained a victory, it meant that your god was stronger than their god!

Thus, their god, or their main god, they had many, was Dagon and because of this victory he was more powerful than the God of the Jews!

And I do love this story; God does have a great sense of humor!

What we see next is that the Philistines take their prize of this victory, the Ark of the Covenant, back home to Ashdod and they place it next to their god, Dagon, who was a half man half fish god!

Why did they do this?

Like I have said. 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!

As we can see, all is not well with their god. You see, 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!

We then see that 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 it is a lot worse. Now he is all broken in pieces and all the kings' horses and all the kings' men couldn't put Dagon back together again!

His 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.”*

And here is the tragic part of all this. They could have seen that the true and living God, the God of Abraham and Issac and Jacob is the only God, but they refused to do that, and, as Sandy Adams wrote,

Rather than admit the obvious and realize the superiority of Jehovah God, the Philistines removed the Ark and created a tradition. No human was allowed to enter the floor of the temple.

The priests stayed away from Dagon’s statue.

Hey, it was easier to just glue together their idol - than to admit their sin and change their lifestyle. Like folks today, rather than open up the windows of their mind and heart to God’s truth - they’d prefer to live with the stench of rotten fish.

- Sandy Adams, I Samuel 5

How true that is. People do that all the time today, they refuse to turn to God and they hold onto their idols that they have made up in their own hearts and minds.

And like today, it is amazing 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! Again, listen to what we are told regarding what they did. We are told, **“Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon’s house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.”** I Samuel 5:5.

And like I have said, 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!

Lastly, Warren Wiersbe put it like this, *“When the Philistines captured the Ark and arrogantly treated the Lord as though He were just another god, they invited the judgment of God.”*

And we will see that as we read on.

VERSES 6-8

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 Rabbis, *“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).

In the Septuagint – the Greek translated of the Hebrew Old Testament – verse 6 goes on to say, *“And the cities and the fields of all that region burst up, and mice were produced, and there was the confusion of a great death in the city.”*

God’s plague may’ve been a combination of hemorrhoids, and a rat induced disease. And I think that is played out as we read on and what they send back to Israel. We will see that as we read on in a few minutes, but one of the things they send back are **“five golden rats.”** I Samuel 6:4.

But I think you get the picture, and I see some of you squirming in your seats right now!

How sad that these people 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.

What are they going to do with it?

I love this. Their solution is to send it to their brethren in Gath!

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

VERSE 9

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

The Ark of the Covenant becomes a hot potato, and nobody wants it.

And this is funny to me. As the people of Gath sent it to their brethren in Ekron, 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!”***

Like I have said, the Ark of God is like a hot potato. ***“We don’t want this Ark of God, 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

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

It is like we are told by Paul in II Corinthians 2:15-16, **“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. In a sense, 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!

Notice that **“the cry of the city went up to heaven.”** I Samuel 5:12.

How can we apply that to our lives today?

First of all, for believers, God can send some pain into our lives to break us of our sin because He loves us that much.

For the unbeliever, He can send some pain into their lives to draw them to Him, and once again it shows how much God loves the people of this world.

The big problem today is that they have become so jaded by all the wickedness, all the immorality, all the godlessness that is going on around them that sin is not a big deal anymore.

“You have pain, suffering in your life, here is a pill to stop it.”

And because of this, most do not think that God really cares about sin, or He is approving of their sin, or they just don't care about the sin in their lives!

But make no mistake about it, as we are told in Revelation 21:8 for all those who reject His forgiveness of sin, “**But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.**”

It is the final judgment of God, and they will spend an eternity in the Lake of Fire apart from God!

I SAMUEL 6

VERSES 1-6

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 showing that their god defeated the God of Israel, 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!

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!

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

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!

If not, then it is just a chance happening. But chance is not the answer. One author put it well when he said, *“Assigning such power to “chance” is crazy because chance has no power. For example, when a coin is flipped, the chance that it will land “heads” is 50%. However, “chance” does not make it land heads. Whether or not it lands heads or tails is due to the strength of the flip, the force of air currents and air pressure as it flies through the air, where it is caught, and if it is flipped over once caught. Chance doesn’t “do” anything other than describe a probability. We live in a cause and effect world, and chance is not a cause, but God is the great cause.”*

Exactly, nothing is by chance – ***NOTHING!***

Notice what they place on this cart. They placed the Ark of God, the five golden hemorrhoids and the five golden rats on it.

What a sight to see!

VERSES 10-12

Again, this should not have happened, but God orchestrated this, He directed these cows to Beth Shemesh.

Keep in mind that Beth-Shemesh was located about seven miles east of Ekron in the territory of Judah.

Why did the Philistines choose Beth Shemesh?

Because it was the nearest Israelite town to which the Ark could be sent.

We are also told 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!

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 the 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.**”

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!

One other point here and that is Beth Shemesh was a Levitical city! That will play a role as we read on.

VERSE 13

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 7 miles from Philistine city of Ekron and yet, God directed these cows with the cart perfectly.

VERSES 14-15

Like I have said, 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. Everything is wonderful, the Ark of God is back and yet, as we will see in a few minutes, that is not the end of the story!

But first, look at how the Philistines responded to what they saw.

VERSES 16-18

These lords of the Philistines made this plan to see if these afflictions that had come upon them 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

As I read what they did my question is, “*Didn’t you guys see the movie Raiders of the Lost Ark?*”

You may remember the movie by Steven Spielberg, starring Harrison Ford. 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 is there a discrepancy here?

What do I mean by that. Well, 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!

Why was God so angry?

Did He have to kill anyone?

It should have been a joyous time as 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 the Ark, 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 this was a Levitical city, the Levites should have known better and yet, they negated what God had said and they did it their own way and they paid the cost for their actions!

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 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

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!

Many do that with God today. They don't want to deal with their sin, so they just move away from God, push Him aside, “*He is for someone else, not for me!*” That is tragic!

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.

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!