

Adult Bible Class

The Book of First Samuel

Lesson 2 - April 24, 2022

In our last lesson we read that Hannah, the wife of the Levite, Elkanah, prayed to the Lord for a son, for she was barren and had no children. She vowed to the Lord that she would give him to God all the days of his life. God heard Hannah's prayer and gave her a son - Samuel. When the child was weaned, Hannah and Elkanah brought him to the Tabernacle in Shiloh where he began (at a very young age) to minister to the Lord.

1 Samuel 2:11 . . . the child ministered to the Lord before Eli the priest.

18 . . . Samuel ministered before the Lord, *even as* a child, wearing a linen ephod.

26 And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the Lord and men.

In contrast to the ministry of young Samuel, the adult sons of Eli - Hophni and Phinehas - behaved wickedly in the tabernacle. They despised the offerings of the Lord and stole meat from the people. They behaved immorally with women in the tabernacle. Their evil deeds were so egregious that God was preparing to act.

1 Samuel Chapter 3

Samuel's First Prophecy

1 Samuel 3:1 (NKJV) Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days [KJV: And the word of the Lord was precious in those days]; *there was* no widespread revelation.

Scripture doesn't tell us how old Samuel is at this time. The Jewish historian, Josephus, said that he was twelve years old.

This was a time when the prophet's voice was seldom heard in Israel.

2 And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, **3** and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down,

There are a couple of double meanings in the above passage. First, Eli's eyes were growing dim - not just because of his advancing age (physical dimness), but because he had not taken charge of his sons and stopped the wickedness in the tabernacle (spiritual dimness). Second, this was "*before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle.*" It was just before dawn when the priests were to tend the lamps. It was also before a "new dawn" in Israel when much would change.

4 that the Lord called Samuel. And he answered, "Here I am!" **5** So he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me."

And he said, "I did not call; lie down again." And he went and lay down.

6 Then the Lord called yet again, "Samuel!"

So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." He answered, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." **7** (Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him.)

Samuel "knew the Lord" more than the sons of Eli did, but the above verse tells us that Samuel was not yet a prophet who brought the word and will of the Lord to Israel. Remember, prophecy was rare in those days. But the Lord was going to begin Samuel's ministry as a prophet that very night.

1 Samuel 3:8 And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you did call me."

Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy. **9** Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Samuel had a place to sleep close to Eli to serve him in the night should he need anything. Samuel's ear was tuned to Eli's voice, so he thought he heard his voice in the night. However, it was the voice of the Lord, and Samuel was hearing that voice for the first time. Eli instructed him what to do. It must have been difficult for Eli to know that God was passing by him (the high priest of Israel) to speak to this young boy.

10 Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears."

11 Then the Lord said to Samuel: "Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. **12** In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. **13** For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. **14** And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."

It was a heavy load for such young shoulders to bear, yet the Lord told Samuel all that He was going to do regarding Eli's house. *His sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.* There would be no atonement for such iniquity.

Both ears of everyone in Israel will tingle having heard this, meaning something will happen that is shocking and unexpected. God at times makes an example of wicked people to strike fear in the hearts of the rest. The story of Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament (Acts 5) is an example of this.

15 So Samuel lay down until morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision. **16** Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son!" He answered, "Here I am."

17 And he said, "What *is* the word that *the Lord* spoke to you? Please do not hide *it* from me. God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said to you." **18** Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It *is* the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him."

19 So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. **20** And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord.

21 Then the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

Samuel told Eli everything, leaving nothing out - even though it was a difficult message to deliver. Samuel grew to be a great prophet. None of his words fell to the ground, meaning that God fulfilled the prophecies that he spoke.

1 Samuel Chapter 4

The Tabernacle had been at Shiloh for the past 300 years or so during the period of the Judges. Joshua had overseen the establishment of the tabernacle in that place:

Joshua 18:1 (NKJV) Now the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of meeting there. And the land was subdued before them.

However, the fourth chapter of the book of 1 Samuel marks the end of that era.

1 Samuel 4:1 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

The prophet Samuel was accepted by all of Israel. He would be the last judge in Israel and help bring the nation to its next phase. But first . . .

The Ark of God Captured

Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek.

During this time the Philistines laid a heavy yoke on the neck of Israel. Though Samson had had some impact on the Philistines, they once again oppressed Israel.

2 Then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel. And when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men of the army in the field.

Israel was soundly defeated. They began to devise a plan.

3 And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, *"Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies."* **4** So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who dwells *between* the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

Israel was truly surprised to have lost the battle. Israel was supposed to seek the will of God for battle strategy from the priest (through the casting of lots). But instead of inquiring of the Lord, they decided to bring the ark of the covenant out of its place in the holy of holies and into battle with them - as a sort of good luck charm. It was as if they were forcing God to do something for them by bringing "Him" into battle. What they needed was true repentance - from the high priest on down.

Wicked Hophni and Phinehas were the last people that should have led Israel into battle. Wherever they went, the curse of God went with them, for they had crossed the line and God was judging them.

To use the ark of the Covenant as a good luck charm was wicked. Perhaps they were thinking back on the “old days” when Joshua led the people in battle against Jericho. At that time, *God commanded* them to bring the ark into the battle (Joshua 6:2-5). However, we should remember that back then they were entering the Promised Land, and they were on the march to conquer it. Things were different then. But now, the Tabernacle was established in Shiloh with a permanent place for the ark, and there was no direct command from God to bring it into battle.

1 Samuel 4:5 And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook.

Shouting is a good thing. Sometimes in a good church service, there is a spirit of shouting unto the Lord in victory. But the Israelites in this situation were not in God’s will. The shout may have been loud, but it was not a shout of obedience leading to victory. It was empty noise from disobedient, presumptuous people.

6 Now when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, “What *does* the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews *mean?*” Then they understood that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp. **7** So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, “God has come into the camp!” And they said, “Woe to us! For such a thing has never happened before. **8** Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These *are* the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. **9** Be strong and conduct yourselves like men [KJV: quit 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!”

The noise of the shout did something that the Israelites didn’t expect - it rallied their enemy to fight even harder! The Philistines were aware that the God of Israel sent plagues on the Egyptians, but their history was a little mixed up. The ark hadn’t been constructed when the Lord sent the Ten Plagues; and furthermore, the plagues did not come in the wilderness, but in Egypt before the people left. However, the Philistines respected the God of Israel, and in their minds, they were going to have to fight with all their might to win.

10 So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. **11** Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

The word that the Lord had spoken by his prophet was fulfilled (1 Samuel 2:34). Both of Eli’s sons died in one day. The ark was taken by the Philistines. Why did the sons of Eli think that the ark would save them when God was against them for their continued wickedness?

Israel was presumptive instead of seeking God’s will and His way. Israel wanted to do what they wanted to do, and they wanted God to okay it and bless it!

Oh, how badly things turned out! There were 30,000 soldiers that fell that day - and the ark was taken by the Philistines!

Death of Eli

1 Samuel 4:12 Then a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line the same day, and came to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. **13** Now when he came, there was Eli, sitting on a seat by the wayside watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city

and told *it*, all the city cried out. **14** When Eli heard the noise of the outcry, he said, "What *does* the sound of this tumult *mean*?" And the man came quickly and told Eli. **15** Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were so dim that he could not see.

16 Then the man said to Eli, "I *am* he who came from the battle. And I fled today from the battle line." And he said, "What happened, my son?"

17 So the messenger answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been a great slaughter among the people. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead; and the ark of God has been captured."

18 Then it happened, when he made mention of the ark of God, that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

Ears in Israel were tingling at the news. Eli was fearful for the ark of God. It was not the news of his sons, but the news of the loss of the ark that caused him to fall off his seat and die. Israel lost both its ark and its high priest in one day.

Ichabod

19 Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas's wife, was with child, *due* to be delivered; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and gave birth, for her labor pains came upon her. **20** And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, "Do not fear, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer, nor did she regard *it*. **21** Then she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. **22** And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

Death in the house of Eli continues. Phinehas' wife dies in childbirth. It should have been a time of great joy, giving birth to a son in Israel. But the news was too much for her to bear, and her strength was gone so she did not survive the birth.

It was the news of the ark that took her. *The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.*

The ark is no longer in Shiloh. God was going to begin something new in Israel; but for now, the ark would stay in temporary places until the time when King David would bring it to its new home in a new place - Jerusalem.

We read in a psalm:

Psalm 78:56 Yet they [Israel] tested and provoked the Most High God,
And did not keep His testimonies,

57 But turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers;
They were turned aside like a deceitful bow.

58 For they provoked Him to anger with their high places,
And moved Him to jealousy with their carved images.

59 When God heard *this*, He was furious,
And greatly abhorred Israel,

60 So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh,
The tent He had placed among men,

61 And delivered His strength into captivity,
And His glory into the enemy's hand.

62 He also gave His people over to the sword,
And was furious with His inheritance.

63 The fire consumed their young men,
And their maidens were not given in marriage.

64 Their priests fell by the sword,
And their widows made no lamentation.

Also, later in Israel's history, when the Lord spoke to the prophet Jeremiah, He referred to the time of the ark in Shiloh:

Jeremiah 7:12 "But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.

Although I Samuel says nothing about the destruction at Shiloh, we glean from other passages that the tabernacle in Shiloh was destroyed in battle. We don't know if Samuel saved the sacred vessels of the tabernacle, but this could have happened. The tabernacle in Shiloh is now history.

First Samuel Chapter 5

1 Samuel 5:1 (NKJV) Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. **2** When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon.

The ark of God had never before been touched by unconsecrated hands. It had been crafted in the wilderness under the direction of Moses, then as it went into use in the tabernacle worship, it was placed in the Holy of Holies. It was seen only by the High Priest, and only once a year on the Day of Atonement when the High Priest brought the blood of the sacrifice into the Holy Place to sprinkle it on the ark (Leviticus 16). Even then, the smoke of incense was so great that the ark was barely visible - if at all. When Israel was traveling in the wilderness, the high priest concealed the ark with coverings. Then carrying poles were placed in rings so the ark could be carried from place to place. Only designated Levites carried the ark, and they didn't see it under its coverings, nor did they touch it (Numbers 4:4-6, 15).

The lid of the ark was called the *mercy seat*. The lid had two cherubim (angels) made of gold, fastened to it. The ark contained the tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them, a pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded (Hebrews 9:3-5). The ark was the place where God's presence dwelt in that Old Testament time period.

Dagon was the chief deity of the Philistines, half man and half fish - a god of fertility and agriculture, first mentioned as god of the Philistines in Judges 16:23 (the story of Samson).

The Philistines believed that Jehovah of the Israelites was a deity, but not the only one, true God. He was placed in the house of Dagon as a conquered deity, one inferior to Dagon. However, inside the ark was a tablet that said, "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*"

God will not stand beside any other god. He is God alone. Christianity is not *a way*, but the way. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:16).

3 And when the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and set it in its place again.

Every knee will one day bow before the Lord, and here we see Dagon on his face before the glory of the Lord.

4 And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the Lord. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were broken off on the threshold; only Dagon's torso was left of it. **5** 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.

Because of what happened, a superstition developed among the Philistines. This superstition must have persisted for centuries, because it is referred to in the book of Zephaniah as one of the pagan practices copied by Israel that the Lord hated and that He was going to judge, *In the same day I will punish all those who leap over the threshold . . .* (Zephaniah 1:9).

6 But the hand of the Lord was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and He ravaged them and struck them with tumors, [KJV: smote them with emerods] *both* Ashdod and its territory.

Jehovah God sent a plague to the Philistines. Many translations describe it as "tumors," which are the result of bubonic plague, that caused death to many of them; but the KJV calls the plague, emerods, which is more correctly stated, "hemorrhoids" - not really a subject for polite conversation. Whether the plague really was hemorrhoids or tumors is up for debate.

7 And when the men of Ashdod saw how *it was*, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is harsh toward us and Dagon our god." **8** Therefore they sent and gathered to themselves all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?"

And they answered, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried away to Gath." So they carried the ark of the God of Israel away.

The Philistines had won a great victory by capturing the Ark of the Covenant of Israel. They were not yet willing to part with so great an object, so they passed it on to another Philistine city. They asked a great question, "*What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?*"

9 So it was, after they had carried it away, that the hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction; and He struck the men of the city, both small and great, and tumors broke out on them.

10 Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. So it was, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!"

The people of Ekron weren't about to take the ark along with the plagues that accompanied it.

11 So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go back to its own place, so that it does not kill us and our people." For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. **12** And the men who did not die were stricken with the tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

The once triumphant Philistines were now begging to get rid of the ark. Back in Israel, the people were mourning for their dead, and Shiloh lay in a heap of ashes among the smoke. Yes, Israel had its own troubles because they knew better than to practice idolatry, and God judged the people and their leaders in Shiloh.

But the Philistines had a different kind of trouble. They were not authorized to handle the ark, nor to look upon it. They got more than they bargained for.

It may seem odd that while the ark was in Israel, it seemed to be powerless to help the Israelites against their enemies. However, we must realize that Israel was not right with God, and therefore they lost the battle because of their sin. They were judged by God.

And now that the enemy had the ark in its possession, God showed Himself strong. God brought a plague upon the Philistines to speak to them and to correct them. The plague did affect their behavior, after all. They cried unto heaven for help (verse 12).

Conclusion

Some years before this, Samson, calling on the name of Jehovah God, pulled down the temple of Dagon at Gaza, showing just how weak this idol god was. When the Philistines got possession of the ark, they placed it in another temple of Dagon at Ashdod, perhaps in an attempt to gain credibility once again for their fish god.

It must have been quite a shock to find their god bowed down to the God of Israel! They tried to set it up again, but during the night, God cut off Dagon's hands and head! No other god was going to share the same space with Jehovah God!

Then the tumors came and afflicted them until they cried out to heaven for help. Next week we will read how the Philistines very carefully sent the ark back to Israel, and we will also read that the ark must be handled according to God's word - or there will be consequences.