

## 1 Samuel 4-6

Good morning and thank you for joining us. We're continuing our study through the book of 1 Samuel, so would you please turn in your Bibles to chapter 4?

Last week we saw the wickedness of Eli's 2 sons who were in the priesthood. And if you recall the beginning of 1 Samuel is taking place during the dark time of the judges, where Israel abounded in wickedness.

And during this time, a persistent enemy of Israel, still bubbling over with anger because of the victories of Samson, the Philistines takes advantage of Israel's lack of trust in God. Yet we'll see despite the Israel's constant defeats, God was still in control

These chapters are relatively short and move at a fast pace, so we're going to study chapters 4, 5 and 6 this morning.

The title of this mornings message is MISPLACED TRUST.

Let's pray.

Remember, back in Judges 14 that we studied a few months ago, Samson had already inflicted multiple defeats upon the Philistines. So to say there was bad blood between the Philistines and Israelites is an understatement. And for a time during the period of the Judges, the Philistines dominated southern Israel.

The Philistines organized into five city-states – Gaza, Gath, Ekron, Ashkelon, and Ashdod. History tells us that the Philistines had a military advantage. They imported iron weapons from Greece – armor, helmets, spears, swords, and shields. In fact, the Philistines were some of the first people in the region to possess iron.

Interestingly enough, most ancient people viewed dogs as predators and unwanted wild animals. But a dog cemetery has been discovered in the Philistine city of Ashkelon. Evidently, they were one of the first cultures to domesticate dogs.

1-3 kick us off with a battle between Israel and the philistines

1 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.[fn]

Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek. 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. 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." The bloodied and beaten Israelites call for divine back-up - but rather than cry out to the Lord, they bring out the Ark of the Lord. They were putting their trust in a physical object.

Israel rightly sensed they needed God's help to win the battle. But they were wrong in the way they sought help. Instead of humbly repenting and seeking God, they turned to methods that God never approved.

This is nothing new, even among Christians today. I've bet you've seen the Christian books and seminars that present four steps to deliverance, or six steps to victory, or twelve principles of success.

It's never about a program, it's about allowing God to work in us!

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. It's not surprising that Hophni and Phinehas were going along with this foolish plan. These priests were carnal, and carnality always relies on programs or formulas.

**SHOW PIC** If you recall from our studies in Exodus, the Ark of the covenant was the centerpiece of the holy of holies. The Ark was a rectangular box - roughly 4' long, by 2' high, by 2' deep. In the Ark were 3 items – the two tablets of the 10 Commandments, a jar of manna, and the rod of Aaron that budded with almond blossoms to confirm his priesthood.

The Ark was plaited with gold. Its lid - or “the mercy seat” as it was called - was made of solid gold – and adorned with two cherubim – or angels. The lid of the Ark served as God’s throne... and over the lid rested the visible, tangible presence of God. The Ark of the Covenant represented God to the people of Israel.

**CLOSE PIC**

But the men of Israel had made a fatal mistake. They assumed the Ark had powers of its own. The Ark itself was nothing but a box. Yet the superstitious Hebrews treated it like was some sort of good luck charm. So instead of repenting and changing their ways, they bring out the ark as though that’s all they need.

It's a cautionary tale for you and I to never mistake the things of God for God Himself.

5 And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook. **SHOW PIC** You can picture the scene, the troops get a boost in morale-

the ark is in the camp! Now they're gonna avenge their enemies!

## CLOSE PIC

But all the noise and excitement meant nothing because it wasn't grounded in God's truth.

Folks it's the same with church services. You can have a lot of shouting and shaking and excitement, but if it's not grounded in the truth of God's word, what good is it?

6-8

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.

If these guys believed God was greater than their gods, they should have submitted to Him.

But throughout these chapters we'll see rather than submit to God, they determine to fight against God all the more.

The Philistines encourage each other in verse 9

9 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!" Ok so how's this battle gonna end?..

10-11

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. In 1976 Israeli archeologists were digging in a grain silo at Izbet Sartah when they found a pottery shard on which were inscribed five lines. The writing recounts this story... It provides amazing evidence for the accuracy of the Bible.

The Israelites get absolutely routed-thirty thousand men died as the Philistines butchered the people of Israel.

Reading two chapters a day or attending church two times a week won't guarantee victory any more than bringing the box into the camp brought victory to the Israelites. God doesn't work that way.

If, however, reading two chapters a day or attending church two times a week is done for the purpose of drawing near to the Lord, to learn more about Him, to spend time with Him, God promises He will meet us there **James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.**

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. (a sign of mourning) 13 Now when he came, there was Eli, sitting on a seat by the wayside watching,[fn] 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. News of the defeat reaches Shiloh. The crowd that had shouted... now shutters in horror of the realization that the ark is now in the hands of the enemy.

14-18

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. It wasn't the news about his wicked sons death that upset him, rather Eli is violently shocked to hear the ark of the covenant has been captured. He falls and dies instantly.

19-22

19 Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' 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,[fn] 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." The birth of a son was to be a glorious time of celebrating. But things have changed- the entire nation is mourning over the fact the ark

has been captured. This woman, in her distress, names her son Ichabod, which means “No Glory”

Chapter 5 we see what happens as a result of the Philistines taking the Ark.

1 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[fn] and set it by Dagon.

**SHOW PIC** Half fish and half man, Dagon was the god of the Philistines. Also worshiped by the Assyrians, Dagon was considered by the people in the region of Canaan to be the father of Baal. **CLOSE PIC**

After they capture the Ark, the Philistines bring the ark home to gloat over their victory and mock the Lord. And in the minds of the Philistines their god, Dagon, had proven more powerful than Jehovah. This is why they bring it to the temple of Dagon – set it next to their idol.

Even though the Ark was just a reminder and representation of God; God is about to use the Ark to make a point to the Philistines. They may have defeated Israel’s army, but our Lord remains undefeated!

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.

The disciples of Dagon get up in the morning and find the fish-god bowing before the Ark. This seems a little fishy, but they chalk it up as an accident...

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<sup>[fn]</sup> was left of it. **SHOW PIC 2 of Dagon** Obviously this is more than an accident. The idol's head and hands are broken off. The Lord is obviously way a-head of Dagon. **Close pic**

It's interesting we often think it's up to us to defend God's reputation. But here His people have been unfaithful, yet God still sees to it that He gets glorified.

**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.** Imagine the horror of the Philistine priests when they entered the temple of Dagon the next morning. They not only saw their god bowing down before the ark, they also saw the image broken. How could something like this happen 2 days in a row?

These Philistine priests, like folks confronted with the truth today, rejected God despite the evidence, not because of a perceived lack of evidence. But God's not done getting their attention...

**6 But the hand of the LORD was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and He ravaged them and struck them with tumors,<sup>[fn]</sup> both Ashdod and its territory.** Now there is some debate amongst theologians as to what these tumors were. Some think it refers to a plague. Most understand the word "tumors" to mean hemorrhoids.

I absolutely believe the Philistines were smitten with hemorrhoids. If they wouldn't stand before God, they wouldn't be able to sit before Dagon, either.

God hits below the belt - literally.

7-8

**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. Instead of relenting and trusting in God, they simply deny the evidence and ship off the ark. The same happens today. Jesus tells us in **John 3 19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.**

9 So it was, after they had carried it away,(to Gath) 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. God’s judgment follows the Ark. His wrath now gets poured out on Gath. The men of Gath send the Ark to the city of Ekron, and look at verse 10-12...

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!” 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 Philistines, if they had repented and turned towards the LORD, could have benefited from this whole fiasco. Instead, their lack of repentance became a curse and a judgment to them.

It is the most foolish of things to deny God. For when a person denies God, they are then enemies of God.

Jesus said in **Matthew 12:30** “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.”

Chapter 6 describes the return of the Ark to Israel.

1 Now the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. 2 And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, “What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it to its place.” The Philistines didn’t want to do anything else to infuriate God, so they call in their religious scholars to tell them how God would want the Ark to be sent back to Israel.

3-5

3 So they said, “If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but by all means return it to Him with a trespass offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you.”

4 Then they said, “What is the trespass offering which we shall return to Him?”

They answered, “Five golden tumors and five golden rats, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines. For the same plague was on all of you and on your lords. 5 Therefore you shall make images of your tumors and images of your rats that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, from your gods, and from your land. The Philistine priests come up with the idea of returning the ark with five golden tumors and five golden rats in an attempt to appease God.

Essentially these pagan priests were saying “We know these plagues were no accidents. We know the LORD God of Israel has caused them, so we apologize to the LORD as we return the ark”

We know the plague involved tumors, but we’re never told anything about rats. Some think the tumors were the result of the bubonic plague, carried by rats. Or perhaps the rats were part of another plague or calamity mentioned in **1 Samuel 5:11: For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.**

**6 Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He did mighty things among them, did they not let the people go, that they might depart?** “Learn a lesson from the Egyptians,” the Philistine priests say. “When Pharaoh hardened his heart, the result was deadly. Let the ark go.”

Now God has revealed Himself several different times to the Philistines, but clearly they didn’t put their trust in Him. So now they decide how to return the ark, but they also come up with a plan to test God and see if the judgments they endured were really from the Lord.

7-9

**7 Now therefore, make a new cart, take two milk cows which have never been yoked, and hitch the cows to the cart; and take their calves home, away from them. 8 Then take the ark of the LORD and set it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you are returning to Him as a trespass offering in a chest by its side. Then send it away, and let it go. 9 And watch: if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that struck us—it happened to us by chance.”**

The test was simple and the odds were heavily stacked against God. By nature, two milk cows which have never been yoked would've resisted their yokes and not pulled a cart at all. And on top of that, these guys decided to take these cow's calves away.

Why? Because the "maternal instinct" of the cows would draw them not towards the land of Israel, but back home to their own calves.

Note the Philistines continue to doubt despite the evidence. The statue of Dagon fell, twice, the plague followed the Ark three times - shifted direction every time the Ark moved, and they still doubt it's God? How are the Philistines still refusing to believe?

Folks it's not signs and wonders that cause people to believe.

Luke 16:27 "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' 29 Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' "

10-16

10 Then the men did so; they took two milk cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. 11 And they set the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the chest with the gold rats and the images of their tumors. 12 Then the cows headed straight for the road to Beth Shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, (lowing means the cows were not especially happy. They longed for their calves at home) and did

not turn aside to the right hand or the left. And the lords of the Philistines went after them to the border of Beth Shemesh.

13 Now the people of Beth Shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley; and they lifted their eyes and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it. 14 Then the cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and stood there; a large stone was there. So they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. 15 The Levites took down the ark of the LORD and the chest that was with it, in which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone. Then the men of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices the same day to the LORD.

16 So when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day. After being guided for some ten miles from the Philistine city, without stopping or going to one side or the other, the ark is now back in the hands of the Israelites.

17-18

17 These are the golden tumors which the Philistines returned as a trespass offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron; 18 and the golden rats, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both fortified cities and country villages, even as far as the large stone of Abel on which they set the ark of the LORD, which stone remains to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh. And this is where we would wrap a nice bow on the story right???...not so....

19 Then He struck the men of Beth Shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck fifty thousand and seventy men[fn] of the people, and the people lamented because the LORD had struck the people with a great slaughter. You've

heard the expression, “curiosity killed the cat”? Well, it killed more than a cat in Beth Shemesh. The men of the city let their curiosity lead them into sin.

The Ark of the Covenant was only to be touched and handled by specific Levites from the family of Kohath, and even they were commanded to not touch the ark itself **Numbers 4:15 And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.**

The men of Beth Shemesh sinned by not only touching the ark, but trying to take a peek inside!

Notice God dealt with the Israelites more strictly than He dealt with the Philistines, who just transported the ark by a cart. God did this because the Israelites, who had His law, knew what He commanded.

**20 And the men of Beth Shemesh said, “Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? And to whom shall it go up from us?”**

**21 So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath Jearim, saying, “The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down and take it up with you.”** In their disrespect for God, the men of Beth Shemesh offended the holiness of the LORD. Now they knew the LORD was holy, but it didn’t make them want to be closer to God. It made them want to distance themselves from God.

They say “Come and get this ark.”

No one knows where the ark is today. Indiana Jones still hasn’t found it!

Because of Jesus, we have access to heaven, and God, any time we want.

Hebrews 7:25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.