

1 Samuel 4:4-22 - Thursday, August 1st, 2013

(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. (5) And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook.

- What they do here is wrong on every level for a number of reasons not the least of which is the way they transport the Ark of the Covenant.
- Namely, we're told that it was the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas who are the ones that accompany the Ark of the Covenant of God.
- The problem with these two men doing this is that their carnality is matched only by the carnality of the Israelites in doing this to begin with.

- Another problem with what they do here is that they are tempting God, such that doing this would force God's hand to give them victory.
- In so doing, they are playing into the Devil's scheme, which is that of testing God, just as the Devil tried to do with Jesus in the wilderness.
- The take away from just this aspect of it is this, the will Devil relentlessly tempt us to fight spiritual battles with carnal plans and weapons.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 NKJV (3) For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. (4) For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, (5) casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, (6) and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

- Peter is the best example of someone fighting a spiritual battle, with carnal weaponry. It's found in John 18:10-11, when Jesus is arrested.

John 18:10-11 NIV Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) (11) Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

- A third problem with what the Israelites are doing here is that have no regard for the holiness of God, and as such, they have fear of God.
- They reduced the Ark of the Covenant to a lucky charm of sorts, as evidenced back in verse three where they say that "it" might save them.
- Perhaps it's for this reason the Holy Spirit insures that the narrative records it, no less than four times in three verses, Ark of the Covenant.

Charles Spurgeon - "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. . . . They trusted in the outward sign, and forgot that the most holy emblems bring no blessing to ungodly hearts. God will have us know that external religion, is nothing worth, without inward holiness. . . . Ceremonies cannot help us if the Lord be not with us. A cross on the bosom is worthless, Christ in the heart is precious."

- A fourth problem I found with what they do here is, they are hyping everyone up by way of shouting loudly so much so that the Earth shook.
- The problem with this is that it's disingenuous at best, and it's dishonest at worst, because they're manufacturing this fake and plastic fruit.
- By that I mean the Israelites have resorted to creating this display of spirituality outwardly in order for them to fill their spiritual void inwardly.

Adam Clarke - "Had they *humbled* themselves, and *prayed* devoutly and fervently for success, they would have been heard and saved. Their shouting proved both their vanity and irreligion."

- Here's the bottom line, when we lack the Spirit, we resort to the flesh, and it's manifested in the very same ways as we see here with Israel.
- Here's how, we like the Israelites will resort to fleshly means of manipulating God to grant us that which He would gladly give in the Spirit.
- Then, secondly, resorting to fleshly means will give way to fighting spiritual battles in the arena of carnal methods just as the Israelites did.

- Thirdly, fleshly means and carnal weapons need the superstitious component of the lucky charm, as a substitute for the presence of God.
- Then, fourth and finally, to keep up this false façade, as it were, we've got to get hyped up, and pepped up so as to hype others up with us.
- Sadly, this is an apt description of many a worship service in the church today and what's even sadder is that it doesn't have to be this way.

Charles Spurgeon - "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."

(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.

- Couple of thoughts on this the first of which is, the Philistines seemly have more regard for the Ark of the Covenant than do the Israelites.
- This is remarkable and commendable when you realize Israel hadn't brought the Ark of Covenant into battle against the Philistines before.
- Secondly, it seems the Philistines have more of a fear of God than do the Israelites, and this fear of God was from four hundred years ago.

Henry Morris - "Some four centuries after the event, the Philistines were still aware of the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt."

- The lesson here is quite clear in that the enemy is more afraid of us than we should ever be of him this because the Devil is a defeated foe.
- This of course presupposes the Lord goes before me, such that He is with me, and for me, because then, nobody can prevail against me.
- This also presupposes I don't have just the outward appearance of God's presence, but I have the inward assurance of God's presence.

- It's interesting to note that Israel were victorious in Jericho when the Ark of the Covenant went in front of those marching around the city.
- Even prior to that, the Israelites were victorious against the Midianites when Moses had the priests lead the Ark of the Covenant into battle.
- When we get to 1 Samuel 14, we'll see Saul doing it then in 2 Samuel 11:11 we also see David bringing the Ark of the Covenant into battle.

(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!" (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.

- How tragic is this? Not only do 30,000 Israelite foot soldiers die in addition to Eli's two sons but the Ark of the Covenant is captured as well.
- Perhaps you'll indulge me for just a bit as I attempt to tackle the question of why it happened, and why God wants us to know it happened.
- First, why did this happen in this way? I believe God allowed the Israelites to be defeated and the Ark to be captured because of idolatry.

- Here's how I get there, the Israelites replaced the God of the Ark with the Ark of God, and as such they made for themselves another god.
- They had turned the Ark of the Covenant into an idol, which may explain why it is that God allowed the Philistines to take their idol away.
- The truth of the matter is, because the Israelites trusted in the object of their idolatry instead of their God, they'd see only God can deliver.

As one commentator so aptly noted, "The ark of God was captured, but the God of the ark was still on the throne in heaven, and guiding these circumstances for His glory. Israel thought they could ignore the God of the ark and find deliverance in the ark of God. But God showed He was greater than the ark."

- Now, why is it that God would want us to know about this horrific defeat? Why would this rise to the level of being recorded in the narrative?
- I would suggest it's because God wants us to know that those other god's we put before Him, cannot deliver us, and bring the victory to us.
- I realize this may be a firm grasp of the obvious, but in the next chapter (1 Samuel 5) we will literally see what can happen to other god's.

By the way, as a side note, there are archeological finds that prove this literally happened exactly as we have it in our Bible's. Listen to what one commentator wrote, "in the late 1970's, a five-line inscription was found on a grain silo in the ruins of Izbet Sarteh. When deciphered, it was found to contain a Philistine account of this battle, the capture of the ark, even specifically mentioning the priest Hophni. This is the earliest known extra-biblical reference to an Old Testament event.

(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.

- Just when you thought it couldn't get any worse when Eli hears the Philistines captured the Ark he falls backward breaks his neck and dies.
- What's interesting to me about Eli's reaction is that it wasn't the death of his two son's that caused this, it was the capture of the ark of God.
- I think the reason is that Eli knew God's just judgment would be meted out when Hophni and Phinehas would both die on the same day.

One commentator said it best this way, "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."

Charles Spurgeon - "His heart was broken and then his neck. He fell in a swoon of grief. No sword of the Philistines could have killed him more certainly than this terrible news that God's ark was captured. ...Thus was fulfilled the prophecy that the judgments of the Lord on Eli's house should make many ears to tingle. Shiloh had been defiled with sin, and it therefore came to be defaced with sorrow. ...Nothing so much affects good men as calamity to the Church, or dishonor brought upon the name of the Lord."

(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, 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."

- This is rather intense in the sense that she lost her husband, brother in-law, father in-law, 30,000 men, the battle, and even the Ark of God.
- All this happened in the span of just one day, and it's such bad news that it causes her to go into early labor and this birth brings her death.
- Not only is her life lost in addition to everything else that's lost, the glory of God is also lost, such that it had as a result departed from Israel.

- Note that the Ark was captured because the glory had already departed. It wasn't that the glory departed because the Ark was captured.
- The reason I make that distinction is because doing so keeps the onus and culpability on the elders of Israel and Hophni and Phinehas.
- In other words, they brought this on themselves and Israel when they presumptuously moved the ark from the tabernacle in the first place.

Henry Morris - "The presence of the Lord, the shekinah glory, dwelled in the tabernacle, over the ark between the cherubim's, and neither the ark nor the tabernacle were ever to be moved unless the glory cloud itself, representing the Lord's presence, moved first. This presumptuous act of the elders, with Hophini and Phinehas, in taking the ark out of the tabernacle into the army camp resulted in the tragic loss of the glory itself, along with the divine presence, ...which had evidently been permanently residing in the temple at Shiloh until this time. It is also significant that Shiloh itself is never mentioned as the center of Israel's worship after this. Archaeological and Biblical evidence indicates that the city was eventually destroyed."

- Before we bring our study of this chapter to a close I think I'd be remiss were I not to talk just a little bit about the wife of Eli's son Phinehas.
- Here's why, I get the impression that she was likely a woman of God. The reason I say that is because of what she does at her son's birth.
- More specifically, she did not regard the birth of her son as good news because of the bad news that the glory of God had departed Israel.

- Moreover, there is most profound irony that woven into the fabric of the narrative, and it's one for which can be easily missed at first read.
- Here's what I'm thinking, this wife of Phinehas honored the Lord over her son in stark contrast to Eli who honored his sons over the Lord.
- Whereas Eli cared more about his two sons than he did his God, this wife of Phinehas cared more about her God than she did her sons.

- There's something else about here I need to point out. She was a godly wife in stark contrast to Phinehas who was an ungodly husband.
- This speaks to how that wives can live godly lives in spite of their ungodly husbands lives. Sadly, it's usually the wife that's the godly one.
- This begs the question of why she had to die, especially on the receiving end of such devastating news at a time when she should rejoice.

Charles Spurgeon - "She seems to have been a pious woman, though her husband was a wicked man: her piety led her to forget her own miseries in the greater miseries of the Church of God, and to make her child's name the memorial of the departed glory of Israel. Her death was another stroke at Eli's house, but it was sent in love to her, for she was spared the sight of Israel's sorrows."