

THE ARKS OF OUR DAY

“Why did the LORD bring defeat on us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD’S covenant from Shiloh, so that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.” —1 SAMUEL 4:3

What God blesses as an expression of Himself, He will condemn when it becomes a substitute for Himself. This has been the case throughout the history of the Israelite people, and is a commonplace among Christians today.

The Ark of the Covenant had brought success to the Israelites before, but after losing a battle against the Philistines, the Israelites believed bringing the ark from Shiloh and taking it into their next battle would bring them victory. They did this, and not only did they suffer an even greater defeat, but the ark was captured by the Philistines. Wherever the Philistines brought the ark, God caused an outbreak of tumours. After seven months, it was returned to the Israelites, and brought to a place called Kiriath Jearim.

1 Samuel 7:2 says, “The ark remained at Kiriath Jearim a long time - twenty years in all. Then all the people of Israel turned back to the LORD.” Samuel then tells them to rid themselves of foreign gods, commit themselves to the Lord, and He will deliver them from the Philistines. “So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only” (7:4). The people fasted and confessed their sin. They said to Samuel, “Do not stop crying out to the LORD

our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines” (7:8). God gave them victory, throwing the Philistines into such a panic they ended up killing their own men and running from the Israelites. Throughout the rest of Samuel’s lifetime the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines.

Something very different is happening now. The people recognized their own ideas and means of dependence were bankrupt of any power. Only God is alive and active. Detached from God, the ark was a lifeless piece of furniture, and merely representative of God. All the pagan gods imported and erected in Israel were, of course, useless. The subtlety of our day is that the better the object of our trust, the greater the illusion we have.

What are the arks of our day that represent hope that help us? Perhaps family, friends, pastors, counselors, programs, techniques or self help books? These may be of tremendous value, but there is no substitute for dealing with God Himself. After the Israelites' victory, Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it ‘Ebenezer’, meaning “Thus far the LORD has helped us.” If we bring God in and if we keep Him in, the Lord will help us.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, may I never fail to bring You into every circumstance as my source of strength and deliverance. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: Have I substituted dealing directly with God with something else?