

After God's Own Heart

Resisting Superstition

1 Samuel 4:1-11

Today we will consider a key element of being a man or woman After God's Own Heart: **Resisting Superstition!**

"You, LORD, have abandoned your people, the descendants of Jacob. They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and embrace pagan customs." **Isaiah 2:6**

We may not realize it, but we are prone to superstition rather than being people after God's Own Heart.

"And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. 2 The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle. 3 And when the people came to 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 here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.' 4 So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. 5 As soon as the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. 6 And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, 'What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?' And when they learned that the ark of the Lord had come to the camp, 7 the Philistines were afraid, for they said, 'A god has come into the camp.' And they said, 'Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. 8 Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. 9 Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight.' 10 So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell. 11 And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died." **1 Samuel 4:1-11**

Main Idea: People After God's Own Heart Don't Settle for Spiritual Superstition

I. Spiritual Superstition is Devastating in Battle – 1 Samuel 4:1-2

Philistines: Israel's enemy for over 500 years (Used to be Egypt, later Babylon). Normally a Philistine victory over Israel was actually God disciplining his people!

"...Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle." **1 Samuel 4:2b**

"Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.' ...But the evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?' And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." **Acts 19:13, 15-16**

We live in constant spiritual warfare. We are destined to fail in our battles if we are not After God's Own Heart.

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II. Spiritual Superstition is Ineffective in Leadership – 1 Samuel 4:3-5

Rather than seeing this embarrassing loss & 4,000 dead soldiers as a sign that they needed to repent before the Lord, ask his forgiveness and do what he said.

*"...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 here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.'" **1 Samuel 4:3b***

"This was an attempt by the elders to twist God's arm into helping them instead of trying to find out the reason for God's displeasure." **Robert D. Bergen**

"Instead of attempting to get right with God, these Israelites set about devising superstitious means of securing the victory over their foes." **Charles H. Spurgeon**

What was the Ark? A 4-foot x 2-foot box built early in the Exodus journey from Egypt (400 yrs prior). Made of gold-plated wood with a solid gold lid on top with 2 angel-like figures on the ends framing the center famously known as the Mercy Seat. Inside were 3 Items: 1) Stone tablets of Moses (God's Commandment), 2) Jar of Manna from Wilderness (God's Provision), 3) Aaron's Rod (God's Protection). To be clear, it was a meaningful reminder of God's covenant relationship with Israel, but... Nowhere does the Bible teach that the Ark of the Covenant guaranteed the Israelites victory in Battle, or that we can twist God's arm with Spiritual Superstition of any kind (Spiritual disciplines to earn God's favor, rather than pursuing his heart).

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III. Spiritual Superstition is Not Fooling Anyone – 1 Samuel 4:6-10

*"And when they learned that the ark of the Lord had come to the camp, the Philistines were afraid, for they said, 'A god has come into the camp.' And they said, 'Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness.'" **1 Samuel 4:6b-8***

"Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight.' So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell." **1 Sam 4:9-10**

God's favor is solely given to those who desire and are in a sincere relationship with him. There is no cheat code.

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IV. Spiritual Superstition is Spiritual Regression – 1 Samuel 4:11

“And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.” 1 Samuel 4:11

“The God who was revealed as personal and sovereign at Midian and Sinai had been traded in for a god-in-a-box that the leaders thought could work magic against the Philistines at Aphek.” Eugene Peterson

“Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness.” 1 Timothy 4:7

Next year, you'll be a year older. Will you be a year deeper in relationship with God as you pursue his heart or will you still be trying Spiritual Superstitions instead?

Spiritual superstition will always lead to devastation.

“And about the time of her death the women attending her said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, for you have borne a son.’ But she did not answer or pay attention. And 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.” 1 Samuel 4:20-22

What's the alternative to spiritual superstition? The moment we treat God like a transaction, His glory leaves and we're on our own. The answer is found in a baby's name. Baby Ichabod's name announced that God's glory had departed—the result of spiritual superstition. But another baby's name brings us a very different promise.

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us).” Matthew 1:23

“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” Colossians 2:8-10

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Sources and Further Reading Opportunities

- **CSB Study Bible** – Trevin Wax, Ed. (2017)
- **Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel** – J.D. Greear & Heath Thomas (2016)
- **Wiersbe Expository Outlines on the OT** – Warren Wiersbe (1993)

- **New American Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel** – Robert D. Bergen (1996)
- **Spurgeon Study Bible** – C.H. Spurgeon (2017)
- **First and Second Samuel** – Eugene H. Peterson (1999)
- **Tony Evans Study Bible** – Tony Evans (2019)
- **The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible** – Gordon D. Fee (2011)