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## A Lesson in “Ark”-eology

### I Samuel 4

**Intro:** There is an abrupt shift in the narrative in **ch4**. You could say that **vs1a** is actually the concluding statement of **ch3** b/c we will hear nothing more concerning Samuel until we get 2 **ch7**. In **ch1-3**, Samuel's been the focus of attention but now he will disappear from the scene 4 a while so we can see how the old religious regime is removed b/4 we focus on the new leadership **YHWH** will ordain 4 His people thru Samuel & his ministry. **YHWH** will also teach Israel some important lessons in “**Ark**”-eology, not the archeology that is the study of human history & prehistory but a more accurate understanding of the place & purpose of the ark of the covenant in Israelite culture & religion. It is important that they come 2 this right understanding b/4 they come 2 repentance under Samuel. So Samuel will now fade 2 the background & the ark of the covenant will take center stage 4 a few chapters.

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**1- Philistines-** they stand as the major antagonists of Israel from the time of Samson & Samuel until the rise of David's monarchy forces them 2 stop attacking Israel lands. The Philistines are mentioned in the Bible as far back as the days of Abraham (**Gen 21:32**). They were originally a seagoing people, mostly from the Aegean Sea who migrated south & invaded the territory along the Mediterranean coast & their goal was 2 control all the land of Canaan. There were small numbers of them in the land in the days of Abraham & they only began 2 migrate into the area in force about the time that Joshua & Israel began their conquest of Canaan.

What made the Philistines such a formidable enemy was the fact that they were of the military aristocracy of Crete. They possessed the best in Greek military equipment (helmets, shields, mail, swords & spears) & they were also the 1<sup>st</sup> in the region 2 process iron & monopolized the market so they deprived Israel of its use until the time of David.

Now, besides all this historical gobbledy-goop, we should note the context of the *timing* of all this. No sooner had **YHWH** begun 2 reveal His word 2 His people again than the enemy shows up 2 attack them. Have you found that 2 be true in your life? It's a fairly common occurrence that we need 2/b prepared 4 but it also seems some believers would rather not have 2 face the enemy. “If I don't move any further, draw any closer, go any deeper w/ the Lord, I won't have 2 fight many battles.” It's almost like they believe: “what I don't know won't hurt me.” We're about 2 dispel that evil lie b/c as Israel will discover, not only can “what they don't know” hurt them, it may very well **kill** them!

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**2-3- 4K-** so far, so bad: 4K lost in the 1<sup>st</sup> engagement. It wasn't that **YHWH** hadn't been helping, He'd just been helping the wrong team! The elders asked the *right question* (**3a**) but they failed 2 let the reality of it sink into their hearts. If they'd have taken time 2 contemplate the question, they might've been instructed by **Lev 26:17** or **Deut 28:25**. If they'd have remembered the terms of **YHWH**'s covenant, they would've seen that this defeat was caused by their own **disobedience** 2 **YHWH**'s law. But, instead of instruction & correction, they had an epiphany – an idea sounded so good, it couldn't help but be the game-changer they needed. What was this big idea? “Hey, let's go get the ark of the covenant of the Lord. That ought 2 do the trick!”

The ark was the most important piece of furniture in the tabernacle; a gold covered box: 3¾' long X 2¼' wide & high, that sat behind a thick veil in the Holy of Holies (**Most Holy Place**). But the ark was much more than just a gold box, it represented **YHWH**'s **rulership** over Israel (Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of Hosts **Enthroned** on the Cherubim), His **revelation** 2 Israel (tablets of **big 10**) & His **reconciliation** w/ Israel (**mercy seat**). The ark pointed 2 **YHWH**, the **ruling, speaking, forgiving** God of Israel. But the ark also = a *sign* of **YHWH** **leading** His people. The ark led Israel into battle against the Midianites (**Num 31**); was 1<sup>st</sup> 2 cross the Jordan (**Josh 3-4**) & circled around Jericho. Maybe the elders thought they needed a little “old-time religion” in order 2 experience 1 of **YHWH**'s old-time **deliverances**.

The elders, of course, were **right** in seeing they needed help from **YHWH** but were wrong in how they went about seeking that help. Instead of humbly repenting & seeking **YHWH**, they resort 2 a method that equates 2 nothing less than **using God** 2 accomplish their own purposes. Their assumption was: “if we bring the ark 2 battle, **YHWH** w/b **forced** 2 deliver us in order 2 protect His honor.” Their reasoning was: If anything adverse happened 2 the ark, that would make **YHWH** the loser & He won't allow that 2 happen. He'll have 2 save us now – His own honor is at stake! B/c they have the sign of His presence, they now have **YHWH** under pressure – He wouldn't dare allow them 2 lose. 2 have God's furniture is 2 have God's power – the ark is their religious **ace in the hole!** What's wrong w/ that?

This is nothing more than a pressure tactic, a way 2 twist God's arm. This is not **faith**, its **superstition!** They saw the ark as their big, gold good-luck charm. Some call it **rabbit-foot** theology & I believe its 1 of the most widespread sins in the church today. “If I just go 2 church occasionally; if I go thru this ceremony; if I send an offering 2 this preacher; if I listen 2 this music; if I sing these songs; if I kneel on this prayer rug; then God will surely answer, respond, bless!” When believers think & act this way, their goal is not 2 seek God but 2 control Him, not 2 submit 2 Him but 2 use Him. Many Christians prefer religious magic over spiritual holiness b/c they're interested in **success**, not **repentance**.

**4-5-** Will it work? The Israelites certainly believed it would b/c they were looking 2 the ark 2 save them, not **YHWH**. Instead of focusing on the ark, they should've noticed that the ark was being served & carried by priests who had forsaken the Lord. Their shout shook the earth but it was only **carnal self-confidence**. A passer-by would have

thought they were having a great church service but the noise & excitement really meant nothing b/c it wasn't grounded in God's truth. As a matter-of-fact, all it really does is encourage the enemy 2 fight that much harder!

**6-9-What-** It's surprising how much Israelite theology the Philistines were aware of. They new it was unusual 4 the ark 2 come 2 the battle field, they knew what & Who the ark represented & they knew what Israel's God had done 4 her in bringing her into the land. They recognized the superiority of Israel's God but they refused 2 submit 2 Him. Their problem wasn't a lack of knowledge – it was a lack of submission. That tends 2/b our problem a lot as well...

**10-11-30K-** despite all the hype & build-up, the idea tanked! Israel is defeated, there's a great slaughter, Hophni & Phinehas are killed & the ark is taken by the Philistines. On the surface it looks like **YHWH** was defeated, He was unable 2 deliver the goods 4 Israel. Is that possible? No! So, what is really going on? What's **YHWH** saying here?

1<sup>st</sup> & most obvious: **YHWH** didn't feel obligated 2 bless Israel just b/c they took the ark into battle. He won't allow His arm 2/b twisted by superstitious beliefs & actions. God is a Person, not a genie 2/b summoned at the will of man. But there are 2 more sobering implications 2/b derived from this passage, principles we should chew on 4 a good while.

1) God will rather suffer shame in the short term than allow you 2 carry on a false relationship w/ Him. Even worse...  
2) God will allow you 2/b disappointed in Him if it will wake you up 2 the kind of God He really is. (**Dale R Davies**). God is more concern w/ how we see Him than in how He looks 2 us. God wants us 2 see Him accurately b/c it's then & only then that we will approach & relate 2 Him properly: **operating by faith** & **responding in love**.

Today, here in Grace Chapel, it's not a matter of whether you believe in God but rather do you **believe God**? Do you believe what He says in His Word? Do you trust Him 2 keep His promises? Do you really believe Him when He says, **"Those who honor Me I will honor & those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed"** (2:30). What does it mean 2 honor God? Trust Him, take Him at His Word & then obey Him – allow His Word 2 live in & thru your life. When we fail 2 do that, what are we really doing? God says we **despise** Him (2 hold in contempt, 2 disdain). Never! I love God! But if you regularly ignore His Word, reject His principles, think these timeless truths that have been passed down & used successfully thru the ages suddenly don't apply 2 your current situation – what else can you call it? The result: God will **lightly esteem** you, (slight, of little account). When we find ourselves behind the 8 ball: why aren't things working out like they should (**work, family, finances, witnessing**), stop & ask, **"Am I honoring God in every area of my life?"** If you can't say **yes**, then you need 2 confess it & repent & start honoring God the way He deserves 2/b.

This isn't a scare tactic, its concern from a heart saddened by the trouble people get into by failing 2 honor their God. We are living in a time & a world where, as believers, we can't afford 2/b lightly esteemed by God. If we want the full favor of God 2 shine down upon us, we must be willing 2 give God the full measure of honor He deserves (demands)

**12-18-** Eli's anxiously awaiting news of the battle. Oddly, he's more concerned 4 the fate of the ark than 4 his sons. When it comes, the bad news piles up fast: Israel's fled; a great slaughter; 2 sons dead; ark's been taken. It was the last bit of news that did Eli in: fell backwards, neck snapped & died; an ignominious end 2 an unremarkable life.

**heavy-** there's some sober word play going on in this passage. Ancient Hebrews used words from the physical word 2 express abstract concepts. 4 instance, they had no word 4 **power** (abstract) so they used **"hand"** 2 convey the idea. 2/b delivered into the hand of ones enemy = 2/b delivered into his power. Similarly, the word **honor** in Hebrew (or **glory**) comes from the same root as **heavy** (**kabed**). In Israelite culture, a person who was honorable or glorious had a heaviness of presence (they could **"throw their weight around"**). Now, **YHWH** had already accused Eli & his sons of making themselves **fat** (2:29). Eli was taking honor that belonged 2 **YHWH**. Now when Eli dies, we're told he was **"old & heavy"** (same word 4 **honor** in 2:30). The implication here is that Eli literally steals **YHWH's honor**, making himself **heavy** w/ the meat of the sacrifices that belonged 2 God. His appetite 4 good meat was stronger than his appetite 4 spiritual things. He was carnal in every area of life. B/c he walked in the flesh, he grew weary, old, blind & heavy. Tho his life had great potential 4 godly influence, it ended w/ a sad legacy of **disappointment**.

**40 yrs-** in the end, all Eli did was mark time. Time served – in office, in service, in prison – which is it? Well, if all your doing is serving time, it doesn't much matter, does it? **"I've been a Christian for 40 yrs."** That's it? **Time served!**

**19-22- IChabod-** the 1<sup>st</sup> section ended w/ 2 deaths & this section also ends w/ 2 deaths: Eli & his daughter-in-law. The news & the birth was just too much 4 her & she succumbed 2 death. Her last words accurately sum up that dark day: **"the glory has departed from Israel"** She's moved most by the loss of the ark. It's quite possible that she taught more theology in her death than her worthless husband did his entire life. But, was she correct in her assessment?

No, she was wrong! The glory of God had departed but not b/c the ark of God had been captured; the ark had been captured b/c the glory had already departed. The glory of God left when Israel stopped repenting & trusting God & started superstitiously trusting in the ark itself. Again, the implication of this passage should be very sobering: sometimes God must remove His manifest presence from us in order that we might seek Him rightly (correctly).

Sadly, the same can be said 4 many a church, ministry or individual Christian life: the glory has departed. There's activity (priests & tabernacle) but God's not enthroned among them. They have a form of godliness, w/o the power.

How could **YHWH** allow something so terrible 2 happen? 1<sup>st</sup>, He's confirming His Word of judgment against Israel &

the house of Eli. 2<sup>nd</sup>, He's correcting Israel's focus: teaching them 2 trust in the God of the ark, not the ark of God. 3<sup>rd</sup>, was it really that terrible 2 God? Is He up in heaven wringing His hands, fretting over how things will turn out, worried about His reputation or the Philistines or their gods? Not hardly! In fact, He's just beginning 2 show His glory! Rest assured, when calamity strikes, God will use it in a marvelous way 2 glorify Himself in our lives. It was right 2/b sad over the loss of life & the ark on that day. But, they should've had confidence, knowing that **YHWH** was able 2 take care of Himself. God was no loser by this event & the Philistines were no gainers by it either; & Israel would receive more good than hurt from it in the end, all things considered. Yes, **YHWH** is going 2 use the ark 2 teach both the Israelites & the Philistines some important lessons.

Hopni & Phinehas's deaths = God's judgment is assured. It may take some time but it will come.

