

1 Samuel 4-6

Good evening, it is so good to be here with you all tonight.

This evening we are going to continue our study of 1 Samuel, we will be in chapters 4-6 tonight.

Now, in the first three chapters, the story of Samuel dominated the text, but the author will now break from the narrative of Samuel, to close the season on the disobedient generation prior to the great prophet.

Remember last time we were together the priest Eli, and his two sons Hophni and Phinehas came under the judgement of God.

First, an unknown man of God came to bring word of the judgement, then the boy Samuel began to hear the Word of the Lord, and the first Word he received was condemnation of his master Eli.

Instead of repenting and trying to get right with God, Eli the priest is content to meet this judgement, and he was also okay with his two out of control sons meeting their doom as well.

It almost seems as though this cowardly priest was reassured and perhaps even comforted that God was still working in the nation of Israel in spite of his family, and perhaps he found a twisted rest knowing that Samuel had been chosen by God to carry on the mantle of ministry.

And God was moving in the boy, and establishing him as a prophet that was known and respected all throughout Israel.

What a turn of events in the nation of Israel, it seems as though the light of God's Word was about to be snuffed out altogether by the syncretistic religion that Hophni and Phinehas were creating in Israel.

They were lusers, and worked the priesthood just like the pagan religions all around them.

And the hopelessness that we saw in the Tabernacle of God as it was turned into a brothel, has given way now to a new light as God's Spirit is working a new revival through His chosen prophet.

Now, again as the author breaks away from Samuel, he will focus now on the family of Eli meeting their fate promised to them.

Before a new move of God can happen, the old guard must be removed.

And really for the next three chapters now, the Ark of the Covenant will be the main focus of the narrative.

So let's pray before we get into our text tonight.

1 Samuel chapter 4 verse 1 starts out with our last mention of God's prophet...

4:1 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

A monumental moment and statement here, Word is getting out that God is speaking once again to Israel.

And no sooner does God's Word begin to come to His people than the enemy shows up to attack.

We read next...

The Ark of God Captured

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." 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.

Israel's enemy this time is the Philistines, and they will be the main foe throughout the books of Samuel and Kings.

The Philistines were originally Sea going people from the more Northern Aegean Sea region, they invaded the Mediterranean coast and since their arrival, they

sought to control all of the land God promised to Abraham's decedents.

Interesting today, they still desire the land, and continue in their pursuit to control the land.

Palestine is a form of the word Philistine.

And we see the Palestinians in the news still to this day, as they dispute land with Israel, and even war with each other.

Understand the dispute is an ancient one.

In our study of the Old Testament we saw the mention of these invaders all the way back in Abraham's day in Genesis 21:32, and remember when Moses was leading the nation out of Egypt, they avoided the war experienced Philistines and went around their territory.

But here, the two nations draw up in battle array, and it is more likely that this particular battle was Israel's response to a Philistine invasion.

We see the two armies clash, and the Jews are defeated overwhelmingly.

Four thousand warriors were killed.

The defeat caused the elders of Israel question things.

"Were they not the chosen people, told to take the land?"

"Why was God not with them?"

Of course, they know and understand that whether in victory or defeat God is in control and sovereign.

So they ask “Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?”

They are not so much accusing God, as to wondering what the reason was that He allowed this.

They want to know what went wrong, but there seems to be no hint that the loss was considered judgement from God.

Of course, if they just referred to God’s Word they would know what went wrong.

God told them when they turned their backs on Him, that part of their judgment would entail **Lev 26:17**

17 I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies.

Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you.

Also in Deut. 28:25 "The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth.

But as many do today, they think God could not possibly mean that about them, that surely is meant for someone else.

And so they get together to plan and scheme some more, instead of turning to their God humbly and asking for direction we see next that they conclude that they should bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to them.

Instead of repenting, they see the Ark of God as a luck charm or a relic that will win God's favor in the victory. They are trying to use God for their own good, superstitiously.

The Ark was something sacred, it was gold covered and portable, we studied its intricacies in our study of Exodus chapter 25.

It was to sit behind the thick dark veil in the tabernacle in the Most Holy Place.

The Ark represented Yahweh's rulership and authority over His chosen people.

It had a pair of marvelous golden Cherubim attached to the lid of the Ark, copies of the Ten Commandments inside, and a lid called the mercy seat that was sprinkled yearly with the atoning blood of the lamb by the High Priest.

The Ark led God's people in the wilderness, and even went before them into their first battle in Canaan where they defeated the city of Jericho.

Now perhaps they were trying to relive the past, they were trying to return to the old ways, and bringing back the Old Times.

But this was not the Old Times, Israel was in a rebellious state, and far from the obedient people of God that stood with Joshua.

They are no longer seeking, asking and knocking to find the will of their God, they are trying to wield their God as a weapon for their own good.

You see as believers today, sometimes we are caught in these funks as well.

Where our prayers turn from where they should be, seeking the will of our Father in heaven for our lives, instead we begin trying to direct God to benefit our needs and desires.

No longer are we praying to be used by God in His Work, we want Him to work out our will in our life.

Sometimes we even try to work like the Israelites, and we turn God into a luck-charm of some kind.

We think, "Well last time I fasted and prayed 2 days, and God moved."

And we try to copy our past successes to get God to work on our behalf.

It is especially difficult in our culture to have the right mindset about God, because we are a blended culture, and we have the freedom in our culture to believe

whatever we want to believe, and that allows many to make God whatever they want Him to be.

We have to be careful not to lose sight of His Sovereignty and His majesty, as if we, His mere creation can bend and shape His will to benefit us at all.

True belief looks to God's Will, and we join Him in what He is doing, we don't try to manipulate God to join us.

Before we look down upon Israel here for becoming superstitious, we should be honest with our own beliefs and ourselves.

Think about this, I cannot remember if the origins are Germanic or Celtic, but picture two men, pagan in their beliefs.

Their ideas of the gods were that they were jealous, envious, devious, and troublesome.

The one man says to the other man, "I have hopes to have enough success from this years crops to build a bigger cottage."

The man might panic, and start pounding on the trees around him, his friend would join in.

Because they believed the spirit of the gods lived in the trees, and if the gods heard their hopes and dreams, the spirits would then work to distort their plans and ruin them altogether.

You say that is ridiculous.

But today, when you are so nervous for that interview for the promotion at your job, and you feel like you nailed it, and you tell your friend I think I got the job, what do you do, you say "I better knock on wood," as you frantically look for some wood to knock on.

It stems back to that pagan belief.

Or even our "Bless you" after sneeze, it was thought that a person would sneeze their soul out of their body, if no one said "Bless you."

Now we say it without thinking as a common courtesy.

You see we are superstitious by nature for sure.

So Israel reached for the Holy as a good luck charm here and they bring the Ark from Shiloh, and those two wicked men Hophni and Phinehas lead the way with the charm in hand.

Look at the outcome here...

5 And when the Ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook. 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. 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!"

When Hophni and Phinehas arrive with the Ark, they are welcomed with shouts and a self-confidence comes over the army of Israel.

Of course, their self-confidence is a carnal one.

The Ark may be in their midst but God was far from them.

Their enthusiastic shouts may have given their spirits a false optimism, however we realize here it is their enemies that see their God clearest.

The Philistines know the stories of Yahweh, and they fear Him greatly.

In humility they cry "Woe to us."

We see their understanding is off and pagan influenced, however they know that whomever Israel worships, He destroyed the mighty Egyptians.

So we see the severity of who they were up against actually motivated them to bolster themselves against a great Foe.

So the Philistines move ahead thinking they are going to face the most powerful God, and they come in ready.

Israel will be overconfident, and both sides will soon find out that God is not in this fight at all...

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.

Understand God would rather suffer shame, rather than be used to let sinful people achieve their own wicked purposes.

Remember the words of the man of God who spoke to Eli his judgement.

He said in **1 Sam 2:27** “for those who honor Me I will honor”

God will not be manipulated into action, and He will even allow us to be disappointed with Him if it will draw us into a right understanding of who He is.

The consequences here are severe, and 30,000 Hebrew Warriors fall in this battle.

And we see Hophni and Phinehas reap what they have sown, and they are killed according to the Word of the Lord.

And the worse part of it all is the Sacred Ark of God was captured for the first time into enemy hands.

It seems here as though the Lord is the loser in this fight.

It seems Israel's God is taken captive, and will be misused and abused now.

However, as we will see, God will not be helpless at all, even after this great loss, this loss served a greater purpose.

The Ark will no longer be abused in Israel, and the wickedness that surrounded it will be dealt with first, than God will humiliate His enemies, and show that He is no man's captive.

But the Old guard must go, before the New and right can be initiated.

God will be returned to His place, but before the Ark comes back, we see a cleansing take place in Israel.

The media reports head back to Shiloh...

Death of Eli

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.

It is interesting that in verse 13, we see Eli was trembling for the Ark of God.

He knew his sons had taken it from the Holy Place, and yet he did nothing to stop them.

Just as they walked all over him before, this man failed to control his wicked boys.

He was not worried at all about his sons as he waited the news from the battle.

His heart was trembling for the Ark.

We see this messenger from Benjamin came with his clothes torn and dirt on his head as a sign of great sorrow and even repentance at times.

The messenger first finds a crowd in the city and the city erupts in hopeless cries as they hear the news.

The blind old man hears the outcry, but he cannot make any sense of it.

But the messenger finally makes his way to Eli.

And the old man asks in verse 16, “what happened?”

So the Benjamite gives the rundown of the battle, and the great slaughter of Israelites, then next he tells him about his boys, and how they are dead.

All of it was tragedy upon tragedy, but the worse news was last of all, the Ark, that was what Eli wanted to know about chiefly.

The Ark had been captured, and when he mentioned the Ark, that fat glutton of a priest fell back off the seat he was sitting on, and the weight of his body snapped his neck, and the judge who judged Israel for forty years was judged himself.

God’s word was fulfilled concerning Eli and his sons.

And with the death of Eli an era will pass, the slate washed clean, the old leadership is cleared off, and Samuel, God’s man can take the place of leadership.

We see next the wife of Phinehas will be more spiritually competent than her father-in-law, her husband and even her brother-in-law.

Ichabod

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."

The two wicked priests used the Ark as a luck charm, Eli cared for the well-being of the Ark, however; Phinehas' wife was concerned for the glory of God.

The Glory was a sign that the camp of Israel was holy and they were set apart to God.

But the glory had departed, and the scriptures will not show its return until Solomon builds the temple.

The prophet Ezekiel saw the Glory leave again and the glory did not return to this earth until the arrival of the Christ Child in Luke chapter 2.

Today God's Glory dwells in believers individually,

1 Cor. 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you

have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

And also today the church corporately beholds the glory...

Eph. 2:19-22 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

It is seen in every changed life that is touched by the Grace of God, and also as God fashions each of us together as a building, a holy temple, a dwelling place for our God.

He brings all of us together, in the world this group would never come together, but here as Christ joins us together we are fashioned in His love and we are Unified in His purpose.

So... The Glory of God departed from Israel and the capture of the Ark is to tragic of news for her, she immediately goes into labor and dies in childbirth, even with the encouragement of friends.

The gloom is too much for her to consider, and her final words captured and taught more theology than her husband's whole priestly ministry.

She names the child Ichabod, or "No Glory."

One commentator states "...but she was wrong. The glory of God had indeed departed, but not because the Ark of God had been captured; the Ark had been captured because the glory had already departed." H.L. Ellison

This whole scene teaches us that sometimes God must depart from us in order that He might be correctly sought after and worshipped properly.

How tragic it is when the glory of God no longer dwells with His people.

When "Ichabod" is written over the church or a movement.

God cannot be kept in a box, He will not be manipulated into being used by His people.

None of us are needed... this point is emphasized next God is not dependent on any man.

He can take care of business Himself.

Look how He makes a mockery of His captors.

The Philistines and the Ark

5:1 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 and set it by Dagon. 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. 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 was left of it. 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.

So the Philistines tried to mock the defeated Yahweh by putting His Ark as a trophy in the house of their god Dagon.

How sad is it that when the statue bows down to Yahweh, that these people do not think to join him in reverence to God.

They instead help their god back up.

Imagine worshipping a god that you have to lift up, and secure.

My God is a sure foundation, help in time of trouble, He lifts me up when I fall, and He carries me.

How sad it is when people look to idols or even creation and worship them rather than the Creator, the One True and living God.

When they walk out on a beautiful spring day like today and thank some Mother Nature, instead of the Universe Making Creator.

Some people will even worship the trees and animals, and not acknowledge the Maker of both.

And we see here, after they help their god up, the next morning Yahweh dismembered Dagon, and only the torso was spared.

In the Philistines mythology, Dagon was the chief god, father of Baal.

However, Dagon bows before Yahweh here.

Now after this we read Yahweh begin to exalt Himself among the people as well.

Remember they were aware of the plagues of Egypt, so they quickly realize what is happening among them is the judgment of God.

6 But the hand of the Lord was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and He ravaged them and struck them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. 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. 9 So it was, after they had carried it away, 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.

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.

This was not a tame God that they had captured at all. The Ark had fallen into their hands, but they had now fallen into the hands of Yahweh. Davis p. 61

And God's hand was heavy upon them.

Many commentators connect the rats and the tumors with the bubonic plague, which rats carry.

But there was no doubt to the Philistines that this was the Hand of God upon them.

The Ashdodites confess that they nor their god Dagon was any match for Yahweh, they want to get the Ark as far away as possible from them.

So Gath another town of the Philistines received it and it too came under a very great destruction.

Both small and great were plagued heavily.

By the time it arrived in the next town, Ekron, the Ekronites were convinced that it would kill them.

So they called a meeting, they had to get rid of it, but they also had to maintain their dignity.

They just could not send it back to those they just defeated in battle; they had to come up with something that would not take away from their great victory.

So after seven months of death and plagues we read...

The Ark Returned to Israel

6:1 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."

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. 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?"

Seven months their pride put up with this destruction. The priests plead with them to not harden their hearts any more like Pharaoh did.

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 consensus was clear, “Let’s send this thing back,” but the question was “how?”

So they turned to their clergy for answers.

Their priests and diviners suggest a trespass offering to appease or make reparations to Yahweh.

Because there were five lords that ruled over five cities of the Philistines they suggest five golden rats and tumors.

This offering would be costly, and precisely representing something, they were hoping to be delivered from.

They had lived in terror for seven months, so they are hoping this will lighten His hand from them.

Now notice they were to make a new cart as there was the belief in antiquity that new objects were looked at with higher sanctity. Chafin p. 62

And it is interesting here they tell them to get two milk cows that have never been yoked and separate them from their calves, and set the Ark in the cart, hitch the cows to it and let them go.

Now everything here would be working against the offering returning to Israel’s God.

And if the cows followed their natural instinct they would go after their calves, for the pain in their utters would be excruciating without the younglings emptying them.

Also, these cows were never broken in with a yoke, and would be pulling all over the place, yet if they went to Beth Shemesh, in Israel's territory they would know that God's hand was truly upon them.

This was very similar to Gideon throwing a fleece, asking God to do something out of the natural order of things to prove Himself.

Well let us see how this plays out...

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, 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.

It is something to ponder here, that God is even willing to reveal Himself to His enemies.

These people are not of the covenant, yet He shows that He is not far from any people group.

Now, we do not read of the any Philistines repenting and turning to God, but we see God does give them a clear witness of who He is.

He uses these cows and they went lowing down the road, and these two milk cows are preachers for the One True God, testifying to His power, they are crying

for their babies, yet they march in obedience to the Lord.

The cows went straight on the road to Beth Shemesh leaving no doubt in the minds of the Philistines that Israel's God was the True Chief God.

So, it arrives and we read now...

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.

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.

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 of the people, and the people lamented because the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter.

These men of Beth Shemesh should have covered the Ark, no one was supposed to look upon it except the High Priest.

This cost to these reckless Jews is great.

The people's curiosity struck down many.

Now if the judgment of God fell upon the pagan Philistines, who knew very little about Yahweh and His Law.

How much more accountable is the covenant nation of Israel.

They should know better here, so the judgement is so much more severe.

After all, this was a Levitical city, and these men should not have handled the holy so haphazardly.

It was a time of great celebration that led to carelessness.

Remember when the tabernacle was completed, and the worship was too begin, and the two excited priests

Nadab and Abihu came before the Lord and offered profane fire before the Lord?

They were struck down in a sobering scene.

The same kind of thrill was happening here, and the excitement of it all, caused the severity of our God to be overlooked.

Now, There is a question among some of the commentators whether or not the word fifty thousand is a correct translation of the Hebrew. Many commentators, in fact most of them, believe that it should read just the seventy men.

The fifty thousand is a misinterpretation of the Hebrew. I don't know. It would be unlikely that there would be fifty thousand men in that area. The city of Jerusalem's population at the time of David was only around seventy thousand. Chuck Smith

No matter how many it was, it was a great slaughter, and the people lamented, and as we will see next, instead of getting right with God, they like the Philistines rather get rid of God's Presence.

The Ark at Kirjath Jearim

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."

And next time we are together we will see the men of Kirjath Jearim are willing to take on the responsibility and they will correctly handle the Ark...

The Ark of the Covenant represented God's presence in the midst of the people.

But Beth Shemesh did not like the reality of their God. They wanted the authority to make their God into a god they could control and manipulate.

If there is any take away from these three chapters, it is that the One True God will not be trifled or tinkered with.

We cannot bring Him down to fit into our imaginations, we don't get to make Him into an image of our liking.

We cannot manipulate Him, we cannot control Him, He is God, and we are not!

He does not need any of us; this is such a healthy reminder.

Our American ideals stand aghast at the idea of not being able to make a god into our liking.

But we cannot subjugate God, and make Him any lesser than He is.

How foolish for us, finite man, with limited knowledge and wisdom, to proudly hold ourselves in a place where we think God should do our bidding, the God of the universe.

He is all-powerful, and He does not need any of us, He does not need this church building, He does not need this pulpit, He surely does not need this man behind the pulpit.

How can any of us think we are the great piece of the puzzle, and we are the success of anything that happens here.

God can let this church burn down tomorrow, and He would still be working, God could remove me from this pulpit right now, and He would keep on saving souls.

None of us have earned any right, or any place, we are owed nothing from God....

When God found me....

He lifted me up from that pigsty and cleaned me up, and began to use my life.

Gary can only accomplish failure, that is all I did without God, failed.

But with Him, I am humbled that He would put in a place such as this.

He needs none of us.

He only invites us to join Him in His work, if we get away from Him, well, we see movements and churches crumble often and God's work keeps going on.

It is my prayer that we never get away from Him, and that we never start relying on past success, even our heritage and history, or our own abilities.

When we do, this place will become nothing more than a religious relic and it will fade away into History.

And God's work will continue on, with those who are faithful.

Think about this.... We should serve God even if we go to hell at the end of all of this, because He is worthy, He is God, and we deserve nothing.

If you are only serving God for what you will get out of it, if you are looking for a pat on the back, or an "atta-boy," then your heart is greatly wrong.

Today people cannot do anything for the Lord without announcing to the world.

And if people are not acknowledged properly for all of their sacrifice then they get upset, they get bitter, because you know they should be recognized for all that God uses them for.

Listen, if God wants to use two lowing milk cows to spread His message, He will do so.

We should count it the greatest honor to be in the service of our God.

Jess, my wife tells me all the time, God saved us from such misery and failure, then He picked us up, dusted us off, and gave a new life, full of so many blessings, and then at the end of it all He promises us heaven.

We are so unworthy of such a deal!

Yet that is what He offers us, we deserve none of it, yet it is available to us.

Please never let that pride arise in you; never even entertain the thought that God is lucky to have you, that He needs you in some way.

We must continue to decrease, and let Him increase, and this is how we find the blessed life.

This is the proper perspective church.

We do not get to wield God as a luck charm to benefit us, our lives are supposed to benefit Him and His Kingdom.

It is a blessing to be used in the work of God, it is a great privilege.

Amen?

Let's Pray...