

1 & 2 Samuel (A Man After God's Own Heart)

God Pursues Israel

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Pastor Jarrod Adkins

1 Samuel 4:1-11, 18; 5:1-7, 11-12

1 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.

- During this time there was no great world power seeking to dominate the region. So, Israel's battles were waged against her near neighbors, such as the Moabites, the Ammonites, or as here, the 5 coastal cities that made up the **Philistines**. Cf. **Genesis 10:14; 21; 26; Exodus 13:17**
From the very beginning, the Philistines were either allies or deadly enemies of God's people. They played a pivotal role in the lives of Samson (**Judges 13:1; 14:1**), Samuel (**1 Samuel 4:1**), Saul (**1 Samuel 13:4**), and David (**1 Samuel 17:23**). The Philistines worshiped three gods: Ashtoreth, Dagon, and Baal-Zebub—each of which had shrines in various cities. Cf. **Judges 16:23; 1 Samuel 31:10; 2 Kings 1:2**
- **Ark of the Covenant**, also known as the ark of God, was a visible sign of the presence of God. It is going to be regularly brought up in the stories of 1 and 2 Samuel. Cf. **Exodus 25:16; Hebrews 9:4-5**
- **Israel was defeated** because the elders turned to methods that God never approved. They decided to remove the ark of God from the Holy Place and bring it to camp, believing the presence of the ark would make God work for them. Israel made an idol of the ark and God often deals with our idolatry by taking the idol away.

18 As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli **fell** over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years.

- **Eli**, who is 98 years old, and his sons die. Cf. 1 Samuel 2:34

5:1 When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. 2 Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of **Dagon** and set it up beside Dagon. 3 And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. 4 But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. 5 This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day. 6 The hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. 7 And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our god."

- **Dagon** was represented by a half-man, half-fish figure, and was said to be the father of Baal. "This deity was a personification of the generative and life-giving principle of nature, for which the fish with its innumerable multiplication was especially adapted, to set forth the idea of the giver of all earthly good."
- The statue had fallen in a way that it was bowing to the ark. As they continued to set it back up, God would make it fall so that it would break into pieces. Cf. **Exodus 20:3-5**

11 They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people." For there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there. 12 The men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

- If the Philistines had repented and turned toward the LORD, the ark could have blessed them. Instead, it became a curse and a judgment to them.
- **Deuteronomy 32:39** See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

Matthew 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

John 10:18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.

Discipleship Homework:

Our theme references David being a “man after his [God’s] own heart,” but there are many others listed in 1 and 2 Samuel that God pursues, including Israel.

- Reflect on the lack of reverence Israel and the Philistines had for the ark of God. What does it look like for you to reverence God?
- How is the wrath of God revealed to Israel and the Philistines? Think on God’s righteous judgements and His mercy. [Listen to a message on God’s Mercy and Justice.](#)
- What was the significance of the fact that Dagon fell before the Ark of the Covenant? What message does this convey about the power of the true God over false gods?
- Have questions about the message or need help with the homework? Please email Pastor Jarrod at jarrod@1116.church.