

The Covenants

Part 12

“Signs not Enough”

1 Samuel 4

Intro:

The Prophet Samuel bridges the gap between the Judges and the Kings of Israel.

In fact Samuel was the last of the Judges.

1 Samuel 7: 15-17

1Sa 7:15 And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

1Sa 7:16 And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places.

1Sa 7:17 And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the LORD.

The book of Samuel brings us as far as the death of Saul, the first king of Israel.

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This chapter deals with the defeat of Israel by the Philistines.

We note 1,

Verse 1

Israel was not spiritually prepared to meet the enemy.

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

Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek.

Consider:

The emphasis should be “The word of the Lord came”

But not so.

App.

When we receive the word it must be as the word of God and not man.

Q. Are we today ready to meet the enemy?

{M. Henry}

The first words of this paragraph, which relate to Samuel, that his word came to all Israel, seem not to have any reference to the following story, as if it was

by any direction of his that the Israelites went out against the Philistines. Had they consulted him, though but newly initiated as a prophet, his counsel might have stood them in more stead than the presence of the ark did

Note 2

Verse 2

The cost of not hearing the word of God

1Sa 4:2 And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men.

{M. Henry}

Sin, the accursed thing, was in the camp, and gave their enemies all the advantage against them they could wish for.

Note 3

Verse 3

A question asked but no waiting for the answer.

1Sa 4:3 And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.

Consider:

Their blindness to their own state.

Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines?

Had they turned to the Lord they might have learned.

App.

When we go through times of trouble and even spiritual barrenness and defeat, it is time to wait upon the Lord.

Instead, they think they have the answer.

Get the ark!!!

{M. Henry}

They imagined that they could oblige him to appear for them the next time by bringing the ark into their camp.

Note 4

In verse 3

The wrong understanding of the roll of the ark in past victories.

*that, **when it cometh** among us, **it may save us** out of the hand of our enemies.*

Consider:

They thought that the simple physical presence of the ark would secure victory.

But:

It was never the ark that saved them in the past but the presence of God which the ark symbolised that delivered them.

{M. Henry}

It is common for those that have estranged themselves from the vitals of religion to discover a great fondness for the rituals and external observances of it, for

those that even deny the power of godliness not only to have, but to have in admiration, the form of it.

Note 5

In verse 4

They proceed with their own wisdom

1Sa 4:4 So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

Consider:

The mention of Hophni and Phinehas

Compare:

1Sa 2:12 Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD.

1Sa 2:22 Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

{Keil}

The remark introduced here, "and the two sons of Eli were there with the ark of the covenant of God," is not merely intended to show who the guardians of the ark were, viz., priests who had hitherto disgraced the sanctuary, but also to point forward at the very outset to the result of the measures adopted.

{M. Henry}

If there had been nothing else to invalidate their expectations from the ark, how could they expect it should bring a blessing when Hophni and Phinehas were the men that carried it?

Note 6

In verse 5

A false assurance of victory

1Sa 4:5 And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again.

{Clarke}

***All Israel shouted** - Had they humbled themselves, and prayed devoutly and fervently for success, they would*

have been heard and saved. Their shouting proved both their vanity and irreligion.

Consider:

They treated the ark like a talisman instead of seeing it as representing God's presence.

{M. Henry}

And yet indeed they did but make an idol of the ark, and looked upon it to be as much an image of the God of Israel as those idols which the heathen worshipped were of their gods. To worship the true God, and not to worship him as God, is in effect not to worship him at all.

Note 7

In verses 6-9

The Philistines initial fear but then a greater determination.

1Sa 4:6 And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the LORD was come into the camp.

1Sa 4:7 And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore.

1Sa 4:8 Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? these are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.

1Sa 4:9 Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight.

Consider:

Israel ended up worse for the introduction of the ark.

Now they faced a foe who, were literally fighting for their lives.

Note 8

In verses 10-11

The measure of the defeat.

1Sa 4:10 And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen.

1Sa 4:11 And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.

Consider:

The Emphasis

“Philistines fought”

“and Israel was smitten”

No mention even of a fight by Israel.

The only positive point is the death of Eli’s two sons.

Note 9

In verses 12-18

The report brought to Eli.

1Sa 4:12 And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head.

1Sa 4:13 And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon 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.

1Sa 4:14 And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli.

1Sa 4:15 Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see.

1Sa 4:16 And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son?

1Sa 4:17 And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also,

Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken.

1Sa 4:18 And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

Note 10

In verses 19-22

A time of joy turned into mourning.

1Sa 4:19 And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her.

1Sa 4:20 And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it.

1Sa 4:21 And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband.

1Sa 4:22 And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.

