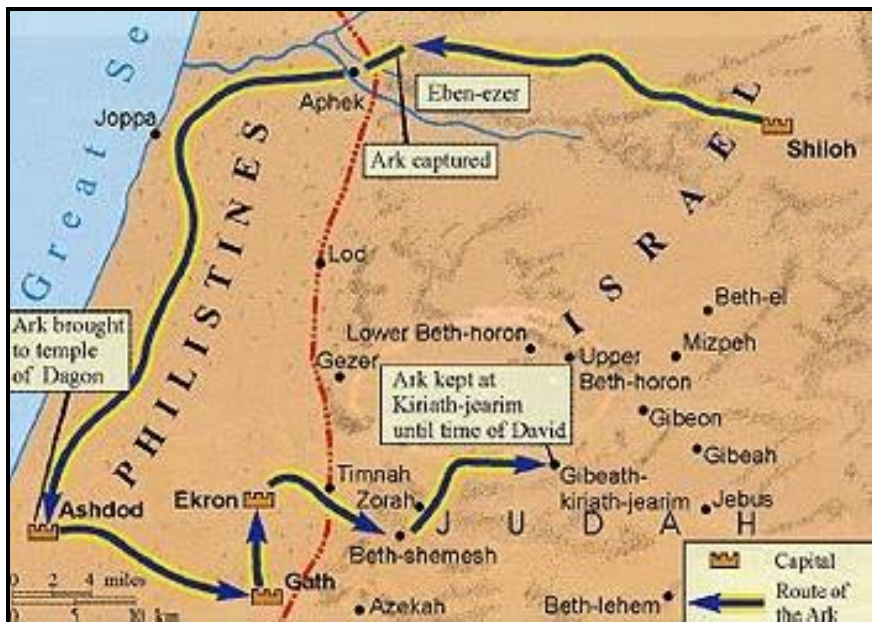


What is our God really like?

1 Samuel 4-7



A. A Bad Idea - God in a Box?**1 Samuel 4:1-11**

Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. ²The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield. ³When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, “Why did the LORD bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD’s covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.”

⁴So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

⁵When the ark of the Lord’s covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. ⁶Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, “What’s all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?”

When they learned that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp, ⁷the Philistines were afraid. “A god has come into the camp,” they said. “We’re in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before. ⁸Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert. ⁹Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!”

¹⁰So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. ¹¹The ark of God was captured, and Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

What role did God have in their defeat?

How were they attempting to compel God into action?

What was the Israelite view of God?

How do we manifest this error in thinking today?

How did the Philistines respond?

What does anyone learn about God here?

B. A Sad Ending

1 Samuel 4:12-22

¹² That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh, his clothes torn and dust on his head. ¹³ When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry.

¹⁴ Eli heard the outcry and asked, “What is the meaning of this uproar?”

The man hurried over to Eli, ¹⁵ who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes were set so that he could not see. ¹⁶ He told Eli, “I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day.”

Eli asked, “What happened, my son?”

¹⁷ The man who brought the news replied, “Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.”

¹⁸ When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy. He had led^a Israel forty years.

¹⁹ His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor pains. ²⁰ As she was dying, the women attending her said, “Don’t despair; you have given birth to a son.” But she did not respond or pay any attention.

²¹ She named the boy Ichabod,^b saying, “The glory has departed from Israel”—because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. ²² She said, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.”

Where had the people had placed their hope?

What do you suppose Eli was worried about in verse 4:13?

The ending for Eli and his family is sad chapter in Israel’s history.

^a Traditionally *judged*

^b *Ichabod* means *no glory*.

Why did Israel lose the battle?

Where is Samuel?

God will not be ignored, neglected or defied without a response. It may be delayed for the purpose of repentance and renewal.

What can we learn about prayer and ministry from 1 Samuel 4?

2 The LORD is Supreme

1 Samuel 5

A. Dagon Dives

1 Samuel 5:1-5

After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ² Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon. ³ When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place. ⁴ But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained. ⁵ That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon's temple at Ashdod step on the threshold.

The people of this era often believed gods of the day were territorial. Wars were fought on two levels, the visible world with armies and the invisible world or the gods. The ark was a trophy of Dagon's power.

What is Dagon's problem?

What do we learn about God?

B. Deliveries Denied

1 Samuel 5:6-12

⁶ The LORD's hand was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation upon them and afflicted them with tumors.^a ⁷ When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god." ⁸ So they called

^a Hebrew; Septuagint and Vulgate *tumors*. And rats appeared in their land, and death and destruction were throughout the city

together all the rulers of the Philistines and asked them, “What shall we do with the ark of the god of Israel?”

They answered, “Have the ark of the god of Israel moved to Gath.” So they moved the ark of the God of Israel.

⁹ But after they had moved it, the LORD’s hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumors.^b ¹⁰ So they sent the ark of God to Ekron.

As the ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, “They have brought the ark of the god of Israel around to us to kill us and our people.” ¹¹ So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, “Send the ark of the god of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it^c will kill us and our people.” For death had filled the city with panic; God’s hand was very heavy upon it. ¹² Those who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven.

What has the Ark become for the Philistines?

Who were the human players in this passage? What did they do? What does this say about the LORD and Dagon?

3 The LORD is Steady

1 Samuel 6

A. Philistine debt and delivery 1 Samuel 6:1-12

When the ark of the LORD had been in Philistine territory seven months,² the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, “What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it back to its place.”

³ They answered, “If you return the ark of the god of Israel, do not send it away empty, but by all means send a guilt offering to him. Then you will be healed, and you will know why his hand has not been lifted from you.”

⁴ The Philistines asked, “What guilt offering should we send to him?”

They replied, “Five gold tumors and five gold rats, according to the number of the Philistine rulers, because the same plague has struck both you and your rulers. ⁵ Make models of the tumors and of the rats

^b Or *with tumors in the groin* (see Septuagint)

^c Or *he*

that are destroying the country, and pay honor to Israel's god. Perhaps he will lift his hand from you and your gods and your land. ⁶ Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When he^a treated them harshly, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way?

⁷ "Now then, get a new cart ready, with two cows that have calved and have never been yoked. Hitch the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and pen them up. ⁸ Take the ark of the LORD and put it on the cart, and in a chest beside it put the gold objects you are sending back to him as a guilt offering. Send it on its way, ⁹ but keep watching it. If it goes up to its own territory, toward Beth Shemesh, then the LORD has brought this great disaster on us. But if it does not, then we will know that it was not his hand that struck us and that it happened to us by chance."

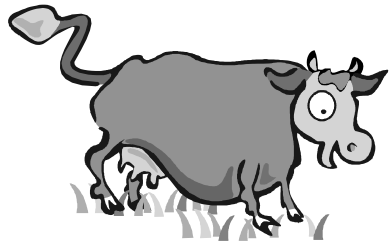
¹⁰ So they did this. They took two such cows and hitched them to the cart and penned up their calves. ¹¹ They placed the ark of the LORD on the cart and along with it the chest containing the gold rats and the models of the tumors. ¹² Then the cows went straight up toward Beth Shemesh, keeping on the road and lowing all the way; they did not turn to the right or to the left. The rulers of the Philistines followed them as far as the border of Beth Shemesh.

What do the Philistines discover?

What is their dilemma? Verse 10

How do they repair their problem?

There are at least 5 ways the delivery method designed to fail.



^a That is, God

B. Israel blessed and burdened 1 Samuel 6:13-7:1

¹³ Now the people of Beth Shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley, and when they looked up and saw the ark, they rejoiced at the sight. ¹⁴ The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and there it stopped beside a large rock. The people chopped up the wood of the cart and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹⁵ The Levites took down the ark of the LORD, together with the chest containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock. On that day the people of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the LORD. ¹⁶ The five rulers of the Philistines saw all this and then returned that same day to Ekron.

¹⁷ These are the gold tumors the Philistines sent as a guilt offering to the LORD—one each for Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron. ¹⁸ And the number of the gold rats was according to the number of Philistine towns belonging to the five rulers—the fortified towns with their country villages. The large rock, on which^b they set the ark of the LORD, is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.

¹⁹ But God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy^c of them to death because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. The people mourned because of the heavy blow the LORD had dealt them, ²⁰ and the men of Beth Shemesh asked, “Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God? To whom will the ark go up from here?”

²¹ Then they sent messengers to the people of Kiriath Jearim, saying, “The Philistines have returned the ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to your place.” **7** ¹ So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD. They took it to Abinadab’s house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the LORD. ¹

What are the Philistines doing? Why?

What does God do to his own people? Why?

What do we learn about God’s plans or power from this event?

^b A few Hebrew manuscripts (see also Septuagint); most Hebrew manuscripts *villages as far as Greater Abel, where*

^c A few Hebrew manuscripts; most Hebrew manuscripts and Septuagint *50,070*

¹ *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Conclusion:

As we look at 1, 2 Samuel we will observe 'God-Sensitive' and 'God-In-Sensitive' living. We will be challenged to answer questions like:

Why is 'God-Sensitivity' important?

How do I improve my 'God-Sensitivity'?

Today's passage gives us a clue toward sorting this out. The incident with the Ark tells us God is not a piece of furniture. The descriptions of Sovereign, Supreme and Holy challenge the tendencies we have to Direct, Disable, Disarm, and Disrespect him.

For Further Consideration:

There are some good questions asked through this account:

Why did the LORD bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines?	1 Samuel 4:3
What is the meaning of this uproar?	1 Samuel 4:14
What shall we do with the ark of the god of Israel?	1 Samuel 5:8
What guilt offering should we send to him?	1 Samuel 6:4
Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? (Psalm 95:8; Hebrews 3:8-15; 4:7)	1 Samuel 6:6
Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God? (Psalm 15; Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:12-27)	1 Samuel 6:20

This passage was not written for the Philistines to read. This was inspired by God and written for his people to read. The questions of the Philistines related to handling the ark, sending a guilt offering, and warning not to be hard hearted are intended for us to think about.