

BIG WORD: 1 Samuel
Homework for Chapters 4—7
Discussion Dates: 8 February 2012 (in house)
and 9 February 2012 (online)

DAY ONE: Overview

PRAY for the Holy Spirit to clear your mind so that you may focus on God's Word without distractions or preconceptions. Ask Him to help you discern only what He wants for you in this reading and for this day.

READ: 1 Samuel 4—7

If possible, read all four chapters in one sitting. Make notes of any details that stick out to you, questions that rise and/or personal insights God gives you while you read.

DAY TWO: The Israelites & the Ark

We left chapter 3 in a somewhat unresolved state. Hophni and Phinehas were living despicable lives in the temple. They had been warned, but, other than that, continued unfettered in their sinful lifestyle. Eli had also been warned (twice) about their coming destruction and the end of his priestly line.

Chapter 4 provides closure to that story, but also introduces us to the Israelites' perspective on the Ark of the Covenant.

First, what was the Ark and why was it significant? (*Read Exodus 25:10—16 for the origin of the Ark and information of its contents. See also Deuteronomy 10:1—8.*)

We saw the Ark in the book of Joshua as God parted the waters of the Jordan (*chapter 4*) and tumbled the walls of Jericho (*chapter 6*). Here in 1 Samuel we see it again, but with different results. Instead of overwhelming and miraculous victories, the Israelites suffered defeat. (*They lost 4000 soldiers when they marched without it; they lost 30,000 soldiers when they marched with it.*)

Why do you think that is?

Read 1 Samuel 4:11—18. What was Eli's main concern regarding the battle?

Do you think he suffered greater distress over the loss of the Ark or of his sons? Why?

Now read the account of Phinehas's wife in 1 Samuel 4:19—22. What seems to be the focus of her lament?

How do you perceive the Israelites' beliefs and perspectives about the Ark? What part does it play in their theology?

DAY THREE: The Philistines

We recognize the Philistines as constant enemies of Israel. They've been around since Genesis 10, the most infamous ones being Delilah (*whom we met in Judges*) and Goliath (*whom we'll encounter in 1 Samuel 16*).

The Philistines became prominent inhabitants of Canaan while the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. After the Exodus, the Israelites were to drive them out of the land, but, as we learned in Judges, they were rarely faithful to the extent of God's instructions. One of the key themes of the books of Samuel is the completion of this war with the Philistines.

In 1 Samuel 5:8 we read the term "lords of the Philistines." You may remember this from our study in Judges. As joined forces these lords employed Delilah to help

them defeat Samson. Clearly the term “lord” refers to a position of leadership, but who were they?

Joshua 13:3 lists five lords. (See also 2 Samuel 6:6, 17.)

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Read Judges 3:1—4. God used the Philistines, in spite of Israel's disobedience. How? For what purposes did He allow them to remain?

The Philistines obviously possessed an awareness of the Ark. (*How could they not after news of Jericho's destruction spread?*) According to 1 Samuel 4:6—9, what were their reactions to it? What did they believe about it?

How is this different, if at all, from the perspectives of the Israelites?

Do you think the Philistines' beliefs about the Ark changed after they won the battle? How?

DAY FOUR: Dagon

There are a number of false gods named in Scripture. We learn about Molech in Judges and Chronicles and Chemosh in Kings and Jeremiah. The most common, however, are Baal and Ashtoroth.

These two names are sometimes used as umbrellas that cover a number of deities: Baals being male gods and Ashtoreth (*the plural of Ashtoroth*) being female gods. The Canaanites, including the Philistines, however, believed these were specific gods. Baal, which means “lord, owner, possessor or husband,” was both a fertility god and a god of harvest or grain. Ashtoreth was his wife, a goddess of fertility, love and war.

Here in 1 Samuel, we encounter Dagon. He was the chief deity (not the only god, just the chief) of the Philistines. According to ancient literature, Dagon was the father of Baal.

Remember Samson and how he pulled down the pillars in a great kamikaze act of faith? Scripture says that was at a celebration to honor Dagon for delivering Samson into the hands of the Philistines. By collapsing that building, Samson may have actually destroyed a temple of Dagon.

Because of this, some scholars believe that 1 Samuel 1:1—3:19 chronologically precedes Judges 11:1 and that 1 Samuel 3:19—7:2 follows Judges 13:1.

I disagree with that assertion. Just as the Israelites had “high places” of worship all over the land, so the Philistines may have had several temples devoted to their gods. Sure, Samson may have destroyed a temple, but there is nothing to suggest this was the ONLY temple. Without that distinction, there is no reason to change the timeline provided in the biblical text.

Read again what happened when the Philistines victoriously placed the Ark of the Covenant in the House of Dagon (1 Samuel 5:1—5).

Now read Isaiah 46:1—5.

What do these two passages teach you about our God?

DAY FIVE: Confidence Shaken

Have you ever feared something only to quickly conquer it? Or maybe you thought you conquered something only to discover later that you were fighting the wrong thing. In either case, what was the resulting affect on your confidence?

This is exactly what seems to have happened to the Philistines. They greatly feared the Israelites because of the Ark, then annihilated them and stole the Ark, but soon discovered that their fight wasn't with the Israelites at all. Their war was with God, and not just any god, but the living God capable of mutilating their own gods.

Both followers and enemies of God responded to the Ark with fear. Was that a legitimate response? Why or why not?

Scripture tells us that "fear of God is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7). Because not all fear produces wisdom, many translate this wise fear as reverence. What is the difference between fear and reverence?

Did fearing the Ark bring the Philistines to faith in God?

While definitely connected, I believe fear and reverence stem from different belief systems and evoke different reactions. What are your thoughts on this?

"Do not fear" is the most repeated command in Scripture. It is stated in some way (fear not, do not be afraid, be courageous, etc.) over 300 times. What enemies or battles might you be facing now that could easily be won if you surrendered your fear to trust in God? How might your life be different as a result?

Search in your Bible for a verse that speaks against fear. Select one to memorize. Here are a few to get you started:

- Deuteronomy 31:8
- Isaiah 41:10
- Joshua 1:9
- 1 Samuel 12:14
- Psalm 56:4

DAY SIX: The Israelites & the Ark, Take 2

Faced with a new, unknown Power, the Philistines were scared. They had heard about the Hebrews' God before, but now they had seen His power, even while seemingly captive to them. Read their reactions in 1 Samuel 5:7—7:2. Describe the journey taken by the Ark.

In chapter 6, the Philistines' tactics change. Rather than trying to hide the Ark or mute its power, they decide to get rid of it. They just want it gone and, therefore, seek the best way to return it to its owners. They consult their priests for instructions.

What are your thoughts and observations regarding the advice they received (2 Samuel 6:2—9)?

The priests offered a rather humbling warning to the lords of the Philistines in verse 6. What do you make of that? Does this indicate faith in the one true God?

When the Ark finally arrives among the Israelites, they look inside it and, as a result, God strikes down over fifty thousand men. Why do you think He did this? The Philistines had not only looked inside, they also added to the Ark's stores, yet none of them died. Share your thoughts.

Chapter 7 shows us a very different Israel than we've seen previously. The Ark is in storage, rather than toted about before them. What else is different, as evidenced in their philosophy and actions?

And what is the result?

Because the Ark was put away, you'd think everyone would have known that the spiritual revival and military victory of the Israelites was the result of Israel's repentance and faith in God, not any magical use of the Ark. Unfortunately, we don't always make those connections. Sometimes we think of God as being fickle. "Well, He got mad this time, but not that time, so maybe we should take our chances." We erroneously act as if His will is ever-changing. Is this true?

Read Hebrews 13:8.

In trying to find what consistently "works" with God, what seems to be the solution?

Here are a few passages to consider:

- John 14:21—24; 15:1—11
- 1 John 5:1—3
- 2 John 1:6

DAY SEVEN: Lucky Charms

There seem to be four human responses to God.

1. **REJECTION:** Hophni and Phinehas offer a distinct example of this. They know about God, but refuse to acknowledge His power or reign. They allow him no impact on their lives.
2. **RESIGNATION:** This is the fatalistic approach Eli takes to both his son's severe defilement against God, the temple, and the nation and to the warning he receives of God's impending judgment upon them and him. He accepts God's will, but makes no effort to change his behavior or even seek forgiveness.
3. **SUBMISSION:** Samuel provides us an example. This is a humble obedience and complete offering of self. Another beautiful picture of this is found in Mary the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26—38) and, of course, in Jesus Himself (Matthew 26:38—42).
4. **SELF-RELIANCE:** This is a “lucky charms” theology. Those with this response believe: “If I just do things the right way, God will bless me and do what I want Him to.”

Chapters 4—7 of First Samuel reveal this “lucky charms” theology in the Israelites. What was their lucky charm?

What did they believe they need to employ God's power for their benefit?

What is wrong with that thinking?

Which of the four responses above best describes you? Is that what you want or is there a better option?

Take a few moments to meditate on Isaiah 40:18—26.

Pray that our responses to God would be right and true, consistently bringing Him glory.