

Lesson 11 – 1 Samuel 4-7

Text: 1 Samuel 4-7

Main Characters: God, Samuel, Eli, Hophni, Phinehas, Philistines, Israelites

Key Passages:

- 1 Samuel 4:3 – The Israelites treated the Ark of the Covenant as an idol and did not trust God.
- 1 Samuel 7:3-4 – God required that the Israelites serve Him alone with the whole hearts.

Main Storyline:

As Samuel grew and began to prophecy, Israel continued their battles with the Philistines. On a particular day, the Israelites fought against the Philistines at Ebenezer, but were defeating, losing about 4000 men in the battle. The Israelites wondered why they had lost, and they decided that if they brought the Ark of the Covenant to the battle, then they would win the battle. They began to trust in the ark as an idol and did not seem to remember that God was the one winning the battles for them.

When the ark came into the Israelite camp, they were very excited and shouted, as they believed they would soon win the battle. The Philistines became afraid because they knew that Israel's God was very powerful and had delivered them from Egypt. Despite this, the Philistines committed to fighting to the death against Israel, not wanting to be enslaved. When they fought, the Philistines devastated Israel, killing 30,000 soldiers. They also captured the ark and killed Eli's two sons. When Eli heard about how his sons died and how the ark had been captured, he fell off his chair, broke his neck, and died. From other passages (Psalm 78:60, Jeremiah 7:12-14), it seems Shiloh was also captured.

The Philistines put the ark in the temple of their god, Dagon. The next morning, they found their idol fallen on its face. They picked it up, but the next morning, it was found on the ground again, this time with its head and hands broken off. Also, the Philistines in the city began to be afflicted by tumors and rats. The Philistines moved the ark around for 7 months, but in each city, God afflicted them with tumors. Finally, they decided to send the ark back to the Israelites to avoid the plagues affecting them.

The Philistines sent the ark back to Israel on a cart pulled by cows. On the cart, they also packed a chest which contained five golden tumors and five golden rats as a trespass offering to God. Eventually, the cart and the ark arrived in the Israelite city of Beth-Shemesh. The people there were overjoyed, and they took the cows pulling the cart and offered them as a sacrifice to God. Unfortunately, many of the people looked inside the ark against God's commandments. For this, 50,070 Israelites were killed. The ark was then taken to Kiriath-Jearim, where it would remain for many years.

Samuel then addressed the Israelites, explaining that they had not been serving the Lord with their whole hearts. He instructed them to return to God with all their hearts and to put away all of their idols and foreign gods. If they did this, and served God alone, God would deliver them from the Philistines. The people put away the false gods, confessed their sins, and began to serve the Lord alone.

When the Philistines heard that the Israelites had gathered together, they planned to attack them again. When the Israelites heard what the Philistines were doing, they were afraid and asked Samuel to pray for them continually. Samuel made a sacrifice and cried out to the Lord for Israel. When the battle began against the Philistines, God sent thunder against the Philistines to confuse them, allowing them to be defeated by Israel. After the battle, Samuel set up a stone and called it Ebenezer as a memorial to how far they had come by God's help. Samuel continued to judge Israel for many years.

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) We cannot forget that God is the source of our strength and begin to put our trust in idols.
- 2.) God is holy, demands that His people are holy, and does not tolerate irreverence.