

## *Promised Land 1 Study and Discussion Questions*

### *Lesson Eight: The Exile of the Ark and Samuel's Leadership – 1 Samuel 4 – 7*

Read 1 Samuel 4:1-11.

- 1) After the Philistines defeated the Israelites in a battle (1 Samuel 4:2), what did the Israelites conclude had gone wrong and why would they have come to this conclusion (consider 1 Samuel 4:4 in light of God's words in Exodus 25:20-22, 29:42-46 and Israel's past experiences in Numbers 7:89, Joshua 6:6-11, 20-21)? **The Israelites concluded that the Lord would give them victory if the Ark of the Covenant was present. They had carried it into battle in Joshua's day (Joshua 6). It was the place where God was symbolically present.**
- 2) What do we know about the spiritual condition of the Israelites in the period of the Judges that offers insight about why their solution failed (compare Judges 2:19-22, 21:25 and 1 Samuel 3:1 with Deuteronomy 6:5 and 1 Peter 4:17)? **The Israelites were idolatrous during the period of the Judges. It was not a time when they typically heard from God (1 Samuel 3:1). Furthermore, because of their unfaithfulness, the Lord had told them that He would not finish driving out their enemies. He left them to test Israel's obedience. While it is possible that the Israelites brought the Ark into battle as a sign of repentance and recommitment, since the Ark did not bring victory, their hearts probably hadn't truly changed. In view of the spiritual ignorance, superstition, and idolatry that characterized the period of the Judges, Israel probably had a mistaken view of the Ark. They probably saw it as a substitute for the Lord Himself, a talisman that would bring them luck. They sought a formula instead of seeking God, a symbol of worship rather than the object of worship, a solution to a physical battle without first considering their own spiritual battle. They thought the Ark would bring victory over their enemies. Instead, they brought judgment upon themselves.**
- 3) Reread 1 Samuel 4:6-9. The Philistines had a confused view about the God of Israel.
  - a) How was their view a reflection of what Israel had modeled to them (cross reference 1 Samuel 4:6-8 with Exodus 20:3-6, Judges 3:5-6, 6:24-25, 8:27, 33, 10:6, and 18:30-31)? **It is no surprise that, while Israel's enemies had heard what Israel's "god(s)" had done in delivering them from Egypt (Joshua 2:9-11 and 1 Samuel 4:8), they were nevertheless confused about the nature of Israel's deity. Indeed, not long after Joshua's death, the Israelites seem confused themselves. At times (such as the battle in 1 Samuel 4), the Israelites recognized Yahweh as their God, yet as the book of Judges makes clear, they also served other gods. God had revealed Himself to Israel as the one and only true God (Exodus 20:3-7). The prevalent, ancient Near Eastern view was polytheistic, with each land having one god of primary influence. Thus, the Philistines recognized Yahweh as Israel's *primary* deity but not as the one and only true Deity. Indeed, since the Israelites had intermarried with local peoples and adopted their polytheistic views, this had apparently become their own belief. They failed in their mission to be God's representatives to all nations (Exodus 19:6).**
  - b) Are you modeling anything that might leave someone confused about the God you worship? If so, what? **Personal sharing**

Read 1 Samuel 4:12 – 5:12.

- 4) Recall and record the significance of the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas (see 1 Samuel 1-3). **Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were wicked priests. They corrupted the system of sacrifices (2:12-17), slept with the women who worked at the tent of meeting (2:22-25), and ignored their father's rebukes (2:25). Their deaths occurred on the same day in fulfillment of prophecy (1 Samuel 2:34). According to the prophecy, their deaths would be a sign that God, as He foretold, would remove Eli's family from prominence in the priesthood and that all of his descendants would die prematurely (1 Samuel 2:30-36).**

- 5) Summarize the story in 1 Samuel 5. After the Philistines captured the Ark of the Lord in battle, they carried it to one of their five city-states (Ashdod) and placed it in Dagon's temple. For two successive mornings, the idol was found on its face before the Ark. After a plague involving rats and tumors caused the residents of the city to become ill and die, the Philistines moved the Ark to the city-state of Gath. When its residents also broke out in tumors, they moved it to Ekron, another of their city-states (under the residents' great objection). When the plague broke out again, the Philistines insisted their leaders send the Ark back to Israel.
- 6) God was not only concerned about the Israelites but also the Philistines.
- What opportunity did He give the Philistines to learn about and embrace Him? Chapter 5 ends with the interesting comment that the cry of the Philistines went up to heaven. They certainly had had an opportunity to know Yahweh. The very Ark of God (with all of its symbolism) was among them. They also witnessed His supreme power over nature and human life (in the plagues of rats and tumors) and over their deities (when Dagon repeatedly fell prostrate before the Ark).
  - What have you learned so far in *Promised Land 1* that indicates God has always been concerned about people of every culture? (If you have previous Bible study experience, you may include information from Genesis through Deuteronomy.) In Joshua 2, knowledge of what God had done for Israel in the past caused the Gentile prostitute Rahab to embrace Yahweh as her own God. The Philistines had heard the very same things (1 Samuel 4:8). The book of Ruth shows God's concern for a Moabitess who, presumably, came to know Him through her Israelite mother-in-law Naomi. God's covenant promise to Abraham included making him a blessing to all nations. God has always been concerned with people from every race, tongue, and nation.
  - Do you share God's passionate concern for people of all nations? How are you currently helping to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20)? **Personal sharing**

#### Read 1 Samuel 6.

- 7) What experiment did the Philistines conduct? Which verse summarizes it? 1 Samuel 6:9 says the Philistines decided to find out whether the plague had been brought on them by Israel's God (for taking His Ark into their land) or whether it occurred by chance. They put the Ark on a cattle-drawn cart, believing that if the cattle returned the Ark to Israel, the God of Israel had been angry and was responsible for the outbreak.
- 8) 1 Samuel 6:19 tells us the Lord put to death seventy Israelites who looked into the Ark. What had they done wrong (see Numbers 4:5, 15, 20; Joshua 3:3; 1 Samuel 6:15; 2 Samuel 6:6-7, and secondarily, 1 Samuel 6:20)? According to the Law of Moses, only Levites could handle the Ark, and not even they could touch it directly or look into it. Touching and looking into the Ark was a direct violation of God's Law. The seventy residents of Beth Shemesh showed no respect for God's holiness.
- 9) The Israelites at Beth Shemesh asked, "Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?" (1 Samuel 6:20).
- How did the Philistines attempt to meet God's holy standard in their own way (chapter 6)? The Philistines offered a guilt offering to the Lord (1 Samuel 6:3) consisting of five gold tumors and five gold rats (6:4), representing the tumors and rats that were destroying their country (five in number to represent the five Philistine city-states and their five rulers). Their "offering" was a syncretistic blend of truth from the Torah (the need for a guilt offering) and pagan superstition (offering created images rather than a blood sacrifice). They offered rats (a detestable animal, according to God's Law [Leviticus 11:29] and tumors (unclean by the Law's standard). God dealt with the Philistines more mercifully than the Israelites of Beth Shemesh who looked into the Ark (6:19.)
  - How do people today respond to the idea that God has a holy standard? People today often view God's self-revelation through pagan lenses (just as the Philistines had) and attempt to appease Him by pagan methods (like many false religions, some "Christian" churches teach salvation by works).

Non-religious people respond to God's holy standard with incredulousness, irritability, or even outright anger.

- c) According to Hebrews 11:6 and 10:19-22, what is the sole basis upon which one can approach and appease a Holy God? **Faith in the blood of Jesus is the only basis for approaching God and the only means by which His wrath over sin is appeased.**
- d) Which of your neighbors, co-workers, relatives, friends, or acquaintances is actively attempting to meet God's holy standard in their own way and needs to hear this good news? **Personal sharing**

#### Read 1 Samuel 7.

- 10) Under Samuel's direction, what did the Israelites do to show they were serious about recommitting themselves to the Lord? **Samuel told Israel to rid themselves of idols (7:3-4) and then assemble for worship, fasting and confession of sin (7:5-6).**
- 11) Contrast the manner in which the Israelites attempted to defeat the Philistines under Hophni and Phinehas' leadership (1 Samuel 4) and the manner in which the Israelites fought the Philistines under Samuel's leadership (1 Samuel 7). Include the results of both. **Under Hophni and Phinehas' leadership, the Israelites thought that relocating the Ark of the Covenant would bring them victory over the Philistines. Instead, the Philistines routed them and the Israelites lost the Ark. Samuel led Israel to victory by bringing the people back to the Lord. He had them rid themselves of idols and assemble to fast and confess sin. Samuel made a sacrifice, in accordance with the Law of Moses, and interceded for Israel. After this, the Lord fought for them and they were victorious over the Philistines.**
- 12) *Ebenezer* means "stone of help." With what do you need the Lord your Rock to help you today (see 1 Samuel 2:2 Psalm 31:3, 46:1, 118:7, 146:5)? **Personal sharing**

#### From 1 Samuel 4 – 7

- 13) What do each of the chapters in this lesson (1 Samuel 4-7) reveal about the power of God? **1 Samuel 4 shows the power of God in the fulfillment of prophecy (the premature deaths within Eli's family [2:32-34; 3:12; 4:11, 18, 20]) and that God's power cannot be manipulated (as the Israelites attempted to do with the Ark). 1 Samuel 5 shows the Lord's power in judgment on the Philistines god (proof that He is as powerful on foreign soil as in Israel; He is Lord of all the earth and the Almighty Judge of all the earth). 1 Samuel 6 shows the Lord's power in overruling nature (so that the cows carried the Ark back into Israelite territory) and in judgment on the residents of Beth Shemesh. In 1 Samuel 7, the Lord "thundered" from the heavens and delivered the Israelites (also a fulfillment of prophecy [2:10]).**
- 14) List the ways in which chapter 7 indicates a reversal of the events of 1 Samuel 4-6. **The battles with the Philistines in chapters 4 and 7 occurred at locations referred to as "Ebenezer." Either these were two different locations with the same name or in chapters 4-5 the writer used the name anachronistically to identify it as the same place so-named by Samuel in chapter 7. A place of Israel's former defeat became a place of victory. Secondly, Samuel's godly leadership (bringing the Israelites together in prayer and repentance) contrasts with the wicked leadership of Eli's sons (who took advantage of the people and the priesthood and misused the Ark). Thirdly, the Israelites previously sought a formula for victory and ignored their sin. In chapter 7, they turned to the Lord with all their hearts. Fourthly, instead of fighting against Israel, as the Lord had at Beth Shemesh (6:19), in chapter 7, He fought for them. Finally, in chapter 7, the towns the Philistines had previously taken from Israel were returned and the two lands stopped fighting.**
- 15) Israel experienced reversals of former misfortunes under Samuel's godly leadership and as a result of their sincere repentance. What kinds of reversals have occurred in your life since you first repented of your sins? What specific change (reversal) will you ask the Almighty God to begin making within you (Philippians 2:12-13) today? **Personal sharing**