

Digging Deeper Samuel Week 3

We will be covering 4 chapters of Samuel today 1 Samuel 4-7 so we won't be looking at each verse but will be looking at sections of Scripture. I encourage you to read all of the chapters on your own. We will see the ark of the covenant come into prominence and two battles the Israelites will have with the Philistines.

- I. *1 Samuel 4:1b-2 Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle.*

This was not the outcome the Israelites were expecting. They had great successes in the past. This defeat must have come as quite a surprise. Have you ever experienced defeat that came as a surprise? Have you thought you were going to get the job and didn't? Have you thought you were going to get into the program and didn't? Have you thought you were going to get the promotion and you didn't? How did you handle your defeat?

I can remember years ago when I was interviewing for a school counselor position. One of the teachers I had taught with previously was on the interview panel and she called me afterwards to let me know that I was their number one choice and I should be getting a call from the human resources department the next day. The next day came and went as did several more days and I heard nothing from human resources. During these few days, I was asked to pray about being the youth minister at our church. I can tell you I had NO interest in being a youth minister – I had taught elementary school and been the coordinator of Sunday School for elementary aged kids but had no interest in working with teenagers.

The Lord clearly had other plans for me because all I could think about for days was the youth minister job. I prayed and the Lord was very clear that I was to be the youth minister and NOT a school counselor. I am so thankful that the Lord intervened and I did not get the counseling position because I would have taken it and my faith would not be what it is today if I had not been a youth minister. It was one of the most rewarding ministry times in my life. I have relationships with many of the youth from

that time and have been able to participate in celebrating their marriages, them serving in ministry and watching some of their children grow up.

We don't see any evidence of the Israelites inquiring of the Lord before making war against the Philistines. It seems like a plan they devised on their own. How often do our plans fail because we have not inquired of the Lord first? Have you had plans fail and later realized that you had not inquired of the Lord and when you did after the failure you learned that it was not His plan for you?

I can remember being asked to be on a board of an organization. I did not inquire of the Lord, I just said yes. It was a one-year term and it was a LONG year. I didn't enjoy being on the board and in fact, I dreaded it. In praying about it AFTER the fact, the Lord made it clear that it was never his plan for me to serve on this board. If only I had inquired of the Lord first, I could have saved myself a lot of headaches.

1 Samuel 4:3 And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies."

Here we see the elders grasping the fact that it was, indeed, the Lord who determined whether they had success or failure on the battle field. Unfortunately, they still do not inquire of Him. Instead they start making their own plans on how to fix the problem. Do you find yourself doing that – you question why something happened the way it did but rather than waiting to hear an answer from the Lord you take matters into your own hands? We often jump right into problem-solving mode without waiting to hear from the Lord.

The elders' plan was to bring the ark of the covenant to where they were – 'that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.' This sounds like they were treating the ark of the covenant like a good luck charm – if it was with them, they would be lucky and would be successful in battle against the Philistines.

Have you ever been superstitious and think that something brings you good or bad luck? Maybe you have certain rituals when your favorite sports team plays or you wear a particular jersey when they are playing.

The ark of the covenant was of great importance. It was only to be approached by the high priest in the holy of holies in the tabernacle.

Ex. 25:22 There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.

So, the elders want the ark of the covenant brought to where they were; they wanted God's presence with them, but would they inquire OF Him? I believe they wanted the ark of the covenant for what they thought it could do for them but they weren't really wanting the presence of the Lord. Do we do that? Do we seek what the Creator of the universe can do for us more than we seek the Creator?

1 Samuel 4:5-8 As soon as the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. ⁶And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And when they learned that the ark of the Lord had come to the camp, ⁷the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "A god has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. ⁸Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness.

The Philistines were afraid when they learned that the ark of the covenant was now in the camp, of the Israelites. They recognized the power of God and its connection to the ark. They remembered all the Lord had done for the Israelites in the past. The Philistines were not followers of the Lord and yet they knew about His power. I wonder if the nonbelievers in our life recognize the power of our God because of the stories we tell about Him? Who have you shared a story with of God's power working in your life?

1 Samuel 4:10-11 So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell.

If the last battle wasn't bad enough – this one was significantly worse. They had previously lost 4,000 men but this time they lost 30,000 men. This was a huge and devastating defeat for God's people and we will see that things don't improve for them.

The ark of God was captured, Eli's two sons Hophni and Phineas died on the same day just as Samuel had told Eli and when Eli hears about the capture of the ark, he too dies.

At the end of chapter 4, we meet the wife of Phinehas and the daughter-in-law of Eli. She was about to give birth and when she heard that the ark was captured, that her husband and father-in-law were dead, she gave birth.

1 Samuel 4:21-22 And she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. ²² And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

Eli's daughter-in-law clearly knew the Lord in a way her husband did not. She knew what the ark of the covenant was and what it represented. She knew with it gone, so too was the glory of the Lord. I hope this gives you hope if you have people in your family who do not know the Lord. This woman was surrounded by people who didn't know the Lord and yet she did. Just because your child or children aren't following the Lord doesn't mean there isn't hope for your grandchildren.

While the Philistines might have thought they had the ultimate victory by carrying off the ark of the covenant, we learned in 1 Samuel 5 that it brought plagues upon the people of the city where it resided and it caused their statue of their god to fall face down before the ark and to break. They moved it to two other cities and ultimately determined that they needed to get rid of it; they needed to return it to the Israelites.

1 Samuel 6:1 The ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months.

The Israelites went 7 months without having the ark of the covenant and the presence of the Lord. Have you ever had a season in your life where you felt disconnected from the Lord or where you walked away from your faith? How did you come back to the Lord?

I think we have all found ourselves in seasons where we feel disconnected from the Lord. One of the things I love about our God is that He never leaves us. He is always waiting for us to return to Him.

*Joel 2:13 ...Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;...*

James 4:8 Draw near to God and he will draw near to you...

He wants us to return to Him and when we do He is gracious and merciful. He is slow to anger and steadfast in love. It is hard for us to grasp this because we are not nearly as gracious with others. When someone hurts us, it is hard for us to be gracious and merciful. We are usually quick to anger and I'm not sure we are abounding in steadfast love. When have you been disconnected to the Lord and how did you return? If you are in a disconnected place right now cry out to the Lord – He simply calls you to return and He is waiting with open arms. If you are struggling with this read the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) and realize that the Lord is the father and He is waiting for you with open arms.

- II. In 1 Samuel 6 we see the Philistine's returning the ark of the covenant to the Israelites and we see some pretty bizarre things going with it – they made golden tumors – to replicate the tumors the Lord sent up on them and golden mice for the number of Philistine cities. They also sent cows that were later sacrificed to the Lord.

The ark is moved to Kiriath-jearim which is on the way to Jerusalem.

1 Samuel 7:1-2 *And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the Lord and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the Lord.* ² *From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and **all the house of Israel** lamented after the Lord.* ³ *And Samuel said to **all the house of Israel**, “If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”*

We have not seen Samuel on the scene during this time but we see him reappear and when he does it is 20 years later. FB Meyer in his book “Samuel the Prophet” says this, “Notice those two phrases; *all the house of Israel* – there is the restoration of the lost unity; *lamented before the Lord* – there is the national repentance, which was followed by widespread reformation.” Samuel was trying to bring unity to the twelve tribes of Israel. During this time, the twelve tribes operated somewhat independently and they needed to be united in order to survive.

I think the true could be said of followers of Jesus today. There is much independence and division between Christians today based on our various denominations. Sometimes I think we focus more on our differences as believers rather than on the most important thing – our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. I wonder if as Christians we would have a stronger influence if we were more united. FB Meyer says, “In being drawn to God they were drawn towards each other, as the spokes of a wheel centre in the hub. If the Lord Jesus is the centre of our heart-life, we must inevitably be drawn into fellowship with all those to whom He is also first and best.” What are your thoughts on this?

Samuel also wanted the Israelites to repent and return to the Lord with all their hearts. As we are in the season of Lent, it is a great reminder for us to do the same. Ask the Lord if there are areas of your life where you need to submit more to His authority, are there areas of your life that are not pleasing to Him, are there idols in your life that you need to lay down?

- 1 Samuel 7:4-6 *So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the Lord only. ⁵Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you." ⁶So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the Lord and fasted on that day and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.*

Here we see the mighty man of God that Samuel was. He was able to bring the people of God together and have them put away their idols and agree to only serve the Lord. In addition, He prayed for them. The people fasted and confessed that they had sinned against the Lord. Can you just imagine what this must have been like – to have all the people gathered together, fasting and confessing as a nation. What might happen in our nation if we were able to do something like that? What difference do you think it might make?

- 1 Samuel 7:7-8 *Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. ⁸And the people of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines."*

What an amazing impact this time of fasting and confessing as a nation had on the people of God. That in conjunction with Samuel's prayers changed everything. They no longer were taking matters into their own hands, they were no longer doing their own will but seeking the will of God. They knew that their success on the battlefield was dependent upon the Lord of hosts – the Lord of angel armies. And the Lord responded in a mighty way.

- 1 Samuel 7:10 *As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel.*

The Lord threw them into confusion and the Israelites didn't even have much of a battle to fight – the Philistines were literally defeated before Israel thanks to the mighty hand of God. What a different outcome for the Israelites this time.

1 Samuel 7:12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the Lord has helped us."

The word Ebenezer means stone of help. You may recall hearing this term in the hymn Come Thou Fount by Robert Robertson -

Come Thou fount of every blessing
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace
Streams of mercy never ceasing
Call for songs of loudest praise

Teach me some melodious sonnet
Sung by flaming tongues above
Praise the mount, I'm fixed upon it
Mount of Thy redeeming love

Here I raise my Ebenezer
Here by Thy great help I've come
And I hope by Thy good pleasure
Safely to arrive at home

To raise an Ebenezer was to remember what the Lord did for Israel in helping them defeat the Philistines. If you were to raise an Ebenezer about what the Lord has done for you – what might you be remembering?

1 Samuel 7:15-17 Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶ And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places. ¹⁷ Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel. And he built there an altar to the Lord.

Here we are reminded that Samuel served as the last judge for Israel. He served as a priest and also as a judge. This time of Israel having judges is going to come to an end as we will see next week when Israel demands a king.

I want to leave you all this week with some final thoughts by FB Meyer: "Samuel did more than pray. He took a sucking lamb and offered it as a whole burnt-offering to the Lord, symbolizing thus the desire of Israel to be wholly yielded to the Divine will. There must be consecration before there can be faith and deliverance. It is not enough simply to put away sin; we must also give ourselves absolutely and entirely to God. There must be a wholeness in the offering, the yielding ourselves – spirit, soul and body – to be whatever God would have us be. Failure in the walk always denotes failure in the heart-life. If you are perpetually overcome by the Philistines, be sure there is a flaw in your inner consecration."