

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE #4

MONDAY At first, the Philistines were dismayed. With the Ark of the Covenant at the scene of the battle, the Israelite's God was also there, and since He had already delivered His people from the Egyptians by sending plagues (and the Philistines knew all about the plagues), he would certainly deliver them again. But some Philistines spoke words of hope, and so the army went forward. The Philistine's won in a big way and 30,000 Jewish foot soldiers died, as well as Hophni and Phinehas. And the Ark of the Covenant was captured.

I Samuel 4:6-11

We can almost taste their fear as the Philistines heard the Israelites celebrating and learned that the Ark was in their camp. We can imagine the timidity with which they started fighting again, expecting any second to be struck down by divine thunder, 99% sure that they were doomed. We can picture the slow realization that not only was there no thunder, there wasn't much resistance either. And we can see in our mind's eye the increasing intensity as the Philistines pressed the attack to their foe. The Jews were shocked! Even the Philistines were surprised to see the results. When we rest upon past victories and anticipate easy ones to come, we are in for a big surprise. Our enemy is resilient.

TUESDAY A messenger ran back to Shiloh with news of the battle. Eli the priest, 98 years old and blind, was waiting eagerly for some word. He was worried about the Ark. The messenger told Eli that the battle was lost, the Ark captured, and his two sons, Hophni and Pinehas, were both killed. Eli was seated, and when he heard this myriad of bad news, he fell backwards out his seat, broke his neck and died.

I Samuel 4:12-18

There seems to be a slight difference in Eli here from Eli in earlier chapters. We read that he was worried about the Ark being in the battle (though his sons were there, too, and not mentioned). We read that when he heard the news about the Ark being captured, he fell back and died. (He did not do that when he heard about the battle being lost and his sons being killed.) It may be that God's discipline in Eli's life opened Eli's eyes to what's really important in life. It's amazing how discipline can do that in our lives, as well. As we meet the problems of life, let us look for what God has for us in it.

WEDNESDAY Eli's sons, Phinehas and Hophni, were killed in battle. When Phinehas' pregnant wife heard about the battle, the capture of the Ark, the death of her husband and then later, of Eli's fall and death, all this bad news so distressed her that it induced early labor, and she gave birth to a son. She announced his name as Ichabod, meaning, "The glory has departed from Israel." Then she died.

I Samuel 4:19-22

In those days, parents often named children to reflect significant happenings or occurrences related to the birth. Notice this about the name: verse 22 tells us that she declared the glory departed because the Ark had been taken. Even at the moment of being overwhelmed by personal family tragedy, she recognized the significance of the Ark being captured by the enemy of Israel. Without God's glory and presence, what hope or meaning would there be to life? Let us be encouraged to know that He has not withdrawn Himself from us. He has promised to be always with us and to shine His own glory through us into the darkness.

THURSDAY The Philistines were delirious with joy. They captured the Ark – the symbol of the presence of the God of the Israelites. Taking it to Ashdod, they placed it in a pagan temple, setting it next to a statue of Dagon. Next morning, they found the statue of Dagon face-down on the dirt in front of the Ark. They stood it up but the next night, the same thing happened again. This second time, the head and hands of Dagon were broken off. The priests of Dago would not enter the temple. And there was another problem attributed to the Ark being in Philistines' hands: many people were struck with tumors.

I Samuel 5:1-6

God will not share His glory with another. All history declares this lesson: all the glory belongs to God and God alone. Our salvation is delivered to us in such a way that we get none of the credit (or glory) and God gets all. Our lives are testimonies that all we are and have are from the hand of our gracious and giving Lord – to Him be the glory! Let us determine that our lives, our speech, and even our thoughts will give the glory to God!

FRIDAY The people of Ashdod thought the Ark to be cursed, and wanted it out of there. So they shipped it to Gath. The citizens of Gath experienced the same sort of destruction as the people in Ashdod, so they sent it on to Ekron. Lo and behold, the same troubles fell upon Ekron: some people died and others were struck with tumors. The citizens, in misery, cried to heaven. They did not cry to the God who dwells in heaven, but only to the heavens themselves.

I Samuel 5:7-12

The end of verse 11 sums up the entire situation: *the hand of God was very heavy there*. When I read a book on dog training several years ago, it emphasized that a master should use the hand for feeding, petting, and commanding, but never disciplining. The dog needed always to recognize the hand in a positive way. People are that way about God's hand, thinking - if they think about God at all - that His hand is a hand of giving and giving and giving. But it is also a hand that sometimes, instead of giving, holds back; and sometimes, instead of blessing, brings correction and destruction. The more we search the Scriptures and study the ways of God, the better we understand these things. And the more quickly we confess *The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh; blessed be the name of the Lord*. So, let us determine to know Him better!

SATURDAY So the Ark of the Covenant remained in Ekron for quite a while. Finally, the people asked the priests and diviners for help. They told them to send it back with some guilt offerings to appease the Israelites and please their God. They told them that a suitable offering would be valuable (gold) and symbolic (likenesses of the mice that ravaged the land and of the tumors that struck the people).

I Samuel 6:1-5

These priests of Dagon and diviners were so wonderfully wise, and at the same time, so woefully foolish! They were wise in this way: to understand that an offense against God would demand some sort of payment in order to satisfy Him. But they were foolish in this way: to imagine that God would want gold. God has never been impressed with, or satisfied by, the things which impress and satisfy us! He's the searcher of our hearts! He searches for genuine remorse and repentance. He desires brokenness and contriteness. He longs for the heart that beats for Him. Your heart, and mine!