

I Samuel 4-7

“Samuel’s Predicament”

Introduction

- Tonight we continue in our study of I Samuel
 - And the content of I Samuel can be remembered by the fact that the book is really about 3 people, 3 main characters

The Book of I Samuel

Samuel – I Samuel 1-7

King Saul – I Samuel 8-15

David – I Samuel 16-31

- Last week we began by looking at the early life of Samuel

I Samuel 1-7 – The Prophet Samuel

#1 – Samuel’s Parents – I Samuel 1:1-2:11

#2 – Samuel’s Preparation – I Samuel 2:12 – 3:31

#3 – Samuel’s Predicament – I Samuel 4-7

- We saw his parents who like all of us had some issues but were generally godly people who loved the Lord and wanted the best for their son
 - Hannah his mother had made a vow to the Lord that if He gave her a son, she would give that son back to the Lord to serve him
 - So once Samuel was weaned, able to operate on his own – she gave him to the High Priest Eli to serve in the tabernacle
- But Samuel’s preparation to serve the Lord came out by learning from the bad examples of Eli sons and Eli’s hands off approach to ministry
 - God showed him what not to do and as he learned to hear from the Lord, God showed him how he was suppose to live and minister

Well tonight we get to Samuel’s predicament, the world that Samuel lived in and was called to serve in

- remember with the age of Samuel we are just coming out of the time of Judges, where there were men and women who served God – like Hannah, Samuel’s mom and Ruth and Boaz from our story from a few weeks ago
 - but many of the people just did whatever they thought was right in their own eyes

And because of this lifestyle, God as in the book of Judges would raise up foreign powers to afflict the children of Israel so eventually they would turn to Him

- and the timing of these first few chapters of Samuel was close to the time of Samson, or just after the time of Samson
 - so the major problem, the major predicament facing the nation was a group of people known as the Philistines

And before we get into the text tonight this is probably the best time to speak for a few minutes about this foe of Israel who will dominate the book of I Samuel

The Philistines – Fast Facts

#1 – They were not from the Middle East

- the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Midianites, those are people from that region in and around Israel
 - but the Philistines were different
 - they came from the area of the Aegean Sea
- **Picture of the Aegean Sea** – it is the area in and around what we would call modern day Greece
 - Some scholars believe they were from Crete, that island at the bottom of the map maybe as close to Israel as Cypress or further north in the Aegean – **Map of Mediterranean**

They came into the region a few generation before the events recorded in the end of the book of Judges and first Samuel

- but history records them first coming to Egypt and also areas further North from Israel, the area of the Hittites

The Philistines – Fast Facts

#1 – They were not from the Middle East

#2 – Known from history as the “Sea People”

- you history buffs who have studied the Near East have heard of the Sea Peoples as recorded in Egyptian and Hittite History – they record a warlike people just appeared from the sea and caused chaos and death and war in the region for years
 - eventually the Egyptian Empire had some victory against them and kicked them out of Egypt were they settled in what is today the Gaza Strip

The Philistines had five main cities (Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron) located in what is today the Gaza strip

➤ **Map of the Philistine Cities**

- You can see the land colored red there is where the Philistines had their major cities, again today that region is known as the Gaza strip

Now that brings up again an important point that is, are the modern day Palestinians related to the ancient Philistines?

The Philistines – Fast Facts

#1 – They were not from the Middle East

#2 – Known from history as the “Sea People”

#3 – They are not in any way related to Palestinians

- Sometime you read things like that, showing the Palestinians have an ancient claim to their land

But other than the fact that they live in the same region, the Palestinians have no connection to the ancient Philistines

Again the Philistines were from what is today Greece or some set of islands in the Aegean Sea

- the Palestinians are Arabs

The Philistines will dominated the region until King David comes on the scene and God will use him to put the Philistines under submission

- but they would continue as a people until the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires would come down and invade the region
 - they were taken captive by those world empires and their days as a people were over, they left the pages of history

The Romans who would later dominated the area, named the region of Israel Palestine after the ancient enemies of Israel the Philistines

- they did it to spite Israel, and the name stuck
 - later Arabs from Jordan and Egypt came into the region and took on the name Palestinians because of the name of the region but they have no DNA link to any Canaanite people or Philistine people who were there before the Jewish people
- The Jewish people have the oldest claim to the land of people still around, they purchased most of the of modern state of Israel from the Arabs whose descendants claimed they stole the land and of course you have God who says – the Land belongs to Him and he has given it to the Jewish people – just to clear things up and because I love to be politically correct
 - But that is who the Philistines are

So now that we know that the Philistines were warrior tribes from somewhere in the Aegean Sea

- who afflicted the Hittite and the Egyptian Empires, but eventually were banished to what is today the Gaza Strip and started their affliction of Israel
 - now that we have that down, we can look at I Samuel 4-7 and see it through the lens of the Philistines and their interactions with the Jewish people
 - four things tonight for you note takers

Samuel's Predicament – I Samuel 4-7

The Philistine Army takes the Ark (I Samuel 4)

The Philistine god bows to the Lord – (I Samuel 5)

The Philistine lords return the Ark (I Samuel 6)

The Philistine people are confused by God (I Samuel 7)

- we will look at these one at a time

Samuel's Predicament – I Samuel 4-7

The Philistine Army takes the Ark (I Samuel 4)

- In chapter four the Philistines have come out to battle against the children of Israel and they defeat them and kill 4,000 men of Israel
 - And Israel blames God as they and we so often do – we don't look inward, we don't wonder what we have done for Him to remove his hand of blessing, its just His fault

But then they come up with what they think is a great idea, apparently some of them were watching an early release copy of Raiders of the Lost Ark, 3,000 years before the movie came out someone got an early release copy and they are convinced that if they bring the ark into battle, they will win

- they will bring the ark into battle because the secret is the ark, notice verse 3 of chapter 14 they say, "It" will save us, the magic box will bring victory
 - it became like a lucky rabbits foot for them
 - which by the way maybe one of you can explain it to me after wards

Why is a rabbit's foot lucky?

- it obviously wasn't lucky for the rabbit that originally had the foot, that rabbit would disagree that his foot brought him luck, since you are currently wearing his foot around your neck
 - but I digress – the Jews are convinced the Ark will save them

But what they don't realize is their past victory over Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, which by the way the Ark wasn't built yet for those events but even the victories afterward, the secret wasn't a box, it was God who fought for them

- and they were living in sin and rebellion from the top down as a nation, so God has removed His hand of blessing and no box was going to change that
 - only repentance was going to change that
 - and they were not there yet as a people
 - and they lost much that day because of that

God teaches Israel an important lesson this day

- You see it is tragic to understand what they are saying back in verse 3
 - "Let **us** take the ark into battle and **It** will save us – **it** will save **us**"

For Israel it was no longer about the Lord, it was them how they were going to save themselves, by taking it, the ark, into battle with them

- The problem with that of course was the ark was just a bunch of gold and wood without the presence of God
 - And yet they had fallen into this thinking, that is so easy for everyone of us to fall in to, and that is it becomes the article or the program that is important, that saves us and not the Lord behind the method or the program

You see this in Israel as you go to certain sites where someone believes this is exactly where Jesus multiplied the fish and the bread

- And this rock is exactly the rock, He broke the bread upon
 - And so they build huge churches around the rock and as you go into the sanctuary, the rock is still in the center of the building, and people are crying around it, kissing it
 - And as I was there I just thought how sad
- I mean number one – this may be the area Jesus did that miracle in, we know stuff like that from the bible, so we can go to the exact area, but that exact rock – first of all yeah right, it is the exact rock, in fact, I don't remember the Bible saying He broke the bread on a rock at all
 - But even if it was – is it the rock that is important or the one who was breaking the bread, or the lesson He was teaching – what is really important

They have excavated streets from Jesus' time leading into Jerusalem and you realize there was only one way for Jesus to enter Jerusalem, meaning He walked on these stones I'm walking on – and that is amazing to me, not because of the stones, but because this is what Jesus would have seen, it's Jesus that is important, not the stones

- But people are so quick to forget that

And so God moves through a particular program some church is doing, and immediately what do we do????

- oh this is the program we need to be involved in
 - our church will double in size, if WE just use THE PROGRAM
 - No – it is not about the program, and it not about the ark, or the stones, or the street
 - It is about the Lord and His Word to us

And precious believers as we continue in life together you need to remember that

- It is the Lord and His Word that works in our lives – not programs (God can use them, but it God, not the program)
 - Its Jesus – Its Him – nothing more, nothing less, nothing else
 - It is Him we serve, it is Him we love, its Him

Because without Him, what happened to Israel will happen to us – the glory will depart

- God is not going to share His glory with things, with artifacts, with programs, with methods
 - We need to learn the lesson Israel had to learn

So in one day they lose the ark to the Philistines, the wicked sons of Eli are killed, Eli falls over and breaks his neck, and the only surviving line of the high priest is named by his mom Ichabod, the glory has departed

- kind of a bad day for the nation of Israel
 - but God was keeping His promises
 - He had promised to judge the sons of Eli
 - He had promised the nation if you walk with me I will fight for you, but if you are going to live in rebellion, well this is what happens
 - God's Word was standing once again

The real problem with all of this if you defeated the nation in battle, in the ancient world you assumed not only did we defeat you but we defeated your gods - and so with Israel's defeat God's reputation is really at stake,

- but He is not worried as we will see in chapter 5

Samuel's Predicament – I Samuel 4-7

The Philistine Army takes the Ark (I Samuel 4)

The Philistine god bows to the Lord – (I Samuel 5)

- So the Philistines bring the ark of God to their temple, to their false god Dagon
 - And again the idea was – our god beat your god
 - but they were quick to realize something was wrong with God's people, but nothing was wrong with the God of Israel

For the next morning the Philistines get up early to worship Dagon

- Dagon was this half fish, half human that the people worshipped – in fact we have these images
 - **Picture of the Starbucks image**
 - Oh wait – that is what we worship today, sorry, wrong image
 - **Picture of Dagon**
- Now that Dagon – this Merman that they would worship as their God
 - He was thought to be the father of Baal who will be prominent in the rest of the Old Testament

So verse 3 says when they got up early in the morning to worship Dagon

- Which I find that interesting that the Pagans have no problems with morning devotions
 - Getting up early to worship this half fish, half man
 - **Picture of the Starbucks image again**
- Now stop putting up Starbucks – we get it

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- But they get up early to worship their god and what they find is the giant statue of Dagon just fallen to pieces before the Ark of God
 - **Picture of Dagon Fallen**

And then they pick it up and put it back together again

- Now again I believe if your god has fallen and he can't get up, that is not a good god to worship, a god you have to repair, how is he going to help you

Now we laugh and think it's silly and it is

- but when you get deeper into their love and worship for Dagon
 - it is pretty clear that the Philistines understood that this statue was not a god – it was not the statue they loved

But the practices of the worship of Dagon

- which involved many deviant sexual rites and drunken parties
 - it was the worship of Dagon they loved and were not willing to give up even when it was clear, their god could not hold a candle to the God of Israel

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The Philistine god bows to the Lord – (I Samuel 5)

- and I point this out to you because it is similar to how we know that lust is not a god, it can't save us, we know alcohol abuse is not a god, our bitterness is not a god
 - but it's the worship of those things we choose not to abandon as pitiful as they are compared to the true and living God
 - we know that's true – we just love to worship at those altars

But this story is so insightful to how to have victory - overcoming Dagon, the answer is not to focus on Dagon

- Now that is what we normally do

We focus on the sin we want to overcome, we think about it, we tell others about it, we discuss it, we read books concerning it

- And yet it seems to me, the more we focus on Dagon, on the sin that rules our lives, the more it grips our lives
- And in this passage I notice overcoming Dagon is not accomplished by focusing on Dagon
 - It happens as you simply bring the Lord in

Instead of obsessing about the sin, I encourage you to simply start obsessing, and I mean obsessing about Jesus Christ

- Bring him into every part of you life
 - By reading His Word every chance you get
 - By seeing the importance of worshipping Him not only here, but get some worship CD, and turn that filth off that you normally listen to, I'm sorry but that is what it is in the eyes of the Lord, turn it off, and put on worship
 - Make church and learning and studying the Bible a priority for you
- And you know what happens as you stop obsessing about the sin, feeding the sin and just invite the Lord into the room of your life
 - Dagon will not be able to stand because the Lord will not allow it

The First Commandment is you shall have no other gods before me

- and we see that as God jealously in heaven is saying – worship me only, because I have a self esteem problem and I need you to worship me so I feel good about myself
 - are you kidding me – no way
 - God is saying – you shall have no other gods before me

Certainly that means – nothing will ever compare to the true and living God in our lives

- nothing we try to put in His place, nothing we try to fill the void with in our hearts
 - nothing will compare

But I also think it means precious church that nothing will be able to stand before Him

- that is if you want the dagoes in your life to fall
 - it is not a ten step program
 - it's a one step program of enthroning Christ and slowly but surely you will see those false gods fall

You bring in the ark – do you remember what was in the Ark? – 3 things

#1 – The Law

- which shows us our need for Christ
 - you can't overcome this sin on your own, no amount of self control or self discipline is going to do it
 - you need Jesus – you see that with the law

#2 – The Manna

- was a picture of devotions in the Word – get up every day for yourself, don't try to gather for the week, it will spoil
 - but get in the Word every day, and the Word changes you from the inside out

#3 – Aaron's Rod

- speaks of Submission to God – Draw near to God and He will draw near to you, but why? – just do it
 - resist the devil and he will flee – but how is that possible
 - just do it
 - and watch those dagoes fall!

The Philistines love the worship of dagon too much, so they send away the ark to other Philistine cities

- but every place the ark goes, plague and death follows

- the towns where the ark shows up are struck with tumors and people are dying
- Now some translations like the KJV say the affliction was hemorrhoids**
- and when you read that the ark went to Gath, that is where the giants like Goliath were from
 - now that is a giant problem
 - sorry – you can thank Pastor Rob for that joke, well really Bob Coy, but I heard it from Rob
- This is a serious issue facing the Philistines
 - and so the Lord of the Philistines decides, let's send the ark back to Israel
 - and that brings us to chapter 6

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The Philistine lords return the Ark (I Samuel 6)

- The Philistines decide to send the ark back to Israel and they are advised that you need to send a trespass offering
 - But before we begin to assume they understand the Jewish law and sacrificial system we see they don't in that they make five golden tumors, and five golden rats as an offering
- This shows us the Philistines believed something called "Sympathetic magic"
 - Sympathetic magic was an occult practice where you would make images of that which was an affliction to you and by that you were made better
- So they make these images and put the ark of God on a new cart, hook up some cows who had just had calves and this is their test

If the cows leave their babies and head away from them, we know this was the hand of God

- but if they go toward their babies, this is just really bad luck, especially giants with hemorrhoids – no wonder Goliath was so grumpy – anyway

The cows head straight to Israel, and all of Israel rejoices that God had brought the ark back to them

- the people sacrifice but then the chapter ends with tragedy as the people look into the ark to see the law and God judges them but why
 - well in order to get to the law, they would have had to remove the mercy seat
 - and not even the high priest did that – the high priest was to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat
 - because the picture was – those things were covered by God's mercy
- And the tough lesson Israel learned that day is you can not approach without His mercy covering you
 - You can't say – well God I want you to be fair with me
 - I don't want Him to be fair – I want Grace, I want mercy to cover every bit of my life

More than some lucky box – it was God that was to be feared and honored and obeyed

- He was the secret to their national strength and we see that in our last chapter before we go our way

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- in chapter 7 they start to get it – its not about a box, it is about the Lord

- they were defeated because they were worshipping other Gods

So under Samuel's leadership they get right with God and put away the foreign gods

- and as they do – He starts to fight for them which was always the secret to their strength and God has way better weapons – thunder
 - and the Philistines were confused and defeated before Israel
 - not because they were a great people, not because they were great warriors
 - but because they served a great God
- And they set up a stone to remember this, the Ebenezer stone

And in the great Hymn “Come thou Font” – this word is used and most people say – what does it mean, I raise my Ebenezer

- but it means I raise up a remembrance, that the Lord needs to be my help
 - I can't do it on my own
 - It is not about me or a box, or a program
 - Its about the great God of Israel
- And I need to put away everything I would dare to worship in His place
 - And love Him and focus on Him and honor Him
 - And not only will the dagoes fall - But the Lord will be my defense and will fight on my behalf

And the chapter ends with Samuel preaching that message on a circuit to the nation and, notice building an altar at home

- we need to bring the gospel to the nations
 - but we also need to build an altar at home
 - here at our home church
 - and mom and Dad – in your home – you need to build an altar and tell the kids who it is we serve and how to turn to Him with all your hearts – He is our only hope