



Text: I Samuel 4:4

4 So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth *between* the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, *were* there with the ark of the covenant of God. 5 And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again. 6 And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What *meaneth* the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the LORD was come into the camp. 7 And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore^c. 8 Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? these *are* the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. 9 Be strong, and quit^d yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight.

10 And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen.¹¹ And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, *were* slain^e. ^[11]

When we think about the ways of the Holy Ghost, His ways are so awesome: His operations are so mysterious, His doings are so secret, and His acts are removed from everything that makes sense.

Israel was out of sync with God. The people had forgotten the Lord and had become Baal worshippers. They had neglected the spiritual side of things so as a result the Lord gave them over to their enemies. When He brought them out of Egypt, He gave them specific instructions on how they were to live in the land to which he would bring them.

His words were very plain: "If ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins."

In fulfillment of Israel choosing the downside of God's command, God permitted the Philistines to bring havoc on Israel and to hold them in cruel slavery.

The only way for Israel to get out of their trouble was for them to return to the Lord with all of their soul and with spiritual fire. The only cure was to go back to God with repentance and renew their faith, trust, and covenant with Him.

If they had done this, everything would have turned out fine, but unfortunately turning to God is usually the last thing that people do.

If you are trying to get into the front door of your house, do you stand there and beat on it, and when that fails to work, you might be tempted to get the crow bar? No way! You simply get the key and it opens the door in the right way!

Jesus said He is the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me. If you want a good life here on this earth, and if you want to live forever in Heaven, then you must go through Jesus because He is the key!

By nature, our minds, do not gravitate toward spiritual things...that is why you often are not glad about the idea of going to a church service or a prayer meeting until after the fact....but once you have experienced the transformation of The Spirit In the Camp, then you begin to look forward to spiritual things...this is what it really means to mature in Him.

Instead of attempting to get right with God, these Israelites set about devising superstitious means of securing the victory over their foes. In this respect most of us have imitated them. We think of a thousand inventions; but we neglect the one thing needful.

Nothing would make me happier as a pastor than to see our prayer meetings this week very well attended! But please

don't do it just to make me happy, please do it because you really love Jesus. Come and be blessed!

I may be addressing someone right now who is passing through the valley of the shadow of death and as a result you think that you have forgotten some little think in connection with an external ritualistic tradition. Former devout Catholics may struggle with letting go of praying the rosary and the like. Your security is not in those things....but in Christ Alone!

Without faith it is impossible to please God. We forget that is the main thing....the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing!

The main thing is to enthroned God in our lives and to seek to do His will by faith in Jesus Christ....if you have not already done so, get right with God, confess your sins to Him, be born of the water and the Spirit, be reconciled to God and all will be right between you and God. This is the Spirit's true work.

You see...people have the tendency to heal their hurt only slightly...they say, "Peace, Peace!" forgetting that outside of a close walk with God there is no real peace, so instead they adopt a thousand external crutches instead of accepting the only remedy provided by the Great Physician for sin-sick souls.

Instead of seeking to become right with God, these Israelites thought that, if they could get the ark of the covenant, which had been the symbol of Jehovah's presence, and bring it from the tent of Shiloh into the midst of their camp, they would then be certain of victory. They thought wrong. So they sent and fetched the ark; and when it came into the camp, they were enthusiastic as if their banners already waved over a victorious battle; they lifted up their voices so loudly, that the earth rang again with their shouts, while the Philistines, hearing their exulting shout, and finding out the reason, were greatly afraid. With fearful hearts, and trembling lips, already counting that all was lost, their enemies turned to one another, and said, "God has come into the camp. Woe unto us! For there hath not been such a thing heretofore."

It doesn't sound all that bad, but when you begin to look a bit deeper and read on, you find that something was still not settled between God and His people. When this is the case, you can't move forward or you will be destroyed....we must never get ahead of God. If the engine is our of whack, it doesn't matter how many cans of turtle wax you put on the outside, it won't run right....get it to the mechanic, then when you get it out of the shop, turtle wax will make it shine, but first get the engine right!

THE GREAT MISTAKE which the Israelites made was that instead of going to God himself, they instead went to Shiloh to fetch the ark of the covenant. The ark was the sacred place where God revealed himself in the days when his people truly served him; but it was empty of power without the presence of the Lord who dwelt between the cherubim.

The Israelites were mistaken because they shouted long before they were "out of the woods." Before they had won any victory, the sight of the ark made them boastful and confident.

The Philistines fell into an error of a different kind: they were frightened without any real cause. They said, "God has come into the camp;" yet God had not come at all. It was only the ark with the cherubim upon it; God was not there. The mistake they made was that *they mistook the visible for the invisible*.

These Israelites fell into another mistake, which is also often made to-day: *they preferred office to character*. In their distress, instead of calling upon God, they sent for Hophni and Phinehas. Why did their hearts turn to them? Simply because they were priests, and the people had come to hold the sacred office in such superstitious reverence that they thought that was everything. But these young men were sinners against the Lord exceedingly; they were not even moral men, much less were they spiritual men. They made the house of God to be abhorred, and dishonored the Lord before all Israel. Yet, because they happened to hold the office of the priesthood, they were put in the place of God.

Here are Hophni and Phinehas, two of the grossest sinners in all the land of Israel; but then, you see, they are in the line of Aaron, and so they are trusted, and indeed are put in the place of God. God forbid that we should say a word against the house of Aaron, or against any who speak the name of the Lord, whom God has truly called unto his work! But this work is not a mere matter of pedigree; it is a question of the abiding presence of God with man and in a man. Unless God be with the minister whom you hear, to what purpose do you listen? Unless The Spirit of the Lord is in the Camp, why dwell there? I want to be in the camp where Jesus is...that is the only camp for us! May this camp be such a camp. May this camp be a camp where God does not have to pry His way in...He won't do that anyway! May this camp be a camp where He is always abundantly welcome!

Song: Welcome into this place

c heretofore: Heb. yesterday, or, the third day

d quit...: Heb. be men

e were slain: Heb. died

[1] The Holy Bible : King James Version. 1995 . Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA