

## 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel Ch 4

Ch 3 introduces Samuel's close encounter with God whereby Samuel came to know the Lord in a personal way and began to hear God's voice. And God told Samuel of the judgment that was going to come to Eli's (the high priest's) house because of the fact that he honored his sons more than the Lord. And that even though they were acting vile, he let them go and didn't restrain them (and yet they were the acting priests of the nation.)

And when Samuel told Eli what it was the God had told him, Eli knew that in fact it was the Lord that was speaking to him because there was no other way that Samuel could've known of the judgment of God that had fallen upon him. God had already told Eli of the coming judgment once by the voice of an anonymous prophet and when Samuel came to him with the same news, it was confirmation of what was to come. (Look at vs 19-21 of Ch 3)

And though God can speak to us in dreams, He can speak to us via visions, He can speak through impressions and the still small voice in our hearts, or thought's in our minds; by far the most direct way that the Lord will reveal to you His direction, or His correction, or His desire for your life, is by His Word. And God will never speak to you anything that will contradict His written Word.

Vs1 (1<sup>st</sup> sentence)

Which is to say that the Word of God was again coming to the people, Samuel speaking to the people on the behalf of God. You remember that in the 1<sup>st</sup> vs of ch 3 that we read that the Word of the Lord was rare in those days, there was just no one that God could talk to, everyone was too busy doing what was right in his own eyes rather than what was right in God's eyes. And when God's Word *would* come, it seemed to surface itself in judgment due to the people's lack *of*, or refusal *to* repent.

But in Samuel, God found a young man that He could speak to, one whom He could show Himself powerful on the behalf of. And so God's Word began to come once again to the people, and let me just tell you that nothing will bring on the attack of the enemy, like the proclamation of God's Word. When God's Word starts going out, it seems to attract the enemy like chum in the ocean does a shark, he hates you hearing the Word of God. And if he can get you upset, or distracted, or condemned, or beat up enough to get you out from under the proclamation of the Word of God, then you can bet that that's exactly what he'll do. No sooner do we read that the word of Samuel came to all of Israel, then we see the enemy lining up preparing to attack, when you come under the proclamation of God's Word, prepare for enemy attack, it's not a maybe type thing, it's coming, you can count on it, notice (finish vs1).

Vs2-3

Ok, There's a couple of things we need to stop and recognize here #1 The Lord isn't to blame for their loss. God told them straight up that as long as they walked in His ways, and kept His Word that He'd ensure victory over their *enemies*.

But if they were to disobey, or walk in rebellion to His Word then He'd allow their enemies to overtake *them*, and as you well know, at this point this isn't a shining moment in Israel's history. The word of the Lord was rare; every man was doing what was right in their own eyes. They wanted to live like the heathens and receive the reward of the righteous, and you can't have it both ways, to understand it simply they're merely reaping what they've sown. And had they been up on their scriptures they'd have known that in the condition they were in spiritually as a nation, it probably wasn't wise to engage in warfare.

But how many times do we do the same thing? We try to live in a manner, or engage in an event that's simply not becoming as a believer, and when things begin to go south in our lives we immediately turn to God and say, "How could this be happening, God why are you bringing all of this hardship upon me?" Or, "How could you allow me to go through such trials?" When the fact of the matter is, if we'd been walking in the light as He is in the light we'd have never done what we did in the 1<sup>st</sup> place, and the simple fact is we're blaming God for the ramifications of *our* choices and *our* actions. But we want to feel justified in what we've done, so we blame God for the hardships that we bring on ourselves, but don't blame God for hardships that you endure when the simple fact is, that if you'd have been leading the life He's called you to live, it would've never happened.

Now I'm not saying that every time we endure trials that it's because of sin in our lives, that's part of growing, and maturing, and allowing our faith to be developed. But *you know* when you engage in something or, take a certain attitude or perspective that quite frankly is unscriptural, and so when the ramifications come down for that, don't blame God. They had the Word of God, and had they heeded it they never would've found themselves in such a tragedy.

2<sup>ndly</sup> I want you to notice that now they're going to look to the ark of God rather than the God of the ark.

Now the ark (which is mentioned over 30 times in ch 4-6) is that piece of furniture which was to represent God's presence and it contained within it a jar of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the 2 tables of the Law, (the 10 commandments). And instead of crying out to God, confessing their sin and seeking restoration through repentance; they decide that they're going to try a different method, notice what they say, "*Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD from Shiloh to us, that when **it** comes among us **it** may save us from the hand of our enemies.*" Now I don't know whose bright idea this was or who suggested it, but it's going to get them into a lot of trouble. Placing all their hopes in a box, it's their "God in a box" program, and let me just tell you that anytime you're eyes are diverted from "Him" to an "it", you're headed for spiritual disaster. Whatever the "it" might be, "10 steps to spiritual success", a certain plan or program that's certain to bring you victory. That's where (I believe) many Christian books go wrong, because they seem to present themselves in such a light as to say, "this" is the way to whatever. Now, no doubt there are certain fundamentals that we all as Christians ascribe to. But even those fundamentals, (praying for so long, reading so many chapters, be at so many bible studies) none of those things in and of themselves are what bring you spiritual victory, they're merely means to the end, they're vehicles that God will move

through, but it's not this book (the bible) that I need so desperately, it's the God of this book, the God that this book speaks of and declares.

So many times we try to put God in a box, and we think, "if we just do this", this program "it" will do the trick, "I'll certainly overcome if I subscribe to 'it'." Bring the ark, "it" will save us, we've got "God in a box" and He'll certainly respond if we do this. We need to be careful to maintain our relationship with the Lord personally vs getting lost in some religious practice or legalistic program thinking that "it" will get us where we need to be verses trusting in "Him" to lead us and bring us victory.

You see they'd have known of the fact that Joshua and Moses had taken the ark into battle in times past, and so someone maybe thought, "that's the key, bring the ark it'll guarantee success", "this is what worked before" and it's putting God in a box. But they didn't seek the Lord concerning it, nor were they walking by faith, they were just seeking to use the ark for their own purposes.

Charles Spurgeon said this, "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 . . . They forget the main matter, which is to enthrone God in the life, and to seek to do his will by faith in Christ Jesus." Let's not put God in a box, and confine Him to having to do certain things in response to our certain ways, let's keep Him enthroned on our hearts, and seek His direction for us, vs seeking to get Him to go our direction.

Vs4

Now you remember these guys, the reprobate priests of carnality, and in here lies a lesson, carnality always comes along with the "program," or the "package," when you begin to look to "it" vs "Him" you're bringing the flesh into the deal. They're treating the ark like it's a good luck charm or something.

Vs 5

Again Spurgeon said, "Now, beloved, when you are worshipping God, shout if you are filled with holy gladness. If the shout comes from your heart, I would not ask you to restrain it. God forbid that we should judge any man's worship! But do not be so foolish as to suppose that because there is loud noise there must also be faith. Faith is a still water, it flows deep. True faith in God may express itself with leaping and with shouting; and it is a happy thing when it does: but it can also sit still before the Lord, and that perhaps is a happier thing still." In other words don't be deceived into equating a lot of whooping and hollering and jumping up and down with true spirituality and the measure of godliness. This would've been considered a radical revival service, everyone was into it, emotions were high, people were shouting, and leaping and everyone was excited. But I've been apart of some services ( And I'm sure you have to), or you've seen them on T.V. where everyone is jumping and shouting AMEN! and Hallelujah and everyone works up a sweat, but when it's all said and done you kind of go, "what just happened?"

There was a lot of excitement there, and people were all amped up, but what was really said, what have I come away with that I'm going to carry throughout my week or my life. And most the time it's not much, I've gotten all excited maybe, but I'm no more equipped for my enemies confrontation now than I was before I walked in.

God's not near as concerned about how high we jump and how much we sweat, as He is how straight we walk when we come down, a lot of people shout real loud and jump real high on Sunday. But when they come down they walk crooked all week completely annulling everything they consented to on Sunday. And even though Israel was shouting, and jumping, and sweating in excitement, there was still no repentance, nothing had changed in their lives personally. Their lives didn't reflect the God they were to be serving, they're no more equipped for the enemies confrontation now than they were before the ark ever arrived.

Vs6-7

So this began to rock the Philistines world, they heard all this shouting and sensed all this excitement and said, "Oh no, God's in their camp" Listen, no He's not, "But listen to all the shouting and the hollering," He's not there, "But such excitement and emotional fervor" God wasn't in it. Don't be fooled my friends, loud mouths and lots of energy isn't the measure of spirituality or God's presence among a people.

And to the Philistines they just seen this as them bringing their God into the battle, but at least they were unbelievers, they equated that ark as the Israelite's God, no different then their little trinkets of idolatry. And they're saying, "This has never happened before, no one's ever brought their gods with them into the battle, we're doomed."

Vs8

Interesting how they were familiar with the history of the nation of Israel, you remember when Moses was speaking to the Pharaoh on the behalf of the Lord and he said to him, "*But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.*" Ex 9:16

And then we read in the song of Moses in Ex 15:13-16, "*You in Your mercy have led forth The people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength To Your holy habitation. The people will hear and be afraid; Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; The mighty men of Moab, Trembling will take hold of them; All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. Fear and dread will fall on them; By the greatness of Your arm They will be as still as a stone, Till Your people pass over, O LORD, Till the people pass over Whom You have purchased.*"

And here we see the faithfulness of God to His Word, now, God wasn't in the midst of Israel's camp like they (Israel or the Philistines) thought that He was.

But nonetheless being familiar with their history, knowing the plagues and the destruction that was brought upon all of Egypt (which at the time they were delivered was the most powerful nation on the face of the earth) brought fear into their hearts, even as God had said it would.

But God had also told them, *“But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you.”* Lev 26:14-17

You see Israel should've known better than to presume upon the Lord, because regardless of what they wanted to happen or thought would happen, God's Word had told them what would happen, and they knew they weren't walking in His statutes or keeping His commands. Again how many times do we think, “oh, that surely won't happen to me,” and we deceive ourselves into thinking that we're exempt from the penalties of God's Word. But will not be mocked and His Word doesn't return to Him void, God is not a man that He should lie, and so if He said it'll happen, it'll happen.

Vs9-10

So actually their actions had a reverse affect, and now things have gone from bad to worse. Upon hearing of the ark in Israel's midst, it caused the Philistines to buckle down and fight even harder. They thought if we're going down, we're going down fighting and someone said, “Hey, quit whining like a bunch of babies, if you don't want to become their slaves like they've been yours, then act like men and fight like men.” and That's exactly what they did, and the end result was a massive slaughter, I mean we kind of read over these numbers but think about this, 30,000 men were killed, now the city limits of Joplin just include right over 40,000, so imagine  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the city being wiped out, these are incredible numbers, it's gone from 4,000 to 30,000.

Vs11

Remember vs 34 of ch 2 regarding God's judgment upon the house of Eli? *“Now this shall be a sign to you that will come upon your two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die, both of them.”* and Here we see the fulfillment of that, and even more the ark was captured, the very thing that they thought would bring them victory has been captured by the enemy and has become a snare to them. Why, because it became an idol to them, they thought that as long as they had God in a box that they could never lose. But God had no obligations to bless them in their idolatry, even though what the ark represented was a good thing.

And often times things that were at one time good for us can become an idol to us, and God will often break us of our idolatry by allowing our idol to be taken from us. That brand new car that you spent all day washing and waxing only to get it keyed at the mall, or a door banged into it.

The ark of God was captured, but the God of the ark was still very much on the throne, and still has a plan to vindicate His name.

Vs12-18

He knew his sons were in for, but he feared for the security of the ark, and when he heard that it had been captured, probably fearful over the ramifications, of what God might do, he had a heart attack and fell off his chair and being so old and feeble it broke his neck. God had told him that his 2 sons would die the same day, but He didn't tell him that he would die as well on the same day. God will reveal a lot in prophecy, but some things He lets us see in retrospect, after it's already happened.

Vs19-22

But in reality the glory of God was gone from Israel long *before* that ark was captured, not *because* the ark was captured. David Guzik comments, "Tragically, the same could be said of many churches, many ministries, and many individual Christian lives: **the glory has departed**. There are still priests, there is still a tabernacle, but God is not enthroned in glory among them. There is the form of godliness, without the power (2 Timothy 3:5). You could write **Ichabod** across many churches, many ministries, many individual Christian lives!"

And I pray that that never be, nor become the case with the ministry that God has established here, but rather that His glory would reign in this ministry, and in our lives.