

1 Samuel 4

April 12, 2012

Unrepentant sin leads to Defeat, Death, and the Departure of God

I. Defeat

A. Initially (1b-3a)

"No sooner does God begin to reveal His Word to His people than the enemy shows up to attack them. The Philistines are mentioned in Scripture as early as the days of Abraham (Gen. 21:32; see 10:14), and in the books of Samuel they're mentioned over 150 times. They were originally a seagoing people from the Aegean region who invaded the territory along the Mediterranean coast (Phoenicia) and sought to control all of the land we know as Palestine (The name "Palestine" is a form of the word "Philistine")." Wiersbe, Warren

"Israel could compete on more equal terms with Moab and Ammon, but the Philistines had much influence from far away Greece. Greek military equipment (such as helmets, shields, coats of mail, swords and spears) made the Philistines formidable opponents. The Philistines were the first people in Canaan to process iron, and they made the most of it. The Philistines were an immigrant people from the military aristocracy of the island of Crete (Amos 9:7). Small numbers of Philistines were in the land at the time of Abraham, but they only came in force soon after Israel came to Canaan from Egypt. They were organized into five city-states." – David Guzik

Israel was encamped by this rock, named Ebenezer, which literally means "Stone of Help." Ebenezer was around 20 miles from Shiloh, and 2 to 3 miles from Aphek, a northern Philistine city.

But - when they went out to fight, God did not help them; they were actually defeated in this field, probably having been run down by the chariots of the Philistines.

And so we read in v. 3 that when they came back to camp, the elders of Israel asked a really good question, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?"

They *knew* it *wasn't* the choice chariots or the fierce fighting of the Philistines, they knew it was the LORD Who had allowed them to be defeated, and so, they asked the question why?

Now, "**why**" isn't *always* the right question to ask, but when you're defeated and overpowered by the enemy, and you fall on your face, it probably *is* a good question to ask, it's always good to search your heart in a situation like that.

And really, all we have to do is be honest, humble and broken before God and His Word...and He will speak to us!

All they would have to do would be to read or remember the scroll of Leviticus 26:14-16a, 17, God said to Israel, "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 set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies."

We read the same thing in Deuteronomy 28:25

Clearly the reason, why God did not help them, was that they weren't being obedient, they weren't observing His commandments, they were despising His commandments, hating his covenant.

Later Samuel reveals this to them, in 1 Samuel 12:9, they had forgotten the LORD their God, so God sold them into the hands of the Philistines.

(Even a basketball team knows, that in order to avoid defeat, there are things like time-outs, where the coach communicates the necessary adjustments and corrections, in order to win the game)

Bottom line is, they were defeated initially, cause they were living disobediently, and had the right mentality to make inquiry, to ask "why?" But the tragedy is they didn't wait for God's answer.

Andrew Maclaren said, *"There are plenty of Christians, like these elders, who, when they find themselves beaten by the world and the devil, puzzle their brains to invent all sorts of reasons for God's smiting, except the true one, - their own departure from Him."*

And sooo, they were defeated not just initially, the time came for them to be defeated – severely. They hastily jumped to superficial, religious conclusions.

B. Severely (3b-11)

They were living disobediently, so they were defeated initially that they might really, radically, righteously return to the LORD. But they didn't return to the LORD, they did a couple of things that a lot of the so-called people of God, do, that lead to further defeats.

1. Superficial Spirituality/Relic Religion (3b-4)

Rather than repenting of their sins, and returning to that relationship with God, the so-called people of God only trusted in the symbols of God, the relics of God – and not God Himself.

Notice that terrible 2-letter word, “it.” (v. 3b) (“Let us...”)

If there was ever a relic that would save, this would be the one:

“The ark of the covenant is mentioned at least thirty-five times in these three chapters and represents Jehovah God, the central Person in all of Israel’s history. The ark was the most important piece of furniture in the tabernacle and resided in the Holy of Holies. In the ark were the two tablets of the law, and on it was the golden “mercy seat” where God’s glorious presence dwelt. This was the throne of God from which He spoke to His people (Ex. 25:10–22).” - Wiersbe, Warren

And if there ever was a relic that would save you, this would be the one, but – that’s not the way God operates.

I remember, before I was a Christian I used to wear a Scapular, convinced that if I die with this Scapular on, I wouldn’t go to hell.

Some people hang a rosary on the rear view mirror of their vehicle, thinking it has the power to keep them from getting in an accident.

Some people must make the sign of the cross when they pray; thinking that’s their way in and that’s their way out. And if you want to do it right, you need to hold your thumb, index and middle finger together, symbolizing the Trinity, and then hold your ring and pinkie finger to the palm of you hand, symbolizing the 2 natures of Christ; when you start on the top, and come down you symbolize Jesus coming down and descending to us...and on and on and on.

But so many times, people make the sign of the cross, yet they don’t take up their cross, deny themselves and follow Jesus.

But that’s what happens when the invisible God, becomes a visible, “it.”

That’s a problem, not only the 2-letter word, “it,” but how about the 2 sons of Eli - Hophni and Phinehas? Why would they allow these guys to join them in battle? Considering the terrible things they were doing?

Well their priests, right? They have a position, right? Doesn’t that mean they get special treatment? Wrong.

God is so much deeper than that.

We have to be careful of Superficial religion and:

2. Empty Enthusiasm (5-6)

It's okay to be super-excited about the LORD - about Him and His presence.

But God doesn't give victory simply because one is optimistic or enthusiastic.

I thought of that Scripture over in 1 Corinthians 13, it's just a bunch of noise, sounding brass, clanging cymbals...without love.

"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." - C. H. Spurgeon

Their confidence was very carnal and very superficial; as a matter of fact it may have been used as fuel for focus on the part of the Philistines.

"The Ark may have been with them, but the LORD was against them." - Wiersbe

III. Death

The 4,000 (v. 2)

The 30,000 (v. 10)

Hophni and Phinehas (v. 11)

Eli (v. 18)

The wife of Phinehas (20)

"In the late 1970's, a five-line inscription was found on a grain silo in the ruins of Izbet Sarteh. When deciphered, it was found to contain a Philistine account of this battle, the capture of the ark, even specifically mentioning the priest Hophni. This is the earliest known extra-biblical reference to an Old Testament event." - Guzik

"The wages of sin is death." – Romans 6:23a

It's not that God's trying to be a killjoy and take away your fun; it's just that the wages of sin is death.

The death of a dream that God had for you and your family; it might even be the death of a marriage, the death of a ministry, sometimes it's physically, and sometimes eternally.

The 4,000, the 30,000, the 2 sons, the High Priest, the wife of Phinehas, they didn't have to die, if only, the people, and especially the leaders, the leadership, would have turned and returned to the Lord.

(Nadab and Abihu; OT)

(Ananias and Saphira; NT)

There might be some here that are thinking, "I'm so sure, God's not gonna kill anyone, we're not gonna die, nothing's gonna die."

And if you think along those lines you wanna know who you sound like?

You sound like the serpent - Satan, the liar, Lucifer, in the Garden of Eden...who told Eve, "Surely, you will not die."

Don't believe the lie, disobedience and death a like Siamese twins – don't take it lightly.

Ezekiel 18:4, "The soul who sins shall die."

Remember Moses' words in Deuteronomy 30:19 "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;"

Proverbs 11:19, "As righteousness *leads* to life, so he who pursues evil *pursues it* to his own death."

Proverbs 12:28, "In the way of righteousness *is* life, And in *its* pathway *there is* no death."

Proverbs 13:14, "The law of the wise *is* a fountain of life, To turn *one* away from the snares of death."

Proverbs 14:27, "The fear of the LORD *is* a fountain of life, To turn *one* away from the snares of death."

(See James 1:13-16)

Defeat (Initially and Severely)

Death (God help us not to be a casualty)

III. Departure

A. The Ark of God was captured (v. 11)

B. The Glory of God departed (v. 19-22)

"The wife of Phinehas had more spiritual insight than her father-in-law, her husband, and her brother-in-law. The two brothers used the ark as a good-luck charm, and Eli was concerned with the safety of the ark, but she was burdened for the glory of God." - Wiersbe, Warren

It's interesting the Hebrew word translated, "departed," means not only to "go away," it actually means to be "exiled."

See also Psalm 78:56-64; Jeremiah 7:8-15

"After the Exodus the Lord promised to consecrate the tabernacle by His glory (Exodus 29:43); after it was set up, His glory filled it and the cloud covered it (Exodus 40:34-35). 'Glory' represents the Presence of God dwelling in the tabernacle (Psalm 26:8)." - Expositor's Bible Commentary

"When King Solomon dedicated the temple, the glory of God returned (1 Kings 8:10), but before the destruction of Jerusalem, the prophet Ezekiel saw the glory leave the temple and the city (Ezek. 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18; 11:22-23). Ezekiel also saw the future millennial temple and the return of the glory of God (Ezek. 43:1-5). The glory of God didn't return to this earth until the birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world (Luke 2:8-11; John 1:14). Today, God's glory dwells in His people individually (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and in His church collectively (Eph. 2:19-22)." - Wiersbe, Warren

*"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!" - David Guzik*

Sin leads so sadly to **Defeat** for so many of the people of God, initially and severely

Sin leads to **Death** to the dreams *for* and lives *of* the Disciples of God

And worst of all - persistent, consistent, insistent, sin leads eventually and tragically to the **Departure** of God.