

Theme: People often superstitiously believe that they can guarantee God's favor and protection through external rituals, but His favor is only received through genuine faith.

I. Literary Allusions

- A. "Call me Ishmael" - literary allusion to begin Moby Dick
- B. Literary allusions can evoke powerful images
- C. Our chapter has several - Ichabod, Ebenezer, Philistines
- D. What is happening in this critical but surprising chapter?

II. The Game of Thrones - Israel & the Philistines

- A. The Israelites are fighting with the Philistines
Now **the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines**. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. 1 Samuel 4:1
 - 1. Philistines are a major foe during this whole time
 - 2. Struggles with them in book of Judges
 - 3. Philistines mentioned 170+ times in 1-2 Samuel
- B. Understanding the protagonist - Philistines
 - 1. Philistines probably originally from Crete or Aegean - probably of early Greek origin
 - 2. Philistines lived in coastal areas - map of five cities
 - 3. Trying to expanding inland throughout this period
 - 4. Conflict on edge of disputed territory (map)
Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. **The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek.** 1 Samuel 4:1

- C. Israel & Philistines are engaged in the game of thrones
 - 1. They are fighting over land & who will rule
 - 2. They also view it as a fight of their Gods

III. The Game of Thrones - Israel Loses To the Philistines

- A. Israel loses the first battle
The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, **Israel was defeated by the Philistines**, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield. 1 Samuel 4:2
 - 1. Israel loses the first battle on the battlefield
 - 2. Not decisive but clear victory for the Philistines
- B. Israel's great question & strategy
When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "**Why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines?** Let us bring the ark of the LORD's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies." 1 Sam 4:3
 - 1. Right question - they should win in promised land
 - 2. Terribly wrong answer as we will see!
- C. Understanding the ark of Yahweh's covenant
When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies." 1 Sam 4:3
 - 1. Ark is a major figure in this section - 36 of 61 times in 1-2 Samuel found in 1 Samuel 4:1-7:2

2. Ark was 45” long, 27” wide, 27” high (graphic)

3. What was the ark - what did it represent?

So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. 1 Samuel 4:4

- a. The ark was in Shiloh - the tabernacle
- b. It was the ark of the covenant of Yahweh Almighty
- c. Yahweh dwelled between the cherubim
- d. The priests were with it because it was the place of atonement - the mercy seat

D. Israel’s disastrous strategy and loss

1. Israel’s misplaced confidence in the Ark

When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, “Why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? **Let us bring the ark of the LORD’s covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.”...⁵ When the ark of the LORD’s covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook.** 1 Samuel 4:3, 5

- a. v3 ambiguous - it will save us or He will save us
- b. Yahweh was judging their sin, and the ark can’t save
- c. Eli feared this would not work (v13)
- d. But Israel thought they were good to go now!

2. The Philistines misplaced fear

When they learned that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp, ⁷ the Philistines were afraid. “A

god has come into the camp,” they said. “We’re in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before. ⁸Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert. ⁹ Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!” 1 Samuel 4:6-9

3. The disastrous outcome

So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. ¹¹ The ark of God was captured, and Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died. 1 Samuel 4:10–11

- a. Israel slaughtered - flee the battle field
 - b. “Slaughtered” is same word as “plagues” on Egypt in v8 - Israel was under a plague (also 1 Sam 6:19 of those looking into the Ark)
 - c. Hophni and Phinehas killed
 - d. Ark of Yahweh carried off by the Philistines
 - e. Ark of Yahweh captured - 5x - v11, 17, 19, 21, 22
4. Ichabod - the glory has departed (no text on screen)
- a. Benjamite runs 20+ miles to Shiloh with bad news
 - b. Eli - the spiritual guide - is the last to know (vv12-15)
 - c. Eli is unable to see (v15) and grown fat (v18)
 - d. Report to Eli - 4 successively worse pieces of news
 - e. When Eli hears the fate - he falls backward & (v17-18) dies

- f. Eli's daughter in law goes into premature labor
- g. She dies in childbirth and names child Ichabod - no glory
- h. The glory has departed/gone into exile (v21,22)

IV. Superstition Versus Faith

A. A sad story of the destructive nature of superstition

1. Israel was superstitious - control Yahweh by the Ark
2. They trusted in rituals rather than in Yahweh
3. This was disastrous - soldiers slaughtered, priests dead, ark of God captured - Ichabod!
4. Eventually Shiloh itself was ransacked & destroyed

B. Humans are given over to this type of superstition

1. The Philistines think they now control Yahweh - and are sadly mistaken (1 Samuel 5-6)
2. Judah does the same thing before the exile
 - a. Believe that God will not let the Temple fall
 - b. But Ezekiel told them the glory had departed the Temple
 - c. Jeremiah compared their superstition to Shiloh
Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel...
¹⁴Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your fathers. Jeremiah 7:12, 14
 - d. Once again, Temple destroyed - but Ark is lost forever

e. This time the people go into exile as well

3. Judah did the same thing in Jesus day

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. ³⁸ Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" Matthew 23:37-39

- a. They loved their Temple - and were about to kill Jesus!
- b. Like Ezekiel, Jesus tells them the glory has gone
- c. Apart from the Spirit, the Temple is just a pile of bricks
- d. This time Israel is sent into Diaspora - and the Old Covenant is done away with once and for all

V. Applying the Word

A. Do I relate to God have a superstitiously - or by faith?

1. This is an ever present temptation
2. Superstition promises to let me win the game of thrones
3. Do I trust in external rituals like baptism, Mass, etc.?
4. Do I embrace a health & wealth gospel - God is my lucky rabbit foot?
5. Do I relate to God personally - only through leaders or others?
6. Do I use the Bible & means of grace superstitiously - as ritual substitute for relationship?

B. Superstition and the Game of Thrones

1. We are tempted like this so we can stay in control
2. We want God - as long as He is tame (Aslan)
3. We need to surrender in the game of thrones - and let God rule

C. A prayer of faith and submission rather than superstitious control

Ichabod - The Glory Is Gone

1 Samuel 4

March 23, 2014

Prayer

Numbers 6:24-26

The Lord bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. Numbers 6:24–26