

1 Samuel 4 — The Ark Is Captured

February 13, 2022

Good morning! If you are a guest this morning, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. It is great to have you. We are in a capital campaign to remodel the new Spencer Campus and make a few improvements here in Spirit Lake. Our goal is to raise \$650,000. We were planning on closing that campaign at the end of January. The good news is God's people keep giving. Last week, we began the week having received \$517,000. Going into this weekend, we have received \$542,000. We are only about \$100,000 short of our goal. If God's people keep giving, we will make our goal.

We are continuing to work 6-9 p.m. Thursdays and 8-11 a.m. Saturdays. If you can help, even if it is just for an hour or two, all hands are appreciated as we are knocking out walls and filling dumpsters.

Before we get started, how many of you remember the movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark" with Indiana Jones? To set us up for our study, I want to take a moment to show you a clip from the movie.



What do you think of that clip? Is it true that an army that carries the ark of the covenant will be invincible? Would God supernaturally fight for Hitler if he had possessed the ark? This morning, we are going to answer those questions.

In our study of 1 Samuel, the opening three chapters of the book focused on Samuel, his birth, and his rise to prominence in Israel. Last week, we saw how God began speaking to Samuel and made him not just a priest for the people but a prophet who spoke God's Word to the people. When we come to 1 Samuel 4, Samuel's story stops and we will learn about the ark of the covenant and the power of God. The opening three chapters were about Samuel. The next three chapters are about the ark of the covenant and the power of God.

Let's read this chapter together so we get a good overview, then we will study it together.

And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle. And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies." So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. As soon as the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And when they learned that the ark of the Lord had come to the camp, the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "A god has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight." So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell. And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes torn and with dirt on his head. When he arrived, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out. When Eli heard the sound of the outcry, he said, "What is this

uproar?” Then the man hurried and came and told Eli. Now Eli was ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set so that he could not see. And the man said to Eli, “I am he who has come from the battle; I fled from the battle today.” And he said, “How did it go, my son?” He who brought the news answered and said, “Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great defeat among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.” As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years. Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth. And when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth, for her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death the women attending her said to her, “Do not be afraid, for you have borne a son.” But she did not answer or pay attention. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel!” because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.” 1 Samuel 4 (ESV)

The chapter divides up into five parts. First, we have a verse on the background to set the scene. Next, we have two defeats, then two deaths. That is how we will divide up the chapter. Let’s begin.

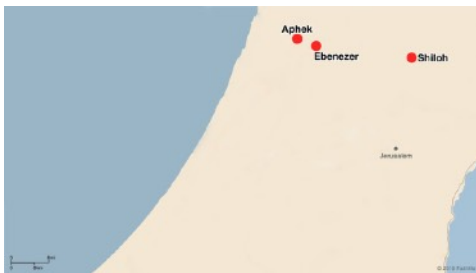
Background

...Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. 1 Samuel 4:1 (ESV)

If you are like me, you read verses and think it is nice information to know but it doesn’t mean much. Let me take a few moments to explain this background. The situation for Israel was a little bit like the tension between Ukraine and Russia is right now. The two armies were next to one another and there was a lot of tension between them. Everyone was waiting for someone to make the first move. The Philistines would be like Russia. They were technologically, militarily, and organizationally superior to Israel. Israel was like Ukraine. The Israelites were trying to defend their homeland.

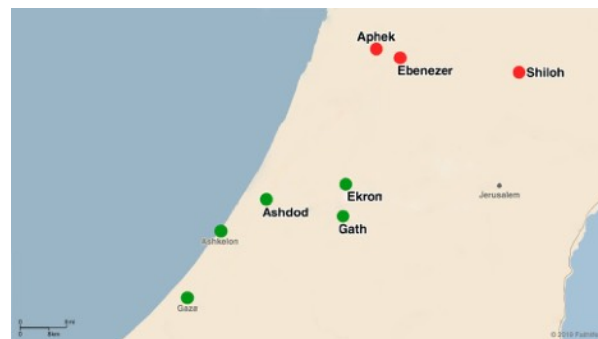
This is the first time the Philistines are mentioned in 1 Samuel, but this is not the first time we hear about them in the Bible. We first hear of them in Judges 3 during the judgeship of Deborah. They were seafaring people who arrived in the Promised Land by sea. By the time of Samson, they spread their influence inland. Let me show you the geography.

Here is a map of the territory of Israel. It shows you the location of Shiloh. This is where the first three chapters of 1 Samuel took place.



The next map shows the location of Aphek and Ebenezer. Ebenezer is only 20 miles west of Shiloh. The next map shows the location of the five major Philistine cities in green. The Philistines were originally

seafaring people. This is why their cities were located close to the shore in the west. The Israelites came into the region from the east. At this time, the Philistines were trying to expand north which is why they went to



Aphek. From there they planned to move east and destroy Shiloh. By destroying

Shiloh, they hoped to demolish the moral of Israel and defeat Israel's God. Next week, we will see how well that worked out.

The First Defeat

The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle. 1 Samuel 4:2 (ESV)

When it says Israel was defeated, that was an understatement. Four thousand dead Israelites was a lot of dead people. We lost 3,000 on the Sept. 11 attacks on the twin towers. This was 4,000 dead people. They died the old-fashioned way, one sword thrust at a time.

We know how demoralized our nation felt after the Sept. 11 attacks. Everyone was in a panic. Israel was a much smaller nation. For it, this was a far greater crisis than anything we have experienced.

And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies." 1 Samuel 4:3 (ESV)

Just as anyone would after a tragedy people asked the question, "Why? Why did we lose?" Defeat for Israel was not defeat for other nations. When Israel entered the Promised Land, God promised to protect it. He promised to rescue the Israelites from their enemies. That is exactly what God had done in the past by defeating enemies much more powerful than the Philistines. God defeated Egypt, the superpower of the day, by the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea where God destroyed Pharaoh's army. When the nation of Israel entered the Promised Land, God defeated the city of Jericho by knocking down the city's walls.

God gave the Israelites victory in the past, why wasn't God giving them victory now? They were in the Promised Land God gave to them. Why wasn't God protecting them? The elders of Israel knew it was God who defeated them, not the Philistines. That is why they said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?"

While they asked the right question, they came to the wrong answer. What happened to them is very similar to what we read about in the book of Judges. That chronicled the 200 years of history before this. In that day, when God's people walked away from him and pursued the sinful ways around them, God raised up enemies around them that he used to defeat them. It is when God's people confessed their sin, repented, and called out to God for help that God came to their rescue. Then they were able to defeat their enemies, no matter the power they possessed.

That was not the answer the elders came to. Instead of identifying their own sin, repenting, and calling out to God for rescue, they decided they needed to bring the ark of the covenant with them into battle. That way they would bring God with them into battle. They decide to treat the ark like a lucky rabbit's foot. "If God's ark is with us, God will protect us." They were thinking just like the movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark." "The army that carries the ark before them is invincible!"

What was the ark like? It was a wooden box covered in gold. It was 4-feet long, 2-feet



wide, and 2-feet high. Inside were the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded. On top of it were two angels known as the cherubim. This was known as the mercy seat. God was said to dwell there between the two cherubim.

The elders of Israel thought if they brought the God-box into battle, it would guarantee victory. It was their lucky rabbit's foot, their ace in the hole.

There were three key things the elders failed to consider.

1. Israel experienced defeat in the Promised Land at the hands of her enemies before. Every time it was tied to sin among God's people, not the superiority of an enemy. God let the nations around the Israelites defeat them to discipline them and bring them to repentance. They failed to see this was happening again.
2. They knew about the corrupt behavior of Eli's sons. As we saw earlier, everyone knew about the Hophni and Phinehas' over-the-top sins. The elders should have made a connection between the sinfulness of Eli's sons as priests and their defeat as a nation.
3. They also knew that punishment was coming to Eli's house. The man of God prophesied this in 1 Samuel 2. Samuel prophesied this in 1 Samuel 3. They knew God said he was about to do something horrifying because of the sin of Eli and his sons. It was going to be so bad that everyone's ears would tingle in response to hearing that news. The elders knew these things but failed to see these things.

Here is the principle they missed. It was true in their time and it is true in our time --- **when we sin, we will suffer**. We think sin will make us happy. All sin does is bring suffering in our lives. Only holiness brings happiness. When sin is at the root, suffering will always be the fruit. There is no escaping that fact for them or for you and me. That is the way sin always works out in life. When we lie, we will always regret the lie instead of telling the truth. When we use rotten words to others, they will cause pain and we will wish we can take them back.

Not only does sin always produce suffering but because God loves us, when we don't repent of our sin, God will bring suffering into our lives to correct us from our sin.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)

God brings discipline and suffering into our lives to correct us from sin when we stray into sin. It is just like raising a child. If you have a child that desperately wants to put a dinner fork into a wall outlet, loving parents will correct that child. They will discipline that child. That discipline may be harsh so they get the message. The motivation for that discipline is love, not hate. The reason behind the discipline is to turn the child away from sin instead of allowing them to suffer the tragic consequences of letting them pursue sin.

God is the same way with us. We are his children. He loves us. If necessary, he will use suffering to correct us.

What should we do when God is getting our attention because of our sin and we are suffering because of our sin? The proper response is to call out to God for mercy, to confess our sin, repent, and ask God for mercy.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (ESV)

That is not the path the elders of Israel chose. They looked at the ark as a lucky rabbit's foot. If they brought it to the battlefield, they were convinced they could not lose. Look at the wording in the text. It says:

Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that IT may come among us and save us...

They thought they were saved by an "it." A wooden box doesn't save anybody. God is the one who saves. The only way to be saved was not by the god-box but by the God who is much bigger than the box.

The Second Defeat

So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. 1 Samuel 4:4 (ESV)

The author of the book of 1 Samuel was making a point with his detailed description of the ark. The elders of Israel believed God was enthroned between the two angels on top of the ark. By moving the ark to battle, they thought they could move God into battle. In 1 Samuel 2, in Hannah's prayer, she introduced us to a number of themes woven through the rest of this book. One of them is the bigness of our God and the foolishness of thinking he can be contained or manipulated.

...For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world. 1 Samuel 2:8 (ESV)

God created and maintains the world. He is not contained in a box. Now, it is true that in the past there were times when God used the ark in powerful ways. In Joshua 3:10-11 the priests carrying the ark put their feet in the Jordan River

and the waters parted. Israel marched around the city of Jericho for seven days with the ark and the walls fell. The fact that God chose to use the ark doesn't mean God's presence was kept in the ark.

God cannot be manipulated or controlled by people using the ark for their own purposes. Don't we find ourselves doing something similar today? It is so easy to fall into this kind of thinking.

It is easy for a businessman to attend church, volunteer at church, and give to the church, then think God owes him a favor. He thinks he deserves to have God bless his business.

Sometimes a student will tell God, "I am faithfully reading my Bible. I was kind to the new girl who moved into the dormitory down the fall. I have a test on Friday. God, you owe me one. I deserve a good grade."

It doesn't work that way. We cannot manipulate God and put him into our debt. While we can't make God owe us anything, we can call out to God asking for mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Thankfully God loves to give those things when we ask for them.

What should jump out at us from these verses is the two people carrying the ark. It was the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas.

Remember these crazy messed-up brothers. They were called worthless men who did not know the Lord. These were the guys who used a big fork to steal people's food out right out of the pot while they were cooking it. They stole raw meat and the fat portions dedicated to the Lord right off the altar. They were sleeping with women who worked at the temple. These guys were legendary

scoundrels. The primary reason Israel lost the battle with the Philistines is because of the guys who were now carrying the ark into battle! You know this will not end well!

I am amazed God didn't strike them with a lightning bolt. God already prophesied that these guys were going to die. You know their end was about to come.

As soon as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. 1 Samuel 4:5 (ESV)

When the people saw the ark, just like in the movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark," the people were confident they wouldn't lose because the god-box would make them invincible. They shouted so loud the earth shook. As we will see in the next verse, they shouted so loud the Philistines heard them, and they were two miles away!

And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And when they learned that the ark of the LORD had come to the camp, the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "A god has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight." 1 Samuel 4:6–9 (ESV)

This is interesting. The Israelites were not just excited at the arrival of the ark but the Philistines were terrified by the arrival of the ark. The Philistines had just defeated the Hebrews. The 4,000 dead bodies were still on the lawn. They weren't even buried. In the first battle, the Philistines defeated the Israelites. What did they have to worry about?

It was because they had heard about the Exodus and what happened to Egypt years before, generations before. Sometimes we wonder if the account of the Exodus is literally true. Did God destroy a nation with plagues such as frogs and flies and turn a river into blood? Did the Red Sea literally part letting the Israelites walk across on dry ground then swallowing the Egyptian army when they tried to cross after them? According to the Philistines, that literally happened. It happened generations before but nobody forgot what happened.

Look at the Philistine's response. Rather than deciding to run in fear, that just made them fight harder.

So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell. 1 Samuel 4:10 (ESV)

Thirty-thousand people dying is a lot of people. Remember, this was one by one with the sword. This was a terrible bloodbath. It was a great loss of life.

Before we continue, let me pause the story right here. You need to know, this was not all the people who died. This was only the beginning of the people who would die. Earlier I told you the Philistines' goal was to pass through Ebenezer to get to Shiloh so they could destroy it. That is exactly what they did. We don't see that happening in these verses but if we turn to the Psalms, Psalm 78 talks about that defeat.

He forsook his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelt among mankind, and delivered his power to captivity, his glory to the hand of the foe. He gave his people over to the sword and vented his wrath on his heritage. Psalm 78:60–62 (ESV)

Besides the death of 30,000 Israelites, there were two other great defeats in the battle.

And the ark of God was captured... 1 Samuel 4:11a (ESV)

This is the ark with the Ten Commandments in it that were written by the finger of God. This is the ark with the manna in it and Aaron's rod that budded in it. This was terrible! It looked like God was defeated! I am sure people thought the gods of the Philistines proved more powerful than their God. This is what made everyone's ears tingle. This was inconceivable.

...and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. 1 Samuel 4:11 (ESV)

While there is much more to this sorry story, in many ways, this is what this whole sorry is about. All this death and destruction could be tied back to these two men. God did what he said he would. Both of them died on the same day.

This brings us to another principle we should learn. Earlier we learned that when we sin, we will suffer. Here we learn that **when we sin, other people will suffer**. In the two battles, 34,000 Israelites died. The defeat of the nation, the capture of the ark, and the death of Hophni and Phinehas were all tied back to the sin of Eli and his sons. They sinned, and other people suffered. They sinned, and 34,000 people died. That may sound like an overstatement. It is not. Let me show you another example of this principle in action.

When the Israelites were conquering the Promised Land the first city they ran across after they crossed the Jordan River was Jericho. It was a large walled city that the Israelites had no way to breach. God directed them to carry the ark around the city for seven days then give a great shout. God fought for them and knocked down the walls of the city. Then Israel went in and destroyed the city.

Immediately afterward the Israelites went to conquer a small city named Ai. That city should have been a pushover. The Israelites only sent a portion of their army to take care of business. It didn't go well. The Israelites were defeated. Thirty-six Israelites died that day as the army ran for its life. When they asked God why they were defeated, God told them it was because a soldier named Achan had kept for himself gold and silver bars from Jericho and a robe after the battle. God specifically told the Israelites to destroy everything in Jericho and keep none of it for themselves. Achan disobeyed. As a result of his sin, 36 men died. Thirty-six women lost their husbands, children lost their fathers. When we sin other people suffer.

When we sin, it is often those we love the most that will suffer the most. When we sin, the greater our position of authority, the more people that will suffer as a result of our sin.

That is what happened with Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas. They were the priests in charge of a nation. There were many men who died because of their sins.

My friends, our sin never stays isolated. It never just affects us. It always leaks, and others will suffer. The drunk driver who drives home while intoxicated gets in a car accident. He kills a young woman and her infant child, but he walks away from the accident. This is the way sin works.

The story continues. Now we move from two defeats to two deaths.

Eli dies at Shiloh.

A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes torn and with dirt on his head. 1 Samuel 4:12 (ESV)

This is the way people learned the news in the ancient world. A messenger ran to a city to tell the news to the city. This is hard for you young people to believe but they didn't text back then. They also didn't have social media. You had a messenger, and he wasn't an app on your phone.

It says the messenger came from the battle that day. This is impressive. This messenger must have been a Crossfit athlete. This guy fought in a war, then he ran the 20-mile distance to Shiloh, which was in the hill country. He ran 20 miles uphill. This guy was a stud.

In that day, there were lookouts on the city walls or in towers of the city. It was their job to see what was coming to the city and warn people. After a battle, they would look for a messenger from the battle to learn what happened. They would try and guess what the messenger would say by the way he looked and the way he ran. In this case, the guy didn't look good. His clothes were torn up, and he had dirt on his head. He was a mess. He was not carrying good news.

When he arrived, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out. 1 Samuel 4:13 (ESV)

Before we hear from the messenger, we switch back to Eli. He was sitting on his seat by the road watching. It is no surprise that Eli was pictured as sitting. As we learned in previous weeks, the author of 1 Samuel always pictured Eli doing nothing. He was either sitting or in bed. That is the message we get about Eli, that he was too old to be a leader. He was ineffective as a leader.

One thing I want you to notice in this verse is he was seated by the road watching. I won't develop that thought right now. Let's remember those words. We will see their importance in a few minutes.

For a moment, we leave Eli. The messenger ran right past Eli into the city and delivered the news of this devastating defeat. Notice the messenger did not see Eli as important enough to stop and tell anything to. Eli was out-of-date. His effectiveness expired. The messenger ran to the center of the city and shared his news of the terrible defeat, the death of Hophni and Phinehas, and the capture of the ark. The entire city went into an uproar.

When Eli heard the sound of the outcry, he said, “What is this uproar?” Then the man hurried and came and told Eli. Now Eli was ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set so that he could not see. 1 Samuel 4:14–15 (ESV)

The author of 1 Samuel was intentionally showing up the age and inability of Eli. He could hear the loud sounds in the city, but he did not know what people were saying. Do you think Eli’s hearing was going? You bet it was. This is another indication that he was ineffective. He was too old to be a leader. Earlier, we read that Eli was by the city gate watching. Here we read his eyes were set so he could not see. Was Eli watching anything when he was at the city gate? Absolutely not!. He was blind! He was pretending to see but he couldn’t see. Eli was like a bag of salad in the refrigerator that is a month past code. Everything about him was falling apart. He acted like he was leading but he couldn’t see. He couldn’t hear. Nobody thought he was important. They ran right past him and ignored him.

And the man said to Eli, “I am he who has come from the battle; I fled from the battle today.” And he said, “How did it go, my son?” He who brought the news answered and said, “Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great defeat among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.” As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years. 1 Samuel 4:16–18 (ESV)

What is interesting is it was not the news that both of his sons died which killed him. He was expecting them to die. God told him that was going to happen. What killed him was the news that the ark was captured. He fell over backward in his chair and broke his neck. When he fell, the author of 1 Samuel commented that what killed him was his great age and his great weight. Are you ready for a little Hebrew humor?

In 1 Samuel 2:29, we read that Eli and his sons were in the habit of fattening themselves on the choice portions of meat that they stole from people and off God's altar. The Hebrew word in this text that is translated as heavy can also be translated as massive. From eating stolen meat over the years, Eli had become a very, very large man. In addition, in Hebrew, the word the author chose to use to describe his weight is very similar to the Hebrew word for glory. What the author was saying was Eli's glory in life, what he was known for, what people remembered about him, was his massive size, a size he obtained by eating stolen meat. It was the stolen meat that made him so fat and it was his fat that killed him. The author of 1 Samuel wanted us to see there is a sense of poetic justice in his death. He sin not only found him out but ended up taking him out.

Now the author of 1 Samuel also wrote Eli judged Israel for 40 years. This is the first time Eli is referred to as a judge. That is a long time. None of us know about the early years of Eli's life when he began serving as the chief priest of God's people and a judge for God's people. I think it is fair to say that he started out well. All of the judges in the book of Judges started well. While he started well, after 40 years, he finished in disaster. He died because of great weight

gained by eating stolen food. His sons were killed. His legacy was destroyed. Thirty-four thousand Israelites died when the nation was defeated in battle because of sin. The ark of God was captured. Eli started well but finished poorly. His only legacy was his massive size. That is not the kind of legacy any of us want to leave behind. What happened? How did his life fall apart? We want to learn from the disaster of his life so we don't repeat it.

His life fell apart the same way it always does --- one small step at a time. In Eli's case, it was also one bite at a time. It began with thoughts that were not guarded. Those thoughts became actions that were not stopped. Those actions became habits. Those habits became a lifestyle. A lifestyle leaves a legacy.

My friends lives that end in disaster begin to head that way when people start to make poor choices to sin when it comes to the little things in life. Little things lead to bigger things, and it slowly goes downhill from there. That is the way it always works.

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Galatians 6:7-8 (ESV)

It is by tolerating and allowing the little sins in our lives that Satan begins to get a foothold in our lives. In Philippians 4, Paul talked about the importance of controlling our thinking. We are to only think about things that are pure, wholesome, and honorable. What we feed into our minds will determine the actions of our lives. I have to ask you, what kind of trash are you feeding into your mind through that little screen on your phone? What kind of Youtube videos are you watching? When you look at TikTok, what videos are you watching?

When you use Snapchat, what are you staring at? What are you typing into Google? The stuff we feed our brains will begin to shape our lives. There is no way we can avoid it. What we feed our brains will determine our actions. What we think about is what we will live out. They are connected together. If you want to end life well and not end your life in a disaster like Eli, we must begin by guarding our minds. What you role play in your mind will become what you real play in your life. The little choices we make matter.

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Proverbs 4:23 (ESV)

The Birth of Ichabod

Now we move from the public scene of Eli's death to a private home and personal tragedy. We are taken to Phinehas' wife, who was about to give birth.

Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth. And when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth, for her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death the women attending her said to her, "Do not be afraid, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer or pay attention. 1 Samuel 4:19–20 (ESV)

Phinehas' wife heard what happened and went into labor. As she gave birth, she lost her life.

And she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured." 1 Samuel 4:21–22 (ESV)

As she died, she named her son Ichabod. That means, "Where is the glory?" It can also mean, "The glory has departed." I am going to go out on a limb a bit. I may be wrong, but I think what was most distressing to her in her death was not the death of her husband or her father-in-law. It was the capture of the

ark. It was the loss of God's presence and intimacy. The reason I think that was most concerning to her is that the text mentions the capture of the ark twice, while it mentions her husband's death only once.

She knew that because of sin, we lose peace and joy in our relationship with God.

Here we learn another consequence of sin. When we sin, God may remove his presence and favor from his people. Sin doesn't just lead to our suffering and the suffering of other people, but it removes the joy of our relationship with God.

We will see this in upcoming chapters. In 2 Samuel, David was king but when he sinned with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, Uriah, David kept that sin hidden for years. One of the most frightening consequences of his adultery and murder was the breakdown of his relationship with God. When David finally confessed his sin to God, look what he said about his experience of that sin in Psalm 51.

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Psalm 51:9–12 (ESV)

He felt far from God's presence after sin. He had no joy in his relationship with God because of his sin. This same experience happens to us when we sin.

Let's sum up what we learned this morning.

Applications

- 1. Sin always brings suffering. We suffer. Other people suffer. Our relationship with God suffers.**

2. **The way to ruin our legacy is one small step at a time.** Little choices, especially thought and heart choices, make a big difference. They determine the outcome of our lives.
3. **God cannot be manipulated for our purposes.** Thinking religious activity or religious places will force God to do something for us is a dead-end road. The only way to obtain God's favor is to repent of our sin and call out to God for mercy for our sin. Mercy is only found in Jesus. God cannot be manipulated by us but he loves to extend mercy and grace to us.
4. **God loves us. He offers to replace our Ichabod with Immanuel.** As a result of the sin of Eli's house, the ark was captured and God's glory departed from Israel. Ichabod took place. Sin sent God's presence away. That was not the end of the story. God loves us. He sent his son to die for us. Jesus is known as Immanuel. God with us. Jesus came to pay for our sin and trade our Ichabod with Immanuel.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (ESV)

Today, you may be here in an Ichabod moment in your life. Your sin is terrible. You are suffering for it. God feels far from you. Call out to Jesus. Ask Jesus' death on the cross to pay for your sin and he will. God will transform you into a completely new person through Jesus Christ.



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