

# 1 Samuel 4:1-22

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[ 0 : 00 ]     and for the reading of God's Word. 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 a line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about 4,000 men on the field of battle.

And when the troops 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?

[ 1 : 02 ]     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 their fell of Israel, 30,000 foot soldiers.

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.

[ 2 : 05 ]     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 98 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 for 40 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 the pains came upon her.

And about the time of her death, the woman attending her said to her, Do not be afraid, for you have born 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.

[ 3 : 23 ] And she said, The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. I took my first job at the age of 15.

I worked in the western suburbs for a company called Hocker U-Haul. I made a solid \$1.90 an hour.

Yes, I am old. It was a long time ago. I worked for Bob Hocker and his U-Haul franchise for six further years.

And without question, other than the Memorial Day weekend, which was the undisputed busiest two days of the year, it was these weeks, the two weeks leading up to Labor Day, which had no other rival on the calendar.

And so at this time of year, my mind goes back. It went back even yesterday to this very idea. For I'm well aware that this week, and these weeks, for many all over the country, are moving weeks.

[ 5 : 04 ] The country is on the move. People are selecting their truck or trailer sizes. They're deciding, based upon the worth of their vehicle, whether or not to purchase a tow bar, which would bring it to their new destination.

They're adding up the costs of these clothing boxes, which stand three-quarters height and with a metal bar that both stabilizes the box and serves as the hanger for all your clothes.

Book boxes, particularly those moving into or out of Hyde Park, are being purchased literally by the tens of thousands all over the country this very week.

They are flying out of storage facilities and trailers. Bike locks are being bought.

Bungee cords are being pulled. Slipknots, if you learned your knots well as a child, are being tied, and that scratching sound of packing tape being pulled across the top is happening all around us.

[ 6 : 27 ] In Hyde Park, some are now coming. Others are now leaving. All are now wondering, how will it go?

What awaits me? Will God, no doubt in the mind of some, go with me. And for those of us who aren't moving, we only exclaim, thank God that I'm not in the process of picking up from one place and going to another.

But even we who remain know what it is to move. And those questions come to us who are situated with the remains of moving yet in storage.

Will God go with me? Will His presence, which has been arguably there in the past, precede my arrival at a new place?

Will God be failing me? Can I be assured that He will remain faithful to me?

[ 7 : 54 ] Now, take that scenario and push it into our text. This text complicates the Christian's tendency toward giving answers that are bathed in the alacrity of affirmation.

Of course! God goes with you! We proclaim without much thought. This text would tell us to be perhaps careful about offering comforting words too quickly.

1 Samuel 4, take a look, and you'll need your text open today. I'm going to do something I don't normally do. We're going to trace a few places in the Holy Writ, and you'll want to follow along.

1 Samuel 4 is divided into two scenes of equal length. 11 verses each. In the first scene, if we were to take it as a whole, we see what transpires when Israel, God's people, live under the presumption of God's abiding presence.

The second scene shifts, and in emphasis could be captured this way. We are pressed by the narrator to consider the implications of God's purifying absence.

[ 9 : 46 ]     Scene one, the presumption of living under the notion that you have God's abiding presence. A warning to be given. Scene two, the implications of God's purifying absence.

Take a look at scene one, verses one and two. What we are walking into is a moment when Israel perceived that an incident with the Philistines was but a small, not insignificant, but nevertheless a small setback.

First Samuel one and two, 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 by the Philistines who killed about 4,000 men on the field of battle.

not insignificant, but in their history of being a people at war, nevertheless at a momentary level was considered small.

You can see it by their response. Verses 3 to 5, they are fairly well convinced that this initial setback can be overcome or remedied by what?

[ 11 : 21 ]     by the bringing of the presence of the Ark of the Covenant to the field of battle. Take a look at verses 3 to 5.

And when the troops 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 was 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 all the earth resounded. Here's the fix.

This is what overcomes the setback, the Ark of the Covenant of God. This is the Ark of which we spoke last time.

[ 12 : 28 ]     It made its quiet appearance in chapter 3 early on as the place at which Samuel himself was sleeping on the night that the word of the Lord was revealed to him for the very first time.

But here that Ark which was merely foreshadowed in its significance in chapter 3 becomes the object of grandeur in chapter 4. The Ark is the place as we learned last time where God spoke to his people.

The Ark is the place where sacrifices were made which mediated a relationship between God and his people. And so for the early Hebrew readers of this first text, they would have had even in their mind that the presence of the Ark is what parted the Jordan as all of God's people stood back and it was the power of the presence of God upon the Ark which gave them entrance into the land.

The Ark was in some sense their warrior, their advance team, their stamp of approval and vindication before all the world. And so they've run to get it.

Why has the Lord defeated us? Well by golly we forgot to bring the Lord with us! And so they've retrieved it. Carried on its golden poles by the sons of Eli, those ministers to the people of God.

[ 14 : 15 ] the presumption is this, if the Ark of God is with us, then God is with us. If the Ark is with us, God is with us.

Think of it today the way many of us tend at times to view God. God is with us. We feel as if he is purchasing power on our behalf.

That he works for us. That since I am related to him in some way, regardless of what your faith commitments might be, you anticipate that God acts on your behalf when you put him into play.

Look, verses 6 to 9, even the Philistines concurred with this assessment. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, what does this mean, the shouting in the camp of the Hebrews?

And when they learned that the Ark of the Lord had come into the camp, the Philistines were afraid. For they said, notice them, a God has come into the camp.

[ 15 : 39 ] And this is not any God. 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, the men, and fight.

They concurred with the assessment that the Ark had a powerful way in the world. What's interesting is their obstinacy, isn't it?

I don't know what more to make of this. then the world will always be filled with men and women who while they acknowledge the power of the God of Israel, they will not follow him, but rather wage war against him.

Against all odds. Israel's and so they call upon their valor, their strength, I'm sure some of them, their own gods, Dagon and otherwise, to overcome the power of this God of the Hebrews, and they fight.

[ 17 : 08 ] Look at verses 10 and 11. Israel's initial setback at the opening of the scene, namely a loss of 4,000 men, is nothing in comparison to the surprising defeat suffered at the hands of the Philistines at the close of the scene.

Verse 10, so the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled. every man to his home, and there was a very great slaughter, for there fell of Israel 30,000 foot soldiers, and the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hothni, and Phinehas died.

What an astounding story. 30,000 men killed. The ark of the covenant of God minted in the days of Moses, upon which his glory descended, through which, around of which, the people entered the land.

This ark, with the testimony within it, with the cherubim over it, with the blood sprinkled on it, with the voice of God which had been heard from it, captured, carried off, 30,000 men killed, the ark carried off, and the direct line of the priesthood which was under Moses to mediate a relationship between God and his people, cut down.

Both of them died on the field of battle that day. Now, this is why I love looking at the Bible, rather than our simplified answers that go with people.

[ 19 : 22 ] God will always go with you. Not here. Not now.

The presumption of God's abiding presence by the Israelites here ought to be a warning for any who would say God is of necessity obligated to go with you.

It's a humbling thing, isn't it? To never be presuming upon the presence of God.

Very easy to do. Interestingly, the text here doesn't indicate why they were defeated, why God waged war against his own people.

Is it merely because we've already read in chapter 2 that the man of God came to Eli and said, your house is coming down on one day? Is it merely connected to chapter 3 as a fulfillment of the words that came to Samuel himself that the house of Eli would fall?

[ 20 : 48 ] Is it just ipso facto narrative telling its way out? I don't think so. This narrative that we're in the midst of, this embedding of the ark of the covenant of God in the Samuel narrative, which really takes between chapter 4 and 7, 1, really is given an interpretive glance on the backside which we'll see in a few weeks.

things. But you ought to take a look at it at least now for there is a hint in the story at the close that indicates why God did not go with his people.

At the concluding part of the narrative, you're going to see that the Israelites are again battling the Philistines, but at the end of chapter 7 they win, whereas here they were defeated. And the difference in verse 3 is clear.

Samuel said to all the house of Israel, 7, 3, if you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreth from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only and he will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines.

Verse 4, key indicator, so the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreth and they served the Lord only. They were worshipping gods while they carried their God with them.

[ 22 : 14 ] Their hearts were divided. Their loyalties were estranged. Their feet were firmly planted in two worlds.

Following God, calling upon him, presuming to be in relationship with him, yet, all the while, running after the other things that would fill their life with lesser pleasure.

If we are to draw anything from this, it would be whether you are a Christian or not. God is not to be mocked. We cannot presume on his abiding presence if our lives are dissonant from living under his divine rule.

The God of glory departed, gone. Gone. Captured. God captured by the world.

The second scene, we see, and we'll do so more briefly, the implications of God's purifying absence. Verses 12 through 22.

[ 23 : 59 ] And we could highlight almost very quickly three consequences of this presumption. First, is that the line of the priesthood under Eli will one day be in need of being renewed under another.

The line of Eli will not hold as the mediating presence of the priesthood for God. it's over. It's done. Finished.

That's an implication. Look at verse 18. It's interesting to me, the key verse there, when Eli, when he hears about the ark of God, not his son's death, not the 30,000 men who were killed, but when he hears about the capture of the ark, he 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.

The Hebrew word for heavy has about as near a connection as you can find for the Hebrew word for glory, the weightiness of God.

Eli, in his glory, died, died, because the ark of God's glory was gone.

[ 25 : 38 ] And therefore, we need to understand that a renewed priesthood must be raised up if God's people are to be restored in relationship with God.

God's love. Now, in the near term, that's going to be Samuel, isn't it? The second thing you learn in the second scene is that the role of the woman, which in God's calling upon Israel, through the woman giving birth, in particular line, would raise up to an office.

The role of the woman giving birth to the child would have to, and someday, be giving birth to a child of a different order entirely. It's the daughter-in-law of Phineas who dies on this same day.

This one who through her womb was to come the continuing presence of those who administer the relationship between God and His people. She herself is giving birth to one that is obvious to all will need to be a different sort of woman, a different sort of day, a different sort of son.

For she names him what? Ichabod. Or gone into exile. It's almost the word here for the exodus.

[ 27 : 02 ] That is gone. So not only does the priesthood need to be renewed, the role of the woman will have to be giving birth to something different. In other words, and then the son, of course, there would have to be a child who would be not Ichabod.

God is gone. But imagine a son who would have a different name. Something more like Emmanuel.

God with us. That's what's needed. God's gone. Mediating presence gone.

I've entered into life without God. When will God? be present with us again. And so Israel, at this moment, sets out laboring on in life without a proper relationship to God.

And the ark is the key element, object, of the whole chapter. It was viewed by the people in scene one as a tactical advantage advantage in war.

[ 28 : 19 ] It was a weapon that would give them tactical advantage. But the reader has been led to understand by the end of the chapter that it is the object of ultimate importance.

importance. Now think of the way we view God. Tactical advantage, ultimate importance. advantage. If we view him as a tactical advantage, his presence is not guaranteed, and we have lost that which is ultimately most valuable in all the world, that heaven came down and glory filled my soul.

well, what are we to do with this in the time that remains? What does this do to your sense of security if you're on the move?

On what grounds can we actually walk into the future without fear? If 1 Samuel was all that we had, it would alter my understanding of God.

[ 29 : 45 ] I would be preaching a God to you that is not only one to be feared, but one which at the end of the day can be arbitrary and cruel and distant.

But remember, 1 Samuel is connected to 2 Samuel, 2 Samuel is connected to 1 Kings, 1 Kings is connected to 2 Kings, that we are reading a part of a story, that originally was called 1st through 4 Kings, and we see that the movement in that story takes us from Samuel to David, through Saul, to David, and then to Solomon.

Now, interestingly, what happens to the ark throughout the narrative? I want you to see what happens to the ark so that you might have some hope by the time we're done. And I'm going to do this in five minutes.

So you might want to write down these texts and trace them later. Take a look at 2 Samuel 6. 2 Samuel 6 is when the ark will return in a major way to the people.

We'll see in a couple weeks' time how it makes its way back at the time of Samuel. But in 2 Samuel 6, under David, David will bring the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem.

[ 31 : 11 ] And when he brings the ark, notice how many he comes with him. Chapter 6, verse 1, David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel. How many? 30,000.

I love that. 30,000 die on the battlefield when the ark is captured. David, when he brings the ark into Jerusalem, brings 30,000. And the ark is there at the time of David.

It returns as the centerpiece of the city and God's mediating presence has been restored. Take a look further. 1 Kings 8.

What happens at the time of Solomon, his son? And what is the influence of the ark there? There, as Solomon at this point has built an entire temple to house this very ark, he brings the ark not only into the city, but into the abode, into the house of God, into the temple.

And I want you to see particularly verses 10 and 11 of 1 Kings 8. And when the priest came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord.

[ 32 : 22 ] That's the time when they brought the ark into the temple. So that the priest could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.

The glory of God was back. Now that'd be great if that's where it ended. But the narrative of the Bible will go on. Take a look at Ezekiel.

Ezekiel was a prophet who came along after the time of Solomon, after the divide of the people, when they had harloted themselves away once again.

And Ezekiel has this vision in chapter 8 of being drawn to Jerusalem, and in the vision taken not only to Jerusalem, but into the presence of one who was like a son of man.

There's this association with the glory of God, and in the appearance of a man, and the man takes him to Jerusalem, verse 3, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court, right at the place where Samuel, those many years before, in the tabernacle days, lay waiting upon God's word.

[ 33 : 34 ] Verse 4, and behold, the glory of God, of Israel, was there. The glory of God was there. But the vision unfolds where they see the abominations of the priesthood during the days of Ezekiel, so that in chapter 9, verse 3, you see the glory is moving again.

There's no fixed presence of God with His people. Chapter 9, verse 3, the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherubim on which it rested to the threshold of the house.

Because of the sins of the people, that glory was again moving, this time to the top of the house. In chapter 10, in verse 4, you'll see the glory going up from the cherubim to the threshold of the house, and the house is filled with all of this brightness.

But verse 18, the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house. And by the time you get to chapter 11, in verse 22, the cherubim lifted up their wings and the wheel beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them, and the glory of the God went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.

So the vision that Ezekiel sees is that the glory that had returned is leaving again because of the abominations of the people. God is leaving. They had presumed upon his presence.

[ 35 : 07 ] And so the question is asked, when will God move in a decided and fixed way wherein his glory is irreversibly placed in the presence of his people.

For without that there is no hope for you or me. Well, the New Testament continues the narrative.

And John writes, And the word of God became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son and the Father full of grace and truth.

John 1, 14. Literally dwelt among us, tabernacled here. God's glory returns in Jesus.

Hebrews 1, 3 speaks about him being the exact representation of God's nature and speaks of him as the glorious radiance of his presence. Jesus.

[ 36 : 09 ] Jesus. Jesus. Luke 9, one of the most wonderful chapters in all the Bible, shows this declarative moment in time when the glory of God rests upon Jesus.

It's at the transfiguration. The transfiguration happens, and look at chapter 9 of Luke and verse 29.

As he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white and behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure.

Literally, they spoke of his exodus, his departing, which he was about to accomplish in the glory of God in the face of Christ, who is his son, the one to whom we are to listen, was speaking to these two about his day of departure or his death, so that when you get to John 17, Jesus begins to pray, Lord, at this time, now glorify me with yourself to the glory that I had before I came.

And the glory of God in the face of Christ is seen in Christ's death on the cross. This becomes the place in all the Bible where God's decided one time declaration of his presence with men is accomplished, where his mercy comes down and his wrath is meted out.

[ 37 : 39 ] Where he saves his people and he sends forth all the rest of the world who will not submit to him unto judgment. God's work done in Christ, the cross, will replace the ark as where God mediates his presence to us.

This is where you know God has his hand on you. if you are in Christ. For that work cannot be undone because it's not based, thank God, on your own obedience.

If you want God to be with you, there will be a repentance of life and of submitting to the cross and a laying before it.

His ascension looks as if it breaks the train because he's gone again. But he said, I will not leave you as orphans. and so he gives his spirit to all who believe so that the very spirit, the glorious spirit, enters into the human breast so that the God of glory who left Israel in the days of Samuel is planted in your hearts by faith.

Christ in you, the hope of glory. It's everything. an interpretive gloss, if I could, upon Sergio Assad's Menino.

[ 39 : 29 ] On the child within all of us. Christ in you, the hope.

of glory. Play that one into eternity. In Christ, God has done great things for you, and we await his glorious return.

So don't presume on the kindness of God bestowed upon you in the death of his son, for that is precious blood indeed.

Not the blood of goats sprinkled upon an object carried through the desert of old, but the blood of his son. This is my son. Listen to him.

Follow him, and you will know the presence of God wherever you go. God will be with you in Christ.

[ 40 : 49 ] So walk worthy of recalling. the soul that on Jesus still leans for repose, I will not, I will not desert to its foes.

That soul, though all hell should endeavor to break. Never, no never, no never forsake. What a wonderful truth.

The truth of the gospel. Whether you're going to the middle of Texas and you're unreachable by the throngs of humanity, God goes with you. Whether you're coming here into this neighborhood, God goes with you.



Whether you've been planted here and will remain here, God remains with you in Christ. Do not presume upon the grace of God in Christ. for if you presume upon that blood, while there is no offering, that will draw you back again.

Heavenly Father, I pray that you would strengthen us through these narratives in the Old Testament to understand your will for all of our life.

[ 42 : 10 ] We give ourselves to you completely. in Jesus' name, in thanksgiving, Amen.