

Thus Far Has the Lord Helped Us (Summer Bible Exposition 2)

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[0 : 00] It's nice to hear the Bible read so well, thanks for that. Please keep that open in front of you. We're going to look tonight at chapters 4 to 7. If you were here on Sunday night, we looked at chapters 1 to 3 and we're looking at 4 to 7 tonight, which finish all up one major section in chapters 1 to 7, looking at God raising up Samuel as a leader before we get to chapter 8 on Sunday night that looks at the first kings of Israel.

So if you've got the Bible open in front of you, that will help. Let me, before I start, give a bit of a plug. I've put some of these out on the table as well, which give you a little bit of information about the Bible College of Victoria.

Just to say that we're still taking enrolments this month. There's full-time, part-time, distance, Centre for the Study of Islam and other faiths and all sorts of different things that you can study at degree and diploma level.

So if that interests you, please grab one of those on the table outside before you go tonight.

Wayne's prayed for us, but let me just pray again briefly that God would speak to us in his word tonight.

Heavenly Father, we do pray that you would work in us by your Spirit now as we have heard your word read and as we think upon it and ponder it now, please work in us by your Spirit to change and transform us.

[1 : 28] And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to start by talking about religion and spirituality. People obviously have been into religion since time immemorial and I guess what people are hoping to do is that they, by getting into religion or spirituality, hope to tap into the power of God or the spiritual world in the hope that that will somehow help us.

It might be a last hope. It might be that you've tried everything for a medical cure. Nothing has worked. And so at the end, people might try religion in the hope that that will somehow help them. Spirituality these days is starting to replace religion, but it's much the same as people hope to get in touch with the power of the Spirit world rather than with God as such in the hope that that might somehow help them in life.

Take, for example, the California Astrology Association. For only \$17.95, they offer all sorts of lucky charms and you can buy lucky charms that will help you in all sorts of things in life.

They can bring you fortune or happiness or help you get into a relationship or find love or bring you a financial windfall and all sorts of things for only \$17.95.

[2 : 51] Now, we might be cynical about that, but the Christianity has a version as well and the Christian version in particular that comes to my mind is that of Christian relics.

Now, a Christian relic, to define it, is a bit of bone, flesh or hair from famous saints or even a bit of clothing that has touched the bones or hair of dead saints and such relics are meant to be able to heal you or help you in some way with life.

Now, in the Middle Ages, relics were a great money spinner and one of the most popular relics were supposedly bits of wood from the cross of Jesus himself on which he was crucified.

John Calvin, the great reformer, said that there were so many bits of wood from the cross of Jesus scattered across the churches of Europe that you could basically build a huge boat out of them.

Now, what's interesting is that currently relics are being sold on eBay today, on the internet, for hundreds or even thousands of dollars so that as people are in desperate need and come perhaps sometimes to the last resort, they'll resort to Lucky Charms or even to Christian relics in the hope that they might heal them or help them in some way that maybe if God is really there, if God is really

powerful, you can tap into that power through these Lucky Charms or relics.

[4 : 24] Now, I don't know whether that sounds a bit ridiculous to you, whether you're a bit cynical like me, but people have always been interested in religion or spirituality if it holds out promise of helping them.

And tonight we're going to see how the Israelites did exactly the same thing. They turned to their own God-given religion in this superstitious sort of way in the hope that that would somehow help them.

They brought out the Ark of God's Covenant in the hope that that would help them and save them. Well, let's look at tonight's passage. I want to start just on the previous page back in chapter 3, just to look back at one verse there.

Chapter 3, verse 11, from the chapter we looked at on Sunday night, is where God told Samuel, as his first message through Samuel the prophet, that he was about to do something drastic, that he was about to do something in Israel that would make the ears of everyone who heard of it tingle. So God was about to do something shocking in Israel and we hear that in the reading we had in chapter 4. In chapter 4, verse 1, we're told of a battle between the Philistines and the Israelites.

[5 : 38] The Philistines are the main enemy of Israel at the end of the book of Judges and all the way through 1 Samuel. And here in verse 1, they attack the Israelites and verse 2 tells us that the Israelites were defeated, which is actually quite a shock, or should be as you read it.

The God of the universe is the God of Israel. He is with Israel and yet, they have been defeated. So what on earth is going wrong? Well, verse 3, the leaders of Israel ask, why has the Lord put us to rout today before the Philistines?

And note in their question, they recognise it is God who has brought this defeat upon them. It obviously can't be that the Philistine gods are more powerful than the God of Israel.

He is the God of the universe. He is all-powerful. He is the Lord of hosts of the armies of heaven.

He can clearly defeat the Philistines. And so they ask, why has God brought this defeat upon them?

They know it must be God, but they don't know why. Now, if you've read the book of Judges, it should be blindingly obvious. Whenever Israel turn their back on God, when they disobey Him and break the covenants, they are defeated before their enemies.

[6 : 57] And we saw on Sunday night how the two sons of Eli, leaders of Israel, Hophni and Phinehas the priests, were treating the sacrifices of God with contempt. Israel is in chaos in the time of the judges.

They're disobeying God. So it's no surprise here that they've been defeated. They should have realised what was happening. They should have repented, turned to God, confessed their sins, but they don't.

And instead, verse 3, they bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh. And why? Well, it says there, so that God may go with them and save them from the power of their enemies.

So they bring the ark of God in the hope that it will somehow save them. But look at the end of verse 4, look who's with it, the two wicked sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas.

The ark, verse 4 says, is the ark of the covenant of God. So it's actually the symbol of God's covenant promises with Israel. It's the symbol of the fact that God promised in his covenant that he would be the God of Israel and would save them.

[8 : 08] And that they promised that they would be his people and would obey him. And they think here that God will save them because of his promises. So instead of repenting and turning to the God of the covenant, they call on God to keep his promises.

They bring the ark in the hope that God will remember his promises and save them. Now I guess we can be a little bit like that as well. We have the even greater promises of the new covenant, fantastic promises of the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus' death on the cross, of the certain hope, of eternal life, great promises God has given to us.

But we can also, like the Israelites, fall into the trap of hoping that the symbols of God's promises might somehow save us. There are people who say that call themselves Christian who hope that because they are baptised, that will save them.

There are people who are Christian who hope that if they have the Lord's Supper regularly, that might mean that God is somehow with them. Or that if we go to church every week or we read the Bible and pray each day, that that will mean that God surely must be with us.

Well, God surely will be with us if we truly repent and trust in Jesus. It is, of course, possible to go to church, to be baptised, to take the Lord's Supper regularly, to read the Bible and pray and be unrepentant.

[9 : 41] And I know that many of us can fall into the trap of having Jesus as our Saviour but not as our Lord, that we can live how we want sometimes instead of living with Jesus as our Lord and our Master.

And it's exactly what the Israelites are doing. They're presuming on God's grace. If you look back at the story again in verse 5, the Ark of the Covenant comes now from Shiloh and it comes into the Israelite camp as they prepare to meet the Philistines in battle.

And when the Ark arrives in the camp, the Israelites are overjoyed. They shout in triumph so that the ground shakes and they think that having the Ark with them will grant them victory.

The Philistines are equally superstitious and they are freaked. The Philistines are very worried. They hear this uproar from the Israelite camp in verses 6 to 8.

They begin to be very worried. In verse 7, they say, God's have come into their camp. Woe to us for nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods.

[10 : 51] These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. The Philistines are afraid here as they face the mighty gods of Israel.

And notice how they know the Exodus story. Although they get it a little bit muddled up with plagues in the wilderness. But they realise that these are the mighty gods who defeated the Egyptians.

So they're in big trouble. Now you think that the Philistines then would sue for peace. But either they're stupid or brave or maybe a bit of both.

And they decide to go for it. They say in verse 9, Be strong, be men. Let's fight the Israelites. And what we should expect to happen next is that the Israelites should win.

God is the God of Israel, the God of the universe. The Philistines should be defeated. But the Philistines not only win, they smash the Israelites.

[11 : 49] Verse 10 says that there was a very great slaughter. It's interesting the word for slaughter there in verse 10 is the same word in Hebrew for the word translated as plague in verse 8.

Plague and slaughter are the same word there. See, God should be with the Israelites and should plague the Philistines just as he plagued the Egyptians. But instead he plagues the Israelites.

And why? Because they haven't repented. They're not trusting in God. And note two things there at the end of that first section in verse 11.

first of all that the ark of God is captured which is extraordinary and we'll come back to that. But secondly in verse 11 that Eli's two sons Hophni and Phinehas died.

The man of God came to Eli at the end of 1 Samuel chapter 2 and told him that his two sons would die on the same day and here the word of God is fulfilled. well we'll deal with the second half of chapter 4 a bit more briefly but we see here in the second half of this chapter the reaction to the news that the Israelites have been defeated in battle and that the ark of God has been captured.

[13 : 06] In verse 12 we read that a man fled from the battle and brought the news to Shiloh and he came and told Eli and verse 17 is important.

He says three things there to Eli first of all that the Israelites have been defeated he says they fled before the Philistines and there's been a very great slaughter and two he says that Eli's two sons have been killed and then thirdly he says that the ark of God has been captured.

Now all three of those things are a disaster for Eli but the worst thing to him is that the ark of God has been captured. Now have a look back at verse 13 it says Eli was sitting upon his seat by the road watching for his heart trembled for the ark of God.

He's sitting there at the gates of Shiloh waiting for news because he's worried about the ark and we're told that he's very old and in verse 18 when he hears that the ark of God has been captured he fell off his chair and died.

Now why would Eli be more concerned about the ark of God being captured than about the death of his own two sons? Why is it such a terrible thing that the ark of God has been captured?

[14 : 26] I'll come back to that in a moment but just a couple more things to point out first. Have a look at the second half of verse 18 first of all down the bottom of that paragraph it says that Eli had judged Israel for 40 years.

So Eli's actually a judge he's one of the saviors that God has raised up to lead his people Israel although obviously he's done a very bad job of it. And secondly the last paragraph there verses 19 to 22 give us another reaction to the terrible news that the ark has been captured where Eli's daughter-in-law the wife of Phineas goes into labor as she hears the bad news and gives birth to a son and names him Ichabod which means no glory and she says verse 21 that the glory has departed from Israel.

Now the glory of God is God's the visible manifestation of God's glory of his presence and power and over the tabernacle where the ark was the Israelites had seen the glory of God visibly as a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire by night.

So God's glory had appeared over the ark where God's presence dwelt and now it says God's glory had departed it's literally it actually says that the glory went into exile and if you know your Old Testament it makes me think ahead of Ezekiel where the glory of God rises up from the temple and departs from it before the Babylonians come and destroy that first temple as Israel goes into exile and here what it's saying is that God has left the house literally he has left the Israelites and gone away and that is why the capture of the ark is such a disaster Israel had presumed on God's grace they thought that they could behave however they wanted to break his covenant and that God would still be on their side and they'd be okay and that is clearly not the case now we have the glory of

God with us in an even greater way than the Israelites did Jesus himself was the manifestation of God's glory the beginning of John's gospel John chapter 1 verse 14 says that the word became flesh and dwelled among us and we have seen his glory the glory as of a father's only son full of grace and truth the very glory of God was manifested in Jesus but as Jesus died and rose again he poured out his Holy Spirit on us so that we now have God dwelling within us we now have if we trust in Jesus the very glory of God with us but if like the Israelites here if we presume on God's grace if we live however we want in disobedience to God and think that we'll be okay and that God will still be with us then we will be sadly mistaken three times the apostle Paul in his New

[17:38] Testament letters says that those who live an ungodly life will not inherit the kingdom of heaven it's a great warning to us I think in 1 Samuel chapter 4 that God will not continue to be with us if we do not obey him now I don't mean by that that we will have perfect obedience because clearly we won't until Jesus return or we go to heaven but if we don't wholeheartedly repent if we presume on God's grace then we will not inherit the kingdom of God and so as I thought through this passage and for you I hope we need to take warning that the Israelites expected their defeat from the Philistines about as much as we would expect to be abandoned by God but that we will be abandoned by God in the end if we turn our backs on him and keep living as we like and do not repent and so we must repent you and

I back to the story in chapters 5 and 6 we change perspective we go with the ark leave the Israelites territory and go to the Philistines territory they've captured the ark they bring it back to their territory in triumph in chapter 5 verses 1 and 2 we're told that they take the ark and put it in the temple of their god Dagon now I don't know if you like the name Dagon sounds to me like a cross between a dag and a bogon but the ark is placed in verse 2 next to the idol of their god Dagon and it's meant to show that Dagon has defeated the god of Israel they think their god is superior to the god of Israel and that makes sense I mean the Philistines have just defeated the Israelites if the god of Israel is more powerful than Dagon then surely the Israelites would have won and the Philistines would have been defeated but that's not what happened the Philistines won therefore their god is surely more powerful than the god of Israel but it's actually a false logic of course because Israel was defeated not because

Dagon is more powerful than the god of Israel but because god is angry with his disobedient people there of course is no god Dagon and the idol or statue of Dagon is just a block of wood or stone well the bible often has a sense of humour and if you look at verse 3 the Philistine people of Ashdod got up early the next morning and there they found in the temple of Dagon the idol of Dagon flat on his face before the ark of god and note the end of verse 3 they had to take Dagon and put him back in his place and they have to put him back in his place because he's a block of wood he can't move or think or speak and then the next morning verse 4 again Dagon is on his face on the ground before the ark of god although this time with his face his head and his hands broken off and the bible's trying to point fun at him and say Dagon's a joke which he is god of course is far from a joke and verse 6 tells us that the hand of god was heavy upon the philistine people of ashdod

Dagon's hands are weak and powerless in fact they're broken off but the hand of the god of israel is heavy and powerful the word for heavy there in verse 6 is actually the same word in hebrew as glory which is interesting the glory has departed from israel and it's gone to the philistines and the glory of god is there punishing the philistines in verse 6 he terrifies them and strikes them down with tumors he plagues them in judgment and the people of the philistine city of ashdod realize that it's god who's plaguing them and so verse 8 they call together the rulers of the philistines there's five major towns of the philistines and there's a ruler of each of those towns and so they call the five rulers together to discuss what to do they realize that the god of israel is powerful and is striking them down but instead of returning the ark they play past the parcel and they pass the ark on to the next philistine town of gath and verse 9 says god then terrifies the people of gath and strikes them down with tumors and so verse 10 they play past the parcel again and move the ark on to the next philistine town of ekron and the people of ekron are starting to catch on and so they say no way we don't want it they say why have they brought around to us the ark of the god of israel to kill us and our people well do you see what's happening here the god of israel is defeating the philistines single-handedly no problems without any help from even a single israelite doesn't need the help of the israelites to defeat the philistines he's perfectly capable of doing it all by himself the israelites were defeated by the philistines not because god can't do that but because of their sin and that they haven't repented well chapter 5 verse 11 towards the end of that chapter the philistines call together another meeting of the five philistine rulers and just tell them this time get rid of the ark and chapter 6 verse 1 tells us that the ark had been in the philistines territory afflicting them for seven months by this point and then verse 2 they turn this time to their religious leaders to the priests and diviners and they ask them how to return the ark and the religious leaders of the philistines say they should return it with a guilt offering they've sinned against the god of israel and they need to make reparation and they suggest in verses 4 and 5 the guilt offering of five gold tumors and five gold rats which symbolize the punishment that god has brought upon them and it's interesting note what they say in verse 6 of chapter 6 they say why should you harden your hearts as the egyptians and pharaoh hardened their hearts after he had made fools of them didn't they let the people go and they departed so again the philistines know the story of the exodus and what happened to the egyptians and here is the ark departs from the philistines it's been compared to the exodus from egypt and the religious leaders of the philistines are saying don't make the same mistake and harden your hearts nevertheless the religious leaders of the philistines aren't entirely sure or convinced that it really is the god of israel who's behind all their problems and so they come up with what's really quite a clever test to make sure that it really is god who's done this to them and the tests in verses 7 to 9 they suggest that they should take some cows who have just given birth and separate the cows from their calves they should then yoke the cows to a cart put the ark and the guilt offering on the cart and then see what happens now the natural thing should be that the cows should refuse to budge or that they should try and get back to their calves but if they go along the road straight away moving away from their calves into the territory of israel then clearly god is the one who was behind it so they do this test in verses 10 to 12 and the cows go straight along the road back to the territory of the israelites and the point is clear clearly it was god who did this to the philistines the philistines realize it and so they give the ark back to the israelites but the story doesn't end there in verses 13 to 15 we read that the israelite people on the border town of bethshemesh received the ark back then with great joy after seven months the ark has returned to israel and it's great news it means the glory of god has returned to israel but unfortunately there's another tragedy in verse 19 the hebrew is a little bit difficult there and i'm not quite sure what happened with the nrsv translation but it kind of goes way left field here the niv in fact is better at this point and what it says in the first half of the verse is that the people of bethshemesh the israelites did something wrong they gazed into the ark a bit like raiders of the lost ark or they looked at it in some way and they were basically treating it with disrespect and over familiarity and as a result god struck down 70 off them and notes back in our bibles at the end of verse 19 in the nrsv it says the lord had made a great slaughter among the people and those are the same words that we read in chapter 4 at the beginning where the israelites were defeated by the philistines god is again here striking down the israelites as he struck them down before the philistines and indeed as he struck down the philistines themselves so having the ark back with them is no guarantee again that god is with them and that they're okay the people of bethshemesh realize this they realize the awesome holiness of god and they're terrified they say in verse 20 who is able to stand before the lord this holy god to whom shall he go so that we may be rid of him and indeed they're right the

unholy unrepentant people cannot stand before a holy and righteous god and so they want to get rid of the ark just as the philistines did and they too play past the parcel and they send the ark away to another israelite town to kirith jerim well what have we seen so far we've seen that the israelites have been defeated by the philistines and the problem was not the philistines the problem was their sin and that they haven't repented they thought that they could break the covenant live however they wanted to and that they'd still be okay and god would be with them which is clearly not the case chapter 7 then is very important for our understanding of what we're looking at tonight we haven't heard of samuel since the end of chapter 3 and samuel reappears here now and what he says in verse 3 is very important samuel said to all the house of israel if you are returning to the lord with all your heart then put away the foreign gods and the astates from among you direct your heart to the lord and serve him only and he will deliver you out of the hand of the philistines samuel is basically calling on israel here at last to truly repent now it might be that verses 2 and 3 there in chapter 7 are actually in chronological order that the ark has been there in israelite territory for 20 years

[29 : 13] it's been ignored up to this point and now the philistines again are threatening the israelites and the israelites want to be delivered from this threat and they cry and lament at the end of verse 2 over their terrible situation but the question is are there tears tears of real repentance and so samuel calls on them in verse 3 to truly repent and says if they really are turning back to god with all their heart wholeheartedly then they must put away their idols and foreign gods so he's basically saying i think no each way bet no two-way bet no having god and hanging on to their idols or i guess we might say today no having jesus and trusting in him and also hanging on to everything that the world offers us no each way bet if we truly repent samuel says here in verse 3 then we must serve god alone to put god first with no other rivals or to put it another way true repentance is that we don't only have jesus as our savior but have him as our lord which means serving jesus alone well i know that it's all too easy for us as christians to live sometimes by having an each way bet to try and have everything that the world offers whether that be financially or with our careers or family or home or whatever it is that we say i want everything the world offers and i'll add jesus to that and trust in him but this is saying no each way bet and that we must serve jesus only well verse 4 is good news it says so israel put away the balls and the astartes and they served the lord only they did repent and trusted in god alone well i guess i should ask myself and all of us here tonight that question then have you repented truly not hanging on to the things of the world but that you and i serve god only well the israelites do that which is great and in verses five to six as a result they gather together and they confess their sins to god which will do tonight as well they've truly repented so they come together before god they admit their sin to him and they turn to god which is a great thing and uh note the end of verse six there it says that samuel judged israel samuel two is a judge in fact he's the last judge as we'll see on sunday night the last judge before israel have kings but back to the passage again verse seven the philistines there are still the threat they hear that israel are gathered together in one place and so they get ready to attack them and basically then we've come full circle we're right back at the same point that we started with at the beginning of chapter four here are israel facing the philistines once again in battle although this time it's very different because this time the israelites have dealt with their real problem which is not the philistines but their sin they have truly repented they've confessed their sin they've got rid of their idols and they're serving god alone and so verse eight they call on samuel to pray to god for them that god will save them from the hands of the philistines and this time god does he saves his repentant people as always god answers samuel's prayer

and verse 10 says that the lord thundered with a mighty voice that day against the philistines and threw them into confusion and they were routed before israel it's interesting back in chapter two in hannah's prayer that we looked at on sunday night in chapter two verse 10 she said that god would thunder against his enemies from heaven and shatter them and that's exactly what we're seeing there and god again single-handedly defeats the philistines well verses 13 to 17 there at the end of chapter 7 finish our story just like in the book of judges there's peace for the rest of the lifetime of their judge samuel verses 15 to 17 it summarizes there his judgeship and for all the time that samuel is judge israel is at peace now before i finally wrap up tonight i just want to take a brief look ahead to what we'll do on sunday night when we look at 1 samuel chapter 8 chapter 8 is a pivotal chapter in which israel asks finally for a king they've almost finally given up faith in god they once again face an enemy in battle and they've had it they want a king with a standing army who will

always be there give them that security and protection to fight against their enemies but what chapter 7 is showing us is that god can defeat their enemies easily anywhere anytime and he does it through raising up a savior for them in this case samuel in the form of judges they don't need a king what they need to do is to repent and then god will save them well you and i have been challenged tonight from god's word i hope that we need to truly repent and that we mustn't sit lightly to the promises that we have in jesus they're great promises that we have in the new covenant in jesus the forgiveness of our sins certain hope of eternal life great promises but we mustn't like the israelites here presume on god's grace we mustn't think that because we're baptized or because we go to church or because we have quiet times that we are okay with god in other words we mustn't trust in religion as the israelites did we mustn't presume on god's grace the passage i think calls on us tonight in the word of god to truly repent to turn to god to trust jesus and to serve jesus only to get rid of whatever else would stop us serving jesus alone well god has saved you and me through the death of jesus he loves you he loves me he's given jesus to die and pay for our sins and because of that we need to truly repent and serve jesus alone let me pray that god will help us to do that heavenly father we do thank you so much for your mercy on us as you had mercy on the israelites and save them so you have saved us by giving your dear son jesus to die in our place and pay for our sins but we pray that you would help us not to presume on your grace not to fall into the trap of thinking we're okay because of any religious things that we do but we pray that you would help us to truly repent to trust in jesus and to serve him alone and we pray that you would help us do this in jesus name amen