

THE ARK OF GOD ON THE MOVE

1Samuel 4:1b-7:1

WHEN GOD GAVE instructions to Moses to build the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the first object God instructed him to make was the Ark of the Covenant. All the other objects were worthless apart from it. As the symbol of Jehovah's presence, all must take their relative value from the Ark. Read Exod. 25. 22.

The Ark was the place of meeting, and the means of communion, between God and man. It was called the throne of God. This is what Christ, through His atoning death, becomes to all who believe. In Him we meet with God in mercy, through Him we have fellowship and communion.

The Ark in Captivity

In v1, Israel went out to fight with the Philistines, but it was not something God had commanded. They weren't concerned at all about what God many of thought about their plan. As the aggressors, they boldly march out in self-sufficiency and they suffer defeat at the hands of the enemy, and 4000 men were slain (1 Sam. 4: 2).

Israel never seemed to learn that they had no strength of their own, and that they could only meet their enemies through God's strength.

Even after their humiliating defeat, they did not humble themselves before Yahweh. What did they do instead?

V3—When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, “why did the LORD bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.”

Up to then, the Ark had only moved at the express command of God. What right had they to dictate the movements of the Ark? And on top of that, bring it into a battlefield.

They evidently thought of the Ark of the Covenant that would secure for them victory over their enemies. But they were trusting it, not God. They were trusting the symbol, not the reality. They had become superstitious, by looking to the Ark as if it possessed special powers. It had become to them a “good luck charm.”

They no doubt recalled what the Ark had done at Jordan, and at Jericho, but they had not understood that its movements had been directed by the word of Almighty God.

The Ark was with Israel, but God was against them. God's judgment fell on Israel and there was a great slaughter. 30,000 of Israel fell in the battle; and for the 1st time God allowed

the Ark of the Covenant to fall into the hands of His enemies, and His enemies to prevail over His people. Ps. 78:61—

*He sent the ark of his might into captivity,
His splendor into the hands of the enemy.*

There should be no doubt in any spiritual mind that the captivity of the Ark is a picture of Christ our Lord, the Son of God.

The disciples of Jesus were confounded when they saw their Master taken captive by the leaders of Israel, then handed over to the Roman power to be crucified; but they learned, and were able to testify before the people, that although He had been *"taken, and by wicked hands . . . crucified and slain," yet is was " by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23).*

Losing the Ark was something major, but God would eventually be glorified on account of its captivity and return. God was never more glorified, except by the death and resurrection of His Son.

The Ark before Dagon

5v1-3— After the Philistines had captured the ark of God...they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon. ³ When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place.

For the Philistines to place the Ark at the feet of Dagon, their national deity meant they attributed their victory to him, and the golden Ark was a trophy of the battle. But God has no equals, nor superiors. He will give His glory to no other. He demonstrated his sovereignty and power by toppling down the idol, bringing it to its knees before the Ark of His Strength.

Christ, the True Ark, by going to the Cross brought low the god of this world. The day will soon come, when *"At the Name of Jesus every knee will "bow", of those in heaven, and those on earth, and those beneath the earth"*, so that all creation pays Him homage (Phil. 2: 10).

The Ark Is Returned

On a new cart, and with two nursing cows, which had never been yoked, and whose calves had been taken away, the Ark was sent on its way to Beth Shemesh. This was done to find out whether the judgments had come from God, or whether "it was a chance" that had befallen them.

Nature would have caused the cows to return for their calves, but God guided them by the way and led them straight to the border of Beth Shemesh, a city in Israel.

The five rulers of the Philistines followed after the cart and saw all that took place, and returned to Ekron, no doubt convinced that the God of Israel had indeed been dealing with them, and glad to no longer have His Ark in their midst.

The Ark at Beth Shemesh

The men of Beth Shemesh break up the new cart, and use it to sacrifice the oxen that had brought the Ark. This offering, and their sacrifices to Yahweh, must have been well pleasing to Him.

But unfortunately, instead of covering the Ark, many men of the city looked into the Ark and *God struck them down the people mourned because of the heavy blow the Lord had dealt them* (1 Sam. 6: 19).

To show disregard for the Ark, by poking their noses into it, was a willful sin against the commandment of the Lord, and the men of Beth Shemesh paid the penalty with their lives.

In lifting off the lid of the Ark they removed that which covered the naked law, and exposed themselves to the “ministry of death.” Who can stand before God and His justice, without having Christ come between them? The blood-sprinkled lid represented Christ. All who presumptuously set aside the atonement of Christ (1 John 2: 2) expose themselves to the “ministry of death.”

Instead of judging themselves for their sacrilege, and crying to God for His mercy, the men of Beth Shemesh said, “*Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God? To whom will the ark go up from here?*” (1 Sam. 6: 20).

It was a very great privilege to be entrusted with the care of God's Ark, but they had abused the privilege, and they no longer desired to have God with them.

Their moral condition was so low that they could not tolerate the presence of the holy Lord God, and sought means to get rid of Him.

Pretty much like the Philistines, many in Jesus' day cried, “*Away with Him!*” Christendom is no better, today. Many, who call themselves Christians, have no real regard for the Person of the Son of God. Many deny His deity and His atoning work, and other foundation truths which involve Christ's Person.

The Ark at Kirjath-jearim

The inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim answered the appeal of the men of Beth Shemesh, and without hesitation, it would seem, *they came and took up the ark of the Lord. They took it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the Lord* (1 Sam. 7: 1).

And the Ark rested there about 70 years before it moved again.

Soli Deo Gloria!