

The Book of SAMUEL

God's "Useless" Ark

1 Samuel 4:1-11

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- Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. ² 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.
- ³ 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." ⁴ 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 4:1-11

- ⁵ 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.
- ⁶ 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, ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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.
- ⁹ 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 4:1-11

- 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 thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell.
- ¹¹ And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

Introduction:

The Scripture Gateway: enter His courts with presence and praise



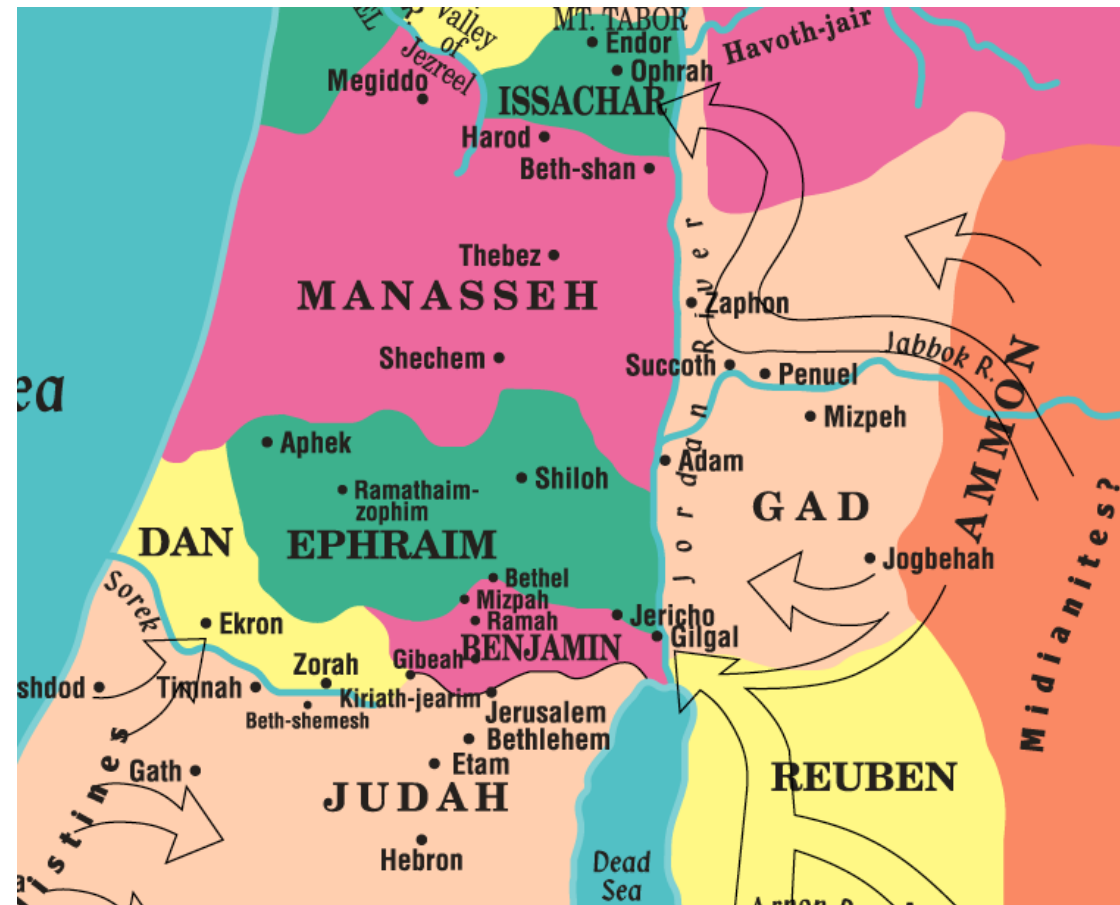
Defining “Useful” vs. “Useless”

- **“Useful” = a means to an end, a practical solution**
- *Transactional*: my interest in a person or thing is determined by what that person or thing can do for me
- Example: a screwdriver is a tool with which you are able to assemble furniture
- Example: calling a play that leads to a score that wins a basketball game
- Example: the ark as a means of achieving military victory
- **“Useless”= an appreciation for the thing itself**
- *Relational*: my interest is in appreciating the person or the thing regardless if the person or thing brings any practical benefit to me
- Example: appreciating a piece of art or a personal relationship
- Example: appreciating the beauty and perfection of a perfectly shot three-pointer
- Example: being in awe of the presence of God with the ark, “holy ground”

Location, Location

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Shiloh: Home of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord



The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord

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What's In the Ark?

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT



- Two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments
- A gold jar filled with manna
- Aaron's staff (that bloomed with almond leaves)

The Significance of the Ark

- **The location of a nearly palpable presence of God:** “the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim.” (1 Samuel 4:4)
- “The ark was presumed to represent God’s presence . . . And, in fact, was virtually synonymous with the deity” (*Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*)
- ²² There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel. (Exodus 25:22)

I. The foolishness of trying to use God for personal political gains (1 Samuel Chapter 4)

- 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 4:3b)
- And the two sons of Eli, **Hophni and Phinehas**, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. (1 Samuel 4:4)
- ²⁰ You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, (Deuteronomy 10:20)
- ⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. (Galatians 6:7)
- ¹¹ And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. (1 Samuel 4:11)

I. The foolishness of trying to use God for personal gains

- ⁹ But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” ¹¹ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. . .
- ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, “Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” ²⁰ But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. (Acts 8:9-11,17-22)

II. The only true God topples imposters (Chapter 5)

- **5** When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. **2** Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon.
- **3** And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, **behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD.** So they took Dagon and put him back in his place.
- **4** But when they rose early on **the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold.** Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. (1 Samuel 5:1-4)

II. The only true God topples imposters

- **Elijah defeats the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:20-40)**
- ²¹ And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.”
- ²⁴ And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God.”
- ²⁹ And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.
- ³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.”

II. The only true God topples imposters

- **The Second Coming of Jesus and the Defeat of His Enemies (Revelation 19)**
- ¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in^[b] blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. . . .
- ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule^[c] them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. (Revelation 19:11-13,15-16)

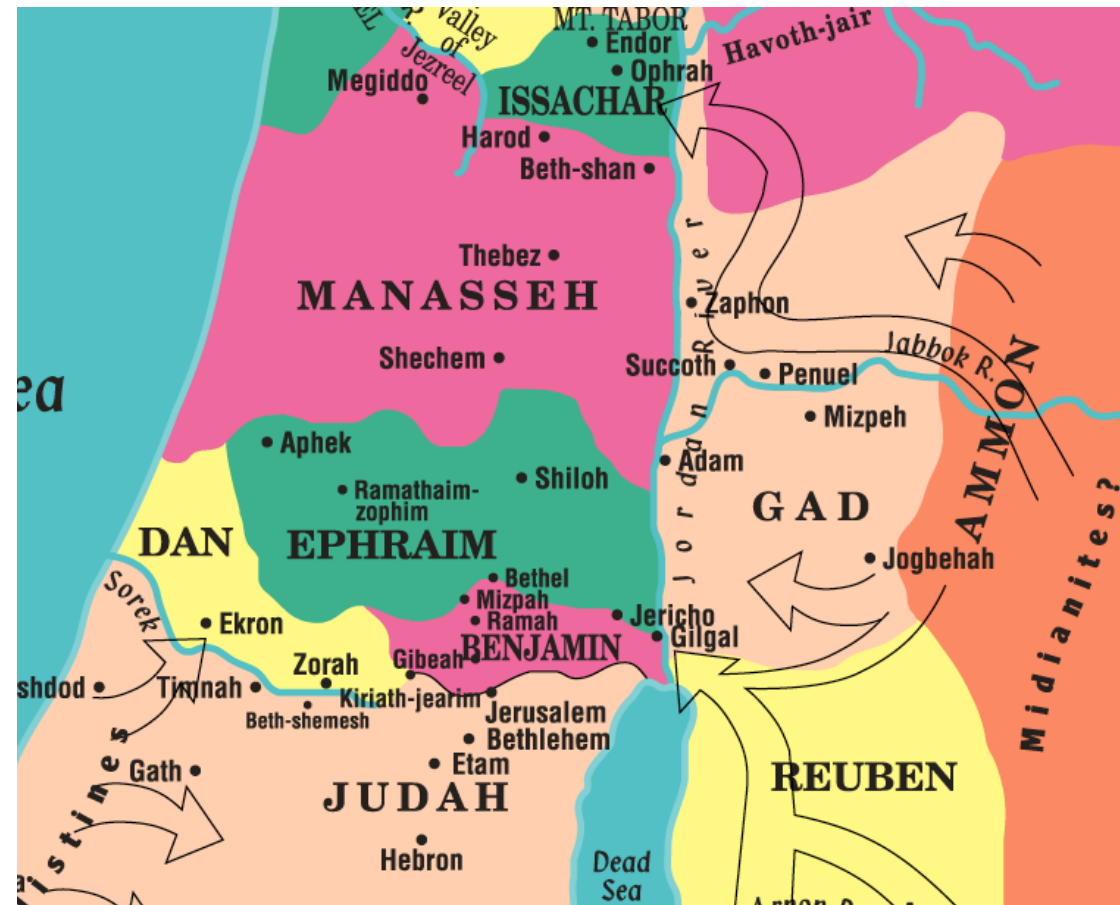
III. Acknowledge that the sovereign God is already at the center of our lives (1 Samuel Chapters 5-6)

- The hand of the LORD was heavy against the people of **Ashdod**, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. ⁷ And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, “The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our god.”
- “Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around **to Gath**.”
- ¹⁰ So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. But as soon as the ark of God came **to Ekron**, the people of Ekron cried out, “They have brought around to us the ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people. ¹¹ They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, “**Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people.**” (1 Samuel 5:6-10)

III. Acknowledge that the sovereign God is already at the center of our lives (1 Samuel Chapters 5-6)

- ⁸ And take the ark of the LORD and place it on the cart and put in a box at its side the figures of gold, which you are returning to him as a guilt offering. Then send it off and let it go its way ⁹ and watch. If it goes up on the way to its own land, **to Beth-shemesh**, then it is he who has done us this great harm . . .
- ¹² And the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went. They turned neither to the right nor to the left, and the lords of the Philistines went after them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.
- ¹³ Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. And when they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark, **they rejoiced to see it.** ¹⁴ The cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh and stopped there. (1 Samuel 6:8-14)

The Philistine Travels of the Ark



III. Acknowledge that the sovereign God is already at the center of our lives

- **Joseph and his brothers . . .**
- When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him."
- ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. (Genesis 50:15-20)

III. Acknowledge that the sovereign God is already at the center of our lives

- **God is to be in our center (“Theo-centric”):**
- ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. (Matthew 22:37-38)
- **The Center Holds:**
- ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. (Colossians 1:16-18)

Takeaway:

God's Sovereignty is shown in unanticipated ways

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.

⁹ **For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:6-9)**

For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

Takeaway:

God's Sovereignty is shown in unanticipated ways

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think”
(Ephesians 3:20)

⁷ Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but **afterward you will understand.**” (John 13:7)

Takeaway:

So, Seek the Presence of the Lord

- Choose this day whom you will serve . . . But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:15)
- But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the sovereign Lord my Refuge; I will tell of all your deeds. (Psalm 73:28)



Let Us Pray

A silhouette of two hands raised in prayer, holding a glowing white cross. The background is a warm, golden sunset over a body of water, with the sun low on the horizon. The hands are positioned in the upper right quadrant of the image, with the cross centered between them. The overall mood is peaceful and spiritual.