“WORTHY!”

We left off in 1 Samuel Chapter 3 last week with Samuel growing both physically and spiritually and the Lord being with him. “And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord.” What the text did not tell us is that it would be another 20 years before Samuel actually began his public ministry as the spiritual leader of Israel. That happens in Chapter 7, which we’ll look at a bit later. In the meantime the nation is in a spiritual drought. The people had moved away from the one true God and have become self-reliant. Through a series of catastrophes God works to draw His people back to Him.

In Chapter 4 the primary enemies of Israel, the Philistines, overwhelm the Israelites in a battle near Aphek. Four thousand Israelite soldiers are killed. Israel’s military leaders fetch the ark from Shiloh and send it into battle. They hope that this will rally their troops, improve morale and therefore ensure victory. Their ill-fated plan backfires! In the ensuing battle Israel loses 30,000 more men. Among the casualties are Eli’s two wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas (recall that God had judged them back in Chapter 2). The Philistines capture the ark of the Lord. When Eli gets word of the catastrophe at Aphek he falls over backward from his seat, breaks his neck and dies. Then Eli’s pregnant daughter-in-law goes into labor from shock and she dies giving birth. Talk about a bad day!

READ 1 Sam 5:1-5 [5 main Philistine cities: Ashdod, Gath, Ekron, Ashkelon and Gaza; Philistine mindset was that the God of Israel was contained in the ark and would be subservient to their god Dagon; superstitious pagans]

But the God of Israel is not finished. Not only does he make a complete mockery of the Philistine’s make believe god, now He curses the people of Ashdod.

READ 1 Sam 5:6-8 [“hand of the Lord” in contrast to the hands of Dagon; in verse 6 the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate add the sentence “And mice multiplied in their land and the terror of death was throughout the entire city”; the Philistines are so deeply entrenched in their evil idolatrous ways that they do not turn to the one true God]

So the Philistines devise a plan which proves to be foolish.

READ 1 Sam 5:9-10

The people in Ekron want nothing to do with the ark of the Lord. They associate it with death and destruction. They realize that the God of Israel is the source of all their troubles. But they don’t turn to Him in repentance even though they recognize His power.

READ 1 Sam 5:11-12

Instead of turning to God they choose to send Him away (they associate the ark with the presence of God). They cry out to heaven (presumably to their many false gods) but they do not cry out to God for salvation and healing.

READ 1 Sam 6:1-6

The Philistine priests recognize that the God of Israel is the cause of their calamity and they plan to appease Him with what they call a “guilt offering.” I prefer to call it a peace offering. Is this what God wants from them? Is this how the God of Israel wants them to give Him glory? They know about God and even recognized His power and might…but they never once turn to Him or worship Him. Why not? Second Corinthians 4:4 tells us why… “the god of this world (speaking of Satan) has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” The pagan Philistines had witnessed firsthand the power of God and they knew about what He had done in Egypt, but did not turn their hearts toward Him… because they were spiritually blinded by Satan.

So the godless priests devise this plan to return the ark of God to Israel.

READ 1 Sam 6:7-12

The plan works. Based on their limited thinking, they reason that if their plan works then they will know that it was the hand of the God of Israel that was upon them. Five Philistine leaders secretly follow the ark from a safe distance and watch as it miraculously makes its way back to Israel without being guided by any man… Further evidence of God to the Philistines and yet they still they do not turn away from their false gods and to the one true God of Israel.

READ 1 Sam 6:13-16

The Philistines in essence have provided the wood and cows for the Israelites burnt offering to the Lord. The people of Beth-shemesh are excited to see the ark of the Lord returned to them. They worship and glorify God. This is the proper response. What a contrast to the Philistines! The Philistines couldn’t wait to be rid of the ark of the Lord and they never once worshiped God or reverenced Him. The Philistine leaders witness the worship of the people of Beth-shemesh, then they return back home. As far as we know they are completely unmoved and unchanged. Their one opportunity to repent and turn to the Lord is gone.

Back in Beth-shemesh, in Israel, everything appears fine and then out of nowhere calamity strikes the people of Israel again…

READ 1 Sam 6:19-7:2

This is a significant event and it ushers in the nation’s repentance and the mass revival that follows. Verse 19 says that God struck down 70 men of Beth-shemesh. The number 70 is used only in the Septuagint and in the writings of Josephus. The oldest Hebrew manuscripts say that the number of men killed was a staggering 50,070. Conservative scholars believe this number is way too high (their human reasoning) so they doubt its validity and say it was probably 70. However, the KJV, NASB and NET bible all use the larger number. The ESV and the NIV use the smaller number. So, which is it? I’m not going to be dogmatic about this but I am going to go with the larger number since that is what the earlier manuscripts say. And verse 6 says He “struck the people with a great blow.” The NASB says, “the Lord struck the people with a great slaughter.”

The result was that the ark of the Lord was moved to Kiriath-jearim where it would remain for 100 years (in the house of Abinadab) until King David came and brought it up to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6).

READ 1 Sam 7:3-6

So revival takes place and Samuel intercedes to the Lord on behalf of the people. They repent of their sin of idolatry and turn back to the Lord.

READ 1 Sam 7:7-11

Divine intervention!

READ 1 Sam 7:12-14

Following this great victory Samuel does what Joshua did frequently following a military victory. He sets up a stone of remembrance. Samuel names this stone “Ebenezer,” which literally means “stone of help.” We should do this as well. When we focus on what God has done for us in the past, it makes it easier for us to have faith that He will come through today and in the future. Remember what God has done!

The one true God, the God of the O.T. Israelites, the God of the N.T. early church, yes our God in 2016 – He is a holy God who demands our worship. He is to be reverenced and glorified. And when people do not honor and worship God and instead reject Him or treat Him as common, He is displeased and will render judgment. One of the things I see missing in our world today is a healthy fear of God.

In Joshua 1:8 God instructs His people with these words: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”