



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Faith or Superstition (I Samuel 4:1—5:5)

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Capitol Commission state directors are missionaries who teach weekly verse-by-verse Bible studies for legislators, lobbyists, and staff members. These Bible studies are hand-distributed to each legislative office, emailed, and made available throughout the Capitol community. The love and grace of God compels us to proclaim the truth of the Gospel with a heartfelt compassion for the Capitol community, to faithfully teach and apply the Word of God, and it is our desire to build meaningful relationships that bear fruit for an eternity to come.

With the Bible as our foundation and authority, the mission of Capitol Commission is obedience to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) within the Capitol communities of the world. We are not a lobbying group attempting to garner votes or reform society. Our mandate is to see the hearts and lives of elected officials transformed with the Word of God. Capitol Commission is a ministry of the church seeking to proclaim the gospel message, and to help believers mature through the verse-by-verse teaching of Scripture. In the Bible, we see God's great love for the world, especially for those who have been placed in authority. This is the foundation for our ministry to you.

The church is instructed to submit and to honor government leaders (Rom 13:1-7), and as a matter of first importance, to pray for their salvation (1 Tim 2:1-4). Our desire is witness God transform the hearts and lives of elected officials, lobbyists, and staff members. We apply this mandate to four major areas of making disciples: (1) *evangelize* those who have not experienced saving faith in Jesus Christ; (2) *establish* those who desire to grow in their faith and knowledge of Scripture; (3) *equip* those called to spiritual leadership; and, (4) *encourage* churches to participate with us in ministry.

Introduction

The power of the calling of God on Samuel's life is evident in the events recorded in chapters 4-7. Chapter 4 begins with the simple statement, "Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel." Although he is not mentioned again until chapter 7, recognition of Samuel's spiritual leadership is unmistakable by his reversal of the trends recorded in the previous chapters. The purpose of these chapters is transitional. The old leadership is being removed (ch. 4) and the new leadership is established (ch. 7). Between the transitions of leadership are spiritual lessons with regard to God's holiness and the necessity of humility and repentance to experience God's presence (chs. 5-6). Moreover, the narrative records the Philistine threat to Israel. The causes of both the defeat and victory of the Philistines are instructive.

WHAT OCCURS WHEN GOD IS SUPERSTITION?

(4:1-11) First Samuel 3 concluded with the famine of hearing the Word of the Lord being brought to an end. Samuel was a prophet of the Lord throughout all Israel. Sadly, verse 1 of 1

Samuel 4 reveals that Israel did not seek the Lord when entering into battle with the Philistines at Aphek. Israel instigated the battle against the Philistines without consideration of God's will. Failure is always certain when we do not first seek the Lord's will.

FAILURE IS ALWAYS CERTAIN WHEN WE DO NOT FIRST SEEK THE LORD'S WILL. . . . GOD'S PEOPLE BECOME DEPENDANT UPON THEIR ABILITIES AND GIFTS, AS OPPOSED TO TRUSTING THE LORD IN HIS DESIRE TO WORK THROUGH THOSE RESOURCES.

The Philistines were a continual and powerful threat to Israel during the latter period of the judges and the beginning years of the Israelite monarchy. The Philistines occupied the coastal areas and the Judean foothills of Canaan, and enclosed many populous towns and villages. Palestine derived its name from the Philistines because their influence was so dominant in these territories.

Israel's defeat by the Philistines (4:3) caused the elders of Israel to bring the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh to the battlefield. Initially, the elders asked the right question with regard to Israel's defeat. Why did the Lord defeat them before the Philistines (4:3)? Unfortunately, the elders did not seek the right answer to their question (cf. Exod 15:3; 1 Kgs 22:5-12; 2 Kgs 3:11; 2 Chron 7:14). Whenever God sent Israel into battle, the people were to consecrate themselves (Josh 3:5). However, in this situation, even the wicked sons of Eli "*were* there with the ark of the covenant of God" (1 Sam 4:4). The psalmist prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts" (Ps 139:23). It is then that God's people may also pray, "Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering (26:1). God's lovingkindness is toward His people when we walk in His truth (26:3). There is not a better counsel that could be given to you than the supreme importance of studying and living God's Word to know the truth.

The elders of Israel believed bringing the Ark into their camp would assure the presence of God on the battlefield (cf. Numb 10:35; Josh 6:2-20). The results, however, were devastating. Israel was defeated again, the Ark was captured, and Eli's sons were slain (1 Sam 4:10) (The latter was prophetic fulfillment, see 2:31.). God will not be mocked (Gal 6:7); therefore, any leader who attempts to manipulate Him will experience bitter consequences. Israel's presumption

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES ~ GEORGIA

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caused the mourning of more than seven times as many families than previously (4:2, 10). The lesson is not to repeat the one basic error of Israel. The people were dependant upon the Ark of the Covenant in a superstitious manner, as opposed to trusting the God of the Covenant to deliver them. It is possible to repeat the same error when God's people become dependant upon their abilities and gifts, as opposed to trusting the Lord's desire to work through those resources.

WHAT OCCURS WHEN GOD LEAVES US?

(4:12-22) When Eli learned that his sons were slain, he fell from his seat and was dethroned (4:17). Hannah was certainly correct in her song of thanksgiving: "The LORD . . . brings low, He also exalts. . . . Those who contend with the LORD will be shattered. . . . And He will give strength to His king" (2:7b, 10a, d). The priestly line would now reside in Eli's newborn grandson by Phinehas' wife (4:19-21). When Samuel is reintroduced into the narrative (ch. 7), it is obvious that he is called by God to lead in a time of spiritual deficiency.

"DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT YOU ARE A TEMPLE OF GOD
AND THAT THE SPIRIT OF GOD DWELLS IN YOU?" (1 COR 3:16).

Both Eli and Phinehas' wife agreed that the real tragedy was the loss of the Ark of the Covenant. Before she died in childbearing, Phinehas' wife confessed, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God was taken" (4:22). Consequently, she named her son, Ichabod ("where is the glory?"). Since the Ark was the visible symbol of God's presence, the capture and exile of the Ark meant the departure of God's glory. The Ark formerly served a genuine need in the early days of Israel's history, but God allowed for it to be captured because the Ark had become mere superstition. The glory of God had indeed departed from Israel, not because the Ark was captured; rather, the glory of God had already departed, and therefore, the Ark was taken. God already removed His glory because the nation sinned against Him. The purpose, however, for God's departure was to bring the people to repentance and dependent faith in Him.

Do not let "Ichabod" be written on your life! The presence and power of God does not reside in material things. "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor 3:16). Indeed, the Spirit of God lives in the individual believer (6:19), but the presence and power of God is in the entire community of His people (cf. John 14:16; 1 Cor 12). The word for "temple" (Gk. ναός / *naos*) is in the singular, whereas "you" (Gk. ἑστε / *este*) is plural. The individual believer is God's temple, but the thought of 1 Corinthians 3:16 is upon the entire community of God's

people as His temple. What would be the effect if all God's people in the Georgia Capitol would seek His presence and power to be manifest in their life, and each time they meet together either in committee, session, etc.? What occurs when God leaves us because we have sinned against Him? Israel experienced ruin. There is a tangible connectedness and mutual responsibility for every believer. The danger is to presume arrogantly upon God's promise, and superstitiously when we seek to control God as opposed to being submitted to Him. Religion is not a replacement for holiness, nor is interest solely in success without humility and repentance.

WHAT OCCURS WHEN GOD IS ESTEEMED?

(5:1-5) "Now the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod" (5:1). They placed the Ark before their pagan deity, Dagon, in his temple. The intent is obvious. The assumption was that the LORD was defeated, and Dagon was victorious. However, "early the next morning," the people of Ashdod found "Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD." Indeed, Dagon was "set . . . in his place" (5:3). The following morning, Dagon "had fallen on his face" again and his head and hands "were cut off on the threshold" (5:4).

Whereas Dagon needed help to be placed again, the Lord could fight the Philistines by Himself. God will return the Ark to Israel by Himself. God is not a fetish for our convenience, but He is the one who equips and strengthens His people. God's people are dependent on Him, and therefore He is to be esteemed to uphold us. God's supremacy is not dependent upon humanity. The Lord sustains His people as they are humble before Him and dependent on His will. The application is universal in all life. Every legislation and decision in life must consider the will of God, and not presume upon His grace or assume superstitiously upon His promises. God's people must beware that such presumptions and assumptions do not result in the true God being cast in Dagon's image.

"BEL HAS BOWED DOWN, NEBO STOOPS OVER; THEIR
IMAGES ARE CONSIGNED TO THE BEASTS AND THE CATTLE.
THE THINGS THAT YOU CARRY ARE BURDENSOME, A LOAD
FOR THE WEARY BEAST. THEY STOOPED OVER, THEY HAVE
BOWED DOWN TOGETHER; THEY COULD NOT RESCUE THE
BURDEN, BUT HAVE THEMSELVES GONE INTO CAPTIVITY.
'LISTEN TO ME . . . YOU WHO HAVE BEEN BORNE BY ME FROM
BIRTH AND HAVE BEEN CARRIED FROM THE WOMB; EVEN TO
YOUR OLD AGE I WILL BE THE SAME, AND EVEN TO YOUR
GRAYING YEARS I WILL BEAR YOU! I HAVE DONE IT, AND I
WILL CARRY YOU; AND I WILL BEAR YOU AND I WILL DELIVER
YOU" (ISA 46:1-4).
