

== IN SEARCH OF A KING ==

Understanding 1 Samuel

Small group questions

1 Samuel 4-7 God is King – like or not

Leaders – if the questions make no sense or you don't know the answer – please contact the preacher!

Background briefing: Three key words

Recall the background and significance of

- the Philistines,
- the ark; and
- Shiloh

What is the passage about?

1. Skim read over the chapters and recall what the passage is about.
2. Is there anything in the account that struck you or stands out for you? Anything you don't follow or understand or that raises questions for you?
3. Why do you think the Israelites felt that having the ark with them would guarantee a win in the battle?
4. Why do you think God brought disaster for the Philistines wherever they took the ark?
5. Why do you think the Philistines took such a cautious approach in sending the ark back?
6. Why do you think God dealt so severely with the Israelites who looked into the ark?

What does it teach us about God?

7. **God is not under our control.** What are the ways in which we sometimes think we can manipulate God into doing what we want him to do?
8. **No contest.** There's no contest between the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and other gods, because there are no other gods!! Both the Philistines and the Israelites needed to realise that! And we still need to see it clearly too!
9. **Who can stand?** That is what the Israelites concluded when they lost 70 people who looked in to the ark. Do you think people today have a notion of the awesome holiness of God? What would you say to someone who says they are a Christian but in reality, takes God all too casually?

How does it point us to Jesus?

10. **Symbolic presence → actual presence.** Discuss the significance of God tabernacling with us in person of Jesus and the impact of the presence of God by His Spirit in our lives now.
11. **Who can stand → a new way has opened for us.** Read Hebrews 10:19ff and explore what this now means for us. What would you say to someone who says they are a Christian but feels terrified at the prospect of standing before God?

Date: 23 July 2017
Services: 730, 930am (T) and 630pm
Series: 1 Samuel – In search of a King
Passage: 1 Samuel 4-7
Title: God is King – like it or not

Preliminaries

- Imagine with me you're watching the Evening news....
- And it starts with the headlines –
- ✘Israel takes on the **Philistines** with a big box – and **loses**,
- ✘the great battle between the **God** of Israel and **Dagon** the god of the Philistines -- we tell you who **wins**...
- And **finally** –✘ Israel's **treasure chest** wreaks **havoc** on its **return**...
- Those stories and **more**... ///
- What we see in these chapters is fascinating – and often – just bizarre!!
- But first – we need some **background**.... Understand what these three words mean will help...
- ✘ Philistines
- ✘ The ark
- ✘ Shiloh
- these they are key players in the story from chs 4-7

1. The Philistines

- You may have recalled these guys coming up Joshua and Judges series over the last couple of years...
- They were a **common political enemy of Israel** – especially during the time of the **Judges** – and in fact, God often **used** them to **chastise** his **people**. //
- ✘When the **Israelites** left **Egypt** the **Philistines** were extensively settled along the ✘**coastal strip** between **Egypt** and **Gaza**... The Israelites detoured **inland** to **avoid** them.
- The **Philistines** had set out to conquer **Canaan** at approximately the **same time** as the **Israelites**, and attempted to take possession of the land from the ✘**coastal side**, while Israel used the approach from the ✘**desert**.
- Their land – which included the coastal cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon and Gaza – they called **Palestine!**
- They were considered with great contempt as those '**uncircumcised Philistines**'.
- Always a good contest guaranteed when these two groups met!
- Now – the **second** piece of background you'll need is a reminder about the ark.

2. ✘ The ark

- - and no – we don't mean **Noah's ark!** – though an understandable mistake.
- We mean – the **ark** of the **covenant** – the one made famous by ✘**Harrison Ford** in the movie '*the Raiders of the Lost Ark*'
- But in its '**previous**' **life** – it was an **extremely significant symbol** for **Israel**...
- ✘It was a **rectangular box**. It measured 1200mm by 760mm by 760mm
- ✘It was covered completely with **gold** and was carried on **poles** inserted in **rings** at the **four corners**.

- It had its beginnings when Moses was given the **ten commandments** – and in fact two stone tablets on which were **carved** the **ten commandments** were kept in the **box**.
- It was the symbol of **God’s presence** with his **people**... it was placed in the **☒ tabernacle** – the **portable temple** – as the Israelites **wandered** through the **desert**...
- Once God’s people moved into the **promised land**, it was taken to a **shrine** at **Shiloh**...

3. ☒ **Shiloh**

- ...where the **tent of meeting**☒ was set up in the early days of Israel conquering the inhabitants of the promised land. ☒
- So it became an important **gathering place** for Israel during the period of the **Judges**.
- And it was here – in this **temporary temple** – **beside** the **ark** – where **Samuel** had been sleeping **last week** when God first called out to **him**!
- Now with **that background** let’s ask the three questions we’re asking every week in this series – what is the passage about, what does it teach us about God and how does it point us to Jesus?

1) ☒ **What is this Passage about?**

a. **God in a box**

- We went out ☒to fight the Philistines. ☒We were at **Ebenezer**. ☒ They were at **Aphek**.
- It was a bad day. We lost **4,000**.
- We couldn’t work out *why* the Lord had let us **lose** like that!
- But we thought if we brought ☒the **ark** of the covenant from ☒**Shiloh**, we’d be right.
- **Hophni** and **Phinehas** were with us – but **Eli** didn’t look **too happy**.
- I don’t know what we were **thinking** really – but we thought having that ark with us would be like having **God** there... he would do his **magic**!
- The whole camp went **mad** when the ark arrived... it was like God himself **was** here.
- And the **Philistines** – should have heard **them** – When they found out we had the ark with us, they were **scared** – they were **convinced** we had a ‘**god**’ in the camp.
- They thought they were in **big trouble** – and they **remembered** all the plagues the Lord had given the **Egyptians**.
- We could hear them **yelling** – “**be men Philistines – be men and fight!**” //
- we were pretty **complacent** going out to the battle that day – **we thought we had it made!**
- But we lost ☒ **30,000 soldiers** – **30,000!**
- And those **Philistines** – ☒they **captured** the **ark**... **Eli’s boys, Hophni** and **Phinehas died**... and when the messenger went back to **Shiloh** to tell everyone, old Eli was apparently **waiting** for **news** of what had **happened**.
- And he **handled** the news of the **defeat**, even handled the news of his **sons’ death**... ! but when he was told that the **ark** was **captured**... he fell backward off his **chair**, broke his **neck** and **died**.
- Did you hear about **Phinehas’ wife**? She was **pregnant** you see – and when she found out that her **husband** was **dead**, her **father-in-law** was **dead** and the **ark** had been **captured** – she went into **labour** and lost her life in **childbirth** – but not before she named the baby – **Ichabod** – *no glory* – because she reckoned with the **ark gone**, the **glory** had **departed** from **Israel**.
- It was like **God himself** had **left us!**

b. ☒ **God vs. Dagon**

- Where was God? How could he allow this? The ark in enemy hands?

- ☒The Philistines took the ark and put it in the **temple** of their god **Dagon** at
☒ **Ashdod**.
- Their way of **showing off**... and rubbing in our **defeat**.
- Well – **that** tide soon **turned**.
- The next day when the people of **Ashdod** got **up** – there was **Dagon** – he was a **statue** you **understand** – fallen on his **face** on the **ground** before the **ark** of the **Lord!** – it was just like **Dagon** was **prostrate** in **worship** in front of the **ark** – you know – **worshipping God!**
- Well – they stood **Dagon** back up again.... And then the **next day** – the **next day** – not only was he on the **ground** in front of the **ark again** – his **head** and **hands** were **broken off!**
- And then all the people of **Ashdod** came out in all these **tumours**... **terrible things** – and there was a **plague** of **rats**... and **people dying**...
- The **Philistine** leaders all reckoned it was because of the **ark**... and started to ask – **what shall we do with it?**

c. Hot potato

- Anyway – they sent it up to the city of ☒**Gath** – and the **same thing** happened **there** – **mass panic** broke out as they all came out in **tumours**... and in **unmentionable** places on the **body** – shocking!
- Then like a **hot potato** they kept **passing it on**.. so it went to ☒**Ekron** – and even as it was **entering** the **city**, the people were yelling out – **it'll kill the lot of us!!**
- **Heaps** of people **died**, **people** were **panicking** and – if they didn't **die** they had these shocking **tumours**...
- So all the leaders decided it send it to **back** to us – **send it back** before it killed the **lot** of **them!**

d. It's back!

- The question was though - **how** to **send it back?**
- So they **decided** – send it on a **new cart**, send it back with **gifts** – **gold models** of the **tumours** and the **rats** that had been **plaguing** them - to make sure it's their God who is taking it back, send it off with **cows** which have never been **hitched up before** and keep their **calves locked up** here.
- **If it goes off** and heads for ☒ **Bethshemesh**, then we'll know for sure that all of this is the **Lord's doing!**
- Well **off it went** – the leaders following it all the **way** – to make sure it **didn't come back!**
- And the people of **Bethshemesh** stopped **harvesting**, used the **wood** of the cart for a **fire**, **sacrificed** the **cows** as a **burnt offering** and the **rock** on which they **sacrificed** – it's **still there** to this **day!** //
- But the Lord **humbled us** that day too... **70 men** from **Beth Shemesh** took the **cover** off the **ark** and **looked inside**... and they **died** – right **there** and **then**.
- We asked a **crucial question** that day... 'who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?'
- After that – they took the ark to ☒ **Kiriath Jearim** – to **Abinadab's house**... and his son **Eleazar** was **appointed to guard it.** //

2) ☒What does it teach us about God?

a. ☒God is not under our control

- If you ever thought you could **manipulate God**, **use** God, tell God what to **do**... as Israel thought they could do by bringing the ark into the battle... **think again.**
- God is **not** under our **control**.
- If you ever thought any **symbol** of **God** or his **presence** had any **magical power** or could **hold** any power – as if wearing a **cross guaranteed** anything... or having a **shrine** at **home** or following **little rules** you had made up... **think again.**

- Any symbol of God's power or presence is just **that** – it has no **power** of its own, and is no **guarantee** of anything.
- **God is not under our control.** He is not there to perform for us on cue. We are **his** servants, he is not **ours.** //
- b. ✖No contest
- The second thing this teaches us about God – is that there is simply **no contest** between **him** and **other gods.**
- ...because there are no other gods! //
- There was no actual **contest** between **Yahweh** and **Dagon** – because **Dagon** didn't exist! He was a **lifeless, speechless, completely powerless statue!**
- **No other god** you may ever try serving will be any sort of **match** for **God!**
- ...for God who is all **powerful, all knowing...**
- And of course we have no **intention** of **bowing before** or **praying** to a **statue** or anything **like it...** but I tell you the name of the **non-existent** god I most often serve?
- **Mark Calder!** I do what **he** wants. I serve and follow **him.** I want **his** glory.
- And in a contest between **Mark and God** – **who will win?**
- **There is no contest!**
- c. ✖Who can stand?
- and finally – he's not to be **fooled with**
- **Both** those who are his **people** and those who are **not,** learn that here, **don't they!?**
- **Israel** – that he cannot be **manipulated** into doing their **will,** and the **Philistines** – that his **presence** is an **awesome** and **terrifying thing.**
- And **Israel** asks that **sobering question...** 'Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God'.
- you don't **meet God** as an **equal...** Only a **fool,** only a **blind person** thinks they meet **God** as an **equal...** **God** is not your **equal..** he is **far above** and **exalted** above you and he is **enormous**
- **he is holy.** I.e. – he is 'other' – **not like us at all.** He is **incomparable.**
- With your **stain** and **rebellion** – your **uncleanness** – your **unholiness....** **You cannot be in the same place as God.**
- Brothers and sisters – this is the terrifying **holiness** of God.
- **We must learn** – he's not to be **messed with!**
- 'Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God'? //
- 3) ✖How does it point us to Jesus?
- Do you recall why we said last week that this was **important question?** Because the **Lord Jesus himself** taught that the **Old Testament** was about **him...**
- So how does **this passage** do that?
- a. ✖Symbolic presence → actual presence
- The **symbolic presence** of **God** in the ark of the **covenant,** points us **forward** to the **actual presence** of **God** in the **person** of the **Lord Jesus!**
- In fact – we are told in **John 1:14** – referring to Jesus, that *the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...* And the word is – that he *tabernacled* among us...

- The **presence of God** with his **people** – not represented **symbolically** by the **ark** – but in **reality** – in **flesh and blood** – in His **Son!**
- **God with his people** – not in a **box** – but in a **person**.
- **Revealing his will, his character, his love, his mission and his future.**
- And among his **last words?** – surely am I with you **always** – to the **very end of the age**.
- **With us** by his **Holy Spirit** – who **now dwells** in **us**.
- We now are **closer** to **God** – by **His Spirit** – than any **Israelites** gathered in the **tabernacle** or **temple** in the **presence** of the **ark**; and as **close** as **any disciple** who followed Jesus around **Galilee** and **Jerusalem!**
- And this not only **now** – but into the **future** – for all eternity as God will be our God dwelling with us in eternity.
- How **blessed** are we? God **with us...** now by His **Spirit** – to the end of the **age** – and in the **new age** – **dwelling among us**.
 - b. ✕Who can stand? → **a new way has opened for us**
- I'm sure we are all **sobered** by that question of **God's holiness** – 'who can **stand** in his **presence?**', the Israelites ask as 70 people **died** looking into the **ark** of the **covenant?**
- But **again** – this points us forward to the **Lord Jesus** – for the answer to this dilemma – more than a **dilemma** – this terrifying **truth** of God's **holiness...** we find in **Jesus**
- We read in the letter to the Hebrews 10:19 that *we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body...*
- You will remember that when Jesus died, the curtain in the temple keeping people out of the part where the ark was kept – was torn in two from top to bottom... signifying that **access** to God was **open**. We can **stand now in the presence of God** – because Jesus has removed all our **unholiness**. How **blessed** are we...? to **stand** in the **presence** of our **holy God?**
- Two brief points to close...

✕Conclusion

- **God is King** – Like it or not ✕ – you cannot **manipulate** him into **doing** what you **want**.
- you cannot use even **modern day symbols** as **good luck charms**, as **instruments** of **power** or **superstition**.
- And **there is no other King** – and there are **no other gods!** And **between** the god you and I **often** serve – **ME** – there is no **contest!**
- And he is **Holy** – completely '**other**', '**separate**'... he is not to be taken **lightly**... and neither **he** nor his **will** is to be **ignored!**
- Both the **Philistines** and the **Israelites** learnt here – that **you cannot mess with God!!**
- **The question is – will we learn it? ///**
- **And.... Second:**
- ✕ **Now – God is with us** – as this passage points us to Jesus – it reminds us of two crucial things... That this God who is still not to be messed with – loves us...
- Loves us so much that he has **drawn close** to us in the **person** of his Son **Jesus**.
- And by **dealing** with our **sin**, has made it possible for even **you** and **me** to stand in his **holy presence**.
- And by His **Spirit** – to **dwell** in our **hearts**...
- And in **eternity** – to again dwell with us in **person**....

- So at the one and the same time - we have a **great** and **holy God** who is not be **messed with** - and yet a God who **loves** us, has drawn **close** us, makes it **possible** for us to **stand** in his **presence**...