

# The Capture And Return Of The Ark

1 Samuel 4:1-7:2

## **MEMORY VERSE**

1 SAMUEL 6:20

“And the men of Beth Shemesh said, ‘Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?’”

## **WHAT YOU WILL NEED:**

Gather and bring to class several items that will illustrate “half;” half of a plastic cup, one shoe, half a pair of sunglasses, half of a dollar, half of a theater ticket, half a phone, Walkman with one battery. You will also need 4 containers, water, a Styrofoam cup and half of a Styrofoam cup (top half missing).

Black, red, yellow and blue construction paper, scissors, glue sticks, small glass jars, water, food coloring and as many “Palette” templates as the number of children in you class.

As many “Stained Glass” templates as the number of children in your class, crayons, cooking spray, a cardboard box, paper towels and plastic bags (optional: clear contact paper).

## **ATTENTION GRABBER!**

### **Half-Hearted Relay**

Gather and bring to class several items to hold up and show to the kids; half of a plastic cup, one shoe, half a pair of sunglasses, half of a dollar, half of a theater ticket, half a phone, a walkman portable tape player with one battery. Ask the children if any of these things will work the right way as they are? (No). What needs to happen in order for them to work right? (You need the rest of the item). Explain that we can’t serve the Lord half way.

Next, have a half-hearted relay. Divide the class into two teams. Set up four containers. On one side of the room, have two containers with equal amounts of water. Not far away, have the two empty containers. Each team member gets 10 seconds to move water from a full container to an empty one. Give one team a Styrofoam cup to transfer the water between containers. Give the other team a Styrofoam cup that has the top half cut off, not allowing it to carry as much water. Then tell the teams that whichever team gets the most water into the empty container, wins. To make things fair, you can switch cups and play a second time.

Ask the children about the game. (This is a demonstration of what it is like when we serve the Lord in a half-hearted way.) Why couldn't the team with the half-cup fill up the water as fast? How does this illustrate how we are when our commitment to the Lord is "half-hearted?" **God wants us to love Him with all of our heart, soul, and strength.**

## LESSON TIME!

***NOTE TO TEACHERS:** This section of scripture is very long. You will want to review the chapters and decide how to best present the material to your children. You could possibly have the children act out certain portions. Do not feel like you have to present everything. As you pray this week, ask the Lord for one or two areas to emphasize as you work within the general theme of how **God wants us to love Him with all of our heart, soul, and strength.** God bless you in your ministry to the children!*

A nation, and a people, cannot serve God and worship idols. A half-hearted commitment to serve God will not work. Israel, in such a state, brought much sorrow and defeat upon themselves. As we look at our lesson today, let us remember **God wants us to love Him with all of our heart, soul, and strength.**

## 1 SAMUEL 4:1-11

And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek.

Then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel. And when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men of the army in the field.

And when the people had come into 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 from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies."

So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook.

Now when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, "What does the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" Then they understood that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp.

So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp!" And they said, "Woe to us! For such a thing has never happened before.

"Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.

"Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Conduct yourselves like men, and fight!"

So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers.

Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

God had a plan for Israel. They were to be a light, a representative of God to other nations, so that they might learn and know His ways. Yet, Israel had fallen into sin and had become like the nations around them. Instead of pointing the way to the true God, they began to worship the false gods of the other nations and commit the same sins. They had lost their witness of God and ability to make an impact in the lives of others.

For this, God brought judgment on them through a war with the Philistines. By Samuel's time, these warlike people were well established in the southwest part of Canaan and were constantly moving inland against the Israelites.

Instead of turning to God out of a heart of humility and repentance, the leaders of Israel came up with a plan. They knew how powerful God was, but they did not understand much about having a relationship with Him. They decided that they would “use” God for their purposes. They thought that if they just brought out the Ark of the Covenant, a special box in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle in which the presence of God dwelt; they would defeat the Philistines on the battle field, for God’s power would be with them.

Though God’s Word said that the High Priest could only enter the Holy of Holies (a sacred part of the Tabernacle) once a year, Hophni and Phinehas, Eli’s sons, did not care about God’s Word. Thinking the ark was some sort of “lucky charm” to be used as their source of power while at battle, they unlawfully entered into the Holy of Holies and removed the ark.

The Philistines were frightened by their recollection of stories from the past of how God intervened for Israel when they left Egypt, and rightly so. But, Israel had turned away from God and now only held onto a form of godliness. And as a result, the Philistines slaughtered Israel in battle. Hophi and Phinehas were also killed as was prophesied by God to Samuel (1 Samuel 2:34).

It is very easy for us to live on the memories of God’s blessings. Israel wrongly assumed that since God had given them victory in the past, He would do it again, even though they had strayed far from Him.

The Israelites memorized scripture, even the scriptures that talk about loving God with all of their heart, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), yet they walked in disobedience. Spiritual victories come through continually renewing our relationship with God. We should never live in the past; God desires that we live each new day with a renewed passion to serve and obey Him. **God wants us to love Him with all of our heart, soul, and strength.**

### 1 SAMUEL 4:12-22

Then a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line the same day, and came to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dirt on his head.

Now when he came, there was Eli, sitting on a seat by the wayside watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told it, all the city cried out.

When Eli heard the noise of the outcry, he said, "What does the sound of this tumult mean?" And the man came quickly and told Eli.

Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were so dim that he could not see.

Then the man said to Eli, "I am he who came from the battle. And I fled today from the battle line." And he said, "What happened, my son?"

So the messenger answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been a great slaughter among the people. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead; and the ark of God has been captured."

Then it happened, when he made mention of the ark of God, that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, due to be delivered; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and gave birth, for her labor pains came upon her.

And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, "Do not fear, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer, nor did she regard it.

Then she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband.

And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

At this time, the city of Shiloh was the religious center of Israel and where the tabernacle was permanently set up. Shiloh was the natural place for a messenger to come and deliver the sad news from the battle, and it was there that Eli eagerly awaited some news of the battle.



Since the presence of the ark represented the presence of God in Israel, its capture seemed like God's presence was gone and God Himself and all His glory were now in enemy hands. The pagan nations believed that they could capture their enemies' god and keep it as a conquest. News of the ark's capture sunk the heart of those in Shiloh.

Eli knew that God's judgment was coming upon his family because of his and his son's disobedience. Eli was very concerned about the ark. When he heard the news, he was so overcome with emotion that he fell back on his chair and died. Eli's daughter-in-law suffered the same fate while delivering a son.

What a blessing it is to have a God who is longsuffering, patient, and kind. We know that His loving kindness is far reaching, leading us to repentance when we recognize our sin and call to Him for forgiveness (Romans 2:4). Sometimes, however, people live in a sinful condition with an attitude of pride, only to stretch God's patience with their sin as did Israel. Then God is forced to discipline and correct.

## Palettes

Let kids draw a palette from the pattern provided on black construction paper and cut out. Cut out 3 circles ahead of time for each child. Use the three primary colors: red, yellow, & blue. These should be about 3" in diameter. On one color write "Heart," on another "Soul," and on the last "Strength." Have kids glue or tape to the palette. These are the three primary colors and all colors can be made from them. Explain to the children that in order to be obedient to the Lord we need to have the 3 primary ingredients: Loving God with all of our heart, soul, and strength.

To demonstrate further, you could bring small glass jars and food coloring. Let kids choose which colors they would like you to mix for a demonstration. Ask what would happen if one or two of the primary colors were missing from our world. When we love God in all three areas, we are balanced; and He can use us for many different purposes.

## 1 SAMUEL 5

Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the temple of Dagon and set it by Dagon.

And when the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and set it in its place again.

And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were broken off on the threshold; only Dagon's torso was left of it.

Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

But the hand of the LORD was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and He ravaged them and struck them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory.

And when the men of Ashdod saw how it was, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is harsh toward us and Dagon our god."

Therefore they sent and gathered to themselves all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" And they answered, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried away to Gath." So they carried the ark of the God of Israel away.

So it was, after they had carried it away, that the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction; and He struck the men of the city, both small and great, and tumors broke out on them.

Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. So it was, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!"

So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go back to its own place, so that it does not kill us and our people." For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.

And the men who did not die were stricken with the tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

The victorious march of the Philistines led to Ashdod where their idol Dagon stood in the temple. Now that the ark of God was captured, they could complete their humiliation of Israel by putting the ark in a position of submission before Dagon their god. Like other heathen nations, capturing your enemies' god was a great victory, especially a God that provided great blessings for such a country as Israel.

But could you imagine waking up the next morning and discovering that your god had just fallen face first into the ground? Dagon had done just that, but the people returned the statue to its place. Isn't it funny that the people had to pick up their god after he fell down? Not a very powerful god, is he? Then again the next morning Dagon is found on the ground face down before the ark of the Lord, with its head and hands broken off. Embarrassed by this, the Philistines would not walk on the threshold of the temple of Dagon.

Although the Philistines had just witnessed God's power over their idol Dagon, they did not take heed to Him until they were afflicted with a terrible plague of tumors. They had thought that God was defeated because they had beaten Israel and captured the ark. They soon learned that no one defeats God as their so-called victory turned sour, for God began to destroy them with the plague.

Those who did not die were smitten with tumors and the cries of the people went up to heaven. The Philistines finally paid attention to God, fearing for their lives. What a tragedy it is when people do not simply respond to God, but must experience personal pain. Unfortunately for the Philistines, their pride was their fall.

## 1 SAMUEL 6:1-16

Now the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months.

And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, "What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it to its place."

So they said, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but by all means return it to Him with a trespass offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you."

Then they said, "What is the trespass offering which we shall return to Him?" They answered, "Five golden tumors and five golden rats, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines. For the same plague was on all of you and on your lords."

"Therefore you shall make images of your tumors and images of your rats that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, from your gods, and from your land."

"Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He did mighty things among them, did they not let the people go, that they might depart?"

"Now therefore, make a new cart, take two milk cows which have never been yoked, and hitch the cows to the cart; and take their calves home, away from them."

"Then take the ark of the LORD and set it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you are returning to Him as a trespass offering in a chest by its side. Then send it away, and let it go.

"And watch: if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that struck us; it happened to us by chance."

Then the men did so; they took two milk cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home.

And they set the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the chest with the gold rats and the images of their tumors.

Then the cows headed straight for the road to Beth Shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right hand or the left. And the lords of the Philistines went after them to the border of Beth Shemesh.

Now the people of Beth Shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley; and they lifted their eyes and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it.

Then the cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and stood there; a large stone was there. So they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD.

The Levites took down the ark of the LORD and the chest that was with it, in which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone. Then the men of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices the same day to the LORD.

So when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day.

The Philistines knew that the God of Israel was greater than all gods. After seven months, they had endured enough tragedy and called upon the priests and diviners for advice on how to get relief. They decided to give the ark back along with some token gifts, not out of worship, but in order to remove the plague.

The Philistines came up with their own way of acknowledging God rather than giving themselves to serve Him in the way that He requires.

The Philistine priest and diviners came up with a way to see if God was the cause of their troubles. They used two cows who had just had calves, hitched them up to a cart and sent it towards Israel's border carrying the ark. If God was the cause, the ark would head towards Israel. For a cow to leave her calves, she would have to go against her motherly instincts. Only God, who has the power, could cause this to happen. Without turning to the right or the left, they went into Israel's territory, again revealing God's power to the Philistines.

The Israelites at Beth-Shemesh were so overjoyed to see the ark that they offered a sacrifice of the cows to the Lord. The burnt offering represented the renewing of their relationship with God.

The men of Beth-Shemesh had great reason to celebrate--their ark was returned. God's great mercy was revealed, forcing their enemies to return the glory of Israel in the ark. Rededicating their lives to God, they demonstrated their willingness to start over with Him as their leader.

### 1 SAMUEL 6:17-7:2

These are the golden tumors which the Philistines returned as a trespass offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron;

and the golden rats, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both fortified cities and country villages, even as far as the large stone of Abel on which they set the ark of the LORD, which stone remains to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.

Then He struck the men of Beth Shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck fifty thousand and seventy men of the people, and the people lamented because the LORD had struck the people with a great slaughter.

And the men of Beth Shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? And to whom shall it go up from us?"

So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath Jearim, saying, "The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down and take it up with you."



Then the men of Kirjath Jearim came and took the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD.

So it was that the ark remained in Kirjath Jearim a long time; it was there twenty years. And all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

Unfortunately, though the people rejoiced at the return of the ark, they were careless and violated God's law (Numbers 4:20) by opening it and looking inside. Only Levites could handle the ark; the people of Beth-Shemesh chose to take matters into their own hands. Their deliberate violation of the clear will of God brought judgment and many died.

God did not want the people to disregard His laws and come into His presence lightly. The hearts of the people of Israel were filled with idolatry, and the cycle of disrespect, disobedience, and defeat could start all over again. Overlooking their sin would only lead them into overlooking God.

The people were eager for the men of Kiriath-jearim to come and take the ark. (After the battle of the Philistines, Shiloh had probably been captured and destroyed (4:1-18), and as a result, it is never mentioned again in the historical books of the Old Testament.) The ark was put away in Kiriath-jearim, and the people avoided it. Though the people felt sorrow for their condition, they refused to act, change, and walk in obedience.

Samuel, now a grown man, would address the people of Israel encouraging them to return to the Lord with all their heart, challenging the people to prove their loyalty to Him and abandon their idols (7:3-4). This challenge is just what Israel needed.

God desires that we fully commit our life in obedience to Him. The Lord alone is worthy of our love and worship. He is worthy of first place in our heart. **God wants us to love Him with all of our heart, soul, and strength.**

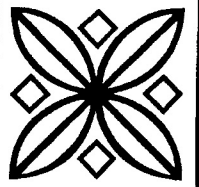
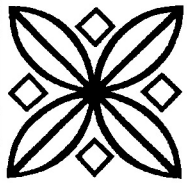
## **Stained Glass Window**

Use the enclosed “Stained Glass” template with scripture verse. Have the children color the worksheet with dark colors as solid as possible. Place paper in a cardboard box. Then spray finished sheet on the back with no-stick cooking spray. Roll in a paper towel and put in a plastic bag to be sent home. Should become translucent and may be taped to glass of a window. (Writing on worksheet will be backwards. Use 16 pound white paper if possible, 20 pound does work though.)

As an option if you do not want to use cooking spray, you can just have the children color the page and put contact paper on both sides so that it will appear to be laminated. Then they can also tape it to a window.

## **PRAYER**

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to love the Lord with all of their heart, soul, and strength, and to obey Him in everything. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.



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GAD wag ERGZ  
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