

# SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

## LESSON 3



## THE ARK TAKEN AND RETURNED

*Scripture Texts: 1 Samuel 4:1-11; 1 Samuel 6:1-14; 1 Samuel 7:1-10*

Notice how the enemy of Israel regarded the ark. Why did they feel so about its presence in the camp? These were heathen men, but what respect for God of Israel is shown! Why did they not hurry the ark away and abandon it some place? In the test they arranged, why did they remove all human influence, leaving the way open for a miracle? They had never forgotten the miracles of the past when the ark was present with Israel.

Once again, God showed His might when all human resources had failed. God is on the side of the nation that honors Him and obeys His Laws. That nation is unconquerable whose God is the Lord and whose people worship Him with clean hands and pure hearts.

**MEMORY VERSE:** *Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance. —Psalm 33:12*

### Philistines Fear God

**1 Samuel 4:1-9** Israel was again at war with their perpetual enemy, the Philistines, and the enemy was winning. What could Israel do? They thought of the ark. The ark was the most sacred article in the tabernacle. God's presence came there. From above it, He spoke to the high priest (**Exodus 25:21-22**). Their thought was that its presence in the camp would bring power to defeat the Philistines. It was brought and with it came Eli's wicked sons, who were holding the priest's office. How easy it is to remember God when we are in trouble and to forget Him when things are going well!

When the Philistines saw the ark, fear struck them. They knew God's punishment of Egypt by the plagues and the destruction of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea. They remembered Jericho. Was His power now to be turned against them? They called for their men to fight their hardest so that they would not become servants of the Hebrews.

### Where Is the Power?

**1 Samuel 4:10-11** The Philistines dealt bitter defeat, slaughter, and flight to Israel. Worse yet, they took the ark. Where was the power of God that Israel had hoped to see bringing them victory? Both Hophni and Phinehas were slain, fulfilling God's Word. (**1 Samuel 2:34**). This was the sign promised to indicate the coming of all the predicted punishments on Eli's family. This news and the loss of the ark were too much for Eli to survive; falling backwards, he broke his neck.

The Israelites had the ark but did not have the God of the ark. They thought that by rallying around the ark and carrying it into battle like a magic charm, they would be assured of victory. Why? The true God, whose presence was symbolized by the ark, had been forgotten, and so He forsook the Israelites. How easy it is to lower one's eyes from the invisible God to a visible object. Many today trust in a charm, something worn or looked at or set up – in a cross, a picture, a trinket, a place, a candle, a building. God is not to be represented by anything. Most who trust in images believe that the idol represents or houses the spirit of whatever god is worshipped. Reliance is placed in the influence and presence of the object. Idolatry is a subtle sin. It is very widespread. How can we avoid it?

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### The Ark Returned

**1 Samuel 6:1-14** The presence of the ark did not prove a blessing to the Philistines. Instead, it brought a curse – desecration of their gods, mice on food and goods, death and affliction on the people. Now they wanted it gone and called upon their heathen leaders to tell the proper way to deliver it to Israel. Following their advice, they set the ark on a new cart drawn by two milk cows, laid beside it a trespass gift of golden mice and emerald images, and sent it away. The plan was a test of who sent the disasters – God or mere chance. If the cows took the ark home, it would prove that God did. That there be no doubt, they arranged three conditions to remove all chance of earthly influence on the cows' course. 1. There was no driver. 2. The cows had never been driven before – were unbroken. 3. Their calves were shut up at home. Naturally, the cows would desire to return to the calves. Being let go, the cows **took the straight way** to the border of Israel, lowing for their calves as they went, and stopped at a great stone beside Israelite wheat harvesters. The miracle left no doubt in the minds of the watching Philistines. Levites took down the ark and gifts, and in thanks to God, the men made a burnt offering, using the cart and the cows.

### Repentance Brings Victory

**1 Samuel 7:1-10** **Return unto the Lord with all your hearts.** Samuel, the prophet, called the people to wholehearted repentance. To do so, they must put aside all idols, all other loves and trustings. Samuel promised a reward – deliverance from their enemies. Israel obeyed – **served the Lord only**. Read how fully they responded. Then see how the Lord conquered the enemy. **Thundered**, and the enemy was powerless. Read and consider carefully **Psalm 81:13-16**.

We read here of two battles, one ending in defeat, one in victory. What made the difference? The only one who received definite Word from the Lord during the following twenty years was Samuel, and the people listened to his counsel. His reputation as a prophet was known over all the land. He had lived a life without reproach and blame before his people, and, above all, he was known as a man of prayer. So great was his reputation in this respect that he was classified with Moses and Aaron as those who called on Jehovah (**Psalm 99:6**).

Samuel had a twofold task to perform: Restore the national unity and rid the land of its evil practices. His exhortation stirred the people: “If you return unto Jehovah with all your heart, He will deliver you out of the hand of the enemy.” To this the nation gave heed and obeyed. Is this not repentance? The efforts of this man of God had been successful. He had directed the people back to God. The nation was in unity under their divine King. Only a strong, moral people can cope victoriously with their enemies. God changes not; we can expect the same from Him today. What is the quality of your repentance?

### JUST A THOUGHT

**National safety depends upon the presence of God, not military might.**