

The ark lost

Part 1

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[00:00:01] When the people of God, the Israelites, were smitten by their enemies, the Philistines, they came together, having lost 4,000 men in the field, in the army.

But it's sad to notice, is it not, that they did not come together apparently with tears and humiliation and repentance because of their moral condition.

They made no reference to the state of affairs which we get in the second chapter. A sad condition, a sad picture of the condition of God's people with men like Hophni and Phineas in the priesthood.

[00:01:05] No, what they were concerned about was that they had suffered a defeat and lost 4,000 men.

So they said, wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines? They attributed the smiting, of course, to God. But there were no tears.

There seemed to be no humiliation and repentance because of the people's sin.

Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh, was the council together, that when it cometh, it may save us out of the hands of our enemies.

A sad picture of those whom God has forsaken because he says, I will be sanctified in them that draw nigh unto me. [00:02:10] And them that honour me, I will honour.

And them that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. And thus the Philistines gained the victory.

Man always requires something visible, does he not? Rather than in the exercise of faith in an invisible God, in an invisible Christ, in an invisible presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church of God. So they call him the ark, that it, not the God who dwelt between the cherubims, not the Lord Jesus Christ, in other words, of whom we have been reading together this week, [00:03:02] represented by this ark.

They treated the ark as a charm.

Rather than saw in it the greatness and the glory of the Saviour God, the only hope of Israel, of his people. So they brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh. I suppose it's still the ark of

the covenant in that God does not abandon any of his thoughts and his counsel in spite of his people's failure, he will surely bring to pass his purpose in regard to them. So the ark was brought, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts.

Wonderful when we fail that God does not abandon us immediately, but he's still the God, the Lord of hosts.

[00:04:06] And the ark is the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who dwells between the cherubims. But it was not God, as we have said, to whom they were looking in their distress. It was it, the ark.

Oh, that we might learn this lesson.

That all the trappings of Christianity, which are visible in which men delight, all the vestments, and the buildings, and the music audible, and the things that are tangible and visible, all of them together, may be all there in their due place, but without the God who dwells between the cherubims, which may attain his righteousness and guard every attribute of our blessed God, [00:05:03] all is in vain if he is not there.

Blessed be God if he has brought us, in the greatest of simplicity, to treasure nothing but the one who is represented in the ark, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, our Saviour God.

Sad again that when they brought it, the ark, those in attendance were Hophni and Phineas.

I understand that the meaning of Hophni is my fist.

Sad indication, isn't it, of violence, which these men, these ungodly men who profess to draw near to God, and represent the saints of God, and lead them to God, [00:06:02] use violence in the accomplishment of their selfish desires.

And Phineas, I believe, means the serpent's mouth.

Corruption in the mouth of those who shall speak in holiness to God for the people, and to the people from God.

Violence and corruption in the highest places.

Beloved brethren, we see that all around us today, preparing for the apostasy, when the one who is represented in the ark, the Lord of glory, will be decisively disowned, and yet all the trappings of Christianity going on.

When the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted. [00:07:04] Their hope was in the ark, not in God. They shouted with a great shout so that the earth rang, and the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, and they were anxious to know what the meaning of it was. But they interpreted it wrongly, they misunderstood it. When the Philistines heard the shout, they were afraid, but they needn't have been afraid. They said, God is coming to the camp, and that's where they were mistaken, isn't it? Because God, as a dear little brother reminded me during the tea interval, is the God who inhabits the praises of his people. He inhabits the praises from hearts who rejoice in him,

and who are subject to him. He does not inhabit companies who gather in large buildings with stained glass windows, and all the externals in which the man after the flesh delights. [00:08:06] He inhabits the praises of hearts moved by his love.

So those after the flesh, the Philistines, they misunderstood the matter. They thought that God was there when the ark had come. They said, woe unto us, it's a sad day for us. Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? The gods that smote the Egyptians were all the plagues in the wilderness. So they exhorted their people to be strong, not to become servants to the Hebrews like the Hebrews had been to them. How sad, isn't it? The people of God. The servants of those according to the flesh.

Professors only.

They said, quit yourselves like men and fight. [00:09:01] And so the Philistines did fight. And Israel was smitten. And they fled every man to his tent. And there was a very great slaughter. And instead of four thousand warriors only falling, as had been the case in the first attack of the Philistines, instead of only four thousand, when men traffic with that which speaks of the greatness of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. If the heart is not subject to him, in deep reality, the judgment is the more severe. And thus, instead of four thousand slain, this time because God, the Lord Jesus Christ, dishonored, represented in the Ark, how many?

Thirty thousand footmen lost their lives that day.

And the Ark of God was taken. [00:10:01] And the judgment of God upon those who dishonored him, Hothnai and Phinehas.

And the tidings came.

And the child that was born at that psychological moment was named Ichabod.

The glory is departed from Israel.

It became only too clear that though the Ark was there, the God of whom that Ark spoke had gone, abandoned those that dishonored him.

The glory is departed.

But the Ark of God, you know, is able to look after itself.

I think we sometimes forget that, that the Ark was never in danger.

It's the people of God who are in danger.

[00:11:02] The Philistines took the Ark of God and they brought it to Ashton and they set it in the house of Dagon.

But there's no question about the supremacy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dagon was found on his face, the only place that suited to any competitor with God's beloved Son.

They took Dagon and set him up again in his place.

But on the morrow, Dagon was fallen upon his face again before the Ark of the Lord, the one who hadn't forgotten his people, still the Ark of Jehovah, the God of Israel.

And not only had he fallen on his face, [00:12:03] but his head was gone.

All his intellect, all the glory of man prostrate before the Lord Jesus Christ, before the Ark. And not only his head, but his hands, not only his head, but his hands, all of his ability, completely nothing, before the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the judgment of God upon this false God and his worshippers. The hand of the Lord was very severe upon the people of Ashton.

And destroyed them until they were glad to get rid of the Ark.

And so they sent the Ark to Gath, [00:13:02] the house of the giants, I suppose, which was mentioned this afternoon. And what about the giants? Are they any better than the ordinary ones? I was glad to hear that the giants have gone. These giants, at any rate, went.

They fared no better than the Ashdodites and their god Dagon.

They carried the Ark of God there. But the hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction. And he smote the men of the city, small and great, giants on their own. And they were glad to get rid of the Ark. It will fare ill, beloved brethren, with those who set themselves against the Lord Jesus Christ. If there is anyone here who has not yet bowed the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ, we implore you to do it today. [00:14:02] While to do so is your salvation.

To do it in the coming day will be to share the judgment of Ashton and Gath. And then finally, they sent the Ark of God to Akron. Why, that's the place where Beelzebub was on it, isn't it? The only name, as we've been hearing this week, the only name of the false god that Jesus dared to mention, the Prince of the Devils.

And what about the Prince of the Devils in conflict with the Son of God?

As the Ark came to Akron, Beelzebub apparently couldn't help them. The Akronites cried out saying they have brought out the Ark of the God of Israel to us to slay us and our people. Yes, all the gods that there are in the world, [00:15:01] gods many and lords many. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes, who is on the throne tonight, to exercise his power, all the gods will not suffice to deliver those who have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ from the judgment which they deserve. So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and they said, send away the Ark of the God of Israel and let it go again to his own place, his own place. The place of the Ark of God is in the midst of his people, is it not? Thank God it is here today, but not it, beloved brethren. Oh, let us never mistake all the trappings for the person of our glorious Lord.

May God grant that this lesson might be learned of us here today.

[00:16:02] Unseen he is, but unseen we love thee.

Dear thy name, but when our eyes behold, the day is coming when we shall see. The men of the world say, well, what have you got? An unseen Lord?

An unseen God?

And an unseen power? Yes. But the day of sight is coming. Unseen we love thee. Dear thy name, but when our eyes behold, with joyful wonder we'll exclaim the half had not been told, for thou exceedest all the fame our ears have ever heard.

How happy we who know his name and trust, trust faith, trust his faithful word.