

# Is God In The Camp?

**Introduction.** In the days before Israel had a king, they were out of sync with God. The people had forgotten the Most High, and had gone aside to the worship of Baal; therefore they were given up to their enemies. When God had brought them out of Egypt, He instructed them how they were to live in Canaan, and warned them that if they forsook him they would be chastened (Leviticus 26:17-18). In fulfillment of this threat, the Philistines had been divinely permitted to devastate the idolatrous Israelites.

The only way for them to get out of trouble was to return to God. But instead of attempting to get right with Him, the Israelites devised a superstitious means of securing victory over their enemies. They forgot to enthrone God in their life and do His will.

In considering the account of 1 Samuel 4:1-7, the first point will examine the great mistakes which both Israel and the Philistines made. In the second point, we will talk about what happens when God does come into the camp.

## ***I. The Mistakes They Made***

- A. They mistook the visible for the invisible.
  - 1. The Israelites, instead of seeing to God Himself, went to Shiloh to fetch the ark of the covenant. The ark was the sacred place where God revealed Himself in the days when His people served Him; but it was devoid of power without the presence of God. The Israelites were mistaken because the sight of the ark made them boastful and confident.
  - 2. The Philistines fell into an error of a different kind, for they were frightened without any cause — God had not come at all. This ark of the covenant, which was but a chest of wood covered with gold, with angelic figures on the lid, was simply a token of the presence of God with His people; and these Israelites transformed it into a sacred object, to be revered, trusted, and worshiped. They ascribed to the ark what could only be done by God Himself.
  - 3. This is the tendency of us all. We lean on the arm of flesh. We want some symbol, some token, something tangible, something that will charm the eye, and immediately we mistake our transient emotion for worship and reverence.
- B. They preferred office to character.
  - 1. In their distress, instead of calling on God, they sent for Hophni and Phinehas because they were priests, and the people had come to hold the sacred office in such superstitious reverence that they thought this was everything. But these young men were sinners against the Lord (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25; 3:13). They made the house of God to be abhorred, and dishonored the Lord before all Israel.
  - 2. This work is not a mere matter of pedigree; it is a question of the abiding presence of God with man. Religion's major credibility crisis comes from preachers who simply do not have the strength to live righteously (Luke 6:39).
- C. They confused enthusiasm with faith.
  - 1. When they saw the ark, they shouted so that the earth rang again. "These are the kind of people I like," says one, "people that can shout." These Israelites shouted, but there was nothing in their noise, any more than there is in their modern imitators.

2. Anyone who has passed the camp of Israel, that day, might have said that they had “a bright, cheerful, happy service; just the kind of service the people like, nothing dull about it.” Surely these people must have great faith! No, they had not a scrap of the real article. Faith is a still water; it flows deep.
- D. They valued novelty above scriptural order.
1. The Philistines were afraid, for they said, “God has come into the camp! Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before.” The Israelites probably made the same mistake, fixing their hope on this new method of fighting the Philistines, which they believed would bring them victory.
  2. We are apt to think that the new plan of going to work will be much more effective than those that have become familiar, but it is not so. We when see subjects being promoted which claim to be “rethinking” a doctrine, you had better rethink your decision to follow it. There is a glamour about the novelty which misleads us, and we are liable to think the newer is the truer.
- E. They confused ritual and spirituality.
1. Every form of religion has its ritual. But if I have gone through the routine of the worship of my church, and then think that I have done something acceptable to God, while yet my heart has not communed with Him in humble repentance, faith, love, joy, or consecration, I am mistaken.
  2. So far as our forms or worship help us towards this spiritual communion, they are good, but no farther. What does signify how you have given your offering if it be not a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1)? Everything brought to God as a sacrifice must be alive. Its blood must be poured out warm at the altar's foot.

## **II. *What Happens When God Comes Into The Camp***

- A. The truth of the gospel becomes our center.
1. The doctrines of grace have with them the grace of the doctrines. Then is Christ not only to us the truth, but He is also the way and the life (John 14:6). The gospel then becomes a sword with two edges, and it does marvelous execution (Hebrews 4:12-13).
  2. The Word of God then shows itself to be both a hammer and a fire, smiting and melting those on whom its power is proved (Jeremiah 20:7-9). Whoever preaches the gospel, may have little eloquence, but if God is with him, and his heart is full of love, he will speak with power.
- B. Fresh energy is thrown into service.
1. Many begin to work for Christ in ways which they would have never thought imaginable. Others reach a height of dedication with the use of their talents which could have never been envisioned (Titus 2:14; cp. Luke 19:11-28).
  2. If we want God in the camp, there must be unbroken union. God will not come where there is strife. We must be as one in our love to one another (Ephesians 4:1-3). On eight occasions, Luke reported that the disciples were united in “one accord” in Acts (1:14; 2:1, 46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 15:25).
- C. Joy is instilled into worship.
1. People do not think sermons dull when God is in the camp; and Bible classes are not considered pointless (Psalm 27:6; 34:3; 66:1-2, 8; 96:1-2). The saints enjoy fellowship with one another; and are excited to be here.

2. In Malachi 3:16, the Israelites had such holy talk that God Himself listened to what they had to say; He liked it so well that He put it down; and He thought so much of it that He said He would preserve it; and a book of remembrance was made for them that feared the Lord, and that thought on His name.
- D. Sinners are converted.
1. When God comes into the camp, we must have a faith which allows us to believe and work to convert people to Christ. We have to love the one gone astray (Luke 15:4-7), and seek to study with them.
  2. Sinners turn to the Lord in so marvelous a way that our weak faith is often astonished. Many have been hearers for years, but seem harder than a millstone, but they become soft as wax to the divine Word.
- E. Consecration is infused in the apathetic.
1. Because God is in the camp, people begin to take seriously the charge to be people of holiness (1 Peter 1:16; 2 Peter 3:11-14).
  2. God will not have fellowship with an unholy church, so all the ugliness of sin becomes an anathema to the consecrated Christian. All the sins of the tongue, and all the moral sins (immodest dress, drinking, dancing, pornography, etc.) are left behind.

**Conclusion.** It is hard work for the whole church to walk with God every day; but if each member will see to it that his own personal life is right, the church, as a whole, need fear nothing. Look after your own life, and see that all is right there; and when we go forth to the battle, the Philistines will know of a truth that "God is come into the camp." We have sinners saved in our midst; pray for them. Some are struggling towards the light; seek to help them. If you meet with any such, love and cherish them, as a father does his child (1 Thessalonians 2:11). May God raise us all up to this point of personal consecration and abide with us in power for evermore!