

Personal Application

What have you learnt about God's freedom and power from this passage?

The Israelite asked a good question: "Why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today" if we translate this type of question into our lives we might ask "Why did the Lord bring this tragedy/illness/hardship/problem ... on me today?" How do we begin to answer such questions? Try to talk from personal experience.

Have you ever been aware of God's glory or presence?
Can you describe what it was like?
Conversely have you ever been aware of God's glory or presence 'departing'?

Pray

This study has been written to accompany a sermon series at St Columb's Anglican Church Hawthorn. It is written for small group and personal study. It is meant as a resource so feel free to select the parts that are most useful to you or your group. It is advised that you at least do the section "Getting Inside the Passage," some parts of "Personal Application" and "Pray." The section "Going Further" will take you further into the 1 Samuel and the Bible as a whole.

With acknowledgement and thanks to Rev. Peter MacPherson
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1 Samuel 4 Small Group Study Material

Sometimes It's Too Late

Context

The Philistines appear in the Bible as early as Gen 10:14. They came from Crete and around the Aegean and settled on the coast near Gaza in the 12th century B.C. (their 5 main cities were Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron). They looked to expand their territory by taking land from Israel. The periodic wars also had a theological dimension as they were seen as a conflict of rival gods. For Israel the question is "Would Yahweh protect them?"; but just as important is the question "Will Israel remain faithful to Yahweh?".

I Samuel 4– 6 are a unit. They are sometimes called ' the ark narrative' They tell of the ark's capture by the Philistine (ch 4), it's power over the Philistines' god's (ch 5) and it's return to Israel (ch 6). In the process of this narrative we learn about God's freedom and power.

Getting Inside the Passage

1- 4 Battle 1

Israel are defeated by the Philistines at Ebenezer. The Israelites think Yahweh has caused this defeat (v3). They think that taking ‘ the ark of the covenant’ into battle will ensure them of this victory. What does this tell you about their theology”

5-11 Battle 2

The ark is captured and 30,000 men are killed including Hophni and Phinhas. How might this loss of the Ark affect Israel’s understanding of God?

12-22 Why does Eli die?

Phinehas’ wife thinks that the loss of the ark means that the ‘glory of the Lord’ has departed from Israel. What does this mean? Is she right?

Going Further

For descriptions of the ‘ark of the covenant’ see Ex 25:10-22 and Heb 9: 1-5. In the ark were a gold jar of manna, Aaron’s staff and the ten commandments (Heb (:4). The ark was kept in the tabernacle inside the ‘ tent meeting’ and eventually put in the Temple once it was built by Solomon, David’s son (1 Kings 8)

Read Ps 78:56-62 for another description of these incidents. According to the psalmist, why was God angry with his people?

“The glory of the Lord” is a way of talking about God being present in both a tangible and spiritual sense.

Exodus 16 & 24 describe the ‘glory of the Lord’ in the cloud and at Mt Sinai.

Exodus 40 tells how the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 1 Kg 8:11, 2 Chr 5:14, 3 Chr 7:1-3 describe the glory filling the Temple. Ezekiel has visions of the glory departing and then returning - Ezek 10 & 43.

Luke 2:9 is the only use of the term ‘ the glory of the Lord’ in the New Testament, but the idea of God’s’ glory is repeated many times.

The picture of the New Jerusalem in Rev 21:22-23 has no temple “because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are it’s temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb and it’s lamp.”

Discuss how the relationship of God’s ‘ glory’ (presence) to a place changes throughout the Bible.