

Oct. 18, 2020

Speaker: Eric Naus **Series:** Kingdom Come – The book of 1 Samuel

Passage: 1 Samuel 4.1-22

Read the passage aloud as a group, and then work through the following discussion questions.

1. In verses 1-4, the Israelites decided to bring the ark of the covenant into battle to ensure victory over their enemies, the Philistines. Rather than ask God's prophet what to do (see 3:19-4:1), and rather than repent of their own sin and folly (note the sins of Eli's sons in chapter 2, and their presence in battle here in 4:4), they tried to manipulate and control God into giving them victory, treating the ark like a "good luck charm." In what ways do people today try to control and manipulate God? Have you ever been tempted to try to manipulate God? What did that look like in your life?
2. In verses 5-11, we see that bringing the ark into battle had exactly the opposite effect than the Israelites had planned: the Philistines were emboldened to victory! Here is the lesson: even when we try to control God, it turns out that He is still in control of us! Have you found that to be true in your own faith journey? In what ways have you seen the sovereignty of God overriding even your own mistakes and foolish decisions?
3. In verses 10-22, a number of tragic events unfold. The ark is captured by the pagan Philistines; Hophni and Phinehas are killed; Eli falls over and breaks his neck; and Eli's daughter-in-law dies in childbirth as she names her child Ichabod (which means "where is the glory?") to express her anguish that God's glory had been carried away by the pagans. On the surface, it looks like the darkest hour. And yet, as we look deeper, we can see the hand of God sovereignly guiding and superintending things so that his promises of judgment and grace come true, and his glory is put on display. Take a moment to review God's judgment on Eli found in 2:27-36. How does the story in chapter 4 illustrate the fulfillment of God's promise of judgment? What do we learn about the overarching sovereignty of God? How does this story illustrate the idea that God "works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11)?
4. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God should bring terror to God's enemies (see Psalm 2), and great comfort to God's people (see Matt. 10:29-31). Do you take comfort in the doctrine of God's sovereignty? Why or why not?